

*THE NEW WAY SERIES*

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*Encountering  
Differences  
in Antioch of Syria*

*Dale Weatherford*

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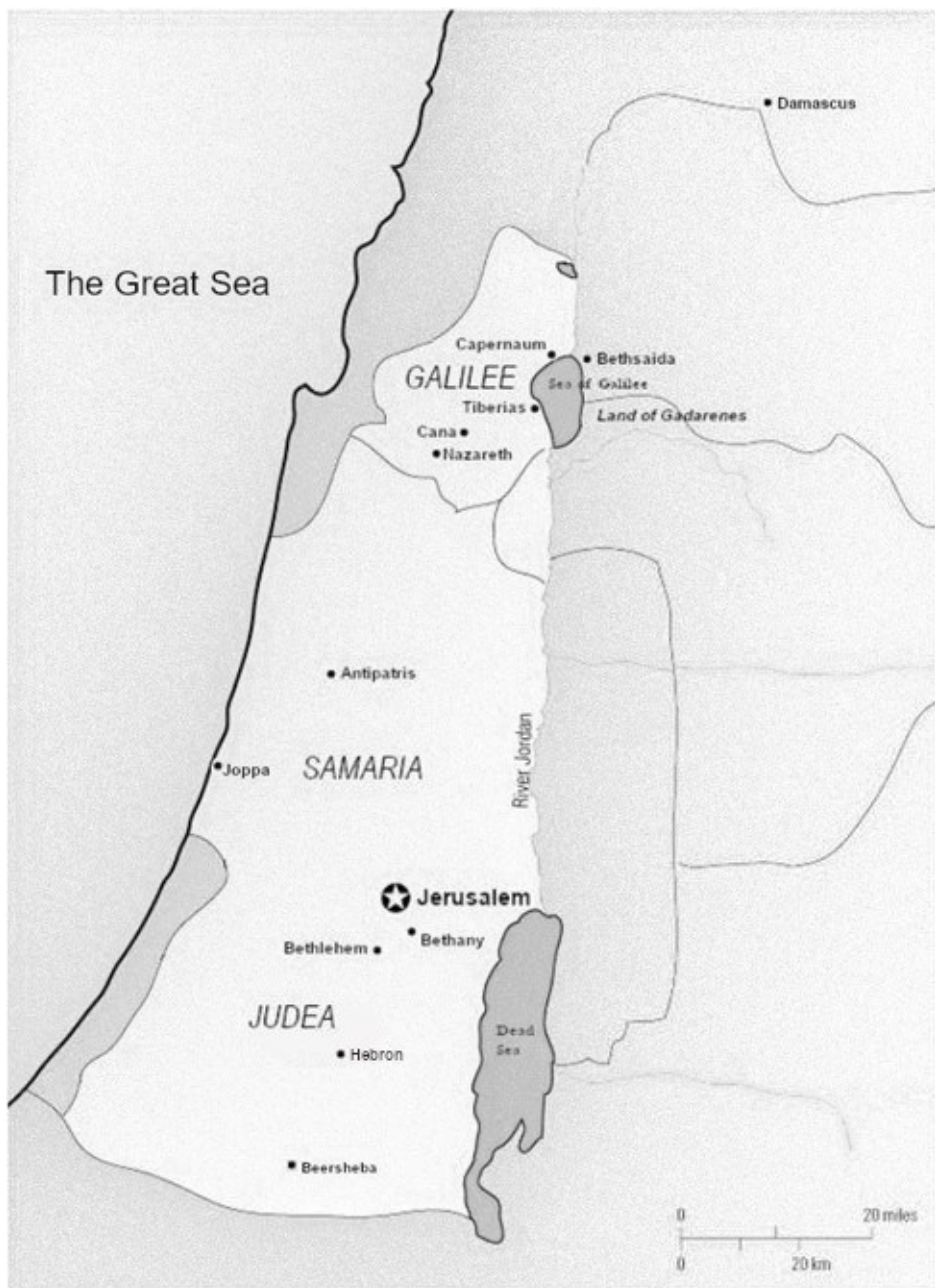
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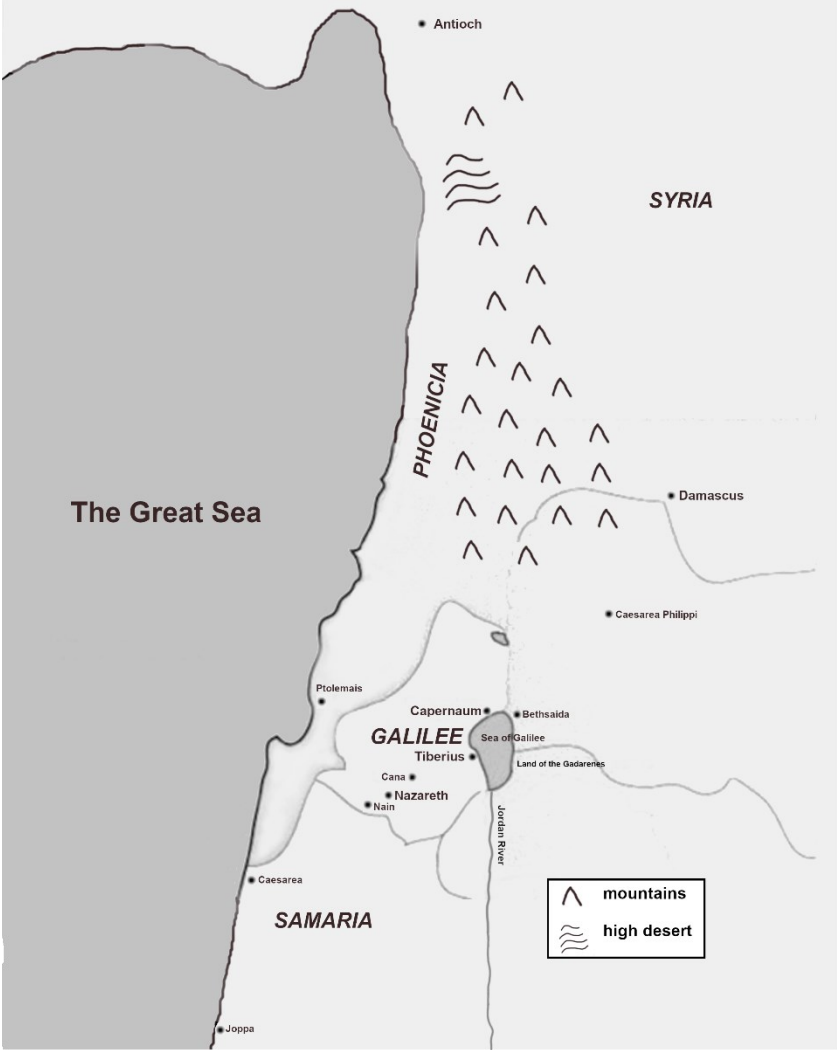
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Special thanks to my husband, David, for all his patience in getting this Series ready for publication. He is not only the technical genius behind the production of these books, but he's my editor, cheerleader, and sounding board. These books would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





# First Century Times and Measurements

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

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

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

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

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

A handbreadth is approximately four inches.

# **PREFACE**

## **THE NEW WAY SERIES #7**

### ***Encountering Differences in Antioch of Syria***

In this series we've watched the New Way travel from Jerusalem to a small village in Cana of Galilee and then to the large city of Capernaum. But it didn't stop there. Just a few years after the crucifixion, the New Way had reached Antioch of Syria, 300 miles to the north of Jerusalem near the north shore of the Great Sea (the Mediterranean). Antioch became a hub for the New Way followers. This was new territory for everyone — and not just geographically. They were dealing with religions from all over the world, but they were also dealing with questions and conflicts between fellow followers. Much like today, the unity that Jesus had prayed for was in short supply. Will these young adults continue to follow Jesus, or will the conflicts overwhelm the New Way? Will their faith withstand the struggles? Will yours?

Dale Weatherford

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# Chapter 1

The synagogue was certainly packed this Sabbath morning. Everyone was eagerly awaiting the announcement. The women were busily discussing the pros and cons of the decision while the children were taking advantage of their mothers' distraction. The balcony had none of its usual atmosphere of worship. On the main floor, the men were loudly propounding their views on what should or should not be done. As Priest Othniel and his son Mahlon entered the platform to begin the service, it took a few minutes for the crowd to hush. Friends began poking their friends to get them quiet. Priest Othniel sternly reminded them that it was the Sabbath, and they should show more respect in the synagogue. "Let us begin with worship. Mahlon will lead us in some Psalms." The people joined in the singing, but everyone seemed distracted. Their worship was rote and unfeeling.

After a time of prayer, Priest Othniel called on Simon and Adonijah to come forward and give their report. "As you know, the Seleucid Government sent representatives to Passover. They spoke to us about relocating to Syrian Antioch. They promised to provide housing and help us to secure employment. But the best part was that they promised to allow us freedom to follow all our Jewish customs and traditions without interference from Rome. They said that Syrian Antioch is primarily a Greek city and they promised us full citizenship. All of us have been praying about this. The four of us, Priest Othniel, Mahlon, Adonijah, and I, met with the High Priest this week and were given his blessing to relocate to Syrian Antioch." There were sighs of relief and gasps of dismay. Suddenly the synagogue was filled with discussion again. It took Simon several minutes to get everyone quiet. "We have been discussing this move since Passover, and it is time for us to take action. It is still one month until Sukkot. We plan to leave just as soon as Sukkot has ended. You need to let Priest Othniel know if you and your family will be relocating with us. There will be two groups — those traveling in ox carts and those walking. A second group of ox carts, led by Manasseh, will leave sometime around the beginning of Elul." Simon continued to give the people instructions regarding the upcoming travel. Priest Othniel assured the people that soon a new priest would be assigned for those who did not wish to leave Jerusalem. No one would be forced to leave. "I believe that this is an opportunity for us to re-establish the synagogue in Antioch that has fallen into disrepair. Our people there have no place to assemble and no one to lead them. My friend from Antioch has indicated that there are several Jews there, but they are scattered and have strayed into Gentile practices. Our goal will be to bring them to repentance and restoration. Please meet me in the courtyard today if you already know that you will be traveling with us." They sang another Psalm, and Priest Othniel dismissed the people.

Priest Othniel joined the men gathered in the courtyard. He was pleased to see that there were eight families represented. He felt that others would join them later, but this would be enough to accomplish the task. For the next month, they would be sorting and packing, selling their homes and businesses, and planning the trip.



At sunrise, one month later, families gathered in front of their synagogue in Jerusalem to wish them farewell. There were long hugs and lots of tears, but there was also a sense of excitement and an anticipation of adventure that most had never experienced. Priest Othniel raised his hands and soon quiet fell as he lifted his voice in a prayer of blessing for this undertaking. He and his wife, Bilbah, and their servants climbed into their oxcart. It was packed with articles of worship as well as some personal household goods. All the oxcars were driven by well-armed servants. A great shout rose from the crowd as their oxcart began to move forward. Right behind Priest Othniel, Simon, who was also fully armed and seated on the driver's seat beside his servant, waved to the crowd. Because Simon was a banker, his oxcart was outfitted with a false floor that was filled with gold and silver that would be needed to start a new bank in Antioch. Simon's wife, Esther, and four maidservants rode in the cart filled with household goods. Behind them was Adonijah's family: his wife Hannah, their children, and servants. The fourth cart in line was Eliphaz and his wife Lilah, with four children. And bringing up the rear was an older couple, Japheth and his wife, Zipporah, and their servants. The back half of Japheth's cart was crowded with armed menservants to protect the caravan as it traveled. The five oxcars would arrive in Antioch long before the others and would negotiate with the Seleucids to secure housing for the entire group so that they all could stay close together.

The rest of the families surged forward to begin the journey on foot. The six married men, led by Priest Othniel's son, Mahlon, were leading donkeys laden with packs of food for the trip. Each man was fully armed and ready for battle. Some had small donkey carts filled with tools and supplies. Behind them, the wives and older children were carrying those too young to keep up. Some of the boys and girls were herding the family goats that would provide milk for the journey. All were carrying travel bags filled with everything they now owned. Soon the crowd that had gathered to watch waved their last goodbyes and headed home. The travelers reached the temple and headed north on the Roman road leading them all the way to Syrian Antioch. The road went right through the heart of Samaria, hence the anticipated need for armor and weapons to protect themselves from these sworn enemies of the Jews.

Priest Othniel's two youngest sons, Elkanah and Isaac, along with six other unmarried men walked in the back of the group to make sure

that no stragglers were left behind. These eight young men played a vital role in keeping everyone safe. It was essential that the travelers stay close together as they went through Samaria. Simon had insisted that each man, both those in the front and those in the rear, be armed and ready to protect the group against, according to Simon, “such a vile and violent people.”

“Dad said it would take about a month to walk it,” said Enos to no one in particular.

“We could walk it much faster, but the women and little children will need to take it slowly. We don’t want anyone getting sick on the way,” replied Elkanah.

“What if we die of boredom?” asked Abner.

“It’s time for two of us to run and check on the front of the group. Why don’t you two start running and see how everyone is doing? You’ll need to let the men in front know if they are traveling too fast for the group. We must stay together. The rest of us will stay in the back and keep an eye on things from here,” said Isaac.

“Sounds like a plan. I think I will go crazy just strolling along like an old lady.” Enos wobbled along and succeeded in getting all the young men to laugh.

“Just don’t forget we’re in enemy territory and could be in danger at all times. Don’t be goofing off or going off alone, okay?” said Elkanah.

“I know. But we’re obviously armed, so hopefully, they will leave us alone,” said Enos.

“We pray it will be an uneventful journey — long and boring,” replied Isaac.



Elam stretched out on a grassy spot in his yard in central Antioch. How he enjoyed Sabbath afternoons with his family. Today he was on his own with the children, since his wife was helping a friend with the birth of a baby. All the women in the group were participating. He didn’t mind his wife’s helping because he appreciated that they all came to help Angela when she needed it.

“Abba, Gideon says that I’m not from Jerusalem,” complained Nahum.

“Well, Gideon is wrong. You never lived in Jerusalem, but you were certainly from there. Gideon, quit antagonizing your brother or I’ll put you both to work.”

“It’s the Sabbath, so you can’t,” retorted Gideon.

“And you are a man now and should know how to behave. You know you shouldn’t tease your siblings. It hurts their feelings. And I don’t like you disrespecting me. Does it make you feel proud that you are the first-born? Should I remind you that you didn’t walk a single step on that journey? Your mother and I carried you all the way.”

“Abba, tell us the story of moving to Antioch,” pleaded Naomi.

“Well, I think we all need some juice and bread rolls. If you will bring me a snack, I will tell you the story.” Rachel and Naomi quickly ran into the kitchen and poured their abba a cup of juice. They brought out a plate of bread rolls with goat cheese, then returned to the kitchen to get juice for Gideon and Nahum before getting their own. Everyone gathered in the yard to listen to their abba.

“Your mother and I lived in Jerusalem and had become followers of Jesus. We were part of a home group led by James the son of Alphaeus, who was an apostle who traveled with Jesus. After Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection, Jerusalem became more and more dangerous and sometimes whole home groups would be stoned by the Jewish leadership. After a really popular leader named Stephen was stoned to death, James began to talk with us about Jesus’ command to tell the whole world about Him. We started praying about leaving Jerusalem. Gideon was almost a year old at the time and we were concerned about the danger and constant violence. We began to feel that God was calling us as a group to relocate here in Antioch. When another home group was stoned and the children left as orphans, we decided it was Jehovah making it clear that we needed to leave. We left six months after Stephen was stoned to death. Everyone sold what they owned and bought donkeys to carry enough food for the journey. We didn’t want to go through the middle of Samaria, so we took the road to Capernaum and went up through Damascus. What we hadn’t planned on was the rainy season. Once we got into the mountains it was rough going. By the time we got to Damascus, we were exhausted and many of our group were sick. We had started out with nine families, all with little children that had to be carried, and Mother was carrying Nahum on the inside. So, yes, Nahum, you came from Jerusalem, too! Jehovah helped us locate a group of New Way followers who had moved and settled in Damascus a year earlier. They gave us lodging for the winter and nursed those who were sick back to health. We would not have made it without their help, and, Nahum, you were born in Damascus at Passover. Everyone agreed to wait until your mother was strong enough to walk again and was declared safe to travel.

“Some of the group wanted to stay in Damascus with the other home group and settle there, but we prayed and felt strongly that Jehovah was leading us to continue our journey to Antioch. So once again, we loaded the donkeys with enough food for the journey and set off for Antioch. Now we had two babies to carry. The weather was much nicer, and it got warmer as we approached Antioch and came out of the mountains. One family stayed in Damascus because they were expecting a little one around Shavuot, and she had family there that would help them to get settled. The rest of us arrived in Antioch and were welcomed by the Seleucid Government. They helped us locate this beautiful house and I started my Carpenter Shop and hired Dan to help me. Jehovah has really blessed our business and met all our needs. The other men found work and soon we were able to build a small synagogue. It’s the one you attended this morning although it’s

been enlarged twice. Barnabas, the man who spoke this morning, was a friend of ours when we lived in Jerusalem. He came out to help us and then went to get Paul to come and be our leader. Now we're combined with a Gentile group of Christians, and we have lots and lots of new friends. Now run and play before Sabbath is over and it's time to do your chores. We will need to prepare dinner and milk the goats once Sabbath has ended."

Elam moved to a cushion in the courtyard and thought about that journey. *Now, my firstborn is a man and working with me at the Carpenter Shop. Nahum is only eleven, but is already very helpful at the shop. Both of my boys have been working with me forever since there is no Hebrew School for them to attend. And my two beautiful daughters are getting old enough to take care of things when my wife needs to help her friends. Rachel is seven and Naomi is five. How quickly time flies! It's hard to believe we have been in Antioch for eleven years. Jehovah has blessed us. He has blessed the entire group of eight families.* Elam got up to see if the girls needed help with the post-Sabbath meal. They had everything prepared, and the boys arrived bringing the jar of goat milk. "Jehovah, thank You for this provision. Please bless Mother as she helps with Vashti's birthing. Please keep everyone safe according to Your will. And bless this food. In Jesus' name." The boys primarily talked with their dad about work projects and Rachel and Naomi sat quietly and listened. Once the men were finished, the girls cleared the table and cleaned the kitchen before retiring. The men had disappeared to the roof and were planning their work week.

Angela thanked the servant who had walked her home and she called for Elam as she entered the house. He and the boys greeted her, and she announced that a healthy baby boy had been born a couple of hours ago. Vashti's sister was going to spend the night with her, and all was going well. Angela said that she would probably check on her tomorrow, but it would be good to sleep on her own mat tonight. The four quickly said goodnight and soon the house was quiet and waiting for the beginning of another week of work.



The four men were grateful that they had found a nice camping area before sunset. They had left Antioch at dawn and now were almost too tired to fish for their dinner but knew that it was too good of an opportunity to pass up. They had found a small stream and plenty of firewood. Now that they were well fed and had caught their breath, they sat around the campfire talking. "Do you remember camping here on our trip nine years ago?" Jonathan asked Asher.

"Maybe. I just remember how scary that whole trip was. I alternated between feeling that we were right in the center of Jehovah's calling and feeling that we would be struck by lightning for leaving Israel," remembered Asher. Jonathan explained to Absalom

and Chillion that he and Asher had just turned thirteen when they both felt strongly that God was calling them to leave their families in Jerusalem and relocate to Syrian Antioch. "And neither of us even knew where Antioch was except that it wasn't in Israel," said Asher.

"So, you were both raised in Jerusalem?" asked Chillion.

"Well, my family was from Capernaum. Then when I was five, my parents started following Jesus and we traveled with Him for over three years. Then we settled in Jerusalem after the crucifixion," explained Jonathan.

Asher added, "I was born and raised in Jerusalem. My parents started attending a New Way house group led by Jonathan's dad at his house soon after that first Pentecost, and Jonathan and I became really good friends. We were inseparable after that."

For the next several days, the four men walked due south along the Great Sea. They camped on the beaches and enjoyed getting to know each other better. When they reached Ptolemais, they would begin to journey eastward until they reached Capernaum. At least, that was the plan.

This trip had been dreamed about ever since Jonathan's dad, the Apostle James, had been martyred by King Herod in Jerusalem. Jonathan's best friend, Asher, knew that Jonathan was torn between needing to be with his family and supporting his wife who was great with their third child. He chose to delay his trip. Then life got incredibly complicated, and Jonathan was busier than ever trying to deal with one crisis after another. Now, two years later, there seemed to be a lull in the schedule and Asher could tell that Jonathan was exhausted spiritually, physically, and emotionally. He began to push for the trip to Capernaum and recruited the two other men to walk with them. He knew that Jonathan's family was just what he needed.



Jonathan's heart lurched when they saw a well just ahead and realized that they had finally reached the west side of Capernaum. He hadn't been here since he was a boy and nothing looked familiar, but he knew if he just kept following the main road to the east, he would eventually find the Fish Shop and would know his way around. Jonathan, Asher, Chillion, and Absalom had left Antioch a week ago. Jonathan seemed to come alive as he said, "Capernaum has certainly grown and changed since I was here last. If I remember right, it's about four miles to the Sea of Galilee and that's where we'll find my grandmother's house. I'll show you where Jesus cooked breakfast for my dad and the other apostles. That was the last time I was here." After a short rest at the well, the men were ready to finish their long hike. *I hope that Grandmother is still alive. It's going to be hard to not see Grandpa, but it will be good to see my uncles. And how good it will be to see Jenay and Yanis. At least, I hope they are still here. I haven't heard anything from them since Dad and Uncle John visited me eight*

years ago. As they walked farther and farther east through the town of Capernaum, the Sea of Galilee glistened in front of them. Jonathan felt his heart soar as memories flooded his mind. "My twin sister, Jenay, and I thought it was the greatest adventure ever to camp out with Jesus and His followers every night. I'm pretty sure that's Uncle Peter's old house. It hasn't changed a lot. We're getting close." Soon, Jonathan found that though his feet were weary from the long journey, he couldn't keep from running up the small incline that led to Grandmother Salome's house. He waited for the other men to catch up before knocking. They were greeted by a servant and invited to enter the spacious living area that he remembered so well. It seemed nothing had changed. And there she was. Grandmother Salome sat on a cushion, her eyes twinkling with joy. She held out her arms to him and held him so tightly he was afraid she would hurt herself. She seemed so frail, but everything else was the same. She was quickly giving orders to the servants, trying to welcome his friends, and asking questions all at the same time. Suddenly, Kayla ran into the room and threw herself into Jonathan's arms. He hadn't expected to see his mother, and all his loss and pain and hurt came gushing out. He felt like a little boy being comforted, and he knew now why God had sent him to Capernaum.

Soon Jenay arrived and he felt more complete than he had felt in years. His twin, his best friend, the one who understood him better than anyone else in this world, was holding his hand and wiping away his tears. He had not realized how badly he needed this time with his family. It had been hard to leave Jerusalem and follow God's call to Antioch. But he had gone obediently. He had served faithfully, and God had blessed his work not only with Jews but also with the Gentiles. Jehovah had provided a wonderful wife for him, and they had served side-by-side in Antioch to teach the good news to people from all nations.

"I'm so glad that Orpah let you come. But I wish I could meet her and my grandbabies."

"Mother," Jonathan's voice broke. "Mother, Jehovah took Orpah to Heaven just two weeks after Dad's death. She died in childbirth and the baby didn't live. I wanted to come to be with you, but I couldn't leave Zebedee and Zerah after they had just lost their mother."

"Oh, Son. I am so sorry. You've been through so much. I'm glad you've come now. Where are the children?"

"Actually, Asher's wife, Sharon, is keeping them. They have boys the same age and they are best of friends. They wanted to come, but it's such a long trip. Zebedee is seven and Zerah is four."

Mid-afternoon, when school was out, Jenay's husband, Yanis, joined them and brought their son Enoch. Abie had waited at home for her abba and informed him of her Uncle Jonathan's arrival. They had walked over together to greet him. Jonathan could hardly believe how much Abie looked like Jenay at that age and it brought back a flood of memories of their happy childhood traveling with Jesus. Jonathan introduced Yanis to his three friends and added, "Yanis was the man I

looked up to. I wanted to be just like him. I even tried to walk like he walked. I was so happy the day my dad announced that he had asked for Jenay as his wife. But then she was gone, and I was devastated. I didn't realize how much I would miss her. And how old are you, my nephew?"

"I am eight years old, and Abie is nine."

"So, you are in your third year of Hebrew School?" asked Jonathan.

"No, sir. I am in my first year at the New Way Academy," replied Enoch politely. He, like Jonathan as a child, was shy around adults and tentative about giving information to this stranger.

Jonathan looked for an explanation from Yanis. "We have joined forces with the Gentile followers, and I'm teaching daily at the school about Jesus' time on earth. It's been a very fulfilling work. I have 200 students who are learning about Jesus. It keeps me busy." They continued to talk about their various ministries and Asher noted that Jonathan was showing more interest and excitement than he had shown in months.

"Do you think our group would benefit from a school? But who would lead it?" asked Jonathan of his three friends.

All afternoon, family members began to arrive, and Salome explained that not only were they gathering to visit with Jonathan, but they met regularly as a New Way group each Sabbath evening. Jonathan and the three guests sat with the other men and enjoyed the fellowship meal. *How good it is to be surrounded by family.* There was much laughter and love shared in this group. After dinner, Yanis led the worship time and recalled happy memories of times with Jonathan and his family as they traveled together with Jesus.

Yanis and Jonathan talked on the rooftop long after the others were sleeping. Jonathan had always considered Yanis a big brother while they were traveling with Jesus, and he felt comfortable sharing his deepest concerns. "Yanis, I have to be honest that I have lost my zeal for leading my groups. I've taught them everything I know, and others are taking care of leading the worship."

"You've been through a lot," counseled Yanis.

"I don't know whether it's losing Orpah or Dad or both, but I'm feeling restless. I'm not sure why I need to be there. Asher and I worked together and started the ministry, then a group of men from Cyprus came and we joined forces. They only stayed for a few months, but it was just what we needed to really begin the ministry to the Greeks and Romans in the area. They taught me a lot about how the Gentiles think. We grew and started renting the Amphitheater for worship on Sunday mornings and Tuesdays after work. The Gentiles didn't want to be associated with the Jews and I was okay with that. After Orpah and I married, we started attending a small synagogue that was made up of a New Way home group from Jerusalem. We worshipped there, but never really felt comfortable because they didn't approve of our work with the Gentiles. Anyway, our work with the Gentiles got the attention of the leadership in Jerusalem, probably



from Dad and Uncle John. They sent Barnabas to help us out. He was such an asset in helping us get organized and able to grow. He helped us appoint a Leadership Team for the group, and it took a big weight off of us. After a few months, we realized we needed more help because we had so many new followers of Jesus and needed to teach them before they could really lead. Barnabas traveled to Tarsus and brought Paul back to help us. Barnabas worked with us and has been a real leader, but Paul's heart seemed to be focused more on the Jews at the New Way Synagogue where we had been attending. He was welcomed there, so, he would teach there on the Sabbath, and then teach for us on Sunday mornings and on Tuesdays after work at our fellowship meal. He has a real gift for teaching people about being followers of Jesus and training leadership. I am so grateful for both of their help."

"Wasn't that the home group that the Apostle James, the son of Alpheus, led to Antioch?"

"Yes, he was the one who led them there, but he was killed on a trip to Jerusalem near Caesarea Philippi. I don't know all the details, but the synagogue didn't have a leader when Paul started teaching them. But then last year Paul started pushing for the New Way Synagogue to join together with us. We helped them enlarge the building and renamed it the Christian Worship Center. It looked like a good fit, but it was a lot of headaches. Putting the two groups together was like mixing oil and water. Last year, Paul took a group to Passover in Jerusalem and brought back John Mark. Do you remember him? He is Mary's son, but his dad was Grecian, so he was able to relate to both sides. He's covering my groups right now as well as his own. He's been a really good addition to the leadership."

"Sounds like your ministry is doing great!" said Yanis.

"Well, to be honest, after Orpah died, I just turned the leadership over to Barnabas and Paul. I mean I still lead the two groups I started with. One is a group of families, and the other is a men's only group. Both are mostly Gentile. I'm not sure where I belong. I want to go to a new place and start all over, teaching people who have never heard the New Way. I don't want to be dealing with people's problems all day. I feel like I want to teach about what I learned from Jesus, and Paul and Barnabas want to focus on living obediently to the Holy Spirit. I don't think that's wrong. I just don't know where I fit."

"I understand," said Yanis thoughtfully.

"Thanks. I think this trip was necessary to get away from Antioch and really determine where I'm supposed to be."

"May I give you some advice?"

"Of course. That's why I shared it with you," said Jonathan.

"My friend, I know you were called to Antioch when you were a young man. Have you heard the Holy Spirit telling you to leave? Have you heard clear instructions to stay? Are you being totally obedient to everything He's shown you? Those are the questions you need to be asking. Every time I have felt confused, I have found that a sincere time of dedicated prayer has confirmed where I needed to be. Jehovah

does not want you to be confused, but He often requires complete surrender before He will reveal the next step,” counseled Yanis.

Both men sat in silence. “I think the next step is sleep. Thanks so much for listening and guiding me. I don’t know what the future holds, but I know I’ve got to get back to Antioch and my sons, even though I hate leaving here.”

The Sabbath was spent talking and remembering, laughing and crying. Jenay could tell that Jonathan seemed detached and lethargic about leading his groups in Antioch. She begged him to return and help them to reach Capernaum for Jesus. And Jonathan invited them to join him in Antioch. They talked about the very real possibility that the Romans would turn against the Jews living in Galilee because of the Sanhedrin’s intolerance of the Romans. Yanis and Jenay agreed that they might find themselves relocating outside of Israel someday, but strongly felt that Jehovah had called them to minister in Capernaum for as long as they were allowed.

As they enjoyed the Sabbath afternoon together, Kayla told Jonathan and his friends about the group she had led in Jerusalem until her husband James, Jonathan and Jenay’s dad, was killed by King Herod. “Marta and I kept the house group together while John continued to travel and preach. But at Passover, a group from Ephesus persuaded John and Marta to come and teach them about following Jesus. I agreed that they should go, but I didn’t want to stay in Jerusalem alone. John arranged for me to move back here to be near Jenay. I’ve been here for two months and I’m just getting settled. But now I feel a strong desire to go and help you raise your two motherless boys. Let me pray about it some more. If Jehovah leads me to Antioch, you may find me on your doorstep!” Jonathan assured her that he understood her desire to stay in Capernaum, but that she was always welcome in his home. He encouraged her to pray and seek God’s will.

“Did you hear that Philip was martyred in Carthage?” asked Jenay.

“Yes, Dad told me that on his last visit. I was probably closer to Philip than any of the other apostles. I mean, the other apostles seemed like Dad’s friends, but Philip took a special interest in us boys,” said Jonathan.

“I always felt that I could go to him with any question, and he would always be there. It was a blow to me to hear of his death,” agreed Yanis.

“Did you know that his wife, Basha, is now married to the Apostle Matthew? Last I knew, they were back in Carthage trying to get deeper into Africa.”

“No, I didn’t know that! Is Jordan with them?” asked Jonathan.

“No, he’s the leader of a strong group of New Way followers in Cana, both Jew and Gentile,” said Yanis.

“We walked right through there on our way. I wish I had known. I would have looked him up. But we don’t plan to return the same route.

I think we're going home through Damascus. Where are Peter and Andrew these days?" asked Jonathan.

"Peter left Jerusalem after nearly being put to death by Herod when your dad was murdered. He has been mostly preaching in Galilee and Samaria but some up in Damascus. And last I heard, Andrew was leading a group to preach north of Damascus in unknown territory," said Grandmother Salome.

"Can you believe Joel is an evangelist in Cyprus?" laughed Yanis.

"I actually saw him a few years ago. He and his wife came to Antioch to preach. When did we grow up? I've even got some gray hair starting!" said Jonathan. How good it was to be together again. Yanis, Jenay, and Jonathan stayed up and talked long after the others had called it a night.

It was hard to say goodbye on Sunday morning. There were long hugs and promises to not stay apart so long, but everyone knew there were no guarantees except that they would be together with Jesus for all eternity. Jonathan had a long journey in front of him, but his spirit had been renewed and refreshed by his family. The four men hoped to be home by the Sabbath.

## Chapter 2

“The crops are bountiful this year. Praise Jehovah! We are learning to live in this new land,” Leah called to Adah. Their booths at the market were side by side and they often helped each other when customers crowded to see what fruits and vegetables they had to sell. Leah’s booth was filled with herbs and spices, while Adah sold vegetables. “Maybe this year we will be able to add a new room to the house. Lily is getting too old to sleep with her brothers.”

“Yeah, I have Jonah sleeping in the living area because his sisters don’t want him in their room. But I’m sure Eli will address it when there’s time to add on. Jehovah has blessed us.”

“Do you remember the beautiful bedrooms we had in Jerusalem?” asked Adah.

“Don’t get me started! What I miss is my dishes. I had a beautiful blue set of matching plates and bowls and cups.” Leah got a faraway look in her eyes. Then she startled. “But don’t forget, we always lived in fear for our lives and the lives of our families. Here we are free to follow Jesus. I’ll take that over dishes or bedrooms.”

“You are right, and if the crops continue to thrive, we will eventually get settled here. I’m pleased that the children are doing so well. Everyone seems to enjoy being out in Jehovah’s creation and they are growing so fast.” Their girl talk continued all morning as they sold their produce. Around noon, when their boxes were empty, they packed up and walked to another booth to see if Maacah was ready to head home.

“Could you help me carry some of these boxes? I’ve been selling Hezekiah’s fruit today, too. His boxes are all empty, but I think it will be another hour before mine are gone.”

Adah grabbed four empty boxes that belonged to Hezekiah. “We had a good morning. Hopefully, yours will sell soon.”

“I lost some customers because I couldn’t get to everyone fast enough. They probably came to your booth!” Maacah laughed.

“Tell Eli, and maybe we can split up Hezekiah’s fruit between the three of us tomorrow,” suggested Adah. Leah added the other four empty boxes to her own and the two ladies headed home leaving Maacah to wait on customers and sell her remaining vegetables.

“I hope Ahinoam is doing well. She had a fairly easy birthing, but it seemed to take the bleeding a long time to stop,” said Leah.

“She will be weak, I’m afraid,” agreed Adah. The women continued to chat as they carried the empty boxes home. They greeted Eli as they left their boxes in the barn. Then they headed to the fields to find their husbands and children and join them to work until sunset.

The six families had moved to Antioch from Jerusalem two years ago and purchased ten adjoining plots of land. They built their huts in a circle around a large, shared cooking area and yard and lived as one family. The children thrived on having so many brothers and sisters.

After working in the fields all day, they needed to enjoy being children for a while before sleep.

Eli led the group in singing a Psalm together and then prayed for God's blessing for the night. Each family moved to their own hut and retired for the night. They would eat breakfast before dawn, and at first light, everyone would need to be in the fields picking the produce for market.

The only break in this routine was the Sabbath. How joyful it seemed to light the Sabbath candles and spend time praising Jehovah for another week. At times they discussed their desire to share with their fellow Jews their belief that Jesus was the Messiah, but so far, they had just stayed together and worshipped as a group each Sabbath. Eli or one of the other men would lead them and they were happy.



On Sunday, the four men accepted the breakfast and travel bags of food that Grandmother Salome had her servants pack for them. They said their goodbyes quickly and ate their bread and olives as they walked. "Your family is incredible! What a heritage you have!" exclaimed Chillion as they walked along the Sea of Galilee. Jonathan had just pointed out the cove where Jesus met with His apostles and fed them breakfast on the beach. He explained that Jesus had emphasized Peter's call to ministry by repeating the miraculous catch of fish.

"I want so badly to be teaching about my time with Jesus and what I learned directly from Him. I'm grateful for Barnabas and Paul and the others, but I'm wondering if I should be moving on to another city so I can share my experiences," confided Jonathan.

"I can see why you would feel that way. It seems the Leadership is moving toward how to live out the New Way and what a Christian should look like and be, rather than focusing on what Jesus' earthly life was like," agreed Absalom.

"I think it's time for you to return to the Leadership meetings. We've missed you and need your input. You should talk with them and explain what you want to do. Maybe you don't need to move away. Maybe you could start some new groups right where you are. There's plenty of people in Antioch that we haven't reached," said Asher.

"That's true," agreed Jonathan, seeming deep in thought.

The road the men were following was much steeper than the route they had traveled from Antioch to Capernaum. But it was wooded and cool, and a welcome relief from having to travel through the desert wilderness. The view of the Mount Hermon Range was beautiful with its snowcapped peaks. The men agreed that this was a much more pleasant route for summer travel, but they wouldn't want to attempt it in winter.



Manasseh padded one corner of the oxcart as best he could for Dinah and their newborn son. He also needed to fit four slaves and three little ones between the boxes of food and household goods. Maybe he should have let his two older boys walk with the first group, but Simon, his father-in-law, had insisted that Manasseh would need them for protection as they went through Samaria. They would ride on the back of the cart. He would ride on the driver's seat with his slave, Cronus. No other families from the synagogue had chosen to join them, so it was just his oxcart and his brother's that would be traveling to Antioch. On Sunday morning, they ate breakfast while it was still dark and then quickly finished loading the oxcart. Dinah recalled the sweet farewell at her brother's home on Sabbath night. Her two older brothers and their families would be staying in Jerusalem and running the bank that their dad had started. It was hard saying goodbye and knowing that she wouldn't be a part of her nephews' and nieces' lives. Now, Dinah wiped away the tears as she silently said goodbye to the home where her babies had been born and where she and Manasseh had lived for their entire married life. *Where has the time gone? Sixteen years of marriage! Who would have thought these strapping young men would be mine? Six babies! Jehovah has blessed us. Now what will the future hold?* Cronus skillfully drove the oxcart to Nathan's house, arriving just as the sun peeked over the mountain.

Nathan, Manasseh's younger brother, was rearranging some boxes in his oxcart as they arrived. Achsah his wife was getting the three little ones settled. She greeted Dinah and discussed rearranging things so that they could travel together. "Hush!" said Dinah. "Be still. Can't you see the men are stressed? Maybe tomorrow we can ride together, but we need to be on the road." Dinah was looking forward to time alone and she knew the servants would entertain her children and wouldn't chatter. Achsah would want to talk. Dinah wanted time to think and reflect and remember. Joab and Jethro, their grown sons, sat on the back of the oxcart. They had long ago resigned themselves to being left out of the walk to Antioch. Their grandfather Simon had decreed that they travel with the family and what he said was law. The men assigned the armed servants to the back of Nathan's oxcart and finally were satisfied that they were ready. The journey had begun. If all went well, they should arrive in time to join their group for the Sabbath. That group had left for Antioch right after Sukkot, but Manasseh and Nathan had waited until Manasseh's sixth child was born and Dinah was able to travel.

All day, Dinah bounced along in the wagon, nursing her son as necessary and reassuring the other children that all was well, but her body hurt. *Is Jehovah punishing me for keeping this secret from my husband? Should I tell him? It will be the end of our world if I tell him that I have become a follower of Jesus. He will divorce me. Then he will either have me stoned or sent back to my abba. And I know that*

*Abba will have me stoned. He will be totally disgraced. They will not be persuaded of the truth that I have found. But how can I keep quiet any longer? This move is disrupting everything that we have established. Is this the right time to tell Manasseh and let him make his decision?*

Her back hurt so badly as they jostled along in the cart. No amount of blankets could soften the blows. She needed a few more weeks to heal from this last birthing. It had been a hard one and it seemed her back was taking its time to heal. How good it felt to walk around and stretch every couple of hours. As the oxen were drinking from a stream and everyone was enjoying a nice stretch, the men decided that they would keep their eyes opened for the next good place to camp for the night. They were pleased with their progress, but everyone was getting tired and cross. Soon they were on the road again, but before they could find a camping place, Hasham, Nathan's driver, pointed out that the ox on the right was limping. Nathan signaled to the men in the front cart that they needed to stop. Cronus stopped and jumped down from the driver's seat. Nathan and Hasham were checking the ox's foot and leg. They couldn't see anything wrong, but Cronus was more experienced. He, too, couldn't see any problem, but suggested that they just take it very slowly into the first camping area they could find. Hopefully, the ox was just tired. Dinah's mind was racing ahead wondering what would happen if the ox was unable to travel. Now, Hasham led the way, letting the oxen go at their own speed. It was obvious to all that the ox was in pain. They were traveling deeper into Samaria, and it was getting harder and harder to find grassy areas. The camping areas were mostly dirt and often a well instead of a stream. Thankfully, they soon found a small camping area that included a stream and a small grassy area.

The servants quickly unhitched the oxen and led them to the stream. They staked them so that they could graze on the patches of grass. The others began to disembark from the oxcarts and stretch their weary bodies. The children collected firewood and some of the servants began fishing. They would have plenty of time to cook the fish before sunset since it was an earlier-than-planned stop for this first day. The men and servants were discussing what needed to be done for the ox.

They finally agreed that a day of rest would probably be the best treatment since there didn't seem to be any obvious damage. They would let it rest for a day and then they would continue on Tuesday. Maybe everyone would benefit from a day of not jostling in the carts.

Monday seemed like a holiday. Everyone was in good spirits and the men were certain the ox just needed a day of rest and would be good as new tomorrow. They had planned for a few delays, and really had no set schedule.

Dinah and Achsah walked around the camping area and talked. "All my life, I've been taught how evil the Samaritans are. But those who have passed by just look like us. It's strange. I thought they would look different," admitted Dinah.

“And I guess I imagined that the whole area would be dark and foreboding. There does seem to be less grass and trees than when we started yesterday morning, but it’s not that different from some places in Judea,” agreed Achsah. The children happily played in and around the stream. The weather was hot, and their linen tunics dried quickly. The men sat and talked, and the servants enjoyed an easy day of mostly resting.

Everyone rose at dawn on Tuesday, and the servants had breakfast ready for the travelers. But the report from Cronus and Hasham was not good. The ox, if anything, seemed worse. Whatever was wrong was not going to heal in a day. The men gathered with Cronus and Hasham. “I don’t think we are far from Sychar,” said Nathan. “It was supposed to be one day’s journey from Jerusalem and Simon warned us to stop either before or after it to camp.”

“So, I guess we need to purchase another ox in Sychar,” stated Manasseh.

“I don’t see any other option,” Cronus said. “We can’t pull this heavy of load with just one ox. You’ll need to purchase a new ox, but one that is already trained and ready to travel.”

“What if we just waited it out? Do you think the ox’s leg would heal if we just gave it more time?” Cronus explained that it was a bad sign that the ox had not improved with a day of rest. He was afraid the ox was lame, and probably should be butchered.

“That’s not something I want to do here!” declared Nathan.

“And you’d still need a new ox. Dad, why don’t you let me and Jethro hike into Sychar and purchase a new ox there?” asked Joab.

The men discussed various options, but in the end, it was decided, much to Joab and Jethro’s disappointment, that Manasseh and Nathan would walk into Sychar and leave the younger men with the slaves to protect the women and all their belongings.

The slaves scurried quickly to find everything that the two men requested for their journey. They were helped into their chain mail tunics and each strapped on a sword. They carried a travel bag with a blanket and three days’ supply of food.

“I feel like I’m going to be roasted alive in this heat. Wow, this tunic is hot!” But both men were convinced that they needed to be prepared to face the Samaritans in case there was trouble. Simon had said that it would be a very dangerous journey and they must remain armed at all times. They had neglected it yesterday and had experienced no problems, but today, they were walking into the unknown and there were only the two of them. They needed to be prepared.

Everyone wished them well as they left the camping area giving last minute instructions to Joab and Jethro who would be in charge at the camp. Once they were gone, the servants began making additional bread. No one knew how long it would be before they would be able to travel, and they wanted to take advantage of their downtime. They collected rocks and designed a small oven while the children collected firewood.



Manasseh and Nathan were grateful that the road was level. But after hiking an hour, they discovered that they were gradually climbing, and the sun was getting hotter. Even so, the two brothers enjoyed their time together. They were both busy men and hadn't had much time to just talk while living in Jerusalem. Manasseh was a scribe at his father-in-law, Simon's, bank, and Nathan had used his earlier training as a scribe to become a rabbi at the local Hebrew School. Since Dinah, Manasseh's wife, was Simon's only daughter, he had insisted that they spend all their spare time with them, especially once their children began to arrive. "Maybe when we get to Antioch, I will help you establish a Hebrew School," said Manasseh.

Nathan had heard this dream before and knew that Manasseh longed to escape the control of his father-in-law. "And you think Simon will be pleased with that?" he asked.

"I was just thinking that it will be a new beginning and I should be able to do as I please. I am not his servant."

"No, but you are married to his only daughter, and I've never seen a man so determined to supervise his grandchildren."

"Joab is doing well working with Simon. And Jethro seems like he will fit in there as well. Maybe I could train him to take my place and then slip out the back door," said Manasseh.

"Yeah, I'll believe it when it happens. What's the plan for today? This road is definitely getting steeper and I'm roasting in this armor," complained Nathan.

"My goal right now is to find a well. My skin of water is empty and I'm not going to last much longer."

"But is it okay if we drink the Samaritan's water? Simon wouldn't approve," said Nathan.

"Simon is not here dying of thirst! I don't see a problem with it. Jehovah created it all. Water is water."

"I guess. But somehow it seems unclean."

"Then we'll deal with it," said Manasseh angrily. He hated all the rules and he hated to be reminded that Simon was forever watching his every move to make sure he and his family complied with The Law and The Prophets and all the other traditions and rules of the High Priest and Pharisees.

They trudged along in silence as the road grew steeper and the terrain became more of a wilderness. Just when they felt they could go no farther, they sighted a well in the distance. They were pleased to find that no one was around, and the water was cold and refreshing. They sat on the edge of the well and drank deeply. They could see nothing ahead but a steep climb and hoped that the well indicated that Sychar was nearby. Maybe when they crested the next hill, they would be able to see better, but right now they needed to rest. As they both refilled the skins that they carried for water, they were startled by the arrival of three men.

"Shalom," said the older man pleasantly, "and welcome."

"Shalom," both Manasseh and Nathan blurted out automatically.

“Do not be afraid. I am a fellow Jew. Are you traveling from Jerusalem?”

“Yes, sir.”

“I am Philip, and I, too, am from Jerusalem. This is Joachim and Shemaiah. Do you realize that this is one of Jacob’s wells? You will find the Samaritans here peaceful, and you would be much more comfortable without your armor. The sun is quite warm at midday,” said Philip.

*Was this a trap? Get us to disarm and then take us as prisoners. But they aren’t even carrying weapons.* Manasseh laughed nervously and agreed. As he pulled off the mail tunic, he talked with Philip. “This is our first trip into Samaria. We were uncertain what we would find.”

“I remember well the fears of my upbringing. What are you looking to find?” asked Philip. Manasseh felt a quickening of his pulse and his interest was aroused. Philip seemed different. He seemed to be filled with a peace that surrounded him and flowed from him. Manasseh felt that he was talking with a holy man or an angel that could read his mind, and he was intrigued. It was as if the question Philip asked had several layers of meaning that penetrated to his very soul. Manasseh explained that they needed to purchase an ox that was already trained and ready to travel since Nathan’s ox had become lame on their first day of travel to Antioch.

“Come with me. I have a meeting with a small group of men in the next city. It won’t take long and then I know where you can find a good ox to meet your needs.” Manasseh and Nathan agreed to accompany Philip and the two other men. As they walked together, Philip continued to ask them about people and happenings in Jerusalem that put them at ease. Once they crested the hill, they could see a large city laid out before them. They were grateful that Philip had volunteered to help them navigate it.

Phillip led them to a home not far from the main road. A group of men were waiting in the back yard and greeted the new arrivals. Everyone seemed to know each other but did not question that Philip had brought newcomers. Manasseh and Nathan sat near the back of the small group and wondered what kind of meeting Philip was leading. “Are these Samaritans or Jews?” Nathan whispered.

“I don’t know. Be still.”

“I don’t think we should be here,” whispered Nathan.

“Then leave. I’m staying.” The brothers continued to whisper until Philip stood to speak.

Phillip stood and addressed the men in the yard. “Men of Israel, you know that Jehovah has sent me to tell you very good news. I was in Jerusalem when Jesus was crucified. I saw Him die a very cruel death. I was there when the Roman soldiers declared Him dead. But three days later, I saw Him alive. There is no question in my mind that a man who can resurrect after three days is indeed the Messiah. For forty days, Jesus continued to teach His followers. When I realized that He was truly alive, that He had conquered death, and that He fulfilled the prophecies found in The Law and The Prophets, I bowed

my knee before Him and worshipped Him as my Messiah. Jesus returned to Heaven, but on Pentecost, Jehovah sent the Holy Spirit to live inside those who were in a right relationship with Him. When the Holy Spirit came into my innermost being, I felt brand new. I felt that He was guiding me and showing me things that I needed to understand. I became a deacon in Jerusalem, but the Holy Spirit led me to move my family to Samaria so I could spend my time teaching you about this wonderful, good news. Today I must help some friends, but tomorrow I will teach you more and stay to answer your questions. Let us pray together before I leave. Jehovah God, thank You for this group that has gathered to learn more about Your Messiah, Jesus. Help us as we study Your Scripture this week. Bless these visitors and help them to find what they are searching for. In Jesus' name."

Someone began leading the men to sing a Psalm, but Philip motioned for Manasseh and Nathan to follow him. The three of them left and Philip began to ask them what they were looking for in an ox. Manasseh and Nathan were too shocked to speak. They had never heard the truth about Jesus. While they knew that many considered him to be the Messiah, they were taught that it was only radical lunatics who did so. What could be worse? *We are deep in enemy territory, totally surrounded by Samaritans, and being led by a Jesus follower. How do we escape?* They couldn't decide whether to follow Philip and let him help them, or to run as fast as possible to get away. But the truth was, they needed help and Philip seemed intent on providing the assistance they needed. So, Manasseh and Nathan continued to follow him and began to answer his questions. They had walked several miles outside of the town when Philip approached a small farmhouse. "Shalom, Zedekiah. How are you, my friend?"

"Philip! Shalom. How good to see you again!" he said as he hugged Philip enthusiastically.

"Zedekiah, these are my new friends Manasseh and Nathan. They were traveling from Jerusalem to Antioch with their families when one of their oxen became lame. They need to purchase an ox to complete their journey. Do you have one ready to sell?"

"For you, Philip, I would give my own ox. But yes, I have one for sale that I think would do nicely." Zedekiah looked at Manasseh and asked, "Would you like to see it?" When they agreed, the four men walked toward the barn. There were several oxen grazing in a pasture and Zedekiah instructed them to stay behind the fence. He went inside and laid his hand on a healthy, young ox. He gave orders and the ox immediately obeyed and accompanied Zedekiah through the gate and into the yard so that Nathan and Manasseh could examine it. They all agreed that the ox looked good. Nathan gave the ox some basic commands and he responded appropriately. After a price had been agreed upon, Zedekiah invited the three men to join him in his courtyard for some juice.

"Thank you, sir, but we need to return to our families," said Nathan quickly.

“But we need to discuss what you are going to do about the lame ox,” Philip reminded them.

“Oh, yeah,” said Nathan as he looked at Manasseh.

“Thank you, sir, we could certainly use some advice and direction and would appreciate your hospitality,” said Manasseh.

“Certainly.” The three men walked to the courtyard where servants offered them juice and rolls with cheese and fruit. Manasseh took a piece of fruit and refused the other. Nathan followed suit. Philip asked Zedekiah if he had a suggestion for what to do about the lame ox. “Is the ox at your camping area?” Zedekiah asked.

“Yes, sir. It is about two hours walking from here,” replied Manasseh.

“I could send my servants to butcher it tomorrow morning. I have a booth at the market where I would sell the meat if the ox is indeed healthy.” Nathan assured him that the ox was healthy except for the one lame leg. They agreed on a price and Nathan stood to leave.

Philip asked, “Do you gentlemen have enough hay to get you to Antioch? Many travelers from Jerusalem do not realize that there is little grass for grazing around here. Did you pack hay for the journey?” Manasseh and Nathan admitted that they had not thought of that, and Nathan sat down quietly. They discussed with Zedekiah how much hay they would need for the four oxen. “Once you see the Great Sea, the camping areas will again be green with grass, but you will need at least two days of food for your oxen to get through the wilderness. And you are getting close to the Sabbath. There will be wells along the road, but very little grass,” Philip counseled.

“Also, I don’t mean to alarm you, but you need to be prepared for lions. You would do well to keep someone on watch and keep a lantern or a fire burning. Since there will be little firewood, I suggest you make sure you have enough oil for your lanterns. Lions won’t bother you during the day. But at night you need to keep a light burning in the camp,” said Zedekiah.

“Do you have enough oil? If you assigned a servant to constantly walk the perimeter of your camp with a lantern, you would be safe. And again, once you see the Great Sea, that won’t be necessary. The lions are more dangerous in the wilderness where there is little food for them,” said Philip.

“We will need to purchase hay and additional oil,” said Manasseh. “Is there anything else we should know before we travel through this area?”

Philip laughed, “Oh, I’m sure you should know many things, but I think you will have a safe journey if you have enough hay for your oxen and oil for your lanterns.” Zedekiah indicated that he could sell them hay, but they would need to purchase the oil at the market.

The talk turned to where Manasseh and Nathan would store the hay and oil since their oxcarts were quite full. The men decided that the bags of hay could be tied to the outside of the oxcarts, but the jars of oil would need to be placed in the carts. In the end, it was decided that Manasseh, Nathan, and Philip would spend the night with

Zedekiah. "At dawn, my servants will take you to the market to purchase lantern oil, and then deliver you and your purchases to the camping area. My servants will butcher the ox after making sure that you are safely on the road again," insisted Zedekiah.

Manasseh expressed his amazement at Philip's and Zedekiah's kindness toward two strangers. "We serve Jehovah and Jesus, the Messiah. He will bless us," said Zedekiah humbly. Manasseh swallowed hard. *I have never met such men. They really seem to care about us. But I know that I mustn't let myself be taken in by their beliefs.*

While the men were invited to join Philip and Zedekiah and his family for dinner, Manasseh and Nathan chose to remain outside and found a place in the yard to throw their blankets in the dirt. They ate bread and pickled fish from their travel bags and settled down to sleep. As they lay on their blankets, they listened to the laughter and joy that came from inside Zedekiah's home.

"Manasseh, are you awake?"

"Yeah."

"Manasseh, I've never met men like this. I mean, they are really going out of their way to help us. What do you think it means?"

"I don't know, but there's something different about them."

"What did you think about what Philip said about Jesus?"

"I think it's getting late, and we have a long day tomorrow," said Manasseh.

"I just wonder what it all means."

"Me, too. Get some sleep."

## Chapter 3

At dawn, Zedekiah introduced Manasseh and Nathan to the two servants who would accompany them. The oxcart was loaded with bags of hay. The three men said goodbye to Philip who had an early morning meeting. Then Manasseh and Nathan climbed into the cart and called their goodbyes and thanks to Zedekiah. They stopped at the market long enough for Manasseh to purchase two large jars of lantern oil. Then they were on their way. They were no longer wearing their mail tunics and while the air was hot, both enjoyed the breeze as they rode quite comfortably atop the bags of hay. It was only a little past the second hour when they found the camping area and reunited with their families. Zedekiah's servants worked alongside Manasseh, Nathan, their sons, and servants to get all the hay sacks tied onto the outside of the oxcart. It made the cart look funny, but they were able to fit it all around the edges. Both men did some rearranging to make room for the additional jars of oil. Then the men yoked the new ox with Nathan's other one, and everyone loaded into the carts. They waved goodbye to Zedekiah's servants who would stay and butcher the lame ox.

Manasseh and Cronus led the way and Nathan and Hasham followed. They stopped at Jacob's well and the servants dipped water from the well to pour into a trough for the oxen. Everyone got out and stretched while Manasseh told them about Jehovah providing them with three men to help them secure the ox and instruct them about traveling through the upcoming wilderness. As the oxcarts topped the crest, everyone gasped at the huge city that lay before them. Cronus and Hasham had to slow down to accommodate the other carts and people walking along the road. It was midday and hot, and when the oxcart slowed, the heat became oppressive. Dinah handed the baby to Junos who fanned him with a cloth. "I hope it won't be this hot in Antioch. I'm not sure I can bear it." They stopped often, but there were no pleasant camping areas, just wells and dirt. When Manasseh stopped for the night, everyone was limp from the heat. Manasseh explained to the men that they would take turns walking the perimeter of the camp for the next few nights. He explained about the lions and assigned the men to shifts, two at a time, to keep the lanterns burning as they walked around the camp.

Nathan led the group in singing Psalms after everyone was settled on their blankets. There were no trees, no grass, nothing familiar, and they felt a long way from home. It was too hot to sleep, but they lay on their blankets and sang the familiar and comforting Psalms. Soon after the sun set, Dinah noticed a chill in the air and thanked Jehovah for relief from the heat. She watched the stars become visible and the immensity of the sky took her breath away. She tried to figure out when she would talk with Manasseh but found that she couldn't stay awake to think.

Early on Thursday, they were on the road again. It was a good thing they had purchased the hay because there was no grass to be found. And that night they heard the roar of lions nearby. Manasseh got up and lit a third lantern just to make sure that the two families were safe. He walked around until nearly dawn. While he walked alone, opposite the two men on guard, he had time to think about all that Philip had said. He appreciated the advice about the lions and the hay, but his thoughts were focused on what he said about Jesus being the Messiah. *Could we have missed Him? Would Jehovah send His Messiah and not make it clear to everyone? But Philip said that He had made it clear, and that Jesus had fulfilled the Jewish Scripture.* Suddenly, his mind began to be filled with passages that perfectly described Jesus as Messiah. *Why didn't I investigate him for myself? I let Simon control everything. He said Jesus was a fraud and a heretic and I just believed him. I wonder what Philip will teach that group of men today. Were they Jews or were they Samaritans? I couldn't tell the difference. I wonder if they are asking the same questions that I am?* He forced himself to quit thinking about Jesus and instead wondered if they would see the Great Sea today. Philip had said that once they saw the Sea, they would start to see grass and trees again and would be out of the lions' territory. It would be nice to get a good night's rest. He realized that he didn't hear the lions nearby, so crawled back into his blanket and let the assigned guards keep watch. It would be dawn soon and the beginning of another long day.

All day Friday, they seemed to be traveling slightly downward and by late afternoon they could see the Great Sea shimmering before them. The temperature was more moderate, and they began to find grass again along the way.

Late afternoon, Cronus spotted a nice camping area, complete with a stream and grass. They stopped and enjoyed the more familiar terrain. The servants fished and prepared Sabbath dinner. Manasseh led them in Sabbath prayer. They gathered around a large bonfire and celebrated that they had made it this far. After dinner, they sang some Psalms and Nathan led them in quoting Scripture together. The little ones were tucked in the carts to sleep on their mats, but the adults sat around the bonfire and talked late into the night. Dinah felt that she was getting used to the bouncing around in the cart but was certainly grateful for a Sabbath break. Manasseh and Nathan admitted that their feet were only now recovering from the trip on Tuesday. Neither man mentioned the meeting or that Philip and Zedekiah had been followers of Jesus. Yet, it seemed that both Manasseh and Nathan could think of little else. Manasseh assured the men that they could get a good night's rest tonight and would not need to take turns standing guard. Philip had said that when they found grass and could see the Great Sea, they didn't have to worry about lions. *It seems strange that I trust him completely,* thought Manasseh.

Dinah and Achsah finally retired and slept soundly in the ox carts with their children. The men threw their blankets on the grass and relaxed for the first time in many days. The Sabbath was indeed a day

of rest. They talked and played at the camping area all day. "I guess it's true that you don't know what you've got until it's gone. I've never thought to be grateful for simple things like grass and trees. But after three days in the wilderness, I'm amazed that Jehovah has provided such a beautiful camping area," said Dinah.

She and Achsah walked around and even waded in the stream with the children. "You seem to be healing and getting stronger, Dinah," observed Achsah.

"Maybe sitting still is what I needed to finish healing. Although, I'm not sure you can call what we are doing sitting still!" Both women laughed.

"No, I have bruises from all the bouncing," admitted Achsah.

"But we may arrive sometime tomorrow. In some ways, I will be sad to see an end to this special time," said Dinah quietly.

"You? Sad to join our own people?" questioned Achsah.

"Yes, in a way. It has been good for Manasseh to be in charge and be his own man. My abba dominates him entirely too much. Sometimes I dream of stopping before Antioch and just never arriving."

"Bite your tongue, Dinah! You would never do that to your parents. And I know you love the synagogue," said Achsah.

"Yes, I would never do it. It's just a silly dream to see my husband become the man that Jehovah intended and not what my abba intends."

"I wouldn't say that it's silly. But it's just the way life is. You are their baby girl, and your abba loves you and your children as his own."

"Yes, I am blessed," said Dinah, but inside her heart she was thinking, plotting, planning, wondering if they could locate away from the rest of the group and not be so dominated by her abba. Soon she would know.

They reloaded the oxcarts and prepared for an early start tomorrow morning. The Sabbath had been good. But the anticipation for arriving in Antioch was building. All day on Sunday, they watched the Great Sea on their left and enjoyed the view of fertile fields and trees on their right. Sometimes the road would veer to the east, and they would lose sight of the Great Sea, but then it would reappear to reassure them they were on course. By late afternoon, Antioch was still not in view. Cronus chose a camping area, and everyone eagerly stretched out for what they once again assumed would be their last night on the road. While the children were being tucked in their blankets by the servants, Dinah privately asked Manasseh how they would find the group. "If Antioch is as big as some of these other cities we have passed through, I don't know how we'll find them."

"Don't you think that we can just start asking for Simon the Pharisee and they will point us to him?" Dinah detected the bitterness in his voice and decided to speak.

"Manasseh, I have really enjoyed this time with you in charge of our family without interference from Abba. I want you to know that. And if you decide to locate away from them, I would not be disappointed," she whispered.



Manasseh jerked away from her wondering if she suspected his thoughts. He decided to not acknowledge her words but instead responded, "I don't know what tomorrow will bring. But in answer to your question, we are to meet them at the market at noon. Goodnight, Dinah. I'm glad you are feeling stronger. I was afraid this trip would be too hard for you."

"Goodnight, Manasseh."

On Monday, they ate a quick breakfast, loaded the carts, and soon were on the road. Everyone was watching ahead, eagerly awaiting the end of their journey. In less than an hour, they felt the oxen straining as they began to pull up a ridge of low mountains. Then suddenly, they were certain that this was Antioch. It lay in a beautiful valley just west of the ridge. For as far as the eye could see, there were dwelling places, businesses, and people. *How will I find the right market? Surely Simon would send someone to meet us near the main road.* Manasseh instructed Cronus to pull off the road at the first well they saw. There Manasseh asked where to find the market. The ladies who were drawing their water didn't understand Greek, Aramaic, or Hebrew and giggled shyly. The oxen needed to be watered, so they waited their turn to dip water into the troughs. Before they were through, a man and two of his servants arrived. "My maidservants reported that two oxcarts had arrived, and they could not understand your language. My apologies. Welcome to Antioch. I see that you are Jewish. Where do you come from?"

"We are from Jerusalem and were told to meet our friends at the market. Could you direct us there?" asked Manasseh.

"There are many markets here. But the closest one is less than a quarter hour from here on your left. The larger one is about a half-hour further, on your right. You can't miss them. I hope your friends will be there to meet you. Welcome to Antioch."

"Thank you for your kindness. Shalom," said Manasseh.

"Good day."

The two families loaded back into the carts and watched wide-eyed as people from every nation crowded the street. Cronus and Hasham had to carefully direct the oxen through the crowds. Manasseh remembered that he was supposed to meet the rest of the group at noon and wondered what he was supposed to do between now and then. It was still two hours before midday. When they found the first market, he instructed Nathan and his family to stay and walk around. "I'm going to the second market and will look around there. If you do not find anyone from our group by the seventh hour, then come and find me. We'll be waiting for you near the main road. We'll decide then, what to do next."

Cronus navigated the oxen slowly through the people and soon they saw the larger market. It, too, was filled with shoppers speaking many different languages. Dinah's eyes shone with delight as she looked around at all the exciting things displayed in the booths. Manasseh assigned her and Junos and the younger children to look in the food area. He assigned Joab and Jethro to search the right side

and sent two slaves toward the left. He would walk around the perimeter and search. This market was larger than the one in Jerusalem. They agreed to look for their friends and to meet at the seventh hour where Cronus was waiting with the oxcart and the rest of the servants.

Nathan had a much smaller market to search, so he and a couple of menservants left the wagon. He told Achsah and the rest to wait with Hasham in the oxcart. Achsah was angry at being left in the cart and once Nathan had gone, she got out of the cart and allowed her servants and children to gather around her. They stretched their legs and played around the cart. She watched wide-eyed as the colorfully dressed women arrived to shop at the market. It was almost noon when she was certain that she spotted Lilah and Hannah and their children coming toward them. When she was certain that it was them, she called out, "Shalom!" They and their children began to run toward them and embraced them enthusiastically. Everyone began talking at once. "Every day for the past two weeks, we have come to meet you. And now you are here. But where is Dinah and her family?" Explanations were given and they were assured that Manasseh and Dinah had a healthy baby boy. And, yes, they had made the trip well. Achsah sent two servants to search for Nathan. The ladies continued to talk while the children played at their feet. When everyone was together and greetings were said, Nathan suggested that they go find Manasseh's family at the larger market.

"Esther and Zipporah are assigned to the big market up ahead. I'm sure that Manasseh will find them. We don't live far from here, so we will shop and go home. We were not able to find houses all together, but Hannah and I live close to each other. We were assigned to daily search this market for you. I'm so glad you've arrived safely. We'll see you on the Sabbath if not before," said Lilah.

Nathan's family climbed into the oxcart, and Hasham navigated the oxen through the people to the larger market. It was past noon when they arrived, and they found Cronus waiting with Zipporah and Esther. Esther had sent her maidservants into the market to purchase things they needed, but they had decided to just wait at the cart, since Cronus had said that everyone would return at the seventh hour. As each group returned from their foray into the market, there was hugging and cries of welcome. Esther was beaming with pride as she greeted her grandchildren. She demanded to see her newest grandson and Dinah obediently lifted him from his carrier.

"Judah, this is your grandmother," said Dinah as she handed him to her mother. Of course, Judah was screaming angrily for being awakened. "He was a hard one to birth, and I still have some back pain, but we're doing great," Dinah reported.

"Oh, he's a fine one. Four healthy grandsons and two granddaughters. It's enough to make one proud!" exclaimed Esther.

Zipporah greeted Nathan's family and informed them that they would be staying with them until they could decide on housing, while Manasseh's family would stay with Simon. Goodbyes were said and

the two groups headed their separate ways. *I should have known we would stay with my parents. Hopefully, we can find housing soon. It is encouraging that we're not all living in one area of town. It's a large city and maybe we can locate even farther away. Jehovah, please guide Manasseh to desire to be farther away from my parents. Jehovah, I want to honor them, but You know that I need to tell them my secret and it will be harder the closer we are.* Esther gave Cronus directions to their home and Manasseh helped her climb into the oxcart to be with her grandchildren. She insisted on holding Judah even though Dinah didn't feel it would be safe for either of them. Cronus directed the oxen to walk slowly, and the servants walked together behind the cart catching up on the news. They had only gone a few steps when Esther declared that Junos should be carrying baby Judah. Junos was walking behind the wagon and Cronus stopped the oxen so the transfer could be made. Dinah breathed a sigh of relief and thanked Junos. *Welcome to you, too, Mother. Now, I am incompetent to carry my own child even though I've just brought him safely for 300 miles. Oh, Great Jehovah, help me to be peaceful and not fight with my mother on this first night. Please, in Jesus' name.*



When Jonathan entered the Christian Worship Center exactly on time for the Leadership Team's meeting, he was surprised that every man stood to greet him. He had planned to slip in quietly and hopefully unnoticed. "Jonathan, welcome back. We have sorely missed you. I trust that you have returned refreshed from your journey," said Barnabas who was currently leading the Leadership Team.

"Yes, thank you, sir," said Jonathan still stunned by the greeting. "It was a very refreshing journey and just what I needed."

"You were visiting your grandmother, and did you find her well?" asked Samuel.

"Yes, sir. My grandmother is hosting a New Way group in her home each Sabbath night and is doing well. But I also got to visit with my mother who has relocated to Capernaum after my dad's death. And I got to spend time with my twin sister and her husband, Yanis. Yanis was a mentor to me while we followed Jesus together. He was a great encouragement to me. Thank you for asking."

"For those of you who may not know, Jonathan's dad was the Apostle James who was martyred two years ago. His Grandmother Salome was a sister to Mary the mother of Jesus. And three of his relatives are apostles. His family has impacted the world with the New Way," said Paul.

"What word did you hear from Peter?" asked Samuel.

"No one knew where Peter was, but Andrew has taken a group of men north of Caesarea Philippi into unknown territory. My Uncle John is teaching in Ephesus."

“So, the New Way is being spread. Jesus said it would spread to the entire world. That is good. Let’s hear reports from the rest of you and see where we need to pray and concentrate our efforts this next week,” said Barnabas.

As Jonathan sat down on a bench at the table, he realized that he had built it up in his head that this group would not be glad to see him. *I thought that they had taken over the leadership and essentially didn’t need me or want me anymore. That’s how Satan works. I miss a few weeks and immediately I get attacked with Satan’s lies to keep me from participating.* He quickly repented and began to listen to the reports from the other men. It seemed that the New Way was being preached on several fronts.

“My friend, Yanis, is teaching in a mixed nationality school. He is teaching a course on the life of Jesus. He has 200 students in his classes. It seems to be an effective way of reaching the next generation and something I think we may want to look into in the future.” Jonathan had not planned to share about the school until he had prayed it through and developed a plan, but he knew that the Holy Spirit was guiding him to participate fully with this Leadership Team and trust them to pray with him about future ministries.

“Is this a Christian school?”

“Yes, but it is almost entirely Gentiles, so they have no background to understand Jesus’ teachings. He reports that the parents are amazed at the improvement in behavior among the students, and many are becoming diligent followers of Jesus as a result of the class.”

“It sounds like something we should pray about and possibly investigate,” agreed Dan.

After some more possible ministries were suggested, Barnabas asked Jonathan to lead them in a prayer of blessing. As he prayed aloud, he felt a deep, deep healing taking place and he knew without a shadow of doubt that God had called him to minister to the people of Antioch. The men stayed and visited a while longer after the meeting ended, then Jonathan and Asher walked toward home together. “Did that feel good?” asked Asher.

“Very good. I know that this is where I belong.”

“I’m glad you got that settled. It’s obvious to everyone else. Welcome back to the work! I’ve been praying for you to find whatever will make you excited again. It’s good to have you back in the meetings.” Jonathan retrieved his two boys and walked back to his house, which was just a few doors down. Zerah was fast asleep, but Zebedee managed to walk home beside his dad. *Thank you, Father, for Sharon. Her keeping the boys is Your provision.*



“Have you found a Hebrew School?” Manasseh asked the men. “If there is one, I want to locate close to it so that my sons can attend.

If there is not one, then I want to locate where a school can be built. We cannot let our sons grow up in a foreign land without knowing the Hebrew Scripture.” The eighteen families of the synagogue were gathered at Simon’s house for Sabbath dinner.

All week Manasseh and Nathan had searched for housing from the list provided by the Seleucid officials. Antioch had many empty properties that the officials wanted filled. They were offering property at very low prices to re-populate the city. The first group had all found housing to their liking on the western side of the city. Unfortunately, there didn’t seem to be a Hebrew School. “Nathan and I will continue to look, but I can’t believe there is not a Hebrew School in this entire city,” said Manasseh.

“I would think you should live closer to the bank since the boys will only be in school for a few years while you will be walking to the bank for the rest of your life,” stated Simon firmly.

“If I don’t find an established Hebrew School, I may not be working at the bank. I may help Nathan establish a school. Joab and Jethro can help you with the bank, but I think it’s more important that we teach our young men the Scripture or we will lose them to Gentile beliefs.” Manasseh was pleased when all the other men supported his position. He had never stood up against Simon and it felt good to be treated with respect.

“If you establish a Hebrew School, it should be near the synagogue. You will see where that is tomorrow. We have repaired it, and it is looking quite nice. Now we are working to enlarge it, because it is barely large enough for our own group,” said Mahlon.

“I don’t believe there is enough property there to build a school,” volunteered Adonijah.

The main road through Antioch divided the city into east and west portions. The government buildings and the bank Simon had purchased were located along this main road. Just behind the bank, Simon had found an area of spacious, elaborate homes. He bought one of the larger ones saying that it would allow the synagogue leadership a place to gather. He had always hosted large Sabbath night dinners in Jerusalem and had already resumed that practice. Priest Othniel and his two married sons had purchased spacious homes near the synagogue which were located near the center of the western area. Everyone else was scattered but on the western side of the main road.

The men continued to discuss plans on Simon’s rooftop, while the ladies and children visited in the courtyard. The ladies began gathering their children and were escorted home by their servants, leaving the men to talk late into the night. Dinah stayed in the courtyard and nursed baby Judah while the servants put the other children to bed. She wasn’t feeling sleepy. It had been a stressful week. *I feel like one of the children here. Manasseh and I, both, are treated like children. If we don’t get out soon, I’m afraid I’ll say something I regret. I know I should be grateful that I can just be lazy and recuperate from the birth. Mother will take care of everything. That seems to be what she wants.*

*Oh, Jehovah, how will I tell her that I have chosen a different way? What will happen to me? They will stone me and take my children. This doesn't just affect me. Guide me and give me wisdom. Help me to know Your leading, Your timing, and help me to be obedient.*

*My peace I give you, not as the world gives. Peace and rest to you.* Dinah sighed deeply as she felt the Holy Spirit speak to her heart. "Dinah, you need to get your rest," called her mother. Like an obedient child, she stood and entered her parents' home.



"Shalom. How could I help you?" said Gideon as he continued to rub a board with oil.

"May I speak with the owner?"

"Sure," said Gideon wiping his hands on a rag. "Wait here, he's in the back." Gideon went to get his dad.

"Dad, there's a man that wants to see you," he called as he opened the warehouse door and saw his dad busy hammering on an oxcart.

Elam put his hammer down and came to the front. "Shalom. How can I help you?"

"Shalom. I just wanted to see what kind of operation you have here," said the man.

"I'm up to date on all my taxes; you can see the records, if you desire."

"No, no. I should introduce myself. I'm Josie and my partners and I own the Carpentry and Fine Furniture Shop near the Bank of Antioch."

"Oh, I've been there. It's a large shop. Are you looking for a job?"

Josie laughed and said, "I might be if you keep undercutting me on prices."

Elam looked confused and replied, "I'm sorry, I don't understand."

"Well, ever since you came to town, you've been stealing my customers by offering lower prices. I figure that you have more customers than you can handle since there are plenty of people moving into Antioch. If you raised your prices, then we would both profit. It's a win-win solution."

"So, you came here to ask me to raise my prices?" Elam looked dumbfounded. And Gideon just grinned. He had suggested the same thing to his dad and heard the same speech each time. He knew what was coming.

"I charge my customers as Jehovah leads me. It is up to Him to provide for me and my family. We do not need to be rich; we only need our daily provision. Jehovah is faithful. I will not charge my customers more for work that Jehovah has provided strength to accomplish. Maybe, your prices are too high."

"You sound like my older brother!" said Josie.

“Sir, I am not in competition with you. There are plenty of customers for both of us. I made sure of that before I opened my store. I wish you no harm,” said Elam with passion.

“I apologize for bothering you. Shalom.”

“It’s no bother. I understand. Shalom.”

After the man had gone, Gideon asked, “Dad, why didn’t you tell him that following Jesus is what makes us different?”

“I don’t know, Son. It just didn’t feel right.” He shook his head as he headed back to work.



On Sabbath morning, the group walked from their various locations to the synagogue. Priest Othniel was pleased to finally have his flock together again. They had completed the journey from Jerusalem in three separate batches, but now they had all arrived. Simon declared that it was time to enlarge the synagogue to accommodate all the new Jews from Antioch that they anticipated. Simon announced the work would begin tomorrow, and they had secured a carpenter who would supervise the volunteers. Priest Othniel required that everyone send or pay for two menservants so that the work would go quickly. They would enlarge both the main floor and the second-floor balcony. “In the meantime, we will meet outdoors in the courtyard until the work is completed, since the weather is perfect.”

## Chapter 4

“Haggith, you’ve got to help me,” pleaded Sophia. “I’ve never even seen this Jewish ceremony.”

“But it was so long ago for my boys, I’m not sure I remember everything. Let’s see, when my youngest boy became a man, the rabbis at the Hebrew School came and talked about his studies. But we don’t have a school. Several of the rabbis talked about his character and discipline as a student, then my son quoted a passage from The Law and The Prophets from memory. I think he could choose any passage he wanted, but I’m not sure. It may have been assigned. Oh, and the rabbi asked him what Jehovah was leading him to do. Sometimes a boy would announce an apprenticeship or where he would be working. Then the rabbi would pronounce him a man and remind him that he was now responsible for following the Law. Then the celebration would begin. That’s about it. But since Costas is not in a Hebrew School, I don’t know how much of it is relevant.”

“Then, can’t we rewrite it so that it is? Let’s see. We could ask Jonathan and maybe others in our Sabbath night group to present him. Then could Samuel teach him to memorize something from The Law and The Prophets to quote? He could announce his plans and Jonathan could encourage him as a follower of Jesus,” insisted Sophia. “I think it would be perfect!”

“I’m sure Samuel would be glad to help Costas learn a passage if he has time to come over and work on it. You would have to talk with Jonathan about being in charge, but I think he would be glad to do it. Would it just be your Sabbath night group?”

“Oh, no. I thought we would invite the whole Christian Center and make it a big party. My firstborn is becoming a man! And should it be a sit-down meal, or just snacks?”

“We just did snacks, but others did whole meals. I guess it’s up to each family,” said Haggith, surprised that Sophia was so excited about this Jewish tradition. She was still amazed that the Gentile Christians wanted to mimic the many Jewish customs and traditions and the Jewish Christians wanted to move as far away from them as possible. “I can see that if it is centered on Jesus, it could be a very nice celebration.”



“Dinah, I want to show you the house I have selected. We will walk there in the morning before it becomes too hot.”

“Certainly,” she replied. She was very curious to see what Manasseh had selected for them.

On Tuesday morning, as the two of them, with baby Judah in his carrier, walked together, Manasseh spoke. “I have made some decisions that I hope will not upset you. I have decided not to work at



the bank with your abba. I will be helping Nathan establish a Hebrew School. We have discussed it with the synagogue, and we are all in agreement. We couldn't find a Hebrew School within walking distance for our sons. We have located three homes that are side by side and Nathan and I will make the center home into a school. It will be really convenient for Nathan and me to be so close. He would be the headmaster and we would ask Mahlon and Priest Othniel to teach some classes. It wouldn't be far for them to walk. Depending on how many students we have, they might only come once or twice a week."

"Oh, Manasseh, I think it's a wonderful plan. Whatever makes you happy is fine with me."

"Dinah, I have always dreamed of using my training as a scribe to teach Hebrew School. I thought I would help your abba for a while until we were established, and then I intended to pursue my dreams. Time has passed quickly and it's time for me to make this move."

"Manasseh, it actually makes me very happy. I am so tired of living under my parents' watchful eyes. When they left Jerusalem before us, I realized more than ever how much I craved independence from them. I am proud of you for pursuing your dreams."

"Nathan! Over here!" called out Manasseh as he saw Nathan searching for him. Nathan had brought Achsah with him, and the ladies began to chatter with excitement. They walked behind the men and let them talk. The two couples walked about a mile and Manasseh pointed out the three houses. Manasseh took Dinah to look at the one on the left, while Nathan and Achsah explored the one on the right. He noticed that Dinah was concerned about the size.

"There will be plenty of room because it is time for Joab and Jethro to get their own places closer to the bank. It's going to be quite a walk and they should be able to afford places of their own. They have both finished their apprenticeship with your dad, so their pay should cover housing for them."

Dinah gasped as she realized the truth in what Manasseh was telling her. *My babies. My firstborn. How quickly they grow up and become men. I don't want to keep them and suffocate them like my parents did me. I want them to grow and become all that Jehovah has planned for them.* Suddenly, she realized that soon they would marry, and she would have grandchildren. It was too much to comprehend. "So, three sleeping areas should be sufficient for us," she agreed.

The men showed the ladies the center house and explained how they would remodel the space so that they would have room to teach up to fifty boys. There was the kitchen area that could be totally torn out, the living area, and three sleeping areas. All three houses were the same size and approximate shape. All had a courtyard in the back and a shady yard for the children to play. Behind that was the slave quarters that would each house six. Manasseh stated that Junos and Cronus would live in the slave quarters behind the school since they were the only married couple.

The ladies asked about the nearest well and market. The men showed them that they were centrally located between the two

markets they had visited as they entered Antioch. But they were not sure where the local well was. On their walk home, they met some ladies carrying their full water pots. Dinah asked them where the well was. They shook their heads that they didn't understand her. She pointed to the water and pretended to take a drink. One of the ladies walked back and showed her a path that led to a well that was hidden among the houses. It would be convenient to their new houses and school.

"Manasseh, how will I live here when I don't know the language? You will need to teach me Greek."

"I'm not sure that Jehovah wants you talking with our Gentile neighbors. He has called us to be separate, His chosen people. You should not be associating with the Gentiles at the well."

The ladies said their goodbyes and the men walked them back to where they were staying. Dinah told her mother that Manasseh had located a house for them. Her mother was not pleased that it was so far away. Dinah defended Manasseh's choice by saying that it was more important for them to get a Hebrew School started soon so that the boys would not miss any education. Her mother was grumpy all day. "I left my boys and grandchildren in Jerusalem. I traveled all the way to this foreign land just to be close to my daughter's children. But, no, my ungrateful daughter wants to move across town. I'll never see my babies again," cried her mother theatrically.

Dinah assured her mother that she would be in and out often and would certainly be there every Sabbath night if she was still welcome. "Manasseh will soon be busy teaching school, but the children and I can visit often." Dinah had placated her mother all her life and knew how to tune out her whining.

She had wanted to tell her mother about Manasseh's decision to no longer provide housing for Joab and Jethro since they were men and should be supporting themselves and preparing for marriage. But she decided to keep that for another day. Her mother would either be upset by it or would be critical of her desire to cling to her babies. Either way, Dinah didn't feel like bringing it up today. She was still upset that Manasseh had refused to teach her to speak Greek. Everyone here spoke Greek, and she only knew Aramaic and some Hebrew. It made it hard to communicate at the shops and certainly at the well. She felt certain that he would eventually cave in and teach her, but she would wait until they had their own home. Joab and Jethro had reported for work early Sunday morning and were already settling into the routine of going to work at the bank with their grandfather every morning. Dinah clung tightly to baby Judah all day as she quietly grieved the idea of moving into a house without her two oldest boys.



Samuel and Haggith walked to Demetrius and Sophia's home on Sabbath afternoon. Haggith thought *No one knows how to throw a*

*party like Sophia!* Costas and many of the boys from the Christian Worship Center were playing games in the yard while the adults were gathering in the courtyard. Wine and bread and cheese were being served by the servants. The younger children were being watched in the front courtyard where servants were supervising their play. The ceremony started at sundown and Demetrius welcomed all the guests and invited them to take seats. He introduced Jonathan as the leader of the Christian Worship Center. Jonathan noted that there were several guests that he did not recognize and assumed they were business associates, family, or neighbors. *What a great idea for letting people know more about the New Way!* Jonathan moved to the platform at the front of the courtyard and called Costas to the front. He congratulated him and wished him a happy birthday. "As you know, on this night, we are celebrating your transition from childhood to manhood. It is a very special night and many of your friends and family are here to witness it. It has been eight years since I became friends with your parents, and I have watched you grow up. I believe that Jehovah has great plans for you and pray that you will follow Him obediently for the rest of your days. Are you prepared to quote from The Law and The Prophets?"

"Yes, sir. Mr. Samuel has helped me to learn Isaiah 46:5-9. These are Jehovah God's words written down by the Prophet Isaiah.

"With whom will you compare me or count me equal?  
To whom will you liken me that we may be compared?  
Some pour out gold from their bags  
and weigh out silver on the scales;  
they hire a goldsmith to make it into a god,  
and they bow down and worship it.  
They lift it to their shoulders and carry it;  
they set it up in its place, and there it stands.  
From that spot it cannot move.  
Even though someone cries out to it, it cannot answer;  
it cannot save them from their troubles.  
Remember this, keep it in mind,  
take it to heart, you rebels.  
Remember the former things, those of long ago;  
I am God, and there is no other;  
I am God, and there is none like me."

Everyone cheered and clapped for Costas, and he was glad that Samuel had helped him practice diligently. Then Jonathan asked Costas if he was prepared to announce what Jehovah was calling him to do. Costas stated that he would begin an apprenticeship at Mr. Kostakis' marble quarry but would specialize in accounting and inventory. He stated that he wanted to stay available for Jehovah to use him however He chose.

Jonathan pronounced Costas a man and encouraged him to join either the family group with his parents, or to join a different group, but

to take seriously his responsibility to learn as much as he could about following Jesus. Jonathan then prayed for Costas to become everything that Jehovah God intended for him. Demetrius invited the crowd to remain seated and the servants would serve them at their places. Costas was seated at a table of honor with his parents and Jonathan, and Samuel and Haggith.

Jonathan retrieved his two boys from the servants and headed home as soon as dinner was over. He knew it would be hard to get them to Mrs. Varda's house tomorrow morning and he had a full day scheduled.



Manasseh and Nathan took their servants with them to prepare the houses. The two homes would need to be deep cleaned before they would start preparing the school. By sunset, the servants were finished with both houses and would be ready to start remodeling the school on Wednesday morning.

Dinah was told that Cronus would drive the oxcart with all of their boxes to the new house on Wednesday morning. She left the children with her mother and the servants but took baby Judah with her. She took Junos to help her prepare the house for her family. Dinah and the two servants unpacked the boxes they had brought from Jerusalem. They began to unpack the dishes and cooking pans to see what else they needed to set up housekeeping. "I had forgotten that we didn't pack any water jars. We'll need to get several at the market," said Dinah.

"I think we have plenty of baking pans, skillets, and soup pots. But we will need to replace the cups. Most of them weren't packed securely and cracked on the trip," said Junos as she pulled out yet another cracked cup. Dinah also wanted to purchase fresh mats and blankets for everyone, and the oxcart would come in handy to transport everything to the new home.

Cronus drove them to the large market and helped them load things into the oxcart. By midafternoon, the house was looking more like home. Dinah sent Cronus and Junos back to the market to get lamp oil, and a supply of flour, salt, and corn meal. She walked around and prayed that Jehovah would bless this house. Tomorrow would be the big move and she could hardly wait to be under her own roof. But then she remembered that Joab and Jethro would not be moving with them, and her heart seemed to jump into her throat. Tears came and she was glad when Junos and Cronus returned and needed her help to stock the kitchen. She wondered when Manasseh would get her a table for the house or furniture for the courtyard, but that would come later. Someday they would be able to purchase cushions, benches, and beds, but for now, she was grateful to have a place to call her own. When they were finished putting the groceries away, they walked over to the school to see if the men were ready to ride to Simon's with them. The men were putting away their tools and Dinah quickly ran

next door to check on Achsah. She, too, stated that they would be moving in tomorrow. There was no time to talk, so they quickly parted. Dinah climbed into the oxcart with the servants. *One more night with Mother and Abba and then I'll have a home of my own again.*

On Thursday morning after breakfast at dawn, Joab and Jethro said their goodbyes and walked toward the bank with their Grandfather Simon. They would be staying with their grandparents until they found their own housing. Dinah, the four younger children, four maidservants, and three menservants loaded into the oxcart. Manasseh rode on the front seat as Cronus drove them across town. The children were shown their sleeping areas and dropped their travel bags there, then quickly began to explore the outside yard. Dinah sat in the grass with baby Judah and enjoyed being alone with her children. They were all growing up too quickly.

Manasseh took nine-year-old Jacob to help him renovate the school. Nathan and all eight menservants were working to get it completed. They had torn out the kitchen area yesterday and were building storage shelves along one wall for school supplies. They had decided to combine the kitchen and living areas to make an assembly room for all the students, but they would leave the sleeping areas intact for individual classes. Nathan was designing a sign that would let everyone know that this was a Hebrew School. They hoped it would grow, but just among their own group, they were expecting approximately fifty students. As long as Priest Othniel and Mahlon didn't expect to be paid, they felt the school tuition would be enough to support both families.

They had decided that Nathan would be the headmaster and teach the boys who had already attended the Hebrew School in Jerusalem, while Manasseh would take the first-year students and teach them the beginning subjects. Priest Othniel would teach a group of the oldest students two mornings a week and focus on the Jewish law. Mahlon wanted to teach all the boys more about worship and focus on the books of poetry, and especially the Psalms. He would teach two days a week. They agreed that no pay would be expected since these were boys from their synagogue who needed spiritual instruction. Once the building itself was ready, Nathan spent time showing Manasseh how to make lesson plans so that he could pace himself for the whole school year. They worked out a school calendar and looked forward to the month of Tishrei when Hebrew Schools traditionally started.

Now that the school was ready, they and their servants spent their days helping to enlarge the synagogue. It, too, was nearing completion. The group continued to gather at Simon's house on Sabbath nights and in the courtyard at the synagogue on Sabbath mornings. They had gained a few new Jewish families from the area who sporadically visited. On the last Sabbath of summer, they had a special dedication service for the completed synagogue. For the first time, they met inside and were able to spread out in the spacious building. The restoration of the synagogue had been one of their

goals. Now, they hoped to find more Jewish families in the area to bring back to Jehovah and help them to understand the importance of following all the Jewish laws.



All summer, Costas had worked at the marble quarry. Kostakis had a small hut there that he allowed Costas to use. He had also provided him with a servant to take care of his food and whatever else was needed. Kostakis told Demetrius that he was very pleased with Costas' work.

Costas reported that he enjoyed his work and felt he was learning a lot of useful information, but he felt isolated and lonely. He was glad he was allowed to return home occasionally for the Sabbath. "Dad, would it be okay if I go over to Abner's after dinner tonight? He is working on preparing a home and some of us guys were going to help him with the walls tonight."

"Just don't neglect time with your mother and brother," reminded Demetrius.

"Yes, sir."

The servants called everyone to dinner and Costas greeted his mother and Giorgio. They sat together and caught up on all the news. It was good to be home.



That fall was the happiest time that Dinah could remember. Each morning Manasseh and Jacob would eat breakfast with the family and then walk next door to the Hebrew School. They would return about the eighth hour and Manasseh would sit and drink some juice. They would talk at the table for a few minutes before Manasseh would return to the school to prepare for the next day. During that time, Dinah would supervise Jacob's homework and by doing so, was learning Greek. Bethany and Martha were usually weaving in the same room, and they were picking up on the language spoken by most of the people in Antioch. Soon Dinah was able to converse at the well and at the market. They went to her parents' home on Sabbath nights and usually spent the night there. On Sabbath mornings they walked with them to synagogue and spent the entire Sabbath afternoon with them. But after a few months, Manasseh said they would walk home on Sabbath nights after enjoying the meal with her parents and friends from the group. He talked it over with Simon, his father-in-law, and explained that he needed this time with his wife and children after a busy week at school. Her abba seemed to understand, but her mother didn't. She complained bitterly. Finally, Dinah asked, "Would you prefer that we not attend the Sabbath dinners? You have

taught me to be obedient to my husband and this is his desire and what he feels is best for our family. Please respect that.” Her mother understood the threat and began to accept their decision. They often visited with her parents after synagogue on the Sabbath, but they very seldom stayed long. Manasseh always claimed that he needed to rest after dealing with fifty rowdy boys all week. Gradually, her parents accepted the fact that they were no longer children who needed supervision, but rather adults who were making their own decisions. Dinah knew it was hard on her mother and made it a point to drop in occasionally for a quick chat. These were happy days and Manasseh seemed to thrive as a rabbi. Instead of being a slave to Simon at the bank, he became a respected man in the synagogue. Dinah felt more content than ever. While she continued to think about telling Manasseh about her belief that Jesus was the Messiah, her marriage was more important to her, and she didn’t want to rock the boat.



As Jonathan settled into the routine of attending the meetings, he once again began to feel a vital part of the Leadership Team. He often was asked to teach during the worship services, and by fall, Barnabas had turned the leadership back over to him. Jonathan felt humbled to lead such a strong, spiritual group of Christian men. The group was made up of leaders from both the Jewish New Way Synagogue and his original Gentile group. Jonathan felt a satisfaction and purpose that had been missing. The two groups felt more and more like one body and there was less conflict between them.

Jonathan looked forward to the Leadership Team each week. The men were genuinely seeking God’s plans for the Christian Worship Center. He learned to depend on them to help him find clear direction, not only for future ministries and decisions, but also for dealing with personal struggles. The men were gradually forming a very tight bond. Paul asked for their prayers to know what to teach. Yes, thought Jonathan, *it is an honor to be a part of this Team.*



Jonathan had been in charge of the Leadership Team for about nine months when one night Lucius of Cyrene suggested that he was feeling a heavy burden to spend the time in prayer. Jonathan agreed that he was also feeling a strong urge to pray, but was not sure why. He asked if all other business could be put off. When everyone agreed, the men scattered about the room and knelt to pray. Since they usually met for several hours, this was a rare treat to get to spend the entire time in prayer and worship. At times someone would pray aloud, quote scripture, or sing a Psalm. Suddenly, Jonathan was

aware of the Holy Spirit's presence in a very real way. He heard Him speaking clearly that the leaders should appoint Barnabas and Paul to go on a ministry trip to spread the New Way beyond Antioch. Its purpose would be to speak in synagogues to fellow Jews and teach about Jesus. Jonathan sat quietly for a few minutes and continued to listen, but that was all he heard. He raised his head and looked around the room. Everyone seemed restless, so Jonathan got up and moved to the table. As others joined him, they began to whisper to one another about what they had heard. "Let's wait for everyone to join us before we share. I have heard some very specific instruction as I suspect you have, too." Soon all the men had joined them, and Jonathan asked each one to share what he had heard while praying. It was unanimous that the Holy Spirit had given the same instructions to each man. Barnabas and Paul stated that that was what they had heard and agreed to begin making arrangements immediately. The Leadership Team discussed how they would fund the trip and agreed that a collection should be taken at each of the gatherings to enable the men to go. Jonathan prayed a prayer of blessing over the ministry trip and dismissed the men.

As he walked home, Asher asked if he was thinking of joining Barnabas' ministry team. Jonathan quickly said, "No, I believe the Holy Spirit was very specific and it didn't include me. I assume that my work here will continue, and Jehovah will use me where He has placed me."



The following week, Barnabas reported that he and Paul and John Mark had secured passage for a ship headed to Cyprus tomorrow at noon. They would preach in synagogues there and then take another ship to Perga in Pamphylia which was on the mainland. "I was not aware that John Mark was going with you," said Jonathan and others agreed that they were surprised.

"John Mark was raised in Greece and knows the area well. I felt that he would be an asset to this missionary trip," explained Barnabas.

"I personally didn't hear the Holy Spirit mention John Mark going," persisted Elam. "I think we should pray about it."

"We can pray about it, but I've already purchased his passage and I feel he's vital to this trip," said Barnabas firmly.

"And I think he's vital to the work in Antioch, but I will leave that as my opinion, since I haven't prayed about it. I just wish we had been consulted about this change in plans," said Demetrius.

"Let's address another issue. John Mark, who will be covering your ministries here? You are leading four groups, I believe. Have you secured leadership for them?" asked Jonathan.

"They are all doing very well, and I asked them to just continue to meet and pray together and let the Holy Spirit guide them," said John Mark humbly.



“That would be fine if you were only gone for a few weeks, but I believe someone should take leadership of these groups since they are all new followers of Jesus and most of them do not have any training. Please provide me with a list of these groups and where and when they meet. I will need to assign someone to check on them while you are away,” said Jonathan.

“Yes, sir,” agreed John Mark.

“That’s great but what about the financial books? I believe you are in charge of keeping all the financial records for the Center. Who have you secured to cover that?” asked Manaen.

“Well, it was a last-minute decision for me to go and I haven’t had time to find anyone. I assumed that someone was doing it before I came, and they could do it.”

“Yes, but that person is with Jesus now, and you are the only one who knows where the books are and what your system is. This is terribly irresponsible!” exclaimed Lucius.

“Lucius, you are an accountant. Could you possibly meet with John Mark and let him show you the books tonight? We don’t want to get in trouble with the tax collectors. And if you can’t do the job permanently, we’ll discuss finding someone else.”

“Sure, but I don’t want to stay late,” grumbled Lucius.

“John Mark, do you have any other ministries ongoing that we need to cover?” asked Jonathan trying to keep his voice calm.

“I don’t think so,” said John Mark.

“Barnabas and Paul, have you thought of any more responsibilities that need to be covered for the two of you while you are away? We discussed your jobs last week and have them all covered,” said Jonathan.

“No, I haven’t thought of any additional ministries that need to be covered. But I would appreciate this group’s support and prayers for John Mark as he joins us. This is too important of a trip to start off on the wrong foot,” said Barnabas, feeling the tension.

“I agree. John Mark, will you show Lucius the financial records while the rest of us spend the remainder of our time in prayer for you and Barnabas and Paul? When you two are finished, please come back and talk with me regarding your groups. I will wait however long it takes, since you three are sailing tomorrow,” said Jonathan. John Mark and Lucius left the room and the other men moved from the table to spread out in Jonathan’s office. Elam led them in singing a Psalm, and the men began to pray aloud for the ministry trip and for all three men who would be going. Jonathan was pleased with the unity he felt with these men. As he prayed, he felt reassured that Jehovah had a good plan for John Mark and that there would not be a gaping hole left in their Leadership Team because of his sudden departure. God would provide everything that they needed. As the men prayed for Barnabas, Paul, and John Mark, they felt the presence of the Holy Spirit and His assurance that all was well. They prayed for effective ministry, boldness in proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah to both Jews and Gentiles, and courage for whatever they encountered.

Later, after the other men had gone, Jonathan met with John Mark. “I need to know more about your groups. I want to see them grow and become all they can be. I will try to meet with each one of them personally and talk with them, but I can’t take on four additional groups when I’m already covering most of Paul’s responsibilities. I will have to secure other leadership,” said Jonathan.

“I understand. I’m sorry I didn’t consult you, Jonathan. Barnabas and Paul asked me to go with them and I felt so honored to be asked, I guess I just didn’t think about all the details,” confessed John Mark.

“I don’t blame you. It is an honor to be asked to join these two giants in the faith. You will learn so much and we will be praying for you every step of the way. It will not be easy, I’m sure. But you will be a real asset to them. And I will personally be praying for you daily.”

“Thank you, Jonathan. You’ve been a true friend. Shalom.”

“Shalom, my brother. May God bless you in a very special way.”

As Jonathan walked home, he was thinking of who might be available to lead John Mark’s groups. He realized that once again he was overwhelmed with the magnitude of the task. Paul taught on Sabbath and Sunday mornings, and on post-Sabbath night. He also taught at the fellowship meal that they shared together after work on Tuesdays, and Jonathan would need to spend much time in preparation. He wondered if he could ask Asher to find leaders for John Mark’s groups, but he knew that he, too, was feeling overloaded. He knew better than to fret. He would start the day fresh in the morning and trust that God would bring the right men to mind.

## Chapter 5

Jonathan prayed with Zebedee and Zerah before they rushed out the door. Chillion's mother, Varda, who was a widow, had kept the boys for the past couple of years and Jonathan was grateful that they were well cared for and loved there. She kept other children occasionally, but Zebedee and Zerah knew that they were loved. "Good morning, Mrs. Varda," Zebedee called as both boys ran to help her in the garden. Jonathan waved to her as he left the boys and admonished them to be good. *Jehovah has blessed me in providing a woman who will teach them well. But soon Zebedee will need a school. Today, I need to focus on finding leaders for the groups.*

He was headed to Demetrius' Mercantile Store. As the men greeted each other, Demetrius said, "You know that I cannot take on any more ministries. I would love to help you out, but Jehovah has only given me seven days in the week." The men laughed together.

"I know, Demetrius, and I am not here to ask you to give more. But I was wondering if you had a few minutes to listen to something that I'm hearing in my head. I think it may be the Holy Spirit giving us a solution, but I trust you to confirm or warn me of what you hear," stated Jonathan.

"Certainly, my friend. Come back to my office." Jonathan followed him to the back of the store and the men sat together and talked.

"Demetrius, you have taught several small groups for almost ten years. Surely there are men in your groups that are ready for leadership! Don't you think?"

"Oh, that could be good. But they are not trained to lead."

"No, but if they have sat under your teaching for so long, don't you think the Holy Spirit would guide them just as He guides us?"

"Wouldn't we need to add them to the Leadership Team?" asked Demetrius.

"We could, but then as we grow, the Leadership Team would become too large for intimate fellowship. I was thinking that if you knew of some men, they could lead John Mark's existing groups and continue to attend your group. There they could ask questions and maybe let your group become mentors to them. Does that make sense? I just wanted your feedback."

"So, these leaders would be like branches from the tree that Jehovah is building. I like that."

"Do you know of any men who are ready for leadership?" asked Jonathan.

"Yes, but let me get back to you after I have had time to pray. I will be praying about four men, but they are all from different groups. It could really enrich our groups and help them to see their purpose — not to just collect knowledge, but to share it with others. I like that. I will talk with you soon."

"Thank you, Demetrius, and shalom."

“I thought you handled the situation well last night. God is with you. I saw His Spirit in you. Shalom.”

“Thank you for your kind words. I need all the encouragement I can get. Shalom.”

Jonathan headed back to the Christian Worship Center with a lighter heart. *Thank You, Jehovah, for meeting my needs and taking care of all the details.* As he entered the building to go upstairs to his office, the large room echoed with emptiness. *Emptiness. Emptiness. Jehovah, what are you saying?* Jonathan stopped in the dark empty room. It was just one large meeting room with benches stacked near the edges. He knelt as he felt God’s presence. “Speak, Jehovah. Your servant is listening,” he quoted from *The Law and The Prophets*. He realized that this would be an ideal location for a Hebrew School. Yet, it wouldn’t be a Hebrew School, it would be a Christian school. He wondered how many students there would be and realized that the balcony was filled for each worship service. There were certainly enough boys to support a school. *Father, is this what you want me to focus on next?* He sat in silence as ideas continued to form about the school. He knew that his brother-in-law, Yanis, from Capernaum, had planted the seed, but it seemed that God was leading him to pursue it. He thought about the men he knew that were trained as scribes. His friend, Absalom, was a scribe for the city of Antioch. Maybe he would know other scribes. Would they be interested in teaching boys?

Instead of going up to his office, he began to walk to the downtown area. Soon he was knocking on Absalom’s door. “Give me just a minute to finish this document and then I can take a break to talk,” said Absalom.

The two men left the office and walked as they talked. Jonathan told Absalom what he had just experienced at the Worship Center. Absalom replied, “You know, ever since we took that trip and met Yanis in Capernaum, I have been praying about starting a Christian School. I have been spending quite a bit of time thinking about it. I know the men that I would like to ask to teach, and I have been daydreaming about quitting my job to be the headmaster. Do you think that might be the Holy Spirit’s guidance? I thought it was only wishful thinking.”

“All I know is that I haven’t been able to quit thinking about it since we talked with Yanis,” said Jonathan. “And my son is certainly old enough to be starting his education.”

“My son, too.”

“I will commit to praying with you about this, and if you feel it is from God, I’ll bring it before the Leadership Team as soon as possible,” said Jonathan.

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

“Shalom, my friend.”

Now, Jonathan’s head was practically exploding with possibilities. He was thinking about the school and all the ramifications of that, and his mind was thinking about other groups who might want to commission one of their own to start new groups. He would need to

contact all the members of the Leadership Team about this new plan to plant even more new groups. He realized as he entered the Christian Center again, that he needed to release these details to God and get busy finalizing three sermons for the weekend. He decided to focus on Jesus' sermon that He taught often about being light and salt to the world. Jonathan sat at his table and began to pray for wisdom and direction.



“Gentlemen, please take your seats and let’s get started. Dan, would you lead us in a Psalm?” The men came to the table and joined in the singing. “Father, we ask for Your presence with us as we discuss the leadership of this Christian gathering that You have called us to shepherd. Teach us and give us wisdom. In Jesus’ name we ask.” He looked around at the eight men, four from the New Way Jewish synagogue, and four from his original group.

“Did you get John Mark’s groups covered?” asked Lucius.

“Not yet, but I wanted to discuss something else before we deal with it. Could we table that for just a few minutes?”

“Sure,” said Lucius agreeably. “But we also need to talk about who’s going to do the finances. I can’t add that to my other responsibilities right now.”

“Okay. I’ll put that on our agenda. Thank you for letting me know. Is there anything else that someone wants to discuss tonight?” asked Jonathan calmly. When no one responded, he asked, “Was anyone able to see Barnabas, Paul, and John Mark off on Friday morning?”

“Yes, there were five of us there and we prayed with them before they boarded. We assured them of our prayers and support, and we gave them the silver that the groups had collected to help with their expenses. They were most appreciative,” reported Samuel.

“Has anyone else thought of something we need to review? Jehovah has brought to mind two important issues that I want to discuss tonight. One will need to be decided tonight, the other will require some time to think about and pray about over the next few weeks. I believe that our current growth is overloading our leaders. Now, we have two basic choices: We can quit growing, or we can train more leaders and prepare for the future. I have talked with several of you this week about the possibility of building a second tier of leadership. I believe it was Demetrius who said it would be like a tree branching out. Here’s what it would look like. All of you are leading groups. At some point those groups need to learn to lead their own groups. I believe that they have been well taught by you and that the best training is their watching you for these past several years. Let’s say that you have a man who you feel is spiritually mature enough to lead a group on his own — or you may want to send them out two by two as Jesus did. Either way, I would like to propose that instead of them joining this Leadership Team, they continue to attend their current group and report to you. You, and your group, would help them

to navigate the questions that may come up. I believe that it will stimulate your group to mature and help them catch the vision of sharing the New Way. It will encourage them to become leaders instead of just followers. Does that make sense to you? I feel that it would work and benefit us by providing leaders, as well as helping our own groups to grow. I have a couple of men who are in my groups that I think are ready to lead. Now in the past we have added these leaders to this Leadership Team, but if we continue to do that, we will become too large, and it will be hard to accomplish the work. I know that we are called as servants to lead this body of followers, but I also know that we are called to train others to lead as well. I'll be quiet now and let's hear your thoughts," said Jonathan.

"I've been excited about this ever since you talked with me on Friday. I have three men who I feel are ready for more responsibilities," said Demetrius.

"I have one man that I feel is ready to accept new responsibilities and he happens to be an accountant. Instead of asking him to teach a group, could we train him to take care of the finances? That would help Lucius out," volunteered Samuel.

"I have not heard of this, but I see its value. I can't continue to add more nights of ministry, and yet there are more new followers every week. We must find a way to expand our leadership," said Manaen.

"I'm sorry that I wasn't able to contact all of you. My son, Zebedee was sick a couple of days, and I needed to attend to him. I had planned to talk with everyone."

"That's okay, you are carrying a heavy load. Is Zebedee okay?" asked Mordecai.

"Yes. Thank you for asking. He ran a fever for a couple of days, but now he's back to his energetic self. Anyone opposed to the idea of expanding the leadership or have questions that we need to consider?"

"Who will approve these leaders? Or will it just be up to each of us?" asked Asher.

"How do you think we should do it?" Jonathan asked the Team.

"I think that the individual Team leader can make that decision and authorize their leadership. We won't know most of these men and couldn't make a real decision. We just need to be praying for each of us to make wise choices. We would have to trust that the Holy Spirit would lead each one of us."

"I like the idea of sending them out by twos."

"It would cut down on our leadership pool."

"But it might cut down on rogue teachers leading a group astray."

"Could that be a married couple if they are working with families?"

"Jesus sent the disciples out by twos, so I feel we should do the same."

"So, what I'm hearing is that you are comfortable with building some new branches of leadership. Does anyone oppose this?" After a few minutes of silence. Jonathan continued, "Those of you who have

men you would like to recommend, please meet with me immediately after this meeting.”

“Jonathan, I would like to pray about this before I submit my names. May I speak with you next week?” asked Manaen.

“Of course. I believe that this will be an ongoing thing. As men are ready to lead, let me know and we’ll find a place for them to serve. And, oh, I would expect that these men have attended your groups for at least a couple of years. We don’t want baby Christians leading before they are ready.”

“Good point.”

“Now, for my second item of business. I felt that Jehovah spoke clearly to me this week and I want you to pray with me about our beginning a school for our sons. I have talked with a friend of mine who feels that the Holy Spirit may be leading him to be a headmaster for a Christian School. I feel that it would be a good use of our Worship Center each morning. It’s just sitting empty right now. This is just a matter to pray about, and it is not open to questions or discussion. Just pray about it and we’ll discuss it in the coming weeks. Now if there’s no other business, I suggest we spend the next few minutes in prayer and then I’d like to meet with those of you who have possible new leaders,” said Jonathan.

When Jonathan left the meeting, he had heard suggestions for twelve possible new leaders. Lucius agreed to train the accountant from Samuel’s group if he would agree to do the finances. The other group leaders would contact their recommended men to secure their help and get back to Jonathan as soon as possible. And everyone seemed excited about the new potential for growth.

Jonathan and Asher walked to Asher’s home. Jonathan retrieved his children from Sharon and thanked her again for making his ministry possible. She assured him that she loved having the boys over and they kept her boys occupied.

“I hope in a good way!” laughed Jonathan.



The Leadership Team had met several weeks and prayed about starting a school. Jonathan was eager to tell Absalom about their decision. He knew he would see Absalom on Sabbath morning, but he wanted to tell him as soon as possible. He strode quickly into the business center of Antioch and knocked on Absalom’s door. Absalom agreed to take a walk and told his staff that he would return shortly. “Absalom, I hope you were serious about wanting to start a Christian School, because God is moving in the leaders’ hearts, and they just approved a tentative budget to get one started at the Christian Center next fall. The first thing we need to do is hire a headmaster and let him begin to do the research needed to find out how many boys we have, how many teachers we will need, and what will be taught.”

“Whoa! That’s exciting. I have talked with my wife, and, yes, I’m still interested in being considered.”

“Well, you are the new headmaster. I told the group last night and they have already approved you. Of course, you can back out if you’ve changed your mind,” said Jonathan.

“Oh, man. This is something I’ve always wanted to do. I can hardly believe this is happening. But I’ve got a huge report due today; I’ve got to get back to work and concentrate. Thanks, Jonathan. This is good. Can we talk about details on Sunday?”

“Certainly. Shalom.”

Jonathan met again with Absalom on Sunday. He told him that they would begin to pay his salary starting on the first day of Sivan. That would give him four months to prepare for the start of school. Jonathan met with him often to talk about what they had heard Yanis say about the Christian School where he taught. They wished they had visited the school while they were in Capernaum. It would have made Absalom’s job a lot easier. But both men were excited about the possibilities. There was much work to be done.



Headmaster Absalom stood at the Christian Worship Center’s doorway and greeted each student and their abba. First days of school are always exciting, but this was a very first day of school for both the rabbis and teachers and even the headmaster. Jonathan and the boys had risen early and walked to the Christian Worship Center for the early morning worship service. Many of the original group still met at dawn each Sunday for a time to celebrate Jesus’ resurrection. Then Jonathan and Zebedee had walked Zerah to Mrs. Varda’s house and the boys said a sad farewell to each other. This was going to be a hard day for both boys. They had never really been apart. Headmaster Absalom had decided that for this first year, only eight-, nine-, and ten-year-old boys would be allowed to attend. Most of the older boys were already working in the family business or had found full-time jobs with friends. He had secured two other scribes to help him teach and Jonathan had agreed to lead a class twice a week for all the boys together. Of course, he was going to teach about his three years of following Jesus. He was excited about this possibility and hoped the boys would enjoy it, since most of them had heard him preach it most of their lives. But then, sometimes boys in the balcony don’t really pay attention. He hoped by sitting down and focusing on each parable and teaching of Jesus, and discussing it on the boys’ level, they would begin to incorporate Jesus’ teachings into their behavior. So, Jonathan was just a little nervous about this first day of school, too, even though he wouldn’t teach until tomorrow morning. Today, he was just an abba. Zebedee was quickly finding his friends and seemed to be looking forward to whatever was planned for the day. Jonathan began to relax and look around at the other dads. He was surprised to see Susanna,



a member of his Sabbath night group, there with her two younger brothers. He asked if her dad was well, and she assured him that he was just busy at work and had asked her to escort the boys. "I didn't realize it would be all men."

"It's a rite of passage for the abbas to bring their sons to Hebrew School. But this isn't Hebrew School and you'll be fine. Is your abba okay with the boys coming to school?"

"Well, he's a little hesitant, but Mother and I insisted. I think he's afraid they won't respect him if they get an education. I assured him that that wouldn't happen," said Susanna.

"Welcome to our first day of school. My name is Rabbi Absalom. This is Rabbi Abihu and Teacher Marcos. Also, our pastor, Rabbi Jonathan, will be helping us with some of the teaching. Let us all sing Psalm 8 together, and then we'll ask the abbas to leave and we will begin our school year. Rabbi Abihu will lead us.

LORD, our Lord,  
how majestic is your name in all the earth!  
You have set your glory  
in the heavens.  
Through the praise of children and infants  
you have established a stronghold against your enemies,  
to silence the foe and the avenger.  
When I consider your heavens,  
the work of your fingers,  
the moon and the stars,  
which you have set in place,  
what is mankind that you are mindful of them,  
human beings that you care for them?  
You have made them a little lower than the angels  
and crowned them with glory and honor.  
You made them rulers over the works of your hands;  
you put everything under their feet:  
all flocks and herds,  
and the animals of the wild,  
the birds in the sky,  
and the fish in the sea,  
all that swim the paths of the seas.  
LORD, our Lord,  
how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Jonathan continued to stand beside Susanna and escorted her out of the school when the abbas were dismissed. He noted some raised eyebrows, but decided her comfort was more important than him having to deal with a little gossip. As he returned to the Worship Center and took the back stairs up to his office, he noted that Absalom had divided the boys into three groups, and they were getting started with the first day's lessons. *Wow, he's good. He certainly was the right man for the job. Thank you, Jehovah, for your provision.*

## Chapter 6

As Jonathan settled down at his table to study, his mind kept thinking of Susanna. *She and her parents have attended my mixed family group since the Jewish New Way Synagogue joined us. That was three years ago. I've never really noticed her before. I'm surprised she stood up to her abba about the boys attending school. I need to decide what I'm teaching for the two groups this week and I've got to finish my preparation for tomorrow's schoolboys.* He sighed deeply. *Susanna is a beautiful woman. I wonder why she has never married. But then, maybe she has and was divorced. It happens. Jonathan, get your mind back to work. I hope Zerah settles down with Varda. Chillion's mother has been a real help, but she's getting older, and she may find that one boy is harder to entertain than two. Jonathan!* He forced himself to review the notes he had made for the school. He felt fairly comfortable teaching boys that age, since he had one. He began to remember his and Jenay's time with Jesus. Those were precious memories. Suddenly, his heart was filled with thoughts about his trip to Capernaum. He wondered about his family's safety there. *I wish they would all move here and join me.* Suddenly he stood and stretched and realized that he was not going to get any fruitful work done. He needed to visit with a man who had just lost his wife in childbirth. He hated such visits because they reminded him of his own loss. But he needed to minister to him and his family and remind them that Jehovah knew and cared.

On his way back, he stopped by to check on Zerah and found that Mrs. Varda had him busy building a chicken coop. It wasn't exactly a work of art, but it might hold a few chickens. Varda explained that she needed to find a way to make more income and her friend was having success selling eggs. Jonathan agreed that it sounded like a good plan and might be easier than taking care of children. "Oh, I love my children, but they grow up too fast. Zerah will be starting school in a couple of years and then I'll just be left with the chickens." She laughed as Jonathan waved goodbye. He stopped by the house to get some juice. Suddenly he realized that he was remembering Orpah serving him juice and sitting at the table talking with him about the messages he was preparing. He knew that dealing with others' grief and thinking about Susanna had brought up these precious memories. *What is going on with my mind? I need to prepare for my groups.* He quickly returned to the center and went to his office. He looked over his notes from last week and felt led to talk about the various ways the Holy Spirit leads. He realized that he was watching the sky and waiting for the eighth hour.

Soon he found himself standing in front of the Christian Worship Center waiting with those gathering for the boys to be released from school. This group was a mixture of mothers, servants, and older siblings with very few men. He assumed the men were at work. His

eyes searched for Susanna and sure enough she was standing near the front talking with a group of women.

He forced his eyes to watch for Zebedee to exit the building, and much to his relief, Zebedee was thrilled with school. He had made new friends and the rabbi had praised him for knowing what the Pentateuch was. "Well, it sounds like you have had a great first day. I'm so glad. Let's go get Zerah. He's got something to show you, too." Zerah was still working on his chicken coop and was eager to share it with Zebedee who gave some big-brother advice about how the poles should be just a little deeper so they would stand up straighter. "Come on boys, let's let Mrs. Varda get some rest. We've got to get the house straightened before the men arrive tonight. Thanks, Varda. Shalom."

"Shalom. I think he had a good day. I know you were worried about him."

"They are just so close, I knew it would be hard for him to be left behind. And on Wednesday, I'll have more time to help you with the chicken coop if you need it."

"Thanks. Shalom."

On the way home, Jonathan stopped by the market to buy bread rolls, fresh vegetables, and fruit. *I should have asked Mother to teach me to make bread while I was in Capernaum. I'm tired of rolls from the market. Jehovah, forgive me, Your hand has provided all we need.*

"Dad, can we build a chicken coop in our back yard?" asked Zebedee.

"We'll see."

"That means no," explained Zebedee to Zerah.

"I know. But we can play with Mrs. Varda's chickens when she gets them," consoled Zerah.

"You can, but I've got to go to school." Suddenly the boys' moods had switched to gloom.

*Father, help me know how to parent.* "Now, Zebedee, you get to go to school, and Zerah gets to help Mrs. Varda. Besides, I don't think chickens are going to be much fun to play with. But I didn't say no, I said, we'll see. There's a difference." Now, both boys were grumbling. He sent them outside to play while he began to prepare the vegetables. He had found some goat cheese at the market. That should make the boys happy.

After dinner, he sent the boys to their room and lit a lamp for them so they could play a while before going to sleep. He prayed with them and then returned to the living area to greet the servants who were arriving for group. He had recently started this group just for slaves. Each man came from a different background but was interested in learning about Jesus. Some of them had already become followers and renounced their native gods. They helped Jonathan teach the others who were still struggling with questions. Tonight, they would talk about the different ways the Holy Spirit leads, and he hoped there would be good participation in the discussion. They were a difficult group to teach because of their training as slaves not to speak. But tonight, he just sat back and listened as the followers of Jesus shared

the many different ways they had heard Jehovah reveal His direction to them through the Holy Spirit.

The meeting ran a little late and he quickly extinguished the lamps and carried one to his sleeping room. He started to lie down on his mat when he thought he heard the boys. He quickly relit his lamp and peeked in to see what was going on. Zebedee was sobbing and Zerah was holding his hand and trying to comfort him. “Zebedee, what’s wrong? Are you sick? It’s very late and you boys should have been asleep hours ago.”

“Abba, I forgot to do my homework. The rabbi said we must do our homework, or we will be punished.” Jonathan’s mind was flooding with all the reasons that this was absolutely absurd, all the reasons he should punish Zebedee himself for forgetting, and all the headaches that school was going to bring. He pulled Zebedee up into his lap and said gently, “Let’s let Zerah go to sleep, and you come with me to the living area. We’ll do your homework.”

Zerah was already on his mat and asleep as the two tiptoed into the living room. “Okay, Zebedee, what is your homework?”

“I’m supposed to tell you all the books of the Pentateuch,” said Zebedee firmly.

“But you already know them,” said Jonathan.

“But the rabbi said that I had to tell you....” and he began to sob again.

“Zebedee, I want you to tell me. Is that all of your homework, or is there more?”

“That’s all.”

Jonathan rubbed his aching head and tried to understand how important this was to an eight-year-old on his first day of school.

“Let’s hear them.”

“The Pentateuch was written by Moses. The word Pentateuch is Greek and means five. There are five separate books in the Pentateuch. They are Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy,” said Zebedee wearily.

Jonathan hugged Zebedee and assured him that he had done a great job. He refrained from fussing but picked him up and carried him to his mat, tucked him in, and then returned to his own mat wondering how in the world he could continue to juggle all of this on his own.

The next morning, Jonathan had to wake the boys a little early. They rushed through breakfast and quickly prayed together before walking Zerah to Mrs. Varda’s. Jonathan and Zebedee hurried to the Worship Center where Zebedee waited outside with the other students while Jonathan slipped inside to talk with Rabbi Absalom. “I just wanted to make sure how much time I was teaching and where I should stand — you know, the basic details.”

“I believe that you are nervous,” Absalom teased.

“Well, I do need to make a good impression since my son is in the group and you know how precarious that can be.”

“I understand. I have scheduled for you to teach for two hours, but that should be mixed with questions and discussion, and you are

free to add music or even stretching if you feel that they are having trouble concentrating. This is only their second day of school, and most are not disciplined enough to sit still for that long.”

“Thanks. I’ll wait outside with Zebedee.”

“That will be fine. We’ll start our day with a Psalm and a Scripture, then I’ll introduce you. You’ll do fine.”

Jonathan thoroughly enjoyed his time with the students. He taught all of them together and they seemed fascinated that as a boy, he had known Jesus personally. It seemed that the two hours just flew by. He walked home and took care of some basic cleaning since there were still unwashed dishes from last night’s gathering.

When he picked up the boys and they had played together for a while, he remembered to ask Zebedee about homework before they left to go to the Christian Center for a fellowship meal. While Jonathan sliced vegetables and washed some fruit to contribute to the food, Zebedee quoted the first five verses of Genesis to him.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light “day,” and the darkness he called “night.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day.

Jonathan praised him and sent him outside to play with his brother. *How fast they are growing up!* As he finished his tray of fruit and vegetables, he had to admit that he looked forward to the fellowship meal with more than just a spiritual emphasis. All the ladies brought their special dishes to share. He craved their homecooked meals. Afterward Elam would lead them in some Psalms and one of the leaders would share a verse from the Jewish Scripture and explain what it meant to him. Everyone would stay and visit for just a short while because tomorrow was another busy day.

Jonathan always looked forward to Wednesdays. He worked until school was dismissed and then tried to spend the afternoon and evening with the boys. It was their special time together. He met Zebedee after school, and they walked to Varda’s house. Together they examined the chicken coop and Varda suggested that they needed help getting the wire across the top. Jonathan began to explain that the four corner poles were going to have to be a little sturdier before they would hold up the roof. He asked if she had any heavier poles, but she did not. He left the boys to dig a deeper hole while he ran to Elam’s Carpentry Shop to purchase some heavier pieces of wood for the corners and some extra wood for whatever was needed for the door. When he returned, the boys were still digging, but

since they only had one shovel, not much progress had been made. Jonathan took the shovel and quickly dug a larger hole. He placed the corner post in its place and told the boys to use their hands to pack dirt around it. He then proceeded to place the other three poles. He had just finished building the door when he noticed that Zerah was not helping but was sitting in Varda's lap. His face was tear-streaked mud. Jonathan rushed to him and asked Zerah what was wrong. "I understand," said little Zerah bravely even as the tears continued to stream down his face.

"You understand what?" asked Jonathan looking to Varda for help.

"I know you are helping," said Zerah wisely as he wiped his dirty hand across his dripping nose and tried to quiet his sobs.

"Zerah wanted to build the pen all by himself," explained Varda. "He knew you were going to help with the roof, but he didn't know you would need to pull out all the poles that he had worked so hard on."

"Son, I'm sorry, but those poles were not going to be big enough to hold up the roof. But come here and let me show you what you need to work on next." Jonathan explained that the chicken coops he had seen all had roosts for the chickens to sit on.

"And tomorrow, I'll get you some more wood to start building nest boxes. But I think it's time for us to call it a day and let Mrs. Varda get some rest." Varda thanked them for helping with her chicken coop, and Jonathan and the boys started home.

Jonathan left the boys playing in the yard while he walked to the well with two large jars. He knew he would need to bathe both boys after their adventures of digging in the dirt. He also needed to wash out their tunics since Zebedee was now in school and needed to look decent. *I wonder if Giorgio has outgrown his tunic? Sophia usually gives me his hand-me-downs for Zebedee and this tunic isn't going to last the school year. I guess I could ask one of the ladies to weave him a new one, but I don't want them all deciding that I need a wife to take care of me. I'll ask Sophia tomorrow night.* He poured the water into a large pot and washed the boys from head to toe in the cold water. They squealed and splashed, and he was soaked before the deed was done. The water was too muddy to use to wash the tunics, so, once again he walked to the well to get two more jars of water. He washed out their tunics and his own robe. At least he still had a spare one to wear. As he prepared their dinner, he remembered to ask Zebedee about his homework. This time he told his abba the difference between Jewish time keeping and Greek and Roman. Jonathan realized that Zebedee would grow up in a different world than he had — a multicultural world where he would need to know many things that Jonathan had had to learn as an adult. *I guess the Scripture would be hard to understand if you don't understand the Jewish time system like why the Sabbath begins at sundown on Friday and ends at sundown on Saturday. Or why the Jews count as a whole day, any part of a day. The Greek and Roman system is much easier to keep up with. I wonder if I should still be using the Jewish system or switch to the*

*Roman system at home?* His next thought scared him. *I wish I had a wife to help me with these decisions.* Soon the boys were sitting around the table eating the rolls and pickled fish that he had bought at the market.

On Thursday, Jonathan again taught at the Christian School and then hurried to Elam's Carpenter Shop and purchased some lighter-weight wood to make chicken nest boxes. He dropped it off at Varda's house and showed her and Zerah how to make the boxes. He noted that Zerah was good with a hammer and told him so. He hurried back to the Christian Center and spent time preparing for the Leadership Team meeting. He could happily report that the Christian School was doing great. He made a note to himself to check with Rabbi Absalom and find out the exact number of students they had enrolled.

He hurriedly prepared dinner for the boys while Zebedee did his homework. They discussed Zerah's chicken coop project and Zebedee's fourth day of school. Then he rushed to Asher's house to drop the boys off with Sharon. Jonathan and Asher headed to the Christian Worship Center to meet with the Leadership Team. Jonathan enjoyed the sweet fellowship with these men that he relied on so heavily. He felt such a unity and bonding with them and was grateful that they were always there when he needed them. He knew he couldn't lead the growing Worship Center without them.

On Friday afternoon, Zebedee informed his abba that he did not need to go to school tomorrow. "No, you will go to the Christian Worship Center, but we'll attend the worship service there as usual. It is the Sabbath. You know that," said Jonathan.

"But I thought I would go to school instead!" Zebedee was genuinely disappointed.

"No, tonight is the beginning of Sabbath and where do we go on Sabbath night?"

"Oh, I forgot. This is the night we go to Mr. Kostakis' house and Mrs. Irini makes really good food. Yippee!" He ran back outside to tell Zerah the good news.

The group was always refreshing for Jonathan. The children played outside or upstairs, and Kostakis had servants who watched them. Jonathan could relax and just enjoy being with the adults. He knew the boys were having fun with their friends.

The nine men reclined at two tables, while the six ladies visited at another. Servants prepared the meal and served them. It was always a special treat. This was the first group that Jonathan and Asher had built from Gentiles who wanted to learn more about Jesus. The group had bonded in a special way. When they had joined forces with the Jewish followers of Jesus from the synagogue, Lamech and Jochebed had asked to join the group with their unmarried adult children, Michael and Susanna. The group had welcomed them, but there had been an awkward phase of getting comfortable with each other. That was three years ago, and now they were just brothers and sisters who loved and cared for one another. There was a lot of laughter and teasing. Afterward they moved to the spacious living area and sang

some Psalms together that Sharon had taught the group. Jonathan welcomed Costas and indicated that he was visiting and might want to visit other groups before deciding which one to join. Everyone welcomed him. Jonathan introduced the topic for discussion by reminding them that they were led by the Holy Spirit just as Jesus had been led. “What are the different ways that Jehovah has spoken to you through His Holy Spirit?”

Everyone participated and they shared deeply with each other ways that God had spoken. Lamech said that the Holy Spirit most often spoke to him by bringing to mind verses from The Law and The Prophets that he had learned as a child. Demetrius shared that the Holy Spirit just brought thoughts to his mind that he knew were not his own.

“I don’t know, but sometimes I just get these impressions that I need to do a certain thing. I’m not always sure that it’s the Holy Spirit, but when I’m obedient, I’m always blessed,” said one of the ladies.

“One time, Jehovah spoke to me in a dream. He very clearly outlined what I needed to do,” contributed Kostakis.

Costas asked, “How can I be sure that it’s the Holy Spirit speaking and not just me talking to myself?”

When Jonathan indicated that he wanted someone from the group to answer, Susanna spoke up. “Costas, for me, it’s a matter of practice. When I first became a follower, I was always wondering whether it was the Holy Spirit or my own thinking. But as I was obedient, I began to recognize His voice. I can’t describe it and maybe it’s different for everyone, but I know His voice. There’s something unique about it, and I immediately know that I need to obey.”

“I agree. When I first started following Jesus, I was just taking baby steps of obedience. But when I obeyed, it made me more and more aware of Him. I think that obedience leads to hearing Him better the next time,” shared Demetrius.

“Have you ever had what seemed like a stray thought that just came out of nowhere? You ignore it, but it keeps coming back until you realize that God is trying to get your attention. Sometimes I think I’m just dense, or maybe just too busy. But eventually God shows me that what He’s bringing to my mind is important and I need to act on it,” said Jonathan.

Jonathan ended the meeting with the reminder that they should all be listening and obeying quickly. He prayed for God to bless their Sabbath day of rest, and everyone said their goodnights. He retrieved the boys who were still playing, although Zerah was yawning. They walked home with Asher and Sharon and their family. The boys ran ahead while the adults discussed the meeting as they walked.

Jonathan got the boys up to eat their breakfast before going to the Christian Center for Sabbath worship. Each week he prepared a lesson based on The Law and The Prophets in order to please the Jewish Christians. This week he spoke of the Prophet Zephaniah and how God had used him in a mighty way even though his young life



hadn't looked very promising. Jonathan encouraged his people to keep trusting God to work things out for them.

He enjoyed a few hours with his sons before he needed to prepare a post-Sabbath meal. *I'm tired of rolls from the market. Maybe I should hire a servant to cook for us. Maybe I need a wife!* His mind immediately flew to Susanna, and he wondered why she had never married or what her story was.

After dropping the boys off, Jonathan headed to the market. He needed to stock up for the week and was also getting very low on lamp oil. He would need to go to Demetrius' Mercantile Store for that. He would have him deliver it so he wouldn't have to carry it to the market, and then home. He visited with Demetrius for a few minutes, but other customers were demanding his attention and Jonathan left quickly. He suddenly realized that he was walking right past Lamech's Rope Shop. He remembered that he had wanted to ask about Susanna and her story. She had been in his group for three years and he had never asked. He felt that as her leader, he should know her situation. "Shalom, my friend. How good to see you! How can I help you this morning? Do you need some rope to tie those two boys up?" asked Lamech.

"I might at that, Lamech. They are growing up too fast. Do you have any rope that will stop that?"

"Unfortunately, no."

"Actually, I was just headed to the market and thought I would stop by to say hello."

"Welcome to my humble shop. Come to the back and see where I work." Jonathan followed him into a back room that was crowded with hemp fibers. Lamech began to hand weave the fibers together and twist them in strands. He explained that different people needed different weights of ropes. He was currently working on a three-stranded rope that would be strong enough to stake an ox.

"The other day I realized that you and your family have been a part of our group for over three years, but I have not asked you about Susanna's situation."

Lamech's attention was suddenly focused on Jonathan. "Oh, you wish to inquire about Susanna?"

"Yes, I'm her leader and I was just wondering if she was divorced or never married. I would feel it improper for me to ask her."

"Of course. She has never married. When she became available, none of the young men wanted a woman with a club foot. It was considered a sin to be deformed as she is. But since she became a follower of Jesus, she has begun to hope that Jehovah will provide for her. I know that she will be so happy. I am so happy, I could cry," said Lamech.

## Chapter 7

“No, no. I’m not interested in marriage. I was just asking because I didn’t know her situation. But I’m quite content raising my boys alone. I wasn’t asking about her with any intent of marriage,” protested Jonathan. He realized he was in danger of offending Lamech.

“You don’t want a wife with a club foot?” asked Lamech sadly.

“No, Lamech, you misunderstood me. I don’t want or need a wife. I have never noticed her club foot and I agree that Jesus made it clear that such things happen. I have only noticed her beautiful eyes and ready smile. She is a wise woman. She will make a wonderful wife, but not for me. I am not looking for a wife,” said Jonathan firmly.

Lamech put his arm around Jonathan’s shoulder. “You said last Sabbath night that sometimes you were a little dense when God put thoughts in your head. Don’t you think Jehovah brought you here today to inquire about Susanna? Why were you thinking about my daughter? I believe that Jehovah intends for every man to have a wife. Susanna’s mother died giving her life. I tried to raise her and her two older brothers on my own, but Jehovah sent Jochebed to help me. I resisted it, but I could not work and care for them properly. I needed a wife. My sister took care of Susanna as her own until she was weaned, but then I brought her to my shop to play each day until God provided her a mother. Jonathan, why is God bringing Susanna to your mind? Why don’t you join us for dinner tomorrow night?”

“Lamech, I really can’t. I need to focus on my work and the boys right now. I don’t know how they would feel about bringing a woman into our home.”

“They would love her just like you would. Pray about it and let me know. I will not mention this to Susanna.”

“Thank you, and shalom.”

“Shalom.”

Jonathan continued to the market, but he had forgotten what he needed. He found a bench and sat down. *Father, what have I done? I did not mean to inquire about Susanna as a future wife. I thought I was simply doing my job as her spiritual leader. Father, help Lamech to drop this. And help me get busy.* “John Mark!”

The man who had just walked by Jonathan pulled the hood of his robe tighter around his face and began to walk more quickly into the crowds. *That’s strange. I was sure that was John Mark. What is he doing here?* Jonathan began to follow the man who was hampered by the crowd at the busy market. The best bargains were available just before most of the vendors left at noon. When the man stopped to buy some apricots, Jonathan was able to catch up with him.

“Shalom,” said Jonathan.

“Shalom,” said John Mark sadly.

“What are you doing here?”

“Buying apricots.”

“John Mark, where are Barnabas and Paul? We thought you were somewhere in Asia Minor. Tell me, my friend, what is going on?” begged Jonathan.

John Mark looked at Jonathan with tears in his eyes. “I couldn’t do it. I came back here. I shouldn’t have.”

“Why shouldn’t you? I don’t understand.”

“I failed, Jonathan. I failed miserably. I don’t want the people here to know. I didn’t want you to know. I didn’t know where else to go, so I came back here. I need to leave before more people find me out.”

“I’m so sorry that things didn’t work out. Please talk to me and let’s make this right. Come, sit down with me and let’s talk.”

“No, I need to go. I just needed some food. I shouldn’t have come at such a busy time. I thought the crowds would hide me,” explained John Mark.

“We can go to my house, and you will be safe.”

“No. I don’t want to go on that side of town.”

“Then tell me where I can meet you,” insisted Jonathan.

“I am camping in a wooded area behind the Antioch Bank. It’s a Jewish area and no one bothers me,” said John Mark. “I know you are busy, but if you want to find me, I’m usually there.” And without warning, he slipped into the crowd and left Jonathan standing at the apricot stand.

*I must get my food bought for the week or we will go hungry. Help me, Father, to know what to do.* He quickly bought what he needed to get through the week, all the time thinking about his schedule and when he could go and minister to John Mark. He carried his bulging sacks home and realized that he was wishing that Orpah would meet him at the door and help him sort out his thoughts. *She always listened to me and helped me figure out how to deal with people. Just like Jenay.* He realized that all his life, he had had a partner when he needed her most. As he put the food away, he wondered if God was telling him that it was time to consider a new partner. He pictured Susanna helping him decide what to do with John Mark and what to say. She would be wise and understanding. He shook his head to clear his thoughts and realized that he needed to be at the Christian Center preparing for the week ahead. He had not prayed about a subject for discussion for his groups and he only had a few hours before school would be out. He hurried to his office and tried to get settled. His mind sifted through all the strange things that had happened, first with Lamech, then John Mark. *Father, help me to know Your will. I need to set those thoughts aside and focus on the subject for the groups, but I can’t turn those thoughts off. Please help me to be obedient.* He decided that Wednesday would be the best day to deal with John Mark. He would secure Sharon to pick up the boys if he was late getting back. “What is prayer?” He said it out loud and then repeated it. “How does it work and why does it work?” He realized that God had given him the discussion subject for his groups. Now, he just needed to figure out if he knew the answers to the questions that would arise. He began to pray again for John Mark and what he would

encounter there. He knew that saying, "We all told you not to go because the Holy Spirit didn't call you," wasn't what John Mark needed right now.

On Wednesday morning, Jonathan dropped off both boys and had arranged for Sharon to pick them up if he was not back. Thankfully, she never asked what his plans were, and he appreciated that she trusted him to only call on her when he really, really needed help. Asher had assured him that she felt a part of their ministry by keeping the boys and wanted to help as much as possible.

Jonathan began his walk to the downtown area. He stayed away from the main road because he didn't want to encounter Lamech. He had never noticed how many Jewish people lived in this area and discovered a synagogue that he had never noticed. He wondered if Paul knew about this synagogue. It looked relatively new. *Father, please guide me and give me wisdom as I talk with John Mark. I don't know what he needs, but You do. Help me.*

Jonathan found the Antioch Bank, the beautiful homes behind it, and then the wooded area. He walked along a path through the woods and found John Mark sitting on his blanket looking dejected. "Shalom, my friend," Jonathan called.

"Shalom," replied John Mark dully. "I figured you would come today. Did you tell everyone I was back?"

"Of course not. That's our secret for now. How can I help you?"

"I don't think you can," said John Mark sadly.

"Well, I can't until I know your story. But I know that God will help you and He already knows what happened. And this I know for sure: He's not done using you and growing you and blessing you."

John Mark looked at Jonathan and smirked, "That's easy for you to say."

"It is easy to say, but it's much harder to believe. It will take a lot of courage and that's why you need a friend or maybe a lot of friends to be praying for you."

"Well, I guess the gist of it is that I quit. Paul was not happy with me at all. He called me a quitter and said that I was immature and unwilling to suffer for Jesus' sake. He essentially said that my leaving was good riddance and that I had been nothing but trouble ever since we left Antioch. I got seasick the first day out."

"Oh, no! That is the pits. All my uncles are fishermen except one. My Uncle Jonas gets seasick just looking at the water from the shore. I know that's miserable."

"Well, I did better on the trip from Cyprus to the mainland. But it was rough. Barnabas and Paul just seemed to be filled with incredible energy, and I couldn't keep up with them. They are twice my age, yet they walked so fast, and it didn't seem to bother them to go without food or water. They were like supermen. Nothing bothered them. I just gave up trying."

"So, they sent you back here?"

"No, Barnabas found a boat headed to Ashdod, then I walked into Jerusalem. But I didn't want to tell Mother what had happened. Paul

thinks I'm a spoiled brat and I didn't want to go running home to my mother. I didn't want to talk with the apostles, so I just decided to come back here. I don't know why because I'm still hiding."

"John Mark, I think the person you are hiding from is you,"

Jonathan said gently.

"Probably," agreed John Mark.

"May I pray for you right now?"

"Sure."

Jonathan laid his hand on John Mark's shoulder and prayed a prayer of blessing over him. He asked God to give him healing and peace and restore his joy. "John Mark, as a fellow follower of Jesus, I know how hard it is to determine God's clear direction at times. I don't think God holds it against us when we get it wrong. But it's our job to get back on track as soon as possible because there's so much work to be done and so many people that need to hear about Jesus. God has a good plan for the rest of your life. Don't waste it sitting here!"

"Thanks, Jonathan. You are a good friend."

"You let me know when you want to come back to the Leadership Team and get busy again."

"I don't see that happening anytime soon."

"Take time to heal but spend it in prayer asking God the next step. I know He will show you something amazing. He's got plans for you. I'll leave you. I'll be back next Wednesday to check on you."

"Thanks for coming, Jonathan. Shalom."

"Shalom. And remember you are always welcome at my house."

"Thanks."

Jonathan walked along the main road to get home. It was much faster, and he wanted to get back to pick up Zebedee. When he arrived, a few were already gathered to pick up their students. Jonathan spotted Sharon and headed toward her when he realized that she was talking with Susanna. He stopped and took a good look at her. She was talking animatedly to Sharon, and they were laughing together. "She would bring much joy to your home." The words were clear, and he looked around to see who had spoken them. He was certain that the whole group had heard the words. But there was no one around him paying any attention and that's when he knew for certain that Jehovah was calling him to re-marry. He stood there and gazed at her in wonder. *Jehovah, am I hearing You right? She's beautiful and filled with Your Spirit. I am of all men most blessed.* He greeted both ladies and tried to keep from showing what he was feeling. He thanked Sharon for being willing to keep the boys, but he had returned earlier than expected. He forced himself to speak normally as if nothing miraculous had just happened. He would need to find time to speak with Lamech. But between the boys, the groups, and preparing messages for the Worship Center, it was the following Sunday before he found the time.



“Shalom, Lamech.”

“Shalom, Jonathan. What can I do for you today?”

“Lamech, I have come to inquire about your daughter,” Jonathan paused to let his words sink in.

“Oh. Oh. Jehovah be praised. Michael come. Jonathan is inquiring about Susanna. Won't she be pleased!” The young man came from the back room and agreed that Susanna would be thrilled. “Come to eat with us tomorrow night.”

“I'm sorry, Lamech, I can't. That's the fellowship night at the Center, but I can come at sunset on Wednesday if that is convenient for you and your family.”

“Wednesday will be fine. I will talk with Susanna and give you my answer then.”

Jonathan visited with both men shortly and then excused himself to get back to work. He was headed to the market to get food for the week. His head felt light, and he had a hard time remembering what he needed to be doing. He was halfway home before he realized he had forgotten the bread rolls. He headed back to the market and then hurried home. All day his head was filled with questions he wanted to ask Susanna. He wondered about her likes and dislikes and her way of doing things. *She'll probably hate my schedule, but there is no changing that. If she wants to marry a minister, then she will have to adjust to me always being available to my people. Orpah loved me in spite of my crazy schedule, but she had occasionally complained and insisted that I put my family first. I hope Susanna will understand her role of helping me stay balanced and focused on Jehovah's priorities.* Suddenly he realized that it was time to pick up Zebedee. He rushed out the door and walked quickly to the Christian Center just as the boys were released. Zebedee was telling him all about his day, but Jonathan couldn't concentrate on any of it. He found himself saying, “Good!” to Zebedee's every statement.

“Abba, you are not listening!” accused Zebedee angrily.

“I'm sorry, Zebedee, I've been really busy today, and you are right, I was thinking of other things. What were you saying?”

“Gabriel got picked to read today when it was my turn. When I told the rabbi, he told me to be quiet. That wasn't fair. It was my turn and I wanted to read.”

“That is sad. I hope you'll get to read soon. Rabbi Absalom said you are doing a great job in school. He's very proud of you and so am I.”

“But Abba, my teacher is Rabbi Abihu!”

“Yes, but Rabbi Absalom is the headmaster and watches over all the students.” *Oh, it's going to be one of those days!* He genuinely tried to pay attention, and he felt that the next two days would be even harder. He had to be able to function, but his mind was not cooperating. *Am I ready for marriage again? Why did I even ask*

*Lamech?* He listened to homework, prepared dinner, got the boys to their room, and was almost able to relax with the group of menservants that gathered in his home that night. Somehow, he got through Tuesday and he and the boys enjoyed the fellowship meal at the Worship Center. He asked Mrs. Varda if she could keep both boys on Wednesday afternoon and that evening, and he paid her extra so that she could feed them dinner. He picked up Zebedee at school and took him home. He said they needed to do homework before going to Mrs. Varda's and explained that he needed to go out for the evening to visit with a family.

"Why can't we go with you?"

"Because you two weren't invited. It's adults only. Besides, you love being at Mrs. Varda's and she'll make you a good dinner."

"But Wednesdays are our special days together," complained Zebedee.

"Yes, but sometimes, I have to be in two places and tonight I decided this was more important. I'm sorry. I promise I won't miss our Wednesdays unless I absolutely have to. But you need to understand and forgive me. Okay?" asked Jonathan.

"Okay, I guess."

"So, what's your homework? Let's hear it." Jonathan was impressed with what Zebedee was learning and told him so. Soon they were on their way to Mrs. Varda's house and Jonathan spent a few minutes explaining to Zerah the plan. He promised both boys to pick them up before bedtime. He hoped he could keep that promise.

Jonathan arrived back at his home and spent some time in prayer as he prepared his heart to face this evening, whatever it might bring. He had been confident when he talked with Lamech, but as he had thought about all the responsibilities of being a minister's wife, he was feeling less confident that Susanna would be interested. He wasn't sure how much say she would be allowed by her abba. Besides, wasn't she needed at home to help raise her three younger brothers? He tried to quiet his heart and ask for Jehovah to simply show all of them His will. Jonathan prayed for peace to accept whatever happened. And he prayed that he would be able to honor Orpah's memory and yet fully love and care for Susanna. As the sun shone through the window, he realized it was time for him to leave. He quickly changed into his cleaner robe and set off at a quick walk to Lamech's home. They lived close to the market, north of the Christian Center. He arrived perfectly on time. He was offered water to wash his hands as he joined Lamech, Michael, Aaron, and Neri at the ceremonial washing pot.

Lamech saw Jonathan's look of surprise and explained.

"Welcome, Jonathan. No, we don't keep the Jewish Laws. We know we are free from them. But since we already had the pots, and we've raised five very dirty boys, the ladies have insisted we continue the tradition of washing before dinner. I don't suppose it hurts anyone." Jonathan quickly agreed and entered the modest house. There were three small tables prepared and Lamech directed him to sit with him

and Michael, while the boys sat at the other. Jonathan supposed that Susanna would sit with her mother, Jochebed, at the other table. Once the men and boys were seated, Susanna served him a plate and shyly greeted him. He could tell that she was trying hard to perform as her abba had instructed her, but he missed getting to talk with her casually and comfortably as they did in group. She and her mother served the other men and then took their seats at the far table. Lamech had splurged on some fish and the ladies had prepared it superbly. He knew they could not afford such a feast often, and he took it as a good sign. The men talked of many things, mostly the Rope Shop, where both Lamech and his son Michael worked. Since they had been in group together for three years, there was little to ask about each other. They had heard just about everything there was to know about Jonathan. Lamech asked what he thought of the school, and they laughed together about trying to remember to make time for homework. "I think I am learning as much as the boys," declared Lamech. "Now, I make Michael listen, too, so that he can learn."

"Yes, I am learning things, too. I never attended Hebrew School because I was traveling with Jesus during those years," said Jonathan.

"But you think it's important to send your boys?" asked Lamech.

"Yes, I think it's very important. There was no Hebrew School in Capernaum when my abba was growing up. So, all I know is what he and Jesus taught me. I felt certain he would want his grandsons to attend, especially since it is now a Christian School and not so focused on the Laws," said Jonathan. Still no mention of the decision was made.



## Chapter 8

Finally, the meal was complete, and the men stood. Lamech motioned for Jonathan to follow him up the stairs to the roof. He offered Jonathan a seat and pulled four benches together to form a circle. Jonathan's heart rejoiced that maybe Susanna was going to be allowed in on this discussion. And he was right. After the ladies had cleared the tables, they joined the men on the rooftop and sat on the benches in the circle. Susanna was seated directly opposite him, and he smiled at her reassuringly. He could tell that she was nervous. He wasn't sure whether she was scared of the marriage, or scared her abba would say the wrong thing. He realized that he didn't know her as well as he thought. But he was also overwhelmed with his desire to get to know everything about her and share his life with her. *Thank You, Father, for this feeling of reassurance.* Lamech began, "Jonathan, why don't you begin by stating your request."

Jonathan was a little surprised by that, but quickly composed himself. "Lamech and Jochebed, it is my desire to take your daughter, Susanna, as my wife. I have grown to love her during our time in group and Jehovah has revealed to me that she is the one I should marry to complete my family. You know that my first wife died in childbirth three years ago, and I am raising two boys. Zebedee is eight and Zerah is five." Jonathan stopped and looked to Lamech. *Is that what he wanted? Should I say more? Should I have addressed Susanna?*

"Jochebed and I have discussed your request and have presented it to Susanna. Susanna, what is your response?"

Susanna spoke firmly, "It would be an honor to be your wife and mother to your boys. Jehovah has also confirmed this to me."

"Since this is a second marriage, will it be conducted privately?" asked Lamech.

"It is my second marriage, but I see no reason why we can't celebrate it in some way. I was in hopes maybe we could invite the Sabbath night group. I have no family that could attend, do you?"

"No, we, too, are far away from home. Well, we do have Susanna's older brothers and their families."

"When would you allow the espousal?" asked Jonathan.

"I see no reason to delay," replied Lamech.

"Would you be comfortable if Samuel conducted the ceremony?" asked Jonathan.

"I think that would be a good choice," replied Lamech. "I'll talk with him tomorrow and see if he could come and do the espousal on Sabbath night with our group. Would that meet your approval?"

"Certainly. How soon would you allow the wedding to take place?" asked Jonathan.

"What were you thinking? I know it is traditional to wait a year, but for a second marriage, sometimes there is no waiting time. When would you be ready?"

“Let’s plan it in approximately a month. It will just be a one-day event, but I would like to surprise Susanna.”

“Is everyone agreed?” Everyone nodded and Jonathan apologized for needing to leave so quickly. He reminded them that he had boys to get to sleep and it was a school night. They quickly said their goodnights and Jonathan strode across town to Mrs. Varda’s house. The boys were still awake, but Mrs. Varda looked exhausted. He chided himself for asking her to keep them, but hopefully, soon, that wouldn’t be necessary. Susanna could share the parenting load. Sweet thoughts filled his mind, but he knew better than to share it with the boys just before sleep.

He quickly tucked them in their blankets and crawled onto his own mat. Jonathan slept soundly and Zebedee woke him when the sun was up, and he wasn’t. Now everything was in a rush. He fed the boys, dropped Zebedee at the school, took Zerah to Mrs. Varda’s, then rushed back to the school to teach his class. Afterward, he took the stairs up to his office and stretched out on one of the benches. He cradled his head in the crook of his arm and simply lay there knowing that he should be busy. He was paralyzed by an incredible sense of relief and peace. He just wanted to be still and stay there forever. He had not allowed himself to dream of taking Susanna as his wife, but now he was pledged to her and would be espoused on Sabbath night. He thought about all that needed to be done before then. He suddenly sat up as he realized that he needed to find gifts for her and for her parents. *There is so little time. What should I do? Sharon will know.* It was only noon, and he had a couple of hours. He ran to Asher’s house and knocked at the door hoping that Sharon would be home. She was busy making bread and invited him to come into the prep area. *How many times have I sat and talked with Mother or Jenay or Orpah while they made bread? Thank You, for my Christian sister, Sharon.*

“Sharon, I have a secret that I need to share with you because I need your help desperately.”

“And what is this secret that you think I haven’t already heard?” she said with a twinkle in her eyes.

Jonathan realized that she and Susanna were best friends, and she would be the first to know. “Then you’ve already heard that Lamech has pledged Susanna to me, and we will be espoused on the Sabbath?”

“Of course. Susanna is so happy.”

“I’m glad. But Sharon, you’ve got to help me. The espousal is tomorrow night. I don’t know what to get her or her parents as gifts. What do I do? Please help me!”

“Oh. Let me think,” she said as she punched down the bread and started twisting it into individual rolls. “Let’s start with the hardest. That’s Lamech. What are you thinking?”

“I don’t know. I know he’s a ropemaker. I don’t know that much about him.”

“Well, I know that he’s been talking about wanting to get some goats for the boys to care for after school. It would give them

responsibilities and provide milk for his family. I don't know whether that's a reasonable gift, but it's the only thing I can think of right now."

"He would have to build them a pen, but I could get some chain to stake them for now. That could work. But I certainly couldn't present them at the espousal."

"Maybe you could present him the staking chains," suggested Sharon.

"I like that. I think I know where to find some goats and I'm sure Demetrius will have the chains and stakes. Now, how about her mother?"

"Let me think. She's losing a daughter and will be surrounded by all men. Why don't we think of something dainty and pretty for her. It won't replace Susanna, but it would be special."

"Like what?"

"Like a flower vase, or a fancy platter, something like that. You'll just have to go to the big market and look around. Even a pretty water pot might be nice — she could use it for the goat milk. Or you could get her a churn for the goat milk, but she probably already has one."

"I like the idea of getting her something pretty, not something that reminds her that now she will have to do all the work by herself," said Jonathan.

"You are a wise man," laughed Sharon.

"Now, most importantly. What do I get Susanna?"

"What are your ideas?"

"I have none. I think her favorite color is blue because she's always wearing something blue. But I don't know what is appropriate. I was thinking maybe a fancy pin to decorate her robes, but I don't know if she would like that."

"I think she would love it as long as it is small and not gaudy. Just a small token of your love for her. That would be nice. Don't get her a bracelet — they just get in the way when you are making bread."

Sharon set the pan of bread aside to rise and stood by the counter. "The other day, I was looking for new blankets for the boys. They have totally worn theirs out. Susanna was fingering a blue plaid blanket in that Textile Shop two doors down from Demetrius' Mercantile Store. You don't want her to have to use Orpah's blanket."

"Oh, and I could get her a new mat, too. Sharon, you are wonderful. Thank you so much. Now, I've got to run. May I ask you another favor?"

"Yes, I can pick up the boys if you are not back. Now, get busy," said Sharon as she rushed him out the door.

"Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!" he cried as he ran from her house toward Demetrius' Mercantile Store. He was in hopes Demetrius could tell him where to get two goats.

When Jonathan hurriedly told Demetrius what he needed and why, Demetrius volunteered to help. "I've got time to walk down to the farm and get the goats. My steward will watch the store. I assume you want two nanny goats to milk. Let me have your chains and stakes

and I'll stake them in your yard before sunset. You can pay me later. Do you want a couple of milking pans?"

"Sure! Demetrius, you are a real friend. Thank you so much. I don't know anything about goats! I appreciate your help." He gave the stakes and chains to Demetrius and then bought two milking pans to give to Lamech as the gift. *I'll get a bag of some kind at the market to put them in.*

He headed to the Textile Shop and found what he hoped was the blue plaid blanket that Susanna had admired. He asked about where to purchase a mat. He was directed to the Cushion Shop. There he purchased her a new mat, but they did not provide delivery, so he would have to carry it home before going to the market. Hopefully, he wouldn't run into Sharon and the boys, or they would beg to tag along. He knew they were still mad about him leaving them yesterday. He carried the mat home and decided he would only present her with the blanket and just tell her about the new mat.

He grabbed a glass of fruit juice and rushed back toward the market. There were many, many booths. He tried not to rush, but he wanted to find just the right things for both Jochebed and Susanna. Feminine, pretty things. He walked and walked looking at all the wares. He had covered all but the last row of booths and was wondering if he would have to return tomorrow when he saw the perfect pin for Susanna. It was a silver circle with a single blue stone set in the top. The circle would remind her of his eternal love. He knew she would love it. He purchased it and told the shop owner that he needed to purchase an extra bag. He was glad he remembered that. Now all he lacked was the vase or something pretty for Jochebed. He decided he would have to return tomorrow. As he walked back through the booths toward home, he spotted a beautiful blue mosaic vase. It was small, but the sun was hitting it in such a way that it seemed Jehovah Himself was pointing it out. Jonathan felt it would be perfect. He purchased the vase and began his journey home. He hoped that everyone would be happy with their gifts. He wondered if he should purchase something for her brothers, but realized that with six brothers, it would be expensive, and besides he wouldn't know what to get them. He put his purchases away and hurried to Asher's house. He discovered that Sharon was not back yet from picking up Zerah. He walked quickly to meet them and wondered how the boys would react to the news. Sharon was leisurely walking back surrounded by the five boys and carrying her daughter. He claimed his two boys and thanked her for all her help. He quietly whispered that his shopping had been successful. "You need to tell the boys soon before they hear it from someone else," she advised.

But when they arrived home, they discovered two nanny goats staked in their backyard. The boys were thrilled and were already discussing names for them when Jonathan sat them down and got their attention with some fruit juice and bread rolls filled with cheese. He asked the boys to sit at the courtyard table with him and let him explain about the goats. "First of all, they are not ours."

“Aw, Dad. I want a goat. Why can’t they be ours?”

“I love my goat. It’s what I always wanted,” claimed Zerah forgetting that chickens had been his latest request.

“Son, those goats are a gift for another family. But maybe, and I’m not promising, but maybe sometime this spring, we can consider getting you two some animals to raise, if you think you can take good care of them. Animals are a lot of work, and you’ll have to fit it in with homework, too. But right now, I need to tell you something that is going to happen on Sabbath night. You know that we always go to Mr. Kostakis and Mrs. Irini’s house. Do you know Miss Susanna?”

“Isn’t she Neri’s big sister?” asked Zebedee.

“Yes, she’s Aaron and Neri’s big sister. You’ve probably seen her picking them up at school. Well, on Sabbath night I will become espoused to Miss Susanna. That means that we will be preparing for her to move to our house to be my wife. That will happen in about a month. Do you have any questions?”

“Will she be our mother?” asked Zerah.

“She won’t be your mother, because Orpah will always be your mother, but you will call her Mother or you may call her Mother Susanna if you prefer. Jehovah designed families to have a man and wife working together to raise children. I have asked Miss Susanna to help me raise you two and she has said yes. There will be a special ceremony tomorrow night at group. I expect that you boys will be invited to watch. And I will need your help.”

“What do you need, Abba? We will help you,” said Zebedee proud to be able to offer.

“Well, in order to become espoused to a lady, you must offer her dad and mother and her some gifts. I will need you two to help me get the gifts to Mr. Kostakis’. The gift I’m giving to Miss Susanna’s dad is the two goats.”

“Dad, that means that Aaron and Neri will get the goats instead of us! Why would you buy them goats?” demanded Zebedee, very offended.

“Zebedee, I just told you. They are the gift that I’m giving Mr. Lamech. I have to give him something and Mrs. Sharon suggested the goats.”

“I don’t think that’s fair. They are in our yard. Jehovah sent them to us,” stated Zerah firmly.

“No, I bought them, and Mr. Demetrius delivered them here so that we could take them tomorrow night. You may play with them for a little while this afternoon, but you must do your homework, Zebedee. I’ve got to figure out if I can remember how to milk goats. Maybe you could do your homework while I milk them. Then I have to attend the Leadership Team meeting immediately after dinner, and you two are going to go and play with Elias and Adam again. You can tell them all about the goats.”

Jonathan was surprised that there were no more questions about Susanna becoming his wife and was grateful that the goats had distracted them. He dropped the boys off with Sharon and thanked her

again. He and Asher headed to the Leadership meeting. "Am I crazy to bring this up with the Team?" asked Jonathan.

"Well, I think it depends on how you bring it up. I think if you are asking for their approval or their opinion, you may be opening up a can of worms you don't want to deal with."

"Do you think so? Do you think they would be opposed?" said Jonathan, suddenly concerned.

"Honestly, I think some might be."

"Why? Because of her foot?"

"Yes. Jonathan, don't be naive. You know that Jesus encountered it everywhere he went. If a person was not perfect, then God was not pleased with them. That not only is a Jewish belief, but the Gentiles teach it, too. Their gods are angry, so they send a deformed baby."

"You consider Susanna deformed?" said Jonathan testily.

"Of course not, but you've got to admit that her foot is not right. I'm just saying that you need to be careful about opening it up to discussion. But you need to let them know that it is happening."

"Maybe I should just wait until after the espousal is done."

"Oh, they will hear about it long before tomorrow night. I don't doubt that they are already talking about it," said Asher.

"You are probably right." Jonathan sighed deeply and prayed that God would give him the right words to say. He took the stairs two steps at a time. It helped him to clear his head. Only Demetrius and Manaen were there, and they were talking about problems at work. They stood and greeted Jonathan and Asher. Soon the others joined them, and the meeting began with a short time of prayer. Jonathan called for reports and any concerns. He listened and tried to pay attention as they discussed some questions about the school and about the need to repair a bench that was broken in the balcony. They discussed some of the branch ministries and reported that they seemed to be working quite well. Someone asked when Barnabas, Paul, and John Mark were due to return. "I think it was fairly open-ended. They will return whenever Jehovah directs them back here," replied another. Jonathan wondered if he should report that John Mark was back, but decided tonight was not the night.

"Are there any other reports?" asked Jonathan, trying not to sound impatient. "I wanted to share something personal with you. As I was praying earlier in the week, I felt that Jehovah was telling me that it was time to take a wife." When he paused to take a breath, everyone began to applaud and whistle and agreed that it was about time. Orpah had been gone for three years, they reminded him.

"Who's the special lady?"

"Jehovah made it very clear that it should be Lamech's daughter, Susanna. I have talked with Lamech, and the espousal will be tomorrow night. Since this is a second marriage, we will be married in about a month. It will be a small, private wedding that I will need some time off to prepare. I was wondering if some of you would volunteer to teach for the Sabbath worship service and that first Sunday morning. Demetrius, I would probably need you to lead the family group on

Sabbath evening so that I wouldn't have any responsibilities over that weekend."

"I could cover the Sunday morning worship. Just let me know when," volunteered Lucius.

"I will cover the Sabbath morning worship," agreed Samuel.

And not a single comment was made about Susanna's foot.

Either they were not aware that she had a club foot, or they genuinely believed what Jesus taught. Jonathan hoped it was the latter.

Jonathan thanked them for their support and called on Dan to close their time with prayer. The men stood around and talked for a while afterward since it was a shorter than usual meeting. Jonathan and Asher excused themselves and headed home so that Jonathan could retrieve his boys and get them to sleep.

On Friday, he saw Susanna with a group of ladies, but they didn't speak. He kept trying to catch her eye, but she seemed to be deliberately avoiding him. It made his heart yearn even more for her. She would be such a welcome ray of sunshine in his life. He was glad that the espousal would be tonight, then he could talk with her freely.

When they picked up Zerah, Jonathan let the boys play together while he told Varda about the plans for tonight. "Oh, yes," she said, "Zerah has told me all about it. He also said that once his new mother was there, she would let him have goats."

"Oh, he did, did he?" Jonathan shook his head. "Gotta run. Shalom. Come on, boys. We've got a lot to do this afternoon."

The boys said goodbye to Mrs. Varda and joined their abba as they walked toward home. Jonathan explained that they needed to take the goats to Mr. Kostakis' house and then return to get cleaned up and ready for the special ceremony. It was only a half mile to his house, but Jonathan wasn't sure how long it would take to move the goats. Once the boys drank their cup of juice, they were eager to get started on their adventure. And an adventure it was. Jonathan pulled up one stake and handed it to Zebedee. The goat didn't seem to notice. Then he pulled up the other stake and handed it to Zerah. Everything went well until the boys tugged at the chain to get the goats to move. They refused and continued to graze on the tender green grass. Jonathan helped the boys pull on the chains, but the goats wouldn't budge. They pulled, they pushed, they begged and pleaded, but the goats ignored all their efforts. Jonathan had the boys roll up the chains and try to just talk with the goats. He sent Zebedee inside to grab some fresh vegetables and suddenly the goats were interested. Jonathan instructed the boys to run to Mr. Kostakis' house and not let the goats catch them. They made a funny sight with the two boys running and being chased by two goats, and Jonathan running behind the goats. *I'm just glad I don't have to deliver them tonight. It will be Lamech's job to get them home!* Then he wondered if he should gift him some vegetables to help him out. As they stood in Kostakis' back yard, the servants helped them stake them where they couldn't reach the garden or flowers. He explained to Kostakis what was happening and why he had brought goats to his yard. Kostakis called to Irini and

together they congratulated Jonathan. They assured him that it would be a special night.

Jonathan and the boys walked to the market to purchase some vegetables for Lamech to use to get the goats to his home. Jonathan had decided it wouldn't be nice to give him such stubborn goats without something to bribe them. They picked out some cucumbers, carrots, and onions since the goats had seemed to like all three. They quickly returned home, and Jonathan added the vegetables to the bag containing the milking pans. He checked the other packages and felt that everything was ready. He closed the door and told the boys he was going to the well. When he returned both boys were looking dejected. They said they missed their goats. They all three washed their faces and hands and changed into their nicest robes. Jonathan remembered he was supposed to ask Sophia about a new robe for Zebedee. Maybe he would remember tonight, or maybe she would notice. Now that they were clean, Jonathan insisted the boys come inside and wait until time to return to Kostakis' house. It would only be another half hour, but the boys wanted to be outdoors in the crisp fall air. He finally gave up and started their walk to Mr. Kostakis' early. He gave Zerah the bag with the plaid blanket in it. He gave Zebedee the larger bag with the milking pans and vegetables in it. And he carried Jochebed's vase and Susanna's pin in their bags. They walked around the neighborhood delaying their arrival until the sun was almost at the horizon. As they arrived, Irini helped him place the gifts so that they would not be visible to everyone until they moved to the living area.



## Chapter 9

Others began to arrive at Kostakis' house for their regular Sabbath night group. The men welcomed Samuel to their table, but nothing was said about the espousal. Jonathan was sure that everyone already knew, but they politely avoided speaking about it. Jonathan had hoped that the ceremony would be before dinner so that he could relax and enjoy it. Instead, he felt too excited to eat and only picked at his food. He couldn't see Susanna, who was seated with the ladies at the far table. The children were seated in the middle. When dinner was finally ended, Lamech stood and invited everyone to witness the espousal of Jonathan and Susanna. Everyone broke out in smiles and Jonathan knew that they had already heard the news. Each family group gathered with their children in the living area and Lamech introduced Samuel, who would conduct the ceremony.

Realizing that this group was primarily Gentile, Samuel took the opportunity to explain the historical meaning of the espousal. Jonathan noted that he was a good speaker and related the information well. When he asked if Jonathan had brought gifts, Zerah couldn't suppress a giggle. Jonathan gave him a stern look and he quieted. Jonathan stood and handed Lamech the bag of vegetables. Lamech looked confused, but thanked Jonathan. "If you look deeper in the bag, you will find more," encouraged Jonathan. Lamech looked puzzled as he pulled out the two milking pans. "I was told by a friend that you were interested in getting some goats. My gift to you is two nanny goats which are staked in Kostakis' yard. The vegetables will be needed to bribe them to follow you home tonight."

"Jonathan, what a delightful gift. I have been considering getting goats and now I will have milk and cheese and butter."

"You said if you purchased goats you would teach Aaron and Neri to milk them. Don't expect me to do it!" said Jochebed laughing. "I don't do goats!"

"Oh, no. My gift is causing marital discord!" Jonathan and the others were laughing as they all knew it was a gift that was appreciated.

Jonathan hoped that his gift to Jochebed would soothe her ruffled feathers. It did. She gasped as she opened her bag. A tear trickled down her face. Jonathan, in keeping with the laughter and tone that this gifting had taken, explained that he was taking her daughter and recognized that she would be sad to be left behind with nothing but ugly men and boys. "I want you to have a gift of beauty to remind you of Susanna." The group roared with laughter, and everyone agreed that the vase was beautiful.

"Susanna, my first gift to you cannot be wrapped in a bag. In front of this group that has become our extended family, I want to declare my love for you. Your beautiful eyes, your love and care for people, the way you bring sunshine into even the darkest places — I am so

glad that Jehovah has saved you for me.” Tears ran down both their faces.

“My second gift is a practical one to indicate that I will care for you for the rest of my life,” and he handed her the bag with the blanket. He decided not to mention that he had also purchased her a mat.

She hugged the blanket close to her face to wipe away the tears, then she wrapped it around her shoulders and smiled at him with a smile that took his breath away.

“My final gift is because you are marrying a very busy man. As a minister’s wife, you may feel that I belong to everyone else, and you will have to make sacrifices that other women do not have to make. I wanted you to have something special to remind you of my love and I pray that you will never doubt it.”

As she unwrapped the beautiful pin, she gasped. “It’s beautiful!”

“I want to remind you that the circle represents my eternal love for you, even when I’m busy.”

“Oh, Jonathan, thank you. These are precious gifts and I look forward to being your wife.”

Everyone clapped and whistled. Samuel called for quiet and announced that Jonathan and Susanna were now espoused and could not legally dissolve their promises without a divorce.

Demetrius realized that Jonathan was too excited and emotional to lead the group, so he quietly asked the group if there were any prayer requests or anything anyone wanted to share. Most just said words of congratulations to the newly espoused couple, who now sat side by side with the boys at their feet. Demetrius led in a prayer of blessing for the group, and everyone said goodnight. Demetrius and Sophia pulled Jonathan aside after everyone else had moved outside. “Jonathan, when do you plan to marry?”

“In about a month, if I can get everything organized by then.”

“Why don’t you come over and have dinner with us sometime next week and let’s talk about how we can help you,” said Demetrius.

“I only have one free night. I try to spend Wednesday afternoons with the boys and make it a special evening for them. That hasn’t been happening as often as I would like,” replied Jonathan.

“Bring them. Giorgio will enjoy having friends to play with. Please come,” insisted Sophia.

“Okay. But I need to find the boys right now. Goodnight.”

Jonathan couldn’t believe that he had just committed to another obligation when he had promised the boys to keep Wednesdays free. Something had to give, and soon! Several of the group were still standing around the goats giving Lamech and the boys advice on getting the goats home.

“Just take a vegetable and let them smell it and just run all the way home. They will follow you,” offered Zebedee.

“Yeah, but you have to run fast, or they will eat the vegetable and stop chasing you,” added Zerah.

“That’s true. But you have lots of vegetables to get you home. Remember that they will eat anything, so don’t let them eat your tunics,” Demetrius told the boys.

Aaron and Neri each took a vegetable while their dad and Michael pulled up the stakes and held on to the chains. The two women followed laughing. Zebedee and Zerah wanted to follow them and make sure they made it home safely, but Jonathan insisted that they head home and get some sleep. He suddenly realized that it was the Sabbath. He tried to explain to the boys how different the Sabbath was since Jesus had died to fulfill the Law, but they were tired and more interested in talking about when they could get some goats of their own.



John Mark realized that just sitting in the woods waiting for his silver to run out was not going to be a pleasant way to end his life. And worst of all, it had rained last night. Soon it would be deep into the rainy season and not a great time to be camping. He was carefully limiting his food so that his silver would last as long as possible, but something had to change. He appreciated Jonathan stopping to talk with him, but decided he couldn’t face the Leadership Team after he had failed so terribly. After a few more days of sitting and praying and thinking, he decided to explore Antioch and see if he could find a job. He shoved his blanket into his travel bag and started off. He had never had to work and wasn’t exactly sure how one went about finding a job. He knew he wanted to avoid the area around the Worship Center, so he traveled due north and then crossed to the east side and began to explore an area that felt safer. He walked almost an hour before he found a well and sat down to eat his breakfast. He was certainly out of the main part of the city, but now he was surrounded by farmland. All around him were fields of grain, vegetables, and orchards. It seemed to be a very fertile area, and everywhere he looked men, women, and children were harvesting something. He looked up as an older couple approached carrying their empty water pots. They greeted him and he replied, “Shalom.”

“John Mark! Is it you? What brings you to Antioch?” Eli grabbed John Mark in a warm embrace. “What is the news from Jerusalem and how is your mother?”

“Let him talk, Eli!” chided Chakah.

John Mark was startled, but quickly recognized an old friend and mentor from Jerusalem. He replied, “Mother is doing well. There is still quite a bit of Roman persecution, but the Pharisees are not quite as vicious toward us since Saul became one of us.”

“Saul became one of us! You mean he believes Jesus is the Messiah?”

“Yes, he not only believes, but he’s preaching it all over the Roman world. He’s on a ministry trip with Barnabas right now trying to teach as many Jews as possible about the New Way,” reported John

Mark. "He has changed his name to Paul since he became a follower of Jesus."

"And what brings you here?"

Eli and Chakah had been good friends and mentors to John Mark after the crucifixion. They had started a home group just like his mother had, right after Pentecost. He had often sat under Eli's teaching and felt comfortable talking with them now. "I'm not sure. I feel at loose ends. I came to Antioch feeling that it was where I belonged, but now I'm not sure and running out of resources. I did find Jonathan, the Apostle James' son, but I didn't feel comfortable there."

"Come and stay with us if you are willing to help with the harvest. Everyone needs more help, and you would be an asset. We have an extra guest hut that we built for Peter, and you would be welcome."

John Mark's thoughts reeled. *An asset. That sounds nice for a change. I could work hard and be a help to my friends.* He wondered who else he would know in this group. John Mark carried Chakah's water pot back to what looked like a small village. There were eight huts in a circle around a central cooking area. Ground had been cleared for what would be a second row, but only one had been built. Eli showed John Mark around the property. He explained that each family had its own sleeping quarters, but they shared the rest of the space. He also assured him that he would be welcome to stay in the guest hut. Inside, he found two mats and laid his travel bag down on one. Eli said that he needed to collect firewood today as Chakah was running low. John Mark knew that he was expected to help even though he really didn't know how to do manual labor. He felt comfortable enough with Eli to ask how to do things. It wasn't his fault that his dad had insisted on his education rather than his learning practical things since he had plenty of servants to do the work. Eli pulled a small cart to the edge of an orchard, and both began to pick up a pile of limbs that had been pruned from the trees. When the cart was full, John Mark pulled it back to the village. They stacked the wood beside the ovens where Chakah and another lady were working to make bread. Eli introduced Eden, and John Mark asked if she was Barak's wife. She smiled and nodded. All morning, John Mark worked with Eli to collect firewood and as they worked, they talked of many things. John Mark felt his heart healing even though it bothered him that he hadn't told Eli the full truth about his reason for feeling uncomfortable with Jonathan. Eli had not pursued it, and he began to relax. All afternoon, Eli and John Mark worked together. John Mark pulled weeds for the first time in his life and near the end of the day, a herd of ten goats appeared, ready to be milked. Eli taught John Mark how to milk, and Chakah and Eden joined them to fill the jars with goat milk for dinner. John Mark could smell the food cooking in the ovens, and he was eager for sundown. He hadn't had a decent meal since he left on the mission trip with Barnabas and Paul. His mouth watered as he thought about what was in store.

Soon the families began to arrive. First was Naboth, Leah, and their four children. Naboth ran to hug John Mark and welcomed him.

Leah gave him a hug and introduced the children. “This is a good friend of ours from Jerusalem,” she explained. Naboth said that he had been planting a winter crop of herbs and spices and the children were a big help with the backbreaking work. Even their youngest could help with the planting. Leah reminded him that she had started off her day selling their produce at the market. “Farming is a time-consuming job, but it’s something we can do as a family. It is good and Jehovah has blessed us.”

While they were talking, Barak arrived and gave John Mark a hearty welcome. He had four children with him and stated that they were in the olive oil business. They spent five days a week preparing the jars of oil and then sold them on Fridays at the market. “Did you know it takes seven baskets of olives to make one jar of olive oil? We try to make a jar each day, but it’s a lot of work. As the children get older, it will get easier because they can help me more. What brings you to Antioch? Are you on your way to your dad’s?”

“No, I just came trying to figure out where the Holy Spirit was leading. I’m still not sure.”

“Well, you are welcome to join us here — that is, if you don’t mind hard work.”

Hiram and Adah arrived with the three children riding on a donkey’s back. Adah was leading the donkey and Hiram was carrying the plow. Abram, Maacah, and three children were trudging behind looking filthy and exhausted. Maacah carried a small boy. They announced that they were walking to the well to wash. They would need more water than usual since they had been harvesting potatoes. Chakah agreed that she would keep their food hot while they washed. When they returned, Hiram and Abram quickly greeted John Mark before taking their place in the grass with their wives and children. John Mark felt surrounded by family.

Hezekiah and his three sons arrived and greeted John Mark. “Did Eli tell you? Jehovah just gave me another son, day before yesterday. I’ll talk with you later. I want to go check on Ahinoam. You boys go ahead and eat. I’ll be right back.”

“I took her a plate a few minutes ago. Do you want to eat with her inside?” asked Eve.

“If you will keep an eye on the boys, that would be nice,” said Hezekiah as he took a plate from Chakah. Eve agreed to watch the boys and let them visit in peace.

John Mark felt such love in this group and knew that it was a group that would help him to heal. They were strong followers of Jesus. He would have to learn to work hard, but felt that he would like to stay. He said as much to the group. Eli replied that he would be welcome as long as he was willing to work. “I think Hezekiah is the one who needs the most help right now. His fruit trees are ready for their last picking and Ahinoam can’t help him. We’ve all been pitching in, but if you could help him tomorrow, I think he would be finished with the plums for this fall. We all help each other around here and we wouldn’t mind having an extra hand right here at the harvest. Just

about everyone could use your help, but Hezekiah's crop is the most critical right now. If the plums are not picked soon, they will fall and rot. Breakfast is served one hour before dawn and work begins at dawn. We try to get a little prayer time in between the two. Let's sing a Psalm and call it a night. Thank You, Jehovah, for sending John Mark to help us. May we be a blessing to him as well. Heal Ahinoam quickly and keep the baby safe. Give us rest for the night and strength for tomorrow. In Jesus' name I pray."

Before John Mark headed to his hut, he whispered to Eli that he would need someone to knock on his door in the morning because he wasn't used to getting up at that time. Eli assured him he would knock and come shake him if necessary. "You'll learn quickly how to wake up if you want breakfast before work."

John Mark realized that Eli was the dad that everyone needed to make this group run smoothly. And it did run smoothly and on schedule.



On Wednesday, Jonathan and the boys walked together to Demetrius' house. The boys agreed that they would enjoy getting good food and they looked forward to playing with Giorgio who was two years older than Zebedee. Jonathan was grateful for the invitation but was leery that this was a discussion about Susanna. It was a little late to back out now since the espousal was already complete. But he was still nervous. Demetrius was a really good friend, but often spoke very directly. *I'd just like to stay home and go to sleep early for a change. I'm tired.* But he put on his smile and knocked on Demetrius' door. They were greeted by a servant and escorted to the living area. Giorgio took the boys upstairs to play, but Sophia reminded them that dinner would be served in just a few minutes. "Jonathan, you look exhausted. I'm so glad you came tonight. We have something we want to talk with you about that I think will help."

"Have you heard news of Barnabas and Paul returning? That would be a big help!" declared Jonathan.

"No, I have heard nothing from them. Did Lamech make it home with the goats?" asked Demetrius.

"Apparently so. I saw Susanna after school on Sunday and she said that Aaron and Neri were doing a good job caring for them. They were all enjoying the milk and butter. Thank you again for helping me with that gift."

"It was an interesting gift and made the espousal very fun," stated Sophia.

"Sometimes the gifts are much more serious, but Sharon told me that Lamech had been wanting to get some goats to help feed his family and to give Aaron and Neri more responsibilities. I think it went well," agreed Jonathan.

"I thought your gifts for the ladies were especially nice," said Sophia.

“Thank you. Again, Sharon knew what Susanna and Jochebed would like. She helped me out. How is Costas doing with being away from home?” asked Jonathan.

“I think he’s doing okay. He says he is lonely, but Kostakis says he is excelling,” said Demetrius. The servants announced that dinner was ready to be served and they moved to one table, while the three boys sat at the other.

Demetrius led a prayer of blessing, and they began to eat the delicious food the servants had prepared. After a few minutes, Sophia stated, “I believe you said the wedding would be in approximately a month. Do you have a particular date in mind?”

“Yes, but you see in Jewish tradition, the bride is not supposed to know the date. She knows in general when it will be, but she is to wait expectantly for her groom — never knowing when he might suddenly appear. This Jewish tradition reminds us that we don’t know when Messiah is returning. We will see the signs and recognize that it is getting close, but only Jehovah knows the timing. So, I don’t want to give Susanna an exact date.”

“I see. But you will know it,” stated Sophia.

“Yes, I will know it and of course the servants I hire, and musicians, but no one else.”

“How will your guests know to come, or are you not inviting guests?”

“They generally would see the groom escorting the bride to his house and the servants would start telling the guests to come. When I traveled with Jesus, sometimes whole villages would turn out for the wedding.”

“I would think that here, you would need to warn your guests so they could take off work and attend, otherwise you may have no guests,” said Sophia, looking concerned.

“I suppose you are right. But I would like to keep it a secret from Susanna, if at all possible,” said Jonathan.

“How many guests are you planning to invite?” asked Demetrius.

“Are you inviting the whole town of Antioch?” asked Sophia.

“Oh, no. I am not even planning to invite the entire Center. I haven’t talked with Susanna, but I was thinking we would just invite our group and her older brothers and their families. That would be less than fifty, surely. Sometimes second marriages are just done quietly with a priest, but I feel that Susanna deserves at least one special day to celebrate.”

“I would have expected you to also invite the Leadership Team and their families. That would be another thirty.”

“I don’t have room for that many at my house and I don’t want to use the Christian Worship Center unless I invite everyone, and it just gets bigger and bigger. Even if I could afford it, I don’t think I could get that big of an event planned in a month.”

“Let me tell you why we invited you over,” said Demetrius.

“Okay,” said Jonathan tentatively.

“We would like to host your wedding. Sophia and I talked about it after you asked me to help you secure goats for the espousal. We decided, if you would allow us, we would like to provide everything you need. It could be as private as you desire, but our back courtyard will seat one hundred guests. Sophia and I love to throw parties and there is room for the musicians and dancing and all the festivities. Of course, the food would be Greek, but we would talk with our friends to provide some traditional Jewish fare. Would you let us do that?”

“That is too much!” cried Jonathan. “I could never let you do all that for me.”

“Why not? You gave up everything you loved to come here and tell us about Jesus. You have worked tirelessly to teach us and shepherd us. It’s something we want to do,” said Demetrius.

“We love you and your little family so much, and we love Susanna,” added Sophia. “Please say yes.”

“What can I say? This would be a tremendous help. Should I pray about it? I just don’t know what to say.”

“Just say yes and let’s set a date,” said Demetrius. “Sophia loves planning large parties, but she needs to get started.”

“Oh, my. How can I say no? Thank you so very, very much. I didn’t know how I would find the time to get everything done. I would need to hire many servants to help me.”

“And we’ve got everything we need already here.”

“You two have been such a blessing to me, I don’t know how to thank you enough.”

“Now, it’s my understanding that the wedding pronouncement takes place first and then the party begins?”

“Yes, I was thinking about doing it on a Friday afternoon, the first week of Kislev. Most weddings start about the ninth hour, but it could be later if you prefer. Speaking of later, I need to get the boys home. It’s a school night!” declared Jonathan as he rose from the table.

“I will start my planning and let you know if I have any questions,” said Sophia. “Oh, and I keep forgetting, but I have two tunics for Zebedee that Giorgio has outgrown.” She called a servant to retrieve the boys and the tunics.

Goodnights were said and Jonathan walked home between his boys. They had had a good time with Giorgio. “Giorgio taught us a new game. It was fun!” declared Zebedee, still full of energy. Zerah agreed that he had had fun but was yawning and ready for sleep.

Every day during the month of Heshvan, Jonathan and Susanna met at the school to pick up the four boys. Susanna and her mother came to the house and brought the blue plaid blanket. Jonathan explained that he had also purchased her a new mat. He asked if there were any changes she wanted to make or anything she needed. “I think the boys will be happier if I don’t make many changes. I may rearrange some things later, but for now, it’s perfect.”



## Chapter 10

“Good morning, sir, could I help you?”

“Yes, I am looking for Josie.”

“May I tell him your name?”

“Yes, I am Claudius and Elam sent me.”

“It will be just a minute. He’s working in the back, but I will get him for you, sir.”

“Thank you.”

Claudius looked around at the woodwork lining the store and was impressed with what he saw. When the clerk returned, he introduced Josie to him. “How could I help you, Claudius?”

“I have recently moved to Antioch and my wife is not at all satisfied with our house. I have purchased property to build what she wants. I asked Elam if he would build it for me and he recommended you. He said that you specialized in more fancy and unique designs and that is what she is desiring.”

“I would be happy to sit down with you, or both of you, and hear your ideas. Then I would need to see the land you have purchased to make sure that it would work. When would you like to do that? We can either meet in my office or I’ll come to your home,” volunteered Josie.

“I would like to meet with you as soon as possible. How soon could you begin work?” asked Claudius.

“We have several projects in the works, but I could begin working part time on it until we get all the materials ordered and delivered. Depending on what you want, that could take a week or a year. Once we have all the materials, then I would give it my full attention.” While they discussed the details of the elaborate home that Claudius described, Josie kept wondering why Elam would refer the man to him. *I guess he just couldn’t do it quickly enough to suit Claudius, but it was still very nice of him to refer him to me.* Josie walked with Claudius out to the property and declared it to be plenty big to accommodate the house and courtyards. Josie said he would provide him with the cost and Claudius agreed to meet him at his office at noon tomorrow.

When they met at noon, Josie presented him with an estimated price and discussed what materials and details he wanted. He also asked if he wanted additional servant quarters, a barn, or a well to be included. Claudius was pleased with everything that he suggested, and Josie agreed to start work ordering the materials immediately.



About two weeks before the wedding, Sophia talked with Jonathan after the fellowship meal. “Jonathan, I have looked and looked, and I cannot find musicians that know the Jewish wedding

music. I know you want traditional dancing and songs, but I just don't know what to do. Do you know of any group that can help?"

"I don't. But I think I know where to ask."

On Sunday, after he dropped off the boys, he headed to the Jewish area he had found when he was walking on the west side to visit John Mark. He went to the Jewish synagogue, but no one was there. He found a well and waited for a while, but no one came. He continued to walk around the area and came upon a small market that was kosher. He went to the first booth and told the man that he was looking for wedding musicians. The man directed him to the Candle Shop where he again explained his need. Eliphaz, the owner, broke into a huge grin. "Yes! Yes! We have a group. There are eight of us — both men and women who sing and play wedding music or dirges, but we prefer the weddings. They are much more fun! When is the wedding?"

When Jonathan told him, Eliphaz' face fell. "We could only play from the ninth hour until the eleventh because we cannot carry our instruments on the Sabbath. Can the wedding be changed to another day?"

"I'll have to check with my family. What is your fee?" They continued to talk, and Jonathan didn't reveal that he was a follower of Jesus. Jonathan had to pick up the boys, but then they headed straight to Demetrius' house to see if Sophia was home. They discussed the change and decided that Thursday afternoon would be okay. They would just have to quit at midnight so that everyone could still make it to work. She promised to keep the boys at her house for the night and let Jonathan and Susanna have their wedding night alone. She would take care of the boys and send Zebedee to school with Giorgio. It would be no problem. So, it was decided and soon all was in readiness for the big day.

Jonathan paid the wedding musicians in advance and gave them directions to the house. Sophia choreographed her staff of servants so that the courtyard was prepared, and all the guests except the bride and the children had been informed of the date and time. Jonathan was absolutely sure the boys couldn't keep it a secret. He wasn't sure whether they were excited about having a mother, or whether they still believed that she would get them goats. Either way, he was grateful that they were very accepting toward Susanna, and he didn't anticipate any problems. He asked Samuel if he could pay his wife Haggith to make him a wedding robe. He wanted it to be the traditional Jewish robe. She had agreed and now it hung on a nail in his sleeping room. He would pick up the boys at school as usual, and then they would just have a few minutes to change. He had decided he would take the boys with him to claim his bride. He hoped they wouldn't need baths, or he would be late for his own wedding. Samuel had agreed to conduct the ceremony. *Jehovah, I could not have done this without You. Thank You for Your provision. Thank You for Susanna.* He suddenly realized it was time to pick up the boys and he dashed out the door. He wondered what it would be like and how he should

behave when he saw Susanna. They always talked while they waited for the boys. Now he was late. How would he explain? He so wanted it to be a surprise for her. But she was surrounded by women friends, and they seemed to be talking about weaving. He simply waved at her and hoped she would stay with the women. But she quickly slipped away and joined him. His heart filled with pride, but also with total fear that he would say the wrong thing. "Sorry, it was a busy day and I lost track of the time."

"That's okay. I understand. I wanted to ask you if it would be all right for me to replace the tablecloth. Yours is perfectly fine," she quickly assured him. "But we were just talking about a new pattern that I would like to try. Then we would have two. I just want to do my fair share in preparing the house."

"I want it to be our house, our home. You may change it any way you like to make it your own," replied Jonathan.

Suddenly the door opened, and boys seemed to burst out like they had been shot from a cannon. Jonathan grabbed Zebedee and told him that they must hurry to get Zerah. He noticed that Susanna was trying to extricate Aaron from his group of friends. He simply waved goodbye, and they went their separate ways. Once they were out of sight, Jonathan stopped and knelt so that he could get eye-to-eye with Zebedee. "Son, this is the day I told you about. Today is my wedding day. I need your cooperation. I've already talked with your teachers, and you will not be required to do homework because there will be a big party tonight and you get to spend the night with Giorgio."

"No homework! Yay!"

"Let's get Zerah, then we've got to get ready for the wedding."

Jonathan had warned Mrs. Varda that he had a meeting at the ninth hour and was wondering if she would mind seeing that Zerah was cleaned up before he arrived to pick him up. Apparently, she had obliged and had given Zerah's face and hands a good scrubbing. He was sitting dejectedly waiting for his abba since she didn't want him getting dirty again. His face brightened at the sight of his abba and brother. They quickly started home. "Zerah, can you guess why Mrs. Varda got you all cleaned up?"

"She scrubs harder than you do. She even scrubbed behind my ears! I didn't like that," he complained.

"Today is my wedding day. We are going to go home and make sure Zebedee and I are scrubbed, too. Then I'll put on my wedding robe, and I've decided you two can go with me to get Miss Susanna. Then we'll all go to a party at Mr. Demetrius' and Mrs. Sophia's house."

"Will Neri be there?" Zerah asked.

"I'm sure of it," replied Jonathan as he tried to get the boys to walk a little faster. "I'll race you!" All three took off at a run. Jonathan had already filled a pitcher with water and quickly began to scrub Zebedee.

"Get behind his ears, too," demanded Zerah as he watched the process.

Jonathan made a big production of washing behind Zebedee's ears as he squirmed. He then washed behind his own ears just to be sure and then went inside and poured the boys a glass of juice to keep them quiet while he changed. The wedding robe was white with some blue and some gold threads decorating it. It was much too fancy to ever use again, but he wanted Susanna to know how special this day was. He instructed the boys to let him go to Lamech's door alone while they waited in the yard. Then he asked them to walk with Aaron and Neri to the wedding. When they arrived at Lamech's house, Zebedee and Zerah spotted the boys in the backyard. They ran to join them.



The news spread quickly that Eliphaz' group of musicians had been asked to play for a wedding for a Jewish man who lived south of the Amphitheater. They had recently played for two funerals but had not played for a wedding for over a year. They scheduled a rehearsal and looked forward to the joyful day. Eliphaz split the silver evenly among the group after giving a tithe to Priest Othniel and they were pleased to have the extra income. Everyone was still trying to replace the things they had left behind in Jerusalem.

Eliphaz and his son, Abner, were leading the way on that late fall Thursday afternoon. Hannah and Dinah chatted comfortably. Both had children near the same age ranging from full-grown adults to babies still at home. Hannah was soon to become a grandmother. Walking behind them were Manasseh, Adonijah, and Mahlon, the priest's son, who was their lead singer. Once they passed the Amphitheater, Mahlon called to Eliphaz, "Are you sure where we are going? This is a mostly Greek area."

"He gave me very clear directions. He even drew me a map. From the Amphitheater, we are to take the second road to the left and it will be the fifth house on the right. But it does look like a Gentile area to me. He was definitely Jewish, and he specifically requested that we do traditional Jewish music because his bride and her family wanted it."

Everyone was walking slower and looking at the elaborate houses. Eliphaz knocked at the front door and the servant told them to go around to the back courtyard and someone would show them where to set up. "Should we do it, or not?" asked Adonijah.

"He didn't tell you that this was a Gentile home?"

"No, he said nothing about that," asserted Eliphaz.

"We'll be in the yard, so we won't be breaking any Laws," said Mahlon. "I guess as long as we don't touch them or eat their food, we'll be all right."

"The wedding begins in less than a half hour, and we can't just not play for it. Think how disappointed the bride and groom would be," said Dinah.

"And they've already paid us," added Manasseh.

“And I’ve already spent mine,” chimed in Abner.

“We have an obligation to play for them. Yes. But let’s be extra careful not to break the Law. Jehovah forgive us!” said Mahlon as they entered the courtyard gate. A servant met them and led them to an area in the yard just to the left of the courtyard. They would be separated from the people, yet close enough for them to hear the music easily. Mahlon assured the servant that that would be acceptable. Eight benches had been set up for them along with a table containing wine, food, and water. They tried to relax as they unwrapped their instruments and began tuning them.

Shortly, a Gentile man came toward them. Eliphaz stood to greet him but kept his hands in his robe indicating that he did not desire to touch. The man put his own hands in his robe and assured the musicians that they were welcome. “My name is Demetrius, and I am your host tonight. My good friend is Jewish and is marrying a Jewish lady. We wanted the traditional Jewish music and appreciate your coming. If there’s something you need, please let one of my servants know. Do you have any questions?”

“We were not aware that we would be at a Gentile home. But if your friend is Jewish, then you are aware of the Laws that separate us,” said Mahlon. “Thank you for understanding.”

“Will sitting on their benches make us unclean?” whispered Abner.

“No, we are allowed to sit in their courtyards in order to do business, but we cannot enter their houses or eat their food,” explained Mahlon.

The musicians continued to get their instruments ready and then sat and waited. They watched with wide eyes as the guests arrived. There was a mixture of both Jews and Gentiles, yet their friendship was obvious. There was much hugging and laughter. And much to their surprise, the men and women mingled freely together. Dinah had so many questions, she thought her head would explode. She kept her eye on the lady who she thought might be the hostess and watched her greet both men and women, Jew and Gentile. Everyone was treated alike. She also noted that the servants were hugged and greeted also. She had only seen that behavior at one place long ago. She remembered the ladies’ group back in Jerusalem that had introduced her to Jesus as Messiah. They treated their servants as friends and fellow followers. Suddenly, she realized that she was seeing a New Way group like she had attended in Jerusalem and her heart leapt with joy. This group was behaving like the stories she had heard of Jesus healing both Jew and Gentile, speaking to both men and women, and saying that there was no difference between slave and free. It was mind blowing to sit back and watch it in action. She felt certain that there was no other explanation. She hoped the others didn’t notice her interest. But as she looked over at Hannah, she saw that she was equally fascinated by the display of love and care that was being enacted before them. It was all Dinah could do to remain on her bench and resist running up and declaring that she, too, believed

Jesus was the Messiah. *Oh, that would be great. It would ruin the wedding and destroy my marriage. No, I will wait. But, Jehovah, why did you bring me here tonight? I know it was not an accident. Jehovah, speak to Manasseh's heart. Help him to be moved by what he sees. Please help him see the Truth. Help me to know when to talk with him. Do I have to wait until my abba dies before I declare my allegiance to You? Please guide me.*



Jonathan said a quick prayer and knocked on Lamech's door. When Lamech answered, he declared, "I have come to claim my bride, Susanna."

"Wait here, sir, while I get her for you." Jonathan waited outside listening to the giggling and whispering that was happening inside. Shortly, Susanna joined him in a new blue robe. She had put a flower in her hair and her beauty took his breath away. They joined arms as he led her toward Demetrius' house. She was puzzled since she expected the wedding would be at his house. *Will it be a Greek wedding? I hope my parents are not disappointed.* She was surprised again to see how many guests were present and she noted the musicians over to one side. Jonathan led her to the edge of the courtyard. They waited just a few minutes for Lamech and Jochebed and the boys to catch up and the crowd made a way so the family members could stand close to the couple. Demetrius welcomed everyone and introduced Samuel as the acting priest. Samuel led them in a prayer asking Jehovah to be present in all that was said and done today. He then asked Lamech if Jonathan had met all of their requirements to take Susanna as his bride. Lamech answered affirmatively, but then choked up and wiped his face with his sleeve. Everyone understood that these were tears of joy. Samuel asked Jonathan if Susanna had met all of his requirements to become his bride. "Oh, yes," he said passionately. The crowd whispered quietly about how happy he seemed. Samuel announced, "Then it is my privilege to declare that this wedding shall commence. Let us pray for the couple." He led them in a prayer of blessing over the marriage and the boys and any future children.

The traditional Jewish wedding music began, and Jonathan could see that Susanna and her family were relieved that it would not be a Greek wedding, but a merging of the two traditions, just like their ministry.



Dinah was so deep in thought that she was startled to see that the ceremony had begun and Eliphaz was indicating that they would start to play soon. Just as soon as the Priest declared that the wedding could start, they would begin to play so that everyone could

dance and sing together. They listened carefully and heard the pronouncement, but then instead of Eliphaz cueing them to start, the Priest called for prayer. *That was close. I almost started playing. That would have ruined the moment.* Instead, she listened carefully to the prayer and indeed heard the priest end with, "In Jesus' name we pray." *Yes, these are Jesus' followers and Gentiles.* She began to play on Eliphaz' cue. They played until sunset when the meal was served.

Once again, Demetrius came over to thank them for their music and to ask how he could make them more comfortable. He invited them to eat the food but suddenly realized that they would not touch it. "I will have this food removed. I hope I have not offended you. Is there anything that I could provide to refresh you?" asked Demetrius kindly.

"Is there a public well, where we could get water? That will be sufficient," said Mahlon.

Demetrius gave them directions and they all got up to stretch their legs and walk to the well. There was usually a community cup at each well that everyone drank from. Dinah thought to herself, *It is acceptable to drink from a community cup used by everyone as long as you don't know who has used it before you, but it is not acceptable to drink from a perfectly clean cup because it has been touched by a Gentile. What silly games we play! I'm so sick of hiding. I want to live the way these people live. I want what they have found. Freedom. Oh, to be free from the Law!* She realized that Hannah had asked her a question and she had to ask her to repeat it. They drank deeply from the well water and then walked slowly back to Demetrius' house. They walked around the back of the yard until dinner was nearly over, and it was beginning to be too dark to see. Servants lit the lanterns around their area, and they moved back into position. Now, they would play the dancing music until midnight. When Dinah was not playing, she was watching as the Jews were teaching the Gentiles the Jewish wedding traditions. The groom and bride were lifted up into the air for all to see and celebrate. Dinah gasped as she caught a glimpse of the bride's foot. It was not whole; it was clubbed. Her questions multiplied. Her longing to be a part of a group like this was so strong she could hardly bear it. *Was Jehovah saying that it was time to talk to Manasseh? Would it be soon?*

It was probably an hour after dinner and approaching the third hour of the night when a table filled with water pots, wine, bread rolls, and goat cheese was set up beside the musicians. When they had finished their song, Demetrius addressed the musicians. "This is my good friend, Mordecai. He has provided you with food and drink from his home. He is Jewish and keeps a kosher home. Please take a short break and enjoy."

"Thank you, my friend. That was not necessary, but greatly appreciated," said Eliphaz. He addressed the musicians. "Let's do two slower numbers while we take turns eating." Everyone agreed that it sounded good, and they could keep the music going for the guests. At midnight, they were exhausted and had played every song they knew at least five times. Many of the guests expressed their appreciation for

their music and thanked them for making it a special night. The parents of the bride were especially vocal in their praise. Dinah wanted to talk with them but knew that she could not. So she wrapped her lute and quietly joined the other musicians as they began their long walk home. Finally, the musicians were back in their own neighborhood. Manasseh and Dinah's home was closest, and they called shalom to the others. Even though it was now approaching the seventh hour, they sat in the courtyard for a few minutes and enjoyed the peace and quiet of the night. They pretended to be catching their breath, but both knew that they just didn't want this night to end. Something special had happened, but Dinah knew better than to talk, or to ask what Manasseh was thinking. He would talk when he was ready.



## Chapter 11

Each morning, John Mark's day began before dawn and he learned to work. Some days he was picking fruit, other days plowing a field, or gathering firewood. He learned to make olive oil by crushing the olives with a hammer and found that gradually, gradually, he was developing muscles he never knew he had. As the winter rains began, he thought work would slow down, but he discovered that the work continued year-round with only slight variation. Because of the temperate climate, they could harvest twice a year and there was always work to be done. But there were also the Sabbaths and festival days where everyone relaxed and played together. He learned the children's names and they called him Uncle Mark. It was a good life and John Mark felt healthy and strong. Before the new year started and when the farming was at its slowest, the women stayed together and wove new robes for those who needed them. John Mark was touched that they would include his needs. He had outgrown his old robe, and the shoulders were too tight. He felt more a part of this family than he had ever felt anywhere and decided he would never leave.



Dinah was surprised to find Manasseh sitting at the table with his head in his hands. "Manasseh, are you alright? Do you have a headache? Let me get you a wet cloth; maybe that will help."

"No, Dinah, I don't think a wet cloth would help this kind of headache," said her husband. The table was covered with scrolls, and she knew he was preparing lessons for his schoolboys.

"Do you need to talk with Priest Othniel? Do you have a question you can't answer?" she continued to query.

"Dinah, where are the children?" asked Manasseh.

Dinah felt puzzled as she answered. "Jacob is playing with Judah in the yard and the girls have gone with Junos to the market to pick out some thread. Why?"

"Dinah, I've not been able to quit thinking about the wedding. Did it affect you the way it affected me?"

"I know that they were not only mixing Jews and Gentiles, but they were Jesus' followers," said Dinah cautiously.

"Did you notice how kind our host was that night? He did everything he could to make us feel welcome and ... I don't know ... loved. He was different. They were different. Everyone was so loving. They were not critical or condemning or burdened by the Law. There was something about them that was quite attractive, and I can't quit thinking about it."

"They were free from the Law," stated Dinah a little more confidently.

“Yes, they were free. That’s it! They were free, yet they were obviously followers of Jehovah.”

“And Jesus,” added Dinah.

“Do you think it’s their belief in Jesus that makes them different?”

Dinah suddenly became afraid that her secret would be discovered. Since Jehovah was obviously at work in Manasseh’s heart, she decided to withdraw. “It could be. You have been searching the Scripture. What have you found?”

“It’s very confusing. At times, I honestly think that Jesus could have been the Messiah and we missed it. But you mustn’t tell anyone that I said that. We would be destroyed. The school. Your parents. The synagogue would stone me for saying such a thing. Dinah, don’t repeat this to anyone. Understand?”

“Of course, Manasseh. But I want to know the truth about Jesus, don’t you?”

“No, we mustn’t. We must drop this right now. Don’t ever mention it again,” demanded Manasseh.

Dinah knew that the Holy Spirit would not allow Manasseh to drop it and she committed to praying even more that Jehovah would pursue Manasseh until he learned the Truth. “I am your wife. You are head of this home. I will obey you.” Then she added more tenderly, “You know that, don’t you?”

“Yes, Dinah. You have been a good wife to me, and I thank you. Jehovah has blessed us,” said Manasseh as he began to clear the table of the scrolls and put them aside for later.



The winter had been cold and wet, and Josie was as eager as Claudius for better working conditions to begin work on his house. All the supplies had arrived, but very little could be started until the weather improved. Josie had hired men to clear the land for the buildings, but the stone masons didn’t want to set the stones until the soil was dry. The well had been dug, but the surrounding stone also needed drier weather. Josie spent his days in his warehouse with his two partners building elaborate beds, tables, and benches. The other two men had several projects going, but they were small compared to Josie’s. They enjoyed being together and talked and laughed as they worked. He loved doing the fine woodworking, but he knew that Claudius wanted to see the building started. Once the weather cleared, the partners would help Josie in between their own projects.



At the Leadership Team meeting, Samuel announced that he and Haggith would like to make a trip to Jerusalem for Passover. They had

not visited their grown children in over ten years and wanted to make a trip before they were too old to travel. He asked if anyone else would want to join them for the trip. He explained that he would be renting an oxcart and drivers, and they would be gone at least three weeks. Mordecai said that he would like to go. Elam said that he would like to take Gideon and Nahum, his two grown sons, but he needed to ask them and his wife about it. Samuel assured him that they would be welcome and to let him know next week so he would know what size oxcart to rent. Jonathan reminded the men that they had been collecting funds to send to the followers in Jerusalem who were suffering from a famine. He asked if they would be willing to take the silver to James the Just and let him distribute it as needed. They agreed. They spent the rest of the evening praying for those who would make the long journey and for their fellow followers who were suffering in Jerusalem.

The five men and Haggith along with two maid servants loaded into the oxcart the week before Passover. The two drivers were confident they could arrive in Jerusalem by the Sabbath. Elam, Gideon, and Nahum had no relatives in Jerusalem but planned to camp in the olive grove. Samuel and Mordecai were looking forward to a possible reunion with their families since none of their children had been followers of Jesus when they left Jerusalem and they had been praying daily for them.



Spring was fast approaching, and John Mark and Hezekiah's son, Hezron, were pruning the fruit trees. "Uncle Mark, my abba was teaching me about Jonah last night. Why would Jehovah allow such a story in His Holy Scripture? I mean, it was a story of failure. Abba said that Jonah never repented. I wanted there to be a happy ending," said eleven-year-old Hezron.

John Mark quickly replied, "No, his life was not a failure. All of Nineveh repented and there was a great revival as they worshipped Jehovah."

"But I still don't understand why he ran from God. That was wrong, wasn't it?" asked Hezron.

"Yes, Hezron. It's not very wise to try to run from God." John Mark quickly began to gather the limbs he had cut and carried them to the end of the row of trees. *Father, You are pursuing me. I hear You. Should I go to Jonathan's Leadership Team meeting? They've probably changed it to a different night by now. I would just mess up Jonathan's agenda by showing up.* All week John Mark did whatever he was assigned, but his mind was far from the tasks. By the end of the week, he had convinced himself that he was better off staying on the farm. He avoided prayer time alone with God, and yet sang and worshipped with the group. He pretended to be settled and happy, and almost believed it himself.



Manasseh and Dinah walked with Jacob, Bethany, and Martha toward Dinah's parent's house for Passover Preparation Day. Junos followed them carrying one-year-old Judah. But first they stopped at Eliphaz' house to drop off Bethany. She was espoused to Abner and had been invited to spend Passover with his family. Abner would walk with her to her grandparents' home after the Seder meal. Soon they were greeted by Dinah's parents, Simon and Esther, and the celebration began. Even though they saw their two oldest sons each Sabbath night, it was the first time that they had had time to visit with them in several months. They were busy at the bank and had finally moved out of their grandparents' house and bought houses of their own. Their houses were not far apart and they hired one servant apiece to do their cooking and cleaning. Jethro explained that they took turns eating at each other's houses because they hated eating alone. Grandmother reminded them that they were always welcome to eat with her and Grandfather Simon. It was a good day and Dinah enjoyed being with her parents more, now that she wasn't with them every single day. They only visited on Sabbath night, when there were plenty of other friends to visit with. It seemed the things that her mother said didn't bother her so much. She was praying that it would be a peaceful visit. After the sacrificing of the lamb, the men put blood on the doorposts as was prescribed by The Law and The Prophets. Then the men sat in the courtyard and talked about banking while Dinah and Martha went inside to see Mother Esther's latest weaving projects. Of course, she wanted to know how Bethany was doing and whether she was getting her things ready for her marriage. They enjoyed remembering Dinah's own espousal period. Her mother fussed about them allowing Bethany to be with Abner's family instead of her own, but other than that, it was a fairly conflict-free day. The servants were preparing the Seder meal, and the ladies could visit at leisure.

After a while, Dinah went outside to check on Junos and Judah. Judah was content exploring Grandmother Esther's flowers and Junos was watching him closely. Dinah assured her that if she needed a break, she could bring him inside to her. Dinah checked on Jacob sitting at the men's table, and he silently begged for her help. She knew he hated sitting and listening to the men talk. She suggested he take a walk with Judah and Junos, but to not go far. He jumped up from his seat and almost overturned his bench. He apologized and escaped from the boring talk. His ten-year-old body needed to move. When she returned to the house, her mother was showing Martha her embroidery. Mother was looking through her cloth to find a piece for Martha to practice on. Dinah was glad that Mother was busy with something that Martha enjoyed. Dinah began to look through the pile of embroidery and smiled as she remembered her mother's failed attempts to get her to sit still long enough to master such perfection.

Dinah could never please her. But now her mother had a new generation to teach, and she had mellowed in her old age. At least she hoped this adventure wouldn't end in tears. Dinah took Judah and lay down with him for a nap after noon. It would give her a time to escape and give Junos some time to visit with her old friends. Junos had been a servant to Simon and Esther all of Dinah's life. When Dinah married, Junos had been one of their wedding gifts. She and her husband Cronus had made the journey with them from Jerusalem, and Dinah couldn't imagine life without Junos to help her — especially with the six children. After the nap, Grandmother played with Judah for a while and exclaimed that he was growing entirely too fast. All in all, it was a good day with the family, although Dinah missed Bethany. She was determined not to cling to Bethany the way her mother had clung to her. Manasseh had already let Joab and Jethro move out and they only occasionally visited. Her mind wandered to when they would be ready to marry. They already owned homes and had good jobs at the bank. They could certainly provide for a wife. It would be soon, she supposed. She would ask Manasseh if they had mentioned such things.

Finally, the long day ended, and the Seder meal began. Jacob asked his Grandfather Simon the traditional question: "Grandfather, why is this night different from all other nights?" And Grandfather Simon began to tell the Seder story that was being told by Jewish families all over the known world. As Dinah watched her children's faces, she happened to glance at Manasseh. He was sitting wide-eyed as if hearing the Seder for the first time. She could tell that Jehovah was speaking to him and she began praying diligently that his heart would be opened. But as much as she wanted him to discover that Jesus was the Passover Lamb, the Messiah, she was equally sure that she didn't want this night to be ruined for her parents. How she hated the dichotomy that raged inside of her. On one side she wanted to proclaim that she believed Jesus was the Messiah, but she knew that life would never be the same, and her parents would completely disown her. She hated the thought of keeping it hidden. She wanted to tell the whole world that Jesus was her Messiah, but she was horrified at the thought of hurting her parents. *Oh, great Jehovah, guide me. Give me wisdom. I know You are at work. Let Your will be done.*

Junos had already fed and put Judah to sleep in one of the guest rooms. The two older boys were walking home, and they invited Jacob to spend the night with them. They would return tomorrow to visit again. Abner arrived with Bethany who claimed to have had a wonderful day with Mr. Eliphaz and Mrs. Lilah and their family. Her cheeks were flushed, and Dinah wondered how long the two of them had been out walking alone. Bethany and Martha took another guest room and quickly settled on the beds, but there was much giggling and whispering going on. Manasseh and Dinah took the third guest room. They would stay and visit one more day but would walk home by mid-afternoon. Manasseh knew that a much longer visit would put too much stress on everyone.

The second day of Passover was very similar to the first except that Dinah was more than ever aware of Manasseh's deep reflection. At one point, he even excused himself to take a walk alone. She knew that Jehovah was pursuing him, and she prayed that someday he would make the same decision that she had to believe that Jesus was the Messiah. How she longed to just tell him, but she continued to feel compelled to silence.

When Manasseh declared that it was time to walk home, Bethany and Martha asked if they could stay another day with Grandmother and Grandfather so that they could continue to learn embroidery. "Oh, Mother, I would love to make a tablecloth with embroidery all around the edges for my new home. It would be so beautiful. But I need to master this. My stitches are still not straight enough. But I know I could do it with just a little more practice. Could we please stay longer?"

"You would have to ask your abba, and I'll see if it's okay with your grandparents," said Dinah.

"Oh, they have already invited us to stay as long as we wish. But you'll come get us tomorrow afternoon, won't you?"

"Go ask your abba," repeated Dinah pushing down that feeling that her mother was stealing her children. She knew better. And she tried to feel happy that they loved their grandmother so much. But she knew that it would make it harder to break away from her parents' religion. But since she didn't know when or if that would happen, she smiled and gave her consent. Manasseh agreed and they said goodbye to Joab and Jethro. They thanked her parents for a wonderful Passover celebration and promised to pick up the girls tomorrow afternoon.

Her parents were happy to have four of their grandchildren for just a little longer. Manasseh and Dinah, Jacob, Junos, and Judah walked home. It was a long walk, and they were grateful that the servants had dinner prepared for them.



On the Friday before Passover, the Apostle Peter arrived at Eli's farm village. As the families arrived from the fields and orchards, they greeted him warmly. In return, he exclaimed over each child's growth and called them by name. John Mark was greeted profusely. As Peter's eyes took in the peasant robe, the tanned skin, and the thickened muscles, he teased that he never dreamed that John Mark would become a farmer. It delighted John Mark to be considered one of the family. Everyone was talking at once and Hezekiah was showing off his newest son. Naboth apologized for not eating with them but wanted to check on Leah who had just given him a new daughter yesterday. He took his plate into their hut while Ella watched her little brothers. Everyone else sat around the yard and tried to catch Peter up on all the happenings since he had last visited. It had been a whole year, and Peter reported that he had traveled across Galilee

and into Damascus to preach at synagogues and to meet with New Way followers who had left Jerusalem. He reported a great movement of Gentiles accepting Jesus as their Messiah. He told them that many Jewish synagogues had disbanded and joined with the Gentiles to form united groups. Eli's group began to protest that something precious would be lost if they stopped being kosher or started associating with Gentiles. That was contrary to Jehovah's plan for them. "Even Jesus kept the kosher rules, and so will we," declared Eli. Everyone voiced their approval and Peter realized that he shouldn't push. That evening after all had enjoyed the Sabbath meal, Peter told them again some of the miracles that he had seen and the lessons he had learned from Jesus. John Mark thought he seemed more tired than usual. It was good to hear the old stories, but usually Peter was full of fresh insight and enthusiasm about following the Holy Spirit. As John Mark and Peter walked toward the hut that they would share, John Mark commented, "Peter, my friend, you sound down."

"Yes, I am. I've been doing a lot of traveling and teaching. It will be good to stay here a while and let my body rest and heal."

"Does Eli let you rest? He keeps me working!" declared John Mark.

"You are much younger, and it has done your body and soul good," commented Peter.

"Yes, I'm not complaining. I love being a part of this group. I am accepted as one of them now. I even teach the boys twice a week. There are nine of them, all at various levels. It feels good to teach them. I don't have a copy of The Law and The Prophets, but I teach them as best as I can remember."

"Are you allowed to teach them Greek?" asked Peter.

"Yes, Greek was taught in Hebrew School in Jerusalem, and it is even more necessary to function in business here. On Mondays I teach them Hebrew and on Thursdays I teach them Greek and numbers. It has been good for me to have something special to contribute. Most of these dads attended Hebrew School, but they don't have time to teach their sons after a hard day in the fields."

"I'm glad you've found your place here for now, John Mark. It is good, but it is not permanent. Let us sleep now and we'll talk more tomorrow," said Peter wearily. "Shalom."

"Shalom."

John Mark lay awake for a few minutes and prayed that Jehovah would restore Peter's strength and vigor. He had never seen him admit to tiredness and it concerned him. *I've also never seen him so friendly. Usually, he is so focused that he is intimidating. Go. Go. Go. Maybe this is the one place that he comes to relax. They certainly love him here. I wonder why he thinks I can't stay here permanently.* Soon John Mark was fast asleep.

The Sabbath was a day of rest and joy for all. Knowing that Passover would begin after work on Monday meant that there was more work than ever to be done on Sunday and Monday. They doubled the amount of vegetables, spices, and fruit that they picked

because their market would be closed for three days, and everyone was stocking up. But they would do no work for the whole week of Passover.

On Tuesday morning, everyone gathered for the sacrificing of the lamb, and the blood was placed on their doorways just as the Law had prescribed. The houses were all cleaned and prepared for the special week, and all the ladies helped with the cooking as was needed. The children were busy carrying water pots and helping their parents prepare for the celebration that would begin at sundown. Eli led the Seder and then Peter taught about how the Seder was a picture of Jesus' death. They sang a Psalm together and quietly moved to their huts. Everyone enjoyed the day of rest on Wednesday, but John Mark was surprised that the donkeys still needed to be cared for and that he was assigned to help milk the goats. He had never realized that it was not a completely restful day, and he admitted that he was grateful that several of the ladies were assigned to prepare the evening meal. *I feel I'm growing up and seeing things differently. What does it all mean? We keep the Law, but we make so many exceptions — such as the birth of a baby, which is likely this week as Abram and Maacah are waiting on the birth of their sixth child. I never realized that work is just part of life. There's no avoiding it completely. Does God understand that?* He started thinking about what Jesus taught about the Sabbath rest and the next thing he knew they were calling him to breakfast.

John Mark wasn't sure whether to wake Peter but decided to let him sleep and slipped out quietly. That night, Peter taught about Jesus' resurrection and there was much celebrating. All of these adults had been in Jerusalem during that traumatic period and remembered. Some had been followers of Jesus at the time of the crucifixion, and others had joined the group after Pentecost. Peter asked them to share where they were and what they experienced during this season of uncertainty and chaos. John Mark felt comfortable sharing that he had been in the olive garden during the arrest and had run all the way to Bethany to hide at a friend's house. He shared that he had stayed there for two weeks before he was brave enough to wander back to his mother's house. There he learned of all the miracles that he had missed.

During the following days, Peter and John Mark had plenty of time to talk. Often, they took long walks and talked in private.

"Peter, I was surprised by the response of this group regarding Gentiles," said John Mark. "I was under the impression that Eli brought his home group to Antioch in order to minister to the people here and share the New Way. I guess I'm feeling confused."

"Yes, it is confusing. It's hard to deal with fellow followers who claim to be obedient to the Holy Spirit, but who have reached a different conclusion on what is Truth. I, too, struggled with whether Gentiles could follow Jesus without becoming Jews until Jehovah sent a vision to remind me of His teaching from the beginning. As far back as Abraham, He made His plan clear. Some of us are just slower to follow than others. We must be patient with Eli." Peter shared with



John Mark that he was feeling a strong urge to somehow preserve the stories he remembered about Jesus and what He had taught and done. He was burdened by the fact that many of the Apostles were being killed and he had been threatened more times than he could remember. "I just don't want all the witnesses to die and there be no record of Jesus' life."

"I hadn't thought about it, but soon, there won't be any of us left that actually walked and talked with Jesus. My students think it was a million years ago and I am ancient. But it has been sixteen years since He was crucified," agreed John Mark. "And already, there are many different beliefs about what Jesus taught. We must write it down, or we, ourselves, will forget."

"And almost twenty since I began to follow Him," said Peter with a far-off look in his eyes.

Peter made it a point to visit with each family and answer any spiritual questions they might be dealing with. He spent time encouraging Eli. He taught most evenings and challenged them to find ways to share the New Way with others. A few mornings that week, he disappeared and preached at the local markets or wells, but as soon as Passover week was over, he was eager to get back on the road. He said he would preach along the coast of the Great Sea and maybe return to Jerusalem for a while to meet up with the apostles who were still there. He promised to deliver messages to various family members who still had relatives in Jerusalem, if indeed he returned there. Everyone was sad to see him leave and prayed for his safe travels. John Mark was relieved to see that he had rested and recovered his usual vigor for ministry. Peter had invited him to join him, but John Mark felt more comfortable staying at the farm and wasn't interested in taking that risk of failure again. He was enjoying teaching his students and felt needed as he helped each of the other guys with their workload, wherever Eli assigned him each day. Soon it was planting time again and everyone was in the fields from dawn to sunset. They were long, hard days. After all the fields were planted, the men began working together to add sleeping rooms onto four of the houses whose families were growing. John Mark found himself building walls and repairing the thatched roofs that were used to keep the rain out.



Manasseh sent Junos and Jacob to get Bethany and Martha on Thursday afternoon the week of Passover. Baby Judah was taking his nap, and the house was quiet. Manasseh called for Dinah to join him on the rooftop so they could talk in private. "Dinah, what did you think of the Seder?" he asked.

"What do you mean? It's the same every year. Did Abba say something different?" She was genuinely puzzled.

"No, I don't think he did. It's just that I really, really listened. It was like I had never heard it before."

“You’ve heard it at least thirty times!” retorted Dinah, suddenly remembering that God was at work in Manasseh’s heart.

“Dinah, I keep thinking about this and there’s something I need to tell you.”

Dinah sat quietly and waited for him to continue. “I keep thinking about this man, Jesus. Everywhere I turn, I encounter people who believe he was the Messiah.”

Dinah wanted to shout, “He is! He is!” But she knew that Manasseh had to figure this out himself. She asked, “I know you were intrigued by the people at the wedding, but where else have you encountered Jesus’ followers?”

“I didn’t tell you, but the men that helped Nathan and me in Sychar were both followers of Jesus. They told us about Jesus’ death and His resurrection. I can’t get it out of my mind. The Seder seemed to be a foreshadowing, a prediction about the Messiah, that I have never seen before. I keep thinking how closely it correlates to what I have heard about Jesus. I guess it’s just crazy thoughts and I shouldn’t be polluting you. What a terrible husband I am.”

Dinah put her hand on Manasseh’s and assured him. “Manasseh, you said you married me because I liked to think and ask questions and you promised that we would discuss everything. We’ve done very little discussing. Maybe raising six babies has kept us apart. I also believe you did all your thinking and discussing with my abba. I’m glad to have you all to myself these days. I’m glad that we moved away so that you can think freely and discuss things with me. I love to hear what you are thinking.”

“So, you are not upset that I’m thinking more and more that Jesus just might be the Messiah?” asked Manasseh fearfully.

“No. I’m not afraid of seeking the truth as long as we do it together,” replied Dinah.

“Don’t speak of this to anyone. We would be kicked out of the synagogue, and it would destroy the school. Especially don’t whisper it to Achsah. She would tell Nathan.”

“You know that I won’t,” assured Dinah. Dinah’s heart was filled with a joy that she couldn’t explain. Over and over, she found herself praising Jehovah for working in Manasseh’s heart. *When I’m ready to tell my parents, I know that Manasseh will be standing with me. Then I guess we’ll die side-by-side.* Her thoughts were interrupted by the return of Jacob, Bethany, and Martha. Junos took Judah, and Dinah heard all about the girls’ visit with their grandparents and Bethany’s special day with Abner and his parents. Bethany whispered that she thought the wedding would be in about a month since Abner had hinted that he had arranged some time off work during the month of Iyyar. “Then you’d better get busy on that tablecloth. Do you have the measurements for it?” asked Dinah. The girl talk continued, and Jacob wandered outside to find his abba.

## Chapter 12

Jonathan was happy to be back at his office at the Christian Worship Center. He had been with his family for eight days of Passover and while that was satisfying, he felt refreshed and ready to get back into ministry. He had messages to prepare and was eager to meet with his groups and hear what was going on in their lives. He realized once again that this was where God had placed him, and he was extremely happy. There was a knock at his door, and he hurried to answer it. "Peter, how good to see you! Come in! Come in!" The Apostle Peter came into Jonathan's office and commented that it had been a long time since he had taken time to visit.

"It's so good to see you."

"I just stopped by to give you news from home. Everyone is doing well. Your sister, Jenay, just gave birth to Yanis' second son about a month ago. They are doing fine. Your mother and grandmother are aging, but they seem to be fine. I'm concerned that the Jewish ministry in Capernaum is not spreading because of the political climate."

"The Romans or the Pharisees?"

"Mostly the Pharisees. The followers aren't even allowed to mention the name of Jesus to someone who attends the synagogue. But it's amazing. The Holy Spirit just continues to call Gentiles to Jesus. Gentile Christians are multiplying at an amazing rate."

"Yes, I heard about some of that work when I was there two years ago."

"Are you familiar with Eli's farm on the north side of town?" asked Peter.

"In Capernaum?"

"No. Here in Antioch. He brought a home group here from Jerusalem about four years ago. I'm concerned that they are isolating themselves and becoming more Pharisaical in their thinking. They are staying kosher and will have nothing to do with Gentiles. Pray for them."

"I remember Eli leading his small group in Jerusalem, but I did not know that they had relocated here. I have quite a few friends in that group."

"Yes, I was really surprised to see John Mark among the group. He seemed happy to be there, but I feel that Satan is winning the war when they refuse to follow the Holy Spirit's leading."

"I agree," said Jonathan, startled by the news but trying to not show it.

"Peter, come home with me. I've recently remarried, and I want you to meet Susanna. And you won't recognize the boys — they are so big now. How long will you be in Antioch?"

"No, I just stopped by, but I must be on my way back to Joppa. I've still got several hours of daylight before I need to camp."

"Do you ever slow down?" asked Jonathan.

“There’s so much work to be done before Jesus returns. So many people who don’t know the Truth.”

“I understand and we’ll have all of eternity to visit with family. Thank you for bringing me news. Shalom.”

“Shalom, and may God bless your work here. Hopefully, I can return soon and spend more time with you.”

“I would like that, Peter, and if ever you are back in Capernaum, let them know that I’ve married again, and the ministry is thriving.”



It was a couple of weeks after Passover on a bright, sunshiny Wednesday when Eli sent for John Mark to come to the village. He had been weeding in the fields of vegetables and was grateful for a change of pace. It was back-breaking work. As he approached the village, he could see that Eli was sitting in the grass visiting with someone. The man was too big to be Peter. As he came closer, he realized with a start that it was Jonathan. *Uh-oh. I think I just got swallowed by the whale!* He greeted both men. “Look at you! I don’t think I would have recognized you from the city fellow I knew in Jerusalem,” said Jonathan. *So, he hasn’t revealed my secret. In some ways that makes it harder. It means that I will have to do it myself. But at least I can wait until I am ready.* He sat down on the grass with Eli and Jonathan and listened while he caught his breath. They were discussing old times in Jerusalem. Jonathan said that his cousin Peter had stopped by to visit and mentioned that Eli had brought his group to Antioch. He had just stopped by to welcome them and to offer any help he could. “I’m sorry I didn’t know you were here. You seem to be quite settled.”

“Yes, Jehovah has blessed us,” said Eli.

“And Eli tells me that you’ve helped him out a lot,” said Jonathan to John Mark.

“Eli has helped me out a lot,” stated John Mark firmly.

“That’s good. I need to get back to town. I have recently remarried, and I forgot to let Susanna know that I might be late. Shalom.”

“Shalom, and congratulations,” said Eli and John Mark.

“John Mark,” said Eli after Jonathan had gone. “Jonathan and I both believe that Jesus is the Messiah, and we are both trying to follow the Holy Spirit. But Jonathan and I could never be in fellowship because according to the best of my understanding, he is not in a right relationship with Jehovah because of his association with Gentiles. He is unclean according to The Law and The Prophets. That makes me sad to hear.”

**UNCLEAN!** John Mark felt a distinct prompting from the Holy Spirit to speak boldly to Eli about his work with the Gentiles and with Jonathan. But at the same time, he was filled with horror at the thought of being on his own again and he knew he wouldn’t be allowed to stay

at the village farm. He decided to take some time and think things through. He didn't want to make another mistake. He felt too paralyzed to speak up. "Yes, sir. Should I return to the fields?"

"No, it's almost sunset and you can help me with the animals."

"Yes, sir," said John Mark trying to hide his thoughts.



The Leadership Team had not met since Passover because so many of their group had traveled to Jerusalem for the festival. Now that they were back, Jonathan knew that everyone would want to hear a report on how the New Way followers were doing. He planned to let Samuel, Mordecai, and Elam speak first. Once they had gathered, they sang a Psalm together and Manaen led them in prayer. Jonathan asked Samuel about the trip to Jerusalem. With tears in his eyes, he reported that it was not the same. He reported that there was a severe scarcity of food that was alarming. Jerusalem and the surrounding areas had had no rain for over a year and the market had very little to sell. Vegetables were being brought in from faraway places, but they were too expensive for most to purchase.

"They said that the Jordan River was almost dry and so there were no fish to buy," said Mordecai.

"How were your children handling it?" asked Jonathan.

Samuel took a deep breath and said sadly, "We did not find any of them. We have two grown sons and a married daughter, but apparently, they have taken their families elsewhere. We don't know where. It was really hard on Haggith. We searched and searched but could not find anyone who knew where they relocated."

"I, too, could not find any of my family," added Mordecai. "I had three sons and a sister living in Jerusalem. But like Samuel, no one knows where they are now. A lot of houses are empty. Not even the Romans want to live in Jerusalem."

"I am so sorry," said Jonathan. "Did you deliver the silver that we had collected to help our fellow followers?"

Elam spoke up. "Yes, we found James the Just teaching at the temple and tried to give the silver to him, but he insisted we take it to John Mark's mother, Mary. She distributes it to those who need it most. Mary said many of the older New Way groups had relocated all over the world. James the Just was teaching at the temple every day, and we heard some other New Way teachers at the temple and the market."

Jonathan brought up the other matters to be considered. Reports were given and then they spent time in prayer specifically for the people of Jerusalem. While half of the Leadership Team was Gentile and had no attachment to Jerusalem, they certainly could comprehend the grief of not knowing what had happened to family members. They grieved with Samuel and Mordecai and prayed for them and Haggith.



Each day, Josie arrived at the construction site by sunrise. Today he would start the second floor. It was strenuous work, but he loved seeing all his plans come to life. He had watched as the stone masons laid stones for the underground storage cellar. *The cellar is larger than the house where my parents raised seven children!* It was excruciating waiting for the stones to settle before starting to build on them, but he knew he had to be patient. He had finally been able to start the first of Nisan and had worked furiously. His partners helped when they could between their own projects, but most of the time, he worked alone. It seemed that not a day went by without his thinking about Elam, and he decided that once the project was complete, he would stop by and thank him for the referral. This huge project had possibly saved his business. He certainly didn't intend to admit that to Elam, but he did want to express his gratitude.



"Abba," said Zebedee one Sabbath afternoon as the family sat in the backyard enjoying the sunshine.

"Yes, Son," replied Jonathan knowing exactly where this conversation was leading.

"Abba, you said that we would talk about getting some animals for Zerah and me to take care of. You said we should wait until spring. It's spring and I think we should get goats."

"Me, too," said Zerah. Jonathan and Susanna had already discussed the possibility and she felt it would be a good idea.

"Do you know what all is involved in having goats?" asked Jonathan.

"Aaron and Neri have goats and we don't," argued Zebedee avoiding the question.

"Mother and I have discussed it, and we think that it is time for you boys to take on more responsibility. So, you would have to take care of the goats and milk them and Mother will make butter and cheese for us. Tomorrow, we will clear a place to build them a night pen and go to Mr. Elam's to order the lumber."

"Yay!" both boys shouted. "Finally, we will have goats to play with like Aaron and Neri," said Zebedee.

As the boys ran off to play, he reminded Susanna that he didn't want her doing any of the work to care for the goats. He expected her to supervise the boys. He wasn't sure he wanted her churning the butter, but she assured him that she would be fine. "Just because I'm carrying your child, doesn't mean I'm helpless. I'll be fine; quit worrying. But I do look forward to drinking the milk. It will be good for all of us."

Now that Susanna was walking Zebedee back and forth to school, Jonathan's schedule was a little more doable. Since his evenings and weekends were so filled, he took off most afternoons to spend time with Susanna and the boys. Each afternoon, the boys worked with their abba to prepare for the goats. Jonathan could have built the shed in half the time it took, but he wanted to teach his sons how to do things right. His abba had always taken time to teach him things and he wanted to do the same. So, he bought three hammers and they worked together to finish a fine-looking shed. They built two troughs to water the goats — one for the yard, and one for the shed. They bought milking pans, milk jars, chains, and stakes at Mr. Demetrius' Mercantile Store and then asked him where to find goats. The Tuesday before Shavuot, Zebedee and Zerah became the owners of two little nanny goats and the farmer taught the boys how to milk them and care for them. Jonathan had remembered to take vegetables with him to bribe them to follow them home and once again, Jonathan found himself chasing two goats who were chasing two boys all the way home.

They staked the goats in the yard and watered them. The boys didn't want to leave them to go to the fellowship meal, but Jonathan insisted they move them to the barn quickly and milk them and water them. It took a little longer than expected this first time and they didn't get much milk. Jonathan tried to be patient as he waited for them to finish. He hated being late, especially when he was in charge. Susanna offered to wait with the boys, but Jonathan refused, knowing that it was important for the boys to learn to do things right and allow enough time for their responsibilities.

They arrived late for the fellowship meal. Zebedee and Zerah eagerly announced to the other boys that they finally had gotten goats. Jonathan joined the men and Susanna joined the women. Jonathan ate quickly and then spoke to the group about the Jewish Shema. He taught them Deuteronomy 6:4-7 from The Law and The Prophets and helped them to memorize it.

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.  
Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.

Jonathan and Susanna enjoyed visiting with the other couples while the boys played before they headed home. Tomorrow, they would meet to celebrate Pentecost together. There would be more food and celebration as they remembered the day Jehovah sent the Holy Spirit to dwell inside those who chose to follow Jesus as their Messiah. Several in the group were present that day and would share again with the others what they had experienced sixteen years ago, but Jonathan wanted everyone to participate and share how the Holy

Spirit had led them most recently. *There is always the dilemma of remembering the past versus staying in the present. What is the Holy Spirit saying today? Where is He leading me? I am so content. Is that good? Is that bad?* Because of Shavuot, none of the groups were meeting for the rest of the week and he was looking forward to time with his family.

While the boys played outside, he sat at the table with Susanna and discussed his questions. "Is it good that I am content? Or is it complacency?" he asked her.

"I believe that there is a season for everything. Maybe this is your season for raising sons to become men, and leading others to become leaders. You are not exactly sitting still! You are leading three groups, teaching at the Christian School, teaching three worship gatherings, and in charge of the Leadership Team. I don't see where you could add anything unless you give up something else. Is the Holy Spirit speaking or are you just being attacked by the liar?" asked Susanna wisely.

"I think I've just never felt this content. I love you. Life is so good. Others are suffering for Jesus, and I'm enjoying life. Is that okay?"

"If you are doing everything the Holy Spirit has told you to do, then you are right in the center of God's will for you. You know that," said Susanna.

"And where did you get such wisdom?" asked Jonathan teasingly.

"I sat under a good teacher," she replied. "And now I must make bread."

"I'll go check on the boys."



There was a knock on the door long after Jonathan and Susanna had retired. Jonathan, as a minister, knew that it could only mean that someone needed help and he quickly groped his way to the door hoping not to wake his family. "Joel! What in the world brings you here? Come in! Come in!"

"We just need a place to sleep. We are exhausted. I am so sorry for imposing on you this late at night, but I knew you would take us in."

"Certainly. Brrr! It's cold out here. Have you eaten?"

"Not since we docked in Antioch, but just some water or milk would be fine."

Jonathan ran down to the cellar and brought up the jar of goat's milk and some fruit and served the four guests. "Do you remember Basha, the Apostle Philip's wife?" Joel asked.

"Of course! I knew I should know you, but it's been a long time. Oh, I'm putting this together. After Philip was martyred, you married Joel's dad, the Apostle Matthew. Okay. So, where's Matthew?" And then his face fell as he put two and two together. "No! Not Matthew, too? Tell me!"



Joel explained that Basha and Matthew were ministering together in Ethiopia when he was attacked and killed. "But can we get some sleep and talk tomorrow? We'll sleep in the grass if it's safe. We're just all a little jittery right now and we haven't slept in a week."

Jonathan led Basha to his own mat and whispered to Susanna that a friend was going to spend the night. He pointed Joel and his wife to the guest room, and he and their servant lay on blankets in the living area. Soon the house was quiet, but Jonathan's mind was racing. *Killed for sharing the New Way. Basha has lost two husbands for Your kingdom. I need to find a place to house them more comfortably. But I don't know how long they intend to stay. Please, Father, help me to minister to them and care for them through this time of grief. In Jesus' name I pray.*

Jonathan and the manservant greeted Basha and Susanna as they came down for breakfast. He could tell that they had already been talking and a deep friendship was forming. Zerah was milking the goats and soon brought in a jar of milk for breakfast. Zebedee was dressed and ready for school but was begging to stay home in order to visit with company. Jonathan told him firmly that Susanna would walk with him, and he could visit later.

When Susanna returned, Basha and Joel's wife had cleared the table and washed the dishes. Susanna assigned Zerah to fill the water troughs and then he could play in the yard while the adults talked. They all sat in the living area and listened as Joel and Basha told them what had happened. "Sarah, Basha's daughter, and her husband live in Carthage and minister to the group that Philip and Basha started when they moved there," began Joel.

"I remember Sarah as a tiny baby. It's hard to believe she's married and ministering in Carthage."

Basha explained, "They have three children and are both leading groups there. Matthew and I felt called to go to Ethiopia after we met some followers of Jesus who knew so very little about Him. We moved there six years ago, and the Holy Spirit was accomplishing great things. The people were so hungry to hear about Jesus, and we baptized many, many new followers."

"I'm so glad you know for sure that you were exactly where God wanted you to be," said Susanna.

"Yes. We knew it was dangerous, but the Holy Spirit continued to affirm our being there. Matthew was killed by a group who didn't want to hear the Truth. It was harder than losing Philip because I heard it all. I was hiding in the yard, and it was horrible. They destroyed most of the house, but Jehovah protected the manuscript that Matthew and I had been working on for twelve years. After they were gone, I gathered up the manuscript and a couple in our group hid me and took me to Carthage. Sarah and her husband took me to Cyprus, and Joel brought me here."

"Are you heading to Jordan's in Cana?"

"No, I don't think so. Joel needs to return home to Cyprus, and I would like to find a place to stay and finish this manuscript that

Matthew and I were working on. We have completed the first draft, but it needs to be checked and then copied.”

“Is it a record of your work?” asked Susanna.

“No. It is a record of Jesus’ life on earth. We thought it would be important for those followers who never met Him personally,” said Basha. “I need to finish it for Matthew. It was very important to him.”

“Wow. I would say that it could be vitally important, and I would love to read it,” said Jonathan.

“Do you know of anyone who could house me so that I could concentrate entirely on finishing it?”

“I’ll bring it up at the leadership meeting tonight. I can think of several people who will probably volunteer,” said Jonathan. “We would love to have you, but with the baby due any day now, I don’t think it will be a quiet place to work!” explained Jonathan. “So, Joel, what are your plans?”

“We plan to return to Cyprus as soon as Basha is settled.”

“You are welcome to stay here as long as that takes.”

“I would love to sit and visit, but I need to take a quick walk to the market if we are going to have dinner. Do either of you want to go with me?” asked Susanna.

All three ladies left for the market and Jonathan and Joel had time to catch up and recall good times of traveling with Jesus. Joel also wanted to know if John Mark was still helping with the leadership.

“No, actually, he’s living just north of town with Eli. Do you remember him? He started a home group right after Pentecost and then about four years ago, they all relocated together here and started a farm. They all live together like one big family, and Eli and Chakah are the parents. I visited John Mark not long ago and he was actually enjoying farming. Did you know that Yanis is raising goats in Capernaum?”

“Yes, Dad told me that. I would love to visit with John Mark. He’s been on my heart a lot lately and I keep feeling he needs some encouragement,” said Joel.

“We could walk out there tomorrow morning if you wish,” said Jonathan.

After dinner, Jonathan took Joel with him to the Leadership Team meeting. Everyone welcomed Joel, who knew most of the leaders from a previous visit when he and his wife were preaching in Antioch. The Team was saddened by the news of his dad’s passing. When Joel told them about Basha’s work on a manuscript of Jesus’ life and her need for housing and food, it was agreed that she would move in with Samuel and Haggith.

Friday morning, Jonathan and Joel carried Basha’s small travel bag and the box containing the manuscript to Samuel’s home. “Oh, Haggith, this will be perfect. Your home is so lovely, and thank you for the table in my room. Joel, I’m going to get settled in here. You and Jonathan can do whatever you wish.”

“We’ll be back to pick you up for the Sabbath meal tonight,” assured Jonathan.

“And why don’t you all spend the Sabbath with us? We’d love to have you,” insisted Samuel. Jonathan and Joel agreed.

The two men left and decided to walk out to Eli’s farm to see if they could visit with John Mark. “Joel, I need to make sure you understand that Eli does not approve of our ministry to the Gentiles. He considers us unclean and will not greet us properly.”

“Eli?”

“Yes, it is sad, but the entire group is old school and strictly kosher.”

“Then what in the world is John Mark doing there?”

“Only John Mark could tell you that, but I suspect that Eli doesn’t know that John Mark has been polluted by us!” suggested Jonathan.

“That may be what the Holy Spirit has been telling me. I feel a strong urge to encourage John Mark to follow the Holy Spirit’s leading.”

“I just wanted you to know.”

“Thanks for the heads up. I probably would have blurted out the wrong thing and got us stoned.”

“No, Eli is quite cordial toward me; he just considers me unclean.”

As Jonathan and Joel approached the farm, they could see Eli building what looked like fruit packing boxes. Several women were in the yard watching the younger children and preparing dinner for the workers. Jonathan called to Eli, and he came quickly to greet the two men. “Jonathan, welcome. Your friend looks familiar, but it’s been too long, I can’t remember names anymore.”

“I am Joel, sir, Matthew’s son.”

“Ah, yes. I remember now. And how are your parents?”

“My mother has been with Jesus for many years, but Dad just joined her six weeks ago. He was preaching in Ethiopia and was martyred for teaching the New Way.”

“I’m sorry for your loss.”

“Thank you. I was wondering if there was a time I could visit with John Mark. We were close friends in Jerusalem and Jonathan told me that he was here with you.”

“Yes, he is here with me, but he is busy working, and I don’t think it would be beneficial for you to visit with him or pollute him with your pagan beliefs.”

“I feel that the Holy Spirit is directing me to encourage him. I intend him no harm.”

“I would prefer that you both leave. This farm is kosher, and you are not. Jonathan, you knew that I would not allow this.”

“You and I found common ground to encourage one another, and I saw nothing wrong with bringing Joel to visit his friend. I’m sorry I offended you. Shalom.” The two men walked away sadly, and Eli returned to his work.

Jonathan broke the silence. “We need to be praying for John Mark and others who are being deceived by this lie.”

“I don’t know what else I can do to encourage John Mark if I’m not allowed to see him. I thought the Holy Spirit was leading me, but I may be off track.”

“Joel, I don’t always understand why the Holy Spirit directs the way He does, but I believe there is always a purpose. Maybe we just needed the walk. Tell me more about your work in Cyprus.”

## Chapter 13

“I am planning to bring my wife to see the progress next week. I don’t think she can wait much longer. I wanted to wait until it was all complete, but she wants to see it and may make some final changes,” said Claudius.

“You understand that any changes could delay the project further,” replied Josie. He was thinking of all the things she might want added. He had a list of suggestions in mind.

“Certainly,” replied Claudius.

“I’ve finished your office since you were here last week. Would you like to check and see if there’s anything else that needs to be added?” Josie knew that every single thing that Claudius added would mean more money in his pocket and he enjoyed tempting him to part with his silver! “I could build more shelves or benches if you wish,” Josie added.



It was the first week of the new year at school when Jonathan’s contentment ended, and chaos ensued. Susanna’s mother, Jochebed, and Samuel’s wife, Haggith, came to help her with the birth. Jonathan and the boys were ordered out of the house and stayed with Asher and Sharon since they were close by. Jonathan was an emotional wreck remembering how he had lost his first wife in childbirth. He and Asher both spent most of the time in prayer and neither slept until she safely delivered a healthy son.

All the ladies in the Christian Center wanted to help, so there was no shortage of food. Susanna had helped most of them during times of need, and they amply repaid her. But suddenly, Jonathan found himself trying to walk Zebedee back and forth to school and make his schedule fit Susanna’s and the boys’ needs. Zerah was old enough to be a big help to Susanna and learned to churn the butter and fetch water from the well. But he wasn’t old enough to go to the market and Jonathan had forgotten how stressful it was to fit everything into his days. It made him appreciate Susanna even more, and he prayed that she would recover quickly and be healthy and strong again. Samuel circumcised the baby and named him Zephaniah on the eighth day, according to Jewish Scripture, while close friends and family gathered around. Jochebed and other ladies from the Center helped when they could and soon Susanna was gaining her strength and beginning to take over her responsibilities. “Jonathan, what do you believe about my being in confinement for forty days? I know that’s what the Law says, but what do you believe?”

“I’ve never thought about it. I think it’s a good idea for you to not overdo and I think God’s plan is good. What are you thinking?”

“I was just wondering. We say that we are free from the Law, but we still observe some of it and drop other parts. It’s confusing to me.”

“I guess we are free to drop all of it, but much of it is reasonable and good. Don’t you think?” asked Jonathan.

“I know that I wanted Zephaniah circumcised and named. I know that we still observe the Sabbath and the Passover. But we don’t observe most of the other laws concerning food and staying away from Gentiles. How do you know what to keep and what to throw away?”

“Well, if you are wondering if it’s time for you to be up and about town, you can forget it. I want you to take the full forty days to recuperate and let others take care of you.”

“But I would like to attend the group on Sabbath night. How could that hurt?”

“I don’t know, but it doesn’t feel safe to take such a little baby out. Maybe God designed that plan to keep both of you safe. It won’t be much longer, and I’ll stay home with you if you don’t want to be alone. Demetrius said he would cover for me.”

“No, you and the boys go. I’ll be fine. I was just thinking. And I’m feeling so much stronger today.”

“Just don’t overdo and I promise, I’ll pray about your question and get back to you.”



“I think we should make it a rule: No babies should arrive during fall or spring harvest and planting!” said John Mark laughing.

“Ah, but babies are a blessing from Jehovah.”

“Oh, I know. And they will be a help at some point, but right now we need all the help we can get!” said John Mark.

“Jehovah will provide. And I don’t see the new abbas complaining,” said Eli. “When will you marry and experience this joy?”

“No. Not me. I ... I always thought that Jehovah was calling me to share the New Way. I thought I would travel and be an evangelist. Maybe that has changed. Maybe .... If He’s calling me to be a farmer and a rabbi, maybe I should take a wife. I just don’t know.”

“Maybe it’s something you should pray about. You have certainly helped us out and everyone would be pleased if you stayed permanently,” counseled Eli.

“I keep feeling that this is just temporary. I can’t explain it, but it doesn’t feel permanent to me. But I’ll pray about it. Shalom.”

“Sleep well; shalom.”



Josie felt at loose ends. He had arrived at the Carpentry Shop an hour after sunrise and started cleaning his area. He had not had time to breathe for almost a year and his workspace needed a deep cleaning. He began to scrub his storage and work areas. He checked

his tools and set aside those that needed repair. He was pleased with his work for Claudius and very pleased with the income it had brought to him and to the shop, but he couldn't get Elam out of his mind. He tried to continue cleaning but felt compelled to go and simply thank him for the referral.

He told the clerk that he would be out for a while. Both his partners were finishing up jobs on site and he didn't want to miss a sale, but this shouldn't take long.

"Good afternoon, sir. How could I help you?" said Gideon.

"I would like to speak with Elam," stated Josie.

"I'm sorry, he's not here. He is working on a project on site. Could I possibly help you?"

"No. Yes. Could you give him a message?"

"Certainly, sir."

"I am Josie from the other Carpentry Shop, and I just wanted to say thanks for the referral," said Josie, disappointed that he had missed Elam. "I just don't understand why Elam would give away such a lucrative project. Your shop must be doing very well."

"Jehovah meets all our needs, and we try to help anyone around us. I know that's not how most people operate, but my dad and I agree that being obedient to whatever the Holy Spirit tells us to do is more important than making money."

"I see," said Josie, who didn't see at all. "Shalom." He walked away totally puzzled, but as he walked back to the shop, he began to remember bits and pieces of what he had learned at his mother's passing. There he had listened to his uncle and some other men talking about being led by the Holy Spirit. It all had something to do with Jesus, but he didn't know what. *I've thanked Elam for his referral. My business survived the winter and I'm hoping that Claudius will refer others to me soon. Once they start entertaining, I would think it will bring in more clients.* But Josie found it wasn't so easy to turn off his thoughts. All day as he pattered around the shop, his mind kept asking questions about Jesus and what it meant to follow the Holy Spirit's leading. Nothing seemed to make sense and he wondered if he was going crazy. He hoped to get another project soon, or maybe he would help one of his partners tomorrow.

Late in the afternoon, he finally got an order for a table. He didn't have the wood he needed and thought about going back to ask Elam if he had some he could purchase. Instead, he decided to go to the lumberjack and cut and finish it himself just like he always had. It would give him something to do and maybe keep his mind from dwelling on Jesus.



When Jonathan and Susanna arrived for the Sabbath night dinner at Kostakis' house, they both greeted Costas, Demetrius' son. He very seldom was able to attend the group but was always welcome. He was working on an apprenticeship at Kostakis' marble quarry. As always,

there was a lot of laughter and good fellowship at both tables, but the ladies were especially glad to have Susanna back with their new son. She laid him on a blanket in the living area and everyone commented on what a good sleeper he was. Of course, the minute everyone got quiet during the prayer to start the group meeting, he let out a wail of hunger. Susanna quickly picked him up and quieted him at her breast. Jonathan ended his prayer and stated, "My son is already trying to take my place!" Everyone laughed and Jonathan welcomed Costas, Susanna, and baby Zephaniah to the group.

Costas informed the group that he would be attending on a regular basis now that he had finished his apprenticeship. "So, what will you be doing now?" asked Lamech.

"I have accepted a job at the quarry, but I will primarily be doing accounting. My boss, Mr. Kostakis, has allowed me to leave early on Fridays so that I can be a part of this group. Thank you, sir. I've really missed you guys and I think it has affected my growth to not participate."

"Welcome back! And you are right. It does affect your spiritual growth when you are not in fellowship with other followers of Jesus. Does anyone else have anything to share?"

Jonathan encouraged the group to discuss the day when Jesus fed 5,000 men and their families near Bethsaida in Galilee. "First of all, is everyone familiar with that event?" They all nodded as they had heard Jonathan and others tell about it many times. "Okay, here's my question. What was its significance?"

"It proved that He had supernatural power."

"It fulfilled prophecies about the Messiah, so showed that He was the Messiah."

"It met a very real need for the people."

"Okay, those are good thoughts. Now, let's move a little deeper. Everything that Jesus said and did was important to all future followers, so, what does this event mean to you personally today?"

"It reminds me of Jesus' provision for me. I was pretty messed up when Jonathan invited me to a class about Jesus. I had never heard about Him. I feel that God sent him just at the right time, when my life was a mess. I had just been fired from my first apprenticeship for cheating my boss, and I knew no one else would give me a chance after that. God's provision for me was His good news," said Demetrius.

"You were the first Gentile I had ever formed a friendship with. I think you were God's provision for me when I needed affirmation that I was doing what God had called me to do. Watching you grow and become a follower of Jesus was very rewarding and just what I needed to keep me going," responded Jonathan.

Others shared about God providing jobs, or houses, or healing. Susanna shyly stated that she had just about given up on God's providing her a husband, and now she was married and was holding her very own son — plus two more!

Costas said that living at the quarry and getting to know the men that worked there made him realize how wonderfully God had provided



for him. "There's never been a single day of my life when I haven't been taught about Jesus. I mean my parents were already followers of Jesus before I was born, and I've been raised knowing Him and loving Him. I've met men who are full-grown but have never even heard of Jesus. That breaks my heart. But it makes me grateful for my own family."

Jonathan sensed that Costas was maturing into a man that God might use to reach those men at the quarry, and he made a mental note to talk with him soon about trying to start a group for them. They shared prayer requests and promised to pray for each other, then said goodnight and happy Sabbath to each other before starting home.

As they walked home with Asher and Sharon and their family, Jonathan said, "I should have said that I was so grateful to you, Sharon, for helping me with my boys after Orpah died. You were certainly God's provision to me during that time."

"I was happy to be used by God to help you be able to minister. And look at them growing up! Zebedee is getting taller every day it seems!"

How good it was to share life with friends. *Asher and I have been good friends since soon after the crucifixion when my family settled in Jerusalem. That was sixteen years ago. Yes, God provides for His children.*



"Uncle Mark?"

"Yes, Elimelech," replied John Mark suddenly realizing that while the other boys had gone home, Elimelech had stayed to ask a private question. It was not unusual because the boys looked up to him and often stayed after school to talk.

"Are we prisoners?"

"What do you mean? I'm afraid I don't understand your question. We are ruled by Rome, but I would not call that being prisoners."

"My parents said that Eli is holding us as prisoners and making us his slaves."

"Why would they say such a thing?"

"Well, I don't want to be a gossip, but Mother said that two men came to visit you last week and Eli told them to go away and leave you alone. My dad said that we were being held prisoners here and then they were talking about being Eli's slaves. I don't understand. I thought we were all working together."

"I'm sure your parents were just tired. You know how hard we all work and sometimes we say things that we shouldn't say or don't mean. Eli is a good man, and he was probably just protecting me. I wouldn't worry about it."

"Thanks, Uncle Mark, I was just wondering." And off he ran to play with his little brothers.

The following Sabbath, John Mark slipped away from the group that was visiting together in the yard. He walked slowly into the grove

of olive trees and felt drawn to pray alone. He poured out his questions before Jehovah. *Why am I here? Have I let myself become a prisoner to something I don't believe? What is my purpose? Is this all there is to life, planting and harvesting, and then more planting and harvesting? Father, day in and day out I labor, but I don't feel the satisfaction that I once did. Now, it seems empty and rote. I feel that You want me to do something else, but I don't know what it is. Please guide me.* When John Mark didn't hear an answer, he did what he had been taught to do: Be still, worship, and wait. So, as he sat in the dirt under the olive trees, he began to sing Psalms of worship. As he was singing one of King David's Psalms, he realized that he was not in a clean relationship with God. He realized that Jehovah was speaking to him about his living a lie before Eli and the rest of his friends that made up this village, and he knew that God was telling him that he needed to make things right with Jonathan. He knew that he needed to confess his failure to the Leadership Team. *I wonder if Barnabas and Paul have returned. Jonathan and the whole Leadership Team probably already know. What would I say anyway? Hi! I'm a failure and I just wanted to let you know.* The longer he sat in the olive grove, the more confused he became. He angrily walked back to the village and decided to take a nap in his hut. He was in no mood to visit with the other men.

On Sunday he was assigned to help Barak with making olive oil. He was grateful for the hard work, and it seemed to help his mood to bash the olives with a hammer. He tried to join in with the worship that evening, but his heart felt empty and angry toward Jehovah.

On Monday, John Mark was helping Hezekiah and his son prune the fruit trees. With each cut he made, he felt that God was pruning him and forcing him to determine what was truth and what was lies. He knew he couldn't avoid the issue much longer. He couldn't sleep and he didn't feel like eating. His secret was literally physically destroying him.



Work had picked up considerably for Josie. Claudius and his wife were entertaining and staying true to their word to send envious guests his way. So far, they had mostly commissioned him to make beds and tables, and it had kept his business going. He hoped spring would bring bigger projects. But it seemed the more he worked, the more his mind dwelled on his questions about Jesus. Josie and his two partners were all working on their own projects in the warehouse, when Josie had an overwhelming desire to talk with Elam. He told the men he would be back soon, grabbed his cloak, and began to walk quickly to Elam's Carpenter Shop before he could talk himself out of it.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Josie," said Gideon as Josie entered the shop.

"Shalom," replied Josie. "Is your dad available?"

“Yes, let me get him for you.” Josie paced the floor of the front shop, but Elam arrived shortly.

“Josie, how can I help you?” asked Elam.

“Elam, I don’t know. I just have a lot of questions and I thought you might have answers or tell me who to talk with,” blurted out Josie.

Elam asked Nahum, who was carving a piece of wood, to take his work up to the front of the shop so that they could have privacy. Then he invited Josie to sit on a bench in the warehouse and assured him that he was willing to do anything he could to help him. “Now, what’s on your mind?”

“I was in Jerusalem fourteen years ago for my mother’s passing,” said Josie.

“I’m sorry for your loss,” said Elam gently.

“Thank you. It was a crazy time and the Sanhedrin arrested all of us because they thought our gathering was a home group of Jesus’ followers. Anyway, I ended up in a dungeon with a bunch of my uncles and cousins and heard a lot of things about Jesus. They also talked a lot about the Holy Spirit guiding them. I had forgotten all about that until you referred Claudius to me. I just can’t quit thinking about Jesus and wondering why?”

“I think that the Holy Spirit may be speaking to you about your relationship with Jehovah,” said Elam quietly.

“I’m a Jew, but I haven’t given a lot of thought about Jehovah. I know that I don’t have the same kind of relationship with Him that my uncle and cousins have. And I need to let you know that Jesus was my half-brother. I was raised with him. I didn’t know anything about him being different until that time in prison. Now, I can’t quit thinking about him. I felt that maybe you would have some answers.”

“Whoa! What a privilege. But I imagine you do have a lot of questions. That’s a lot to try to process. I can certainly help you, but I don’t want to overwhelm you with too much information if you are not ready. Do you have specific questions, or do you want me to tell you what I know about Jesus and let you ask questions as we go along?” asked Elam.

“I think you are going to have to tell me what you know because I can’t really make sense of all the bits and pieces I heard so long ago.”

“Okay. Let’s start with The Law and The Prophets. How familiar are you with it?”

“We went to synagogue quite a bit when I was a boy, and we went to Jerusalem for Passover, but I didn’t go to Hebrew School, so I don’t really know much.”

“Okay, but you’re at least familiar with some of the basics. You probably know that Adam and Eve disobeyed God.”

“Yes, I know that.”

“That was the first time that God promised to send His Messiah. They messed up, were disobedient, and needed a Messiah to rescue them. Do you know why?”

“Not really.”

“Because God is holy. You can’t be in a right relationship with Him if there’s any sin in your life. Because Adam and Eve had sinned, or disobeyed God’s command, they needed to pay for that sin. Do you know the payment required for sin?”

“I thought you just took a sacrifice to a priest and told him you were sorry.”

“Exactly. God said that the price for sin was a blood sacrifice. But he also said that the sacrifice of a lamb was just a picture of what would ultimately be required. Jehovah said that any sin, no matter how tiny or great, had to be paid for by your life’s blood. He set up the sacrificial system to remind us that we needed a Messiah to pay for us, or we would be forever separated from God for all eternity. Remember God is holy and cannot tolerate sin. He will not allow us to be in His Presence. We will be cast out eternally.”

“Whoa. So, because of my sin, I can’t be in a right relationship with God. Is that what you are saying?”

“Yes and no. Yes, you can’t be in a right relationship with God without a Messiah to pay your way.”

“Okay. And how do I find this Messiah?”

“Apparently you grew up with Him. His name is Jesus and He was sent by God to pay for your sin and mine. He actually paid for everybody’s sin in the whole world. He was sacrificed as the Lamb of God.”

“But the Romans killed him on a cross.”

“Yes, God used the Sanhedrin and Pilate and the Roman soldiers to accomplish the deed, but it was God’s plan all along.”

“How do you know that?”

“Well, in The Law and The Prophets there are prophecies of the coming of the Messiah, but there are also details given about Him being crucified and then coming back to life. The details of His crucifixion are amazing. I watched His crucifixion, and it happened just as the Prophets had said it would.”

“You saw the crucifixion? Was he really dead?”

“Yes, I saw the crucifixion and yes, there was no way that He could have been alive. You see, after they were sure He was dead, a Roman soldier shoved a spear in His chest and all His blood and water came gushing out. It was terrible to see, but I assure you, He was dead.”

Josie was horrified to hear the details of his brother’s death, but at the same time, he wanted to hear everything that Elam could tell him. Elam continued. “I didn’t accept Him as the Messiah, my Messiah, until the day of Pentecost, fifty days after the crucifixion. The Apostle Peter was preaching out in the street and the other apostles and disciples were all translating his words so that all the people could understand. It was an incredible day. Peter told the crowds how God had foretold everything, just as it happened. He talked about Jesus’ resurrection and how the Sanhedrin had paid the Roman guards to say the apostles had stolen His body. He talked about walking and talking with Jesus and even eating breakfast with Him in Capernaum.

He told about Jesus returning to Heaven forty days after His death. Let me stop there and see if you have any questions.”

“Please, don’t stop. What did you do to make him your Messiah? I mean, I think he is the Messiah, but what do I do?”

“I simply asked. I knelt right there in the street and told Jehovah that I wanted Jesus to be my Messiah. That’s it. All you have to do is ask.”

“You mean, like, pray?” asked Josie.

“Yes, just pray to Jehovah and tell Him that you want Jesus to be your Messiah.”

“And then what?”

“Well, you are going to notice a difference on the inside. That’s the Holy Spirit coming into you and starting to direct your life.”

“And that’s when you’ve got to be obedient to him, right?”

“Yes, you will gradually learn to recognize when He is leading you.”

“Can you help me do that? I don’t know that I’ve ever really prayed.”

“Certainly. Let’s pray right now. I’ll pray first, and then you pray and ask God to let Jesus pay for your sins.” The men bowed there in the warehouse and Elam prayed, “Father, Josie wants to be in a right relationship with You. He’s ready to admit that Jesus died to be his Messiah. Please help him as he talks with You and bless him as he learns to follow You. In Jesus’ name I pray.”

Josie began to weep as he prayed, “Jehovah God, it’s Josie, but I guess You know that. I’ve messed up a lot. I didn’t know that Jesus was Your Son, but now I do, and I want Him to be my Messiah. I want to obey Him and let Him guide me like He guides Elam and my Uncle Zebedee.”

Josie reached out to hug Elam and Josie knew that he had been forever changed. Once again, he asked Elam what else he needed to do. Elam told him to just spend the next week listening and trying to be obedient to what he heard the Holy Spirit say. He invited him to come back and talk anytime he had questions. “Oh, if I’m not here, Dan, or Gideon, or Nahum can answer your questions, too. They are all followers of Jesus. Then, whenever you are ready, you are welcome to go with me to the Worship Center to meet lots of other followers of Jesus.”

“Here in Antioch?”

“Yes. Jesus’ followers are all over the world. God didn’t send His Son to die just for Jews. There are a lot of Gentile followers, too.”

“That blows my mind. Jesus. I was so close to Him growing up, but I just thought He was my big brother. I didn’t know He would die for me and for the whole world. I’m going to go tell my partners and let you get back to work. Shalom.” Josie was bursting with energy and enthusiasm and Elam smiled as Josie raced out of the shop to tell his friends about Jesus.

## Chapter 14

It was a cold and dismal Wednesday in midwinter when Eli sent for John Mark to come to the village. He had been pruning the fruit trees with the other men. Eli invited him to come into his home and warm himself. “John Mark, you are not happy here. What is going on?”

John Mark knew there was no way to deal with it, but to tell the truth. He dreaded it, but also somewhere deep inside knew that the Holy Spirit was telling him it was time to get it over with and quit hiding from himself. He looked at Eli and agreed with him. Eli just sat and wisely waited. “I have sinned against you by pretending to have just arrived in Antioch. I worked with Jonathan very closely when I first came to Antioch over four years ago. Yes, I worked side by side with Gentile Christians and fellowshiped with them. They were some of the strongest followers I have ever met. They helped me to grow and while I was teaching them more about Jesus, they were teaching me more about depending on the Holy Spirit. Paul and Barnabas were called by the Holy Spirit to leave on a ministry trip. I was not called by the Holy Spirit. I felt no leading from Him. But when Barnabas invited me to go to help them, I eagerly accepted their invitation. By the time we reached Cyprus, we all knew it was a mistake. When we reached Cyrene, Barnabas put me on a boat to return to Jerusalem. I felt like a total failure and couldn’t find a deep enough hole to hide in. I began to wander to various places, but Jehovah led me back to Antioch. Just when I was about to starve to death, Jehovah directed my path to encounter you and I lied to hide my shame. Then I continued to lie to cover my time with Jonathan. It was true that I had most recently come from Jerusalem, but before that I had lived and worked with Gentiles here in Antioch. Can you forgive me?”

“I don’t understand why you didn’t tell me that you had worked with Jonathan,” said Eli.

“I did not know that you were staying separate from Gentiles until Peter arrived. I assumed you were following Jesus’ teachings regarding them. But I felt certain that you would make me go and make things right with Jonathan and his Leadership Team concerning my trip with Barnabas and Paul. I just wasn’t ready to do that. I have been unable to forgive myself for my failure with them.”

“I see,” said Eli softly. “But I’m afraid that raises a question about what you truly believe. I, too, should have checked out your beliefs before I let you live in the village. And I certainly would not have let you teach our boys. John Mark, what do you believe?”

“Eli, please forgive me for wronging you and your group. But I have seen with my own eyes the transformation of Gentiles into followers of Jesus. I know that they are led by the same Holy Spirit that leads us. I cannot deny my friendship with men who are Gentile followers.”

“You lied to me about your beliefs from the beginning. You have changed from the man I knew in Jerusalem. I am very disappointed in you. But I understand and I forgive you.”

Suddenly, John Mark knew that it was time for him to speak the truth in love. He had always been taught to submit to his elders and he struggled to make sure everyone was pleased with him, but the time had come for him to take a stand. “Eli, I have not lied to you from the beginning. I admit I trusted you when I shouldn’t have. But you are the one who has changed, not me. I forgive you for misleading me and want to encourage you to seek the Truth.” As John Mark spoke, Eli’s face became rigid and more and more angry. He was not accustomed to being corrected by a younger man.

“Pack your things and leave! You have been struggling with this long enough. I hope you haven’t polluted our boys.”

“No, sir. I have deliberately avoided any Scripture that would require this discussion.”

“Then go and pack your bags and follow obediently wherever the Holy Spirit is leading you. You cannot stay here if the Holy Spirit is leading you elsewhere.” John Mark rose and went to the hut where he had lived for two years. He gathered up his extra robe and blanket and stuffed them in his travel bag. He did not know where he would go but was aware that he had no silver and no food. He would have to trust Jehovah to provide.

“Thank you, sir, for everything you have taught me. Again, I beg for your forgiveness for wronging you and the group by not stating my position sooner. I was at a very low point in my life and needed you desperately,” said John Mark.

“I understand and you are forgiven. Now go, with God’s blessings upon you.”

John Mark walked southward toward the center of Antioch. *I think I will walk to Joppa and see if I can find Peter. He asked me to join him in ministry there.*

As he walked past the Christian Worship Center, he decided to knock on Jonathan’s office door.

“John Mark, welcome!”

“I just wanted to let you know that I’ve decided to try to find Peter in Joppa. He asked me to join him, and I was afraid of failure. But that’s where the Holy Spirit is leading me.”

“So, Joel’s trip to see you was not wasted,” laughed Jonathan.

“What are you talking about? I missed Joel?” asked John Mark.

“Yes, we walked out to visit you because he felt led to encourage you to listen to the Holy Spirit’s leading and be obedient.”

“Where’s Joel?”

“He’s back in Cyprus now. His dad was martyred in Ethiopia, and he brought his step-mother, Basha, back here to Antioch. So, you are on your way to Joppa?”

“Yes. Peter asked me over a year ago to join him and help him with his ministry, but I was too afraid of failure to do it,” said John Mark.

“You are free to follow wherever the Holy Spirit leads you, but my personal suggestion is that you come home with me and talk with the Leadership Team tomorrow night about what happened so that you can be totally clean before Jehovah. But that’s just my thinking. I haven’t prayed about it,” said Jonathan.

“Yes. The Holy Spirit is telling me to do that, too. I can’t keep running from it. Are Barnabas and Paul back?”

“No. At least not that I know of.”

“I have put it off for so long, but it must be done. I can just throw my blanket in that wooded area behind the bank. I don’t want to be any trouble.”

“John Mark, look at me. Don’t let Satan win this battle. Will it be hard to face the Leadership Team? Yes! But you stood up to Eli, and it felt good. Who knows what impact you will have on his life and the rest of the village. I think the Leadership Team is mature enough to respond appropriately. Susanna and I have a guest room, but with a new baby in the house, you may prefer to sleep elsewhere. I don’t recommend camping since you’ll freeze to death. Let’s get this settled and then see what God has planned for your future.”

John Mark agreed to stay in their guest room for the night. He enjoyed being around the boys and helped Zebedee with his homework and with the goats. He wanted to stay hidden as much as possible until tomorrow night’s meeting.

After dinner, Jonathan and John Mark walked to the Worship Center and everyone greeted him effusively. They were all asking questions and wanted to know where Barnabas and Paul were. Jonathan asked everyone to take their seats and promised that answers would be given. They began with a time of prayer and then he announced that John Mark would speak first. John Mark looked around at the eyes waiting for him to speak.

“Gentlemen, you warned me that the Holy Spirit had not called me to go on Barnabas and Paul’s ministry trip and I’m here to tell you that you were exactly right. By the time we got to Cyprus, it was clear that I was not prepared to face the hardships of such a journey and not willing to make the sacrifices necessary to see the ministry succeed. When we reached Cyrene, Barnabas booked passage for me to return to Jerusalem. I thought I would be able to hide there. I was so ashamed of my failure. But I couldn’t face the apostles and others in Jerusalem, and I certainly didn’t want to deal with my mother’s questions! So, I came back to Antioch. But by then Satan had convinced me that I had failed so miserably that I couldn’t be restored or forgiven. I was totally out of resources and almost starving when I encountered my old mentor from Jerusalem, Eli. He took me in, and I’ve been working on his farm with his New Way group for the past two years. It has been good for me, and I feel that I have grown a lot physically, emotionally, and spiritually. But the Holy Spirit has been convicting me of my lie to you. I’m here tonight to ask you to forgive me for not listening to your wise counsel and going on the ministry trip against your wishes. I’m also here to declare that I remained with Eli



even after I knew that his beliefs about staying separate from Gentiles was wrong. I kept quiet just so I could live with his group. As I suspected, when I told him two days ago that I believed that Gentiles were equal to Jews in God's eyes, he asked me to leave and refused to even shake my hand. So, tonight, I'm asking you to forgive me, if you will."

"John Mark, you have my forgiveness both for not listening and for keeping quiet about believing that I could not have a relationship with Jesus because I'm a Gentile. But there is nothing I can say about what you call your failure. That's exactly what should happen when we attempt to do something in our own strength and not empowered by the Holy Spirit. We've all done it. I've done it. I've started ministries that have failed miserably. I have spoken when I shouldn't have. God uses this to teach us a total dependence on Him. So, please don't continue to speak of your failure. Speak instead of your growth and learning experience," counseled Manaen wisely.

Each man expressed similar thoughts and soon the men were off their benches and embracing John Mark. Demetrius led them in prayer as each man laid a hand on John Mark's head or shoulder. Demetrius prayed for restoration, but he also prayed for John Mark's future. He asked God to continue to grow and prepare him for ministry. Before the night was over, Mordecai had offered John Mark a room at his house in exchange for helping out, since he was getting too old to keep up with the weeds in the yard and he had a thousand little repairs that needed doing. "You'll have to put up with my servant's cooking, but I've been eating it for sixty years and it hasn't killed me yet!" John Mark assured him that he would be glad to help. Elam offered him a beginning carpentry position when he found out that he had helped with adding on rooms at the village. John Mark thankfully accepted the job and promised to report to work on Sunday morning. He said he would move in with Mordecai tomorrow and address those weeds before the Sabbath. The men spent time in worship and prayer and dismissed for the night.



Manasseh was trying to study the passage that Nathan had chosen for him to teach his class of students tomorrow. The building was cold since the fire had gone out, and he couldn't seem to concentrate. He read it twice and started to walk over to Nathan's house to ask for his help. But then he realized that his thoughts were not something he was ready to share, not even with his brother. He was just glad his students were too young to have known Jesus. His thoughts went back to the crucifixion he had watched as a young man. *Dinah and I had not been married long and it was the Day of Preparation for Passover. I had planned to walk over to help Dinah's dad with the lamb, but he arrived at our place before breakfast and demanded that I come with him and his sons to Pilate's praetorium. I remember how excited he was. I stayed with them all day and watched*

*as Jesus was brutally scourged and then crucified at Golgotha. I left when the sun went dark, but during the Seder meal, Simon told the family that two of his Sanhedrin friends had asked for the body of Jesus and placed it in a tomb. Simon was really mad about that. But then everything seemed quieter and seemed to get back to normal. Then suddenly, without any warning, at Pentecost, the followers of Jesus emerged as a powerful force that would not be silenced.*

Manasseh remembered the frustration of Simon and Priest Othniel as they tried to stop the preaching of the apostles. Jerusalem turned into a killing ground of Jew against Jew. *We didn't need the Romans to kill us; we killed each other. Why? And why did I just listen to Simon?* Then he remembered the day that he had asked Simon if there was any possibility that Jesus was the Messiah. *Oh, that was a mistake. Simon turned all shades of purple and screamed that if I ever mentioned Jesus, he would see to it that Dinah would be released from the marriage, and I would not be her husband. It was a very real threat. Dinah was carrying our first-born at the time, and I kept my mouth shut after that. Yeah, now I remember.* He continued to sit and remember that period and wondered what had changed between the crucifixion and Pentecost. The followers of Jesus certainly became a powerful force in Jerusalem and then began spreading all over the Roman world. But he didn't have time to daydream. He needed to get home for dinner, and he mustn't let Dinah know that he was thinking about Jesus, or she would pester him to death with her questions.

The next day, he taught the boys Isaiah 53:4-12.

Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away. Yet who of his generation protested? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was punished. He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.

Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand. After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous

servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

They learned it by rote, one line at a time until they could say it perfectly. It would be up to Nathan to teach them the interpretation when they were older. He was grateful for that. But he kept wondering how he would interpret these verses. The boys left him little time to daydream, and he continued the lesson by having them write some of the Hebrew words and define them.

After school, he told Dinah he was taking a walk and would be back before dinner. Usually, he spent Friday afternoons doing tasks around the house, but today, he needed time alone. He found himself walking toward the house where they had played for the wedding. He couldn't remember the man's name, but he would never forget what he saw and felt there. How he longed for that freedom. He found the house but kept walking. Somehow, he just wanted to know that it really did exist. He knew he would never have the courage to ask his questions. He quickly walked home. He wished they didn't have to go to Simon's for dinner, but he needed to hurry if they were going to make it across town before Sabbath began.



Elam hadn't heard from Josie since they had talked almost six weeks ago, and Josie had asked Jesus to be his Messiah. Since it was cold and rainy, he was in hopes of catching him at his shop. He asked Dan, John Mark, Gideon, and Nahum to pray for him as he visited with Josie. Josie seemed glad to see him and invited him into his office. Elam asked how he was doing. "Financially or with my obedience?" Josie asked wryly. "That day I left your office, I got back here and had a customer impatiently waiting on me. He wanted a large project completed as soon as possible and I've been working on it constantly. I've just about got all the indoor pieces completed in the warehouse but I can't start the house and other buildings until it quits raining. I guess I haven't thought a lot about Jesus since we talked."

"That's okay. Do you feel the Holy Spirit inside of you?"

"I don't know. I've quit having that urgent feeling of needing to talk with you about finding the Truth."

"That's good. I would assume that means you've found it."

"I guess."

"The Holy Spirit resides deep inside the core of your being and speaks very, very quietly to your mind. Sometimes it is hard to tell whether He's speaking or whether it's just your own thoughts," counseled Elam.

“Oh, the other day Brutus, my newest customer, wanted to add some gold trim on a piece of furniture, and I was surprised by my response. I told him that that wasn’t wise because it wouldn’t hold up. In the past, I would have encouraged him to buy it because I would have made money.”

“Yes, that was probably the Holy Spirit directing you to treat your customer properly. I think you are well on your way to becoming obedient. Do you think you are ready to meet some other followers who will encourage you?”

“I’m going to be really busy just as soon as the weather clears,” said Josie.

“Yeah. Me, too. Just let me know when things slow down. Do you have any questions I can help you with? And then I’ve got to run.”

“No, not that I know of. Oh, you don’t happen to know a follower of Jesus named Jonathan. He’s from Capernaum.”

Elam’s face lit up and he grinned. “Yeah. He’s our leader. Do you know him?”

“He’s my cousin. But I’ve only met him once. That was at my mother’s passing, and he was just a boy.”

“I’ll make sure you meet him. Is it okay if I tell him that you’ve become a follower?”

“Sure.”

“Shalom, Josie. Keep listening and keep obeying.”

“Thanks, and shalom.”



Barnabas and Paul arrived back in Antioch one week before Passover. They were excited to share with the group the things that they had experienced on their ministry trip to the area north of the Great Sea. They graciously accepted Kostakis’ hospitality and rested from their long journey, but they were also filled with a supernatural enthusiasm and spoke as often as they could to anyone who would listen to them teach the New Way. They preached at the markets, and when they heard about the synagogue that Jonathan had found while looking for musicians for his wedding, they were determined to speak there.

John Mark met with Barnabas and Paul and told them all that had happened since he left them. He thanked them for giving him the experience so that God could show him the truth about his life. Barnabas apologized for encouraging him to go with them but acknowledged that God had turned it to good. Paul kept his distance and John Mark felt that he was still not fully accepted by Paul. But he was okay with that. He knew that he had apologized as instructed by the Holy Spirit and he couldn’t change Paul’s heart toward him. That was God’s job.

John Mark encouraged them to visit Eli and his group and try to persuade them of the Truth. He told them that they might encounter the Apostle Peter since he usually visited over Passover.



School was out for Passover and Dinah usually enjoyed this special time with Manasseh. But this year, he seemed totally out of sorts, and she was pretty sure what was causing the problem. She tried to be as understanding as possible, but the whole household was on edge. She could tell that Manasseh was deeply troubled. He complained about Judah making too much noise and even made Martha cry when he yelled about her not helping enough with Judah. Dinah dreaded going to her parent's home almost as much as Manasseh, but they had never missed a Passover Preparation Day or Seder meal with them. The only good part about going was that she would be able to visit with their three grown children. Bethany had been married almost a year and both of their sons were espoused to lovely ladies who would be attending the Seder with them.

Dinah went into Manasseh and rubbed his shoulders. "If we are going, we need to go now. You don't want to start the day off by being late for the Passover ceremony." Manasseh knew she was right but hesitated for just a minute before standing to his feet and joining the rest of the family. Junos was holding tightly to Judah's hand and Jacob and Martha were waiting impatiently. They led the procession to their grandparents' house. Dinah walked behind Manasseh and wondered how she would ever get through the day with her mother. It helped to have the older children there with their spouses. Joab, their firstborn, was espoused to be married to Nancy, Mahlon's daughter, and Jethro was espoused to Eliphaz' daughter, Abigail. They had known both girls since the day they were born. When Bethany and her husband, Abner, arrived, Grandmother Esther was beaming with pride at her family all gathered together. She insisted on holding three-year-old Judah even though he hated being held and protested every time she picked him up. Manasseh tried to avoid Simon and instead visit with his sons, Joab and Jethro. But there was really no way to avoid Simon since he was the host and both boys worked for him at the family bank. Grandfather Simon led the family in the Passover ceremony as they sacrificed the goat and put the blood on the doorposts. Dinah saw Manasseh turn pale when Simon put the blood on the door. Dinah had been a secret follower of Jesus for many years, but Manasseh saw the picture of the cross for the first time. After the ceremony, he excused himself and said he wasn't feeling well and wanted to take a walk and get some air.

*What am I going to do? It will kill the old man if I take away his grandchildren. Then it suddenly dawned on Manasseh — my own children will disown me. I know that Joab and Jethro will side with Simon, and Bethany is married to Eliphaz' son, so she will be forced to*

*stay with the synagogue. I will lose all three of my oldest children. And I can't imagine Martha marrying anyone that her Grandfather Simon doesn't approve. I don't know which way Jacob would go, but he will be on his own in another year. We might have a chance to influence Judah, but that could mean death to him or losing his entire family. That wouldn't be fair to him. He wanted to vomit. How have things gotten into this terrible mess? And what about Dinah? She seems supportive, but could she handle giving up her children and future grandchildren? I can't hurt her this way. No, I just need to be a man and face the fact that I am stuck in this family forever. I need to quit thinking about Jesus and quit thinking about leaving the synagogue and quit thinking about walking to that man's house.* He looked up just in time to realize that once again he was standing and staring at the house where the wedding had taken place. He angrily turned and walked quickly back to Simon's house. *I will celebrate and smile and force myself to be happy. It is no big deal. I have decided and it is final. I can do this.* But he wasn't so sure that the internal conflict he felt wouldn't completely tear him in two.

## Chapter 15

It was the third day of Passover and Barnabas and Paul were in hopes of finding the Apostle Peter at Eli's village. They followed the directions that Jonathan gave them and started out on their journey. As they came close to the village, curious eyes followed their approach. "Shalom," called out Barnabas. Everyone looked to Eli waiting for his response to the men who were entering the village. Since Eli had explained that many followers of Jesus had fallen for the false doctrine that Gentiles were equal in God's Kingdom, they had become suspicious of anyone entering the village. Eli stood and called out, "Shalom." But when he saw that it was Barnabas, he put his hands in his pockets and refused the embrace that Barnabas offered. "It's good to see you, Eli. We pray God's blessings on you and your group," said Barnabas. "This is my friend Paul of Tarsus."

"God's blessings upon you two, also," replied Eli politely.

"We came to see if Peter was here. We will be traveling to Jerusalem soon and wondered if he would like to join us."

"Yes, Peter usually visits us for Passover, but this year, he did not come. We have not heard from him since last Passover. If you hear news of him, we would love to know if everything is all right," said Eli.

"We have just returned from a ministry trip to Cyprus and Pamphylia. We preached in many synagogues along the way and many Jews invited Jesus to be their Messiah. We thought your group would rejoice to hear our report, but we feel that we are unwelcome here."

"You know the reason. You are obviously working with Jonathan and his group. They have strayed away from the truth taught by The Law and The Prophets. I have to assume that you believe similarly."

"If you are referring to whether Gentiles can become believers, then yes, we agree with not only Jonathan, but with Jesus Himself. He told me that I was to take the good news to the Gentiles. I do so in obedience to His clear direction," said Paul.

"Your message is not welcome here. We abide by The Law and The Prophets," said Eli firmly.

"We will bring you news of Peter if the Holy Spirit leads us back this way and we find him in Jerusalem. Shalom," said Paul.

"Shalom," echoed Barnabas.

"Shalom," replied Eli.

Eli realized that most of the families had overheard the conversation and reminded them that many were falling into Gentile practices because of the predominance of Gentiles in Antioch. He encouraged them to remember The Law and The Prophets and to remain loyal to Jehovah's rules.

The rest of the Passover days were filled with rest and worship. Eli assigned as few tasks as possible, and everyone enjoyed the time off from work. Naboth asked Hiram to go with him to look at the fields.

They couldn't work, but they could plan ahead what needed to be done as they prepared for the following week. The early harvest had been completed before Passover and now they needed to prepare the land for planting for the fall harvest. As they walked, Naboth asked, "What did you think of what Paul said?"

"Are you sure we should be talking like this?"

"We are free men! Can't we be honest with each other about what we are thinking or are we bound to silence?" demanded Naboth.

"I just think that this group with Eli has been a really good arrangement. He has mentored us well and I don't want to stir up trouble," said Hiram.

"My wife and children are very happy to be part of this group and it would be hard to leave, but I am not happy to be told what to believe. John Mark, Barnabas, and apparently Jonathan, the Apostle James' son, all believe that Jesus taught that Gentiles would be an equal part of the Kingdom of God. I would just like to hear their thoughts. I guess I would like to decide for myself. I am not a child that needs to be told what to believe."

"But Eli has been our mentor for as long as I've been a man. I trust him," said Hiram.

"I trust him, too. But sometimes I wonder why John Mark left. Then I realize that I can't just take a day off and go talk with him because Eli would say no. Doesn't that make me a prisoner?"

"I've never thought about it that way, but we really aren't free men, are we? Are we Eli's slaves?"

"I don't know, but something is bugging me, and I need time to pray and figure it out. Please don't tell anyone that I'm feeling restless because I have no idea what I believe. I'm just venting because I'd like to check it out for myself," said Naboth.

"I understand. I'll be praying for you as you figure it out. We'd better get back to the village or Eli will worry."

"Exactly. Worry that his slaves have escaped," said Naboth under his breath.

They returned to the village and tried to enter into the festivities of Passover.



"Good morning, Basha, you are up bright and early. Come in. Is everything okay?"

"Yes, everything is fine. I just had something on my mind and thought the boys would be in school by now."

"Yes, they and Jonathan just left. Come in and sit while I finish clearing the breakfast table. What's on your mind?" invited Susanna.

"I've been so busy with Matthew's manuscript, and I realized that time was flying by. I need to be busy telling women about Jesus. I felt the Holy Spirit was leading me to start a well ministry."

"Okay. But I don't understand," said Susanna, sitting down at the table to listen.



“When I was in a strange new town, the best place to meet other women was at the well. I would take my water pot and then try to find someone who was willing to talk with me about Jesus. Pretty soon I would have enough women to form a group and I would teach them, then encourage them to do their own well ministries. I used a seven week lesson that was written by a friend of mine to teach all the basics. But the first step is just making enough new friends to start a group.”

“Basha, that sounds wonderful. So did you do that today?” asked Susanna.

“No, the Holy Spirit instructed me to ask you to help me,” said Basha.

“How could I help? What do you need?”

“I think this time, He is leading me to do it differently. I think you and I should go to the well together and talk about Jesus to each other. We would enjoy the fellowship, the weather is perfect, and baby Zephaniah will even be a draw. You know how women love him.”

“Okay,” said Susanna tentatively. “So, we would just go to the well and while we are filling our pots, we talk about Jesus and hope that other women would join in the conversation.”

“Exactly. So, are you ready to go?”

“Right now?”

“Why not?” asked Basha.

“I do need to go to the well. Let me get Zephaniah in his carrier and grab my water pot. Do you want a water pot, too?”

“Yes, please.”

“Okay, but I don’t know what to say.”

“Just be real and let the Holy Spirit do His job,” replied Basha. They chatted comfortably all the way to the nearest well. When they arrived, Susanna greeted some ladies that she had already made friends with. She introduced them to Basha and then they waited their turn to fill their pots. As they stood in line, Basha asked Susanna what their group discussed last night. Susanna told Basha that they had discussed Jehovah’s provision for them and everyone had shared different ways that Jesus had met their needs — sometimes just in the nick of time. “I love to hear those stories. I remember when my husband died, and I didn’t know what to do. My little girl was only eight and Jehovah sent a friend to help us. My friends, who were followers of Jesus, collected enough money for me to travel to my son’s house. Since I’ve accepted Jesus as my Messiah, He’s helped me a lot. Hey, I’ve got to run. I’ll see you tomorrow. Shalom.”

“Shalom.” Basha left as if headed home, but then turned back to meet Susanna.

“What did you think?” asked Basha.

“They were certainly listening, and I thought Manda might even talk with me after you left, but she didn’t stay.”

“So, you want to go back tomorrow?”

“Certainly. I think this could be big and it’s something I can do even with a baby.”

“Now, I must get back to work on the manuscript. I’m trying to make another copy. It takes forever because I’m so slow.”

“Sorry, I can’t help you there. I’ll see you tomorrow.”



Barnabas and Paul continued to preach in the marketplaces and taught at the Christian Center after work on Tuesdays, then after work on Thursdays they met with the Leadership Team. When they informed the Leadership Team that they were planning to leave on Sunday to walk to Jerusalem, they agreed to collect more silver for famine relief for the followers there. Paul commented that he was pleased that they had given so generously to the needs of the ones who had originally taught them about Jesus. They were eager to go and see the situation and promised to report back when they returned.



After dinner on Sabbath night, Simon asked Manasseh if they could talk in private on the rooftop. Manasseh immediately tensed knowing that these talks generally were not pleasant. “Manasseh, thank you for joining me here. Is your work with Nathan going well?”

“Yes, sir. I’ve found that I really enjoy teaching and it’s been a good schedule for me to spend more time with Jacob and Judah.”

“Your children are growing up too quickly. I wanted you to know that Adonijah and Enos stopped by this week to inquire about Martha,” said Simon casually.

Every fiber of Manasseh’s being tightened. It was all he could do to keep from screaming. “It is my understanding that that matter is between the parents and the child, not the grandparents. Why would they come to you?”

“Well, I think they wanted to make sure that I would not object,” said Simon defensively.

“Well, I object! Martha is not yours to sell or give away or give permission! She is my daughter, and you have no right to make any arrangements for her life.” Manasseh stood to leave when Simon blocked his way and prevented his leaving. Manasseh wanted to push him down the stairs but restrained himself. “I am leaving, please make way,” said Manasseh through clenched teeth.

“You are not leaving until you hear what I have to say. I told Adonijah and Enos that they would need to talk with you. I did not sell your daughter or do anything else improper. These are my grandchildren and I intend to see that they are well cared for.”

“Are you insinuating that I can’t care for them myself?” demanded Manasseh.

“No, but you act like I have committed a crime by caring for and blessing my grandchildren. You have not appreciated all the advantages and privileges that I have given them and you. You are a most ungrateful man,” said Simon.

“Let me leave, or you will be holding me against my will,” said Manasseh firmly. Simon moved out of the way and let Manasseh go down the stairs. He collected his family and they left abruptly.

“Abba, are you okay? Why did we leave?” asked Jacob who had been busy playing a game with his friends.

“Hush. Leave your abba alone,” said Dinah.

“Your Grandfather and I had a discussion and we disagreed. I decided it would be better for us to leave than for me to say something that I would regret,” said Manasseh who was just beginning to breathe easier. The pounding in his chest was beginning to settle and the roaring in his ears was going away. And at that moment he resolved to find out what he could about following Jesus. He had put it off long enough and things couldn’t get much worse between him and his father-in-law.

They skipped synagogue the following morning and Manasseh actually relaxed in the afternoon and quietly prepared for his students. On the following Sabbath night, they stayed home and didn’t join the others at Simon’s house. After the Sabbath meal, he asked Dinah if they could talk on the rooftop, and he told her what had happened the previous week. She agreed that her dad was totally out of line, but then defended him by stating that she felt that it was equally wrong of Adonijah and Enos to ask him. Besides, she thought that Adonijah was a close friend. “Yes, I have grown up with him and am surprised that he would do this. He has still not approached me. I don’t know why.”

“I don’t either. I don’t want Abba making our decisions, even though I’m trying to honor him as the Law requires. I don’t want to reject all our friends just because of Abba’s mistake. I believe that I would want you to talk with Adonijah and figure out what actually happened and what was said.”

“Yes, that is probably wise instead of just listening to Simon’s version of it. I’ve listened to him for too long without checking my facts. I’ll speak to Adonijah tomorrow afternoon.”



“Greetings, my friend.”

“We missed you and your family last night at Simon’s and again at synagogue. Is everything well with you?”

“Yes, and no. May we talk privately?” asked Manasseh.

“Certainly, come into the house with me,” said Adonijah.

“I don’t want to be rude, and I don’t know how to say this politely, but I need to know why you and Enos talked to Simon about my daughter.”

“Ahh. Yes, Enos is heartbroken. But he will survive. We have all had our rejections,” said Adonijah.

“Adonijah, you did not hear my question. Why did you and Enos talk with Simon instead of me? Is he in charge of my daughter?” demanded Manasseh.

“Actually, Enos was not with me, and I didn’t think it was a formal inquiry. What is going on, Manasseh?”

“Simon told me that you and Enos had inquired about Martha. I want to know why you went to him instead of to me. Then he told me that he did not give you an answer but told you to talk to me. But apparently, some kind of rejection took place. I want to know the facts. I am fed up with Simon and the way he manipulates my life and my children. I want you, as my friend, to tell me the truth. Is that too much to ask?”

“No, no. I’m sorry. Simon was at my shop, and we were visiting in the back. He was looking for a gift for a client. He asked whether Enos worked for me, and I told him that he was raising cattle on the north side of town. I shouldn’t have, but I told him that Enos was getting his nerve up to inquire about Martha. Simon said not to bother because he didn’t want his granddaughter to live so far away and besides the life of a farmer would not be easy for her. That was all that was said. I told Enos, and he went back to the farm. I haven’t seen him for a couple of weeks. I think he took it pretty hard. Now, I see that I was wrong to mention it to Simon. But I would hate for their marriage, if it should happen, to start off on the wrong foot with Simon’s disapproval.”

“Thank you for telling me. Are you certain that this is everything and it is the truth, and you are not just trying to appease me?” asked Manasseh desperate to get to the bottom of this.

“Manasseh, we have been friends for a long time. I know that things are not good between you and Simon. I am very sorry that I have made things worse. I am also sorry that I discouraged my son. I don’t want to become a meddling dad.”

“True. And if he should marry Martha, he will have to put up with Simon’s meddling just like I do. If he’s not strong enough to do that, then he’s not the right man for Martha. Now, meddling father, please let Enos know that I am not saying yes, and I’m not saying no. He will have to approach me properly and let me decide. Okay?”

“I understand. And thank you, Manasseh, for straightening this out. Again, my apologies for mentioning it to Simon.”

“You are forgiven. Shalom. I need to get back to my family.”

“Happy Sabbath. Shalom.”

The following Friday afternoon, Manasseh and Nathan, Dinah and Achsah and the children walked to Simon’s house for Sabbath dinner as usual. No one mentioned their absence or welcomed them back. They attended synagogue but returned home instead of visiting with Dinah’s parents. Manasseh wasn’t ready to deal with Simon without a crowd around to protect him.

Dinah noticed a deep sadness that penetrated Manasseh’s entire being. He was having trouble sleeping again and was taking long

walks. She was looking forward to summer break, but wondered if it would be better or worse to have him around all the time. She resolved to be the best wife she could be and try to keep him as happy as possible. But most of the time, he just seemed to be deep in thought and didn't notice her or the children.



"Do you ever wonder what it would be like to not be part of this farming village?" asked Hezekiah.

"Sometimes," replied Hiram. "Sometimes I wonder if I made the right decision to join this group, and then I start thinking about how happy my wife and children are. I think it's taken a lot of work off Adah to have women to share the load."

"But she doesn't have any more free time — she just has more time to work in the fields with the men. I'm not sure it's an advantage. Have you ever asked her?"

"No," admitted Hiram. "Have you asked Ahinoam?"

"No. But I don't think it would be that much harder to stay home with the babies and cook and clean instead of pruning fruit trees! I don't know."

"Once we left Jerusalem, I feel that we've just been in a little world of our own. That bothers me, too. Have you noticed that we seem to be getting more and more isolated?" asked Hiram.

"Are you talking about Eli telling John Mark to leave?"

"Yeah, that and the way he treated Jonathan. I remember in Jerusalem, Jonathan was a good friend."

"Makes me wonder why Peter didn't come for Passover," stated Hezekiah.

"Do you think Eli told him not to? I thought Eli approved of him."

"I don't know. Let's get this planting finished; I'm looking forward to dinner."

"I just want to straighten out this aching back!"

Hezekiah continued to think about their conversation all through dinner. *I wonder what would happen to us if Eli died? Well, I guess that's not really if, but when he dies. How would the finances be split up and would there be anything to split? No one but Eli knows the numbers.* The more he thought, the more his concerns grew. He also wondered who his children would be allowed to marry. Would that be his decision or Eli's? He got up and began to pace around the yard. He was grateful when the worship time was over, and he could crawl onto his mat. It had been a long day. But as he lay on his mat, his thoughts continued. *Why are we not growing? I thought we moved to Antioch to teach the people here about Jesus. We haven't done any of that. I know Eli has taught me a lot, but I can't think of a single person we have shared the good news with. Maybe that's why I feel so out-of-sorts. No, that's just another reason to add to all the others, but maybe*

*it should be the most important one. I need to do some thinking, but right now I must get some sleep.*



“Zebedee, after dinner I would like to talk with you up on the rooftop,” said Jonathan. It was a Wednesday and Jonathan had a rare afternoon and evening home with his family. Zebedee hoped that he hadn’t done something to displease his abba. But all he could do was wait to see.

“Son, take a seat and let’s talk. How is school going?”

“I think it’s going okay. Have there been complaints? I don’t enjoy learning about Roman history and didn’t do well on my last test, but now I know that Teacher Marcos wants me to learn the dates for the wars, and I can do that. I just wasn’t as prepared as I should have been.”

“No, there’s been no complaints. I was wondering if you had discovered a particular area that you do like. It seems you’ve ruled out Roman history, but I’m thinking you are old enough to start considering a summer job. Most boys your age are working with their parents and learning a trade for their future. Have you considered what you would like to do once you become a man? You don’t have to know for sure. I mean, some boys change several times before they decide, but I was wondering if there was something you would like to try?”

“I haven’t really thought about it. I thought I would just teach people about Jesus like you do. I didn’t know I had a choice,” said Zebedee.

“You thought that every boy just grew up and took his abba’s place?”

“I guess so.”

“Well, only if that’s where Jehovah wants him to be. Are you interested in doing what I do?”

“Yes. I love helping people and I think I would enjoy teaching them about Jesus.”

“You are a patient teacher to Zerah. I think that a job at Mr. Demetrius’ Mercantile Store would be a good place for you to start. A clerk is very much like a servant or helper to the customers. I think it would be good training for you. He asked if you would like to work for him this summer. He only wants to hire you for the mornings. You would help him to restock the store each morning, do a little cleaning, and get to know how to help out with the customers. Do you think you could do that?”

“I know I could, Abba. That would be so cool.”

“You would have to walk there by yourself each day and walk home at noon. Zerah would take care of the morning chores by himself, but you would be responsible for your evening chores. Do you understand?”

“Yes, sir. When could I start?” asked Zebedee eagerly.

“Well, not until school is out! But we need to go and talk with Mr. Demetrius tomorrow after school to let him know that you are interested in the job.”

Jonathan was pleased that Zebedee was excited about this next step. He thought he would be a good worker for Demetrius, but a parent never really knows. He was grateful that Demetrius had approached him about it. It was hard to believe that Zebedee was already old enough for a paying job. *I guess I need to teach him how to use his pay well, before he begins earning silver of his own.*

## Chapter 16

Manasseh and Nathan were working at the school to get ready for the new school year after enjoying a summer off. Today they would clean and tomorrow they would start reviewing the lessons to see if they needed to make any changes from last year's material. They had taken a break and just returned to the school at noon when there was a knock at the door. Adonijah asked if he could speak with Manasseh. Nathan knew exactly what this visit would entail and quickly said that he needed to be heading home. Manasseh invited Adonijah to pull up a bench. "Manasseh, I came to inquire about Martha for my son, Enos."

"I see. And why do you desire Martha?"

"Enos has told me that he thought he wanted Martha as a wife, but when the mix-up occurred, he knows now, without any doubt, that he cannot imagine life without her. It has been the hardest time of his life, and he desires to care for her and provide for her."

"And can he provide for her in the manner in which she is accustomed, or will she be expected to become his farm slave?"

"I would like to invite you to come and tour the farm and see what he can provide for her. He has built her a house and she will have a personal slave and a cook to help her care for it. His farm slaves have separate quarters and a separate kitchen. He owns twelve men and four women. The farm is providing ample income for them all and continues to prosper. She will be well cared for."

"Adonijah, you have been my friend all of our lives and I have watched Enos grow up. I would like to speak with Dinah and Martha before we make this decision. How far away is this farm? I would enjoy seeing it before I talk with them."

"It would take about an hour to walk, or I could take you in the oxcart tomorrow."

"Why don't we walk there now? It will help me to clear my head from thinking about school. Could we be back by sunset?"

"Certainly."

The two men walked together, and the formality between them dropped away as they walked together as friends. At times, Manasseh was tempted to mention the wedding that they had played for. He wondered if it had affected Adonijah the same way. But Manasseh refrained and kept the discussion on their own work and Enos' plans for the farm. As they left the north side of Antioch, Manasseh found himself relaxing and enjoying the rural valley surrounding him. Everywhere crops of all kinds were being harvested. Leaves were turning all shades of red and gold. Manasseh knew that Martha would love this area. When they approached the farm, Enos came running to greet them. He showed Manasseh around and explained that he had started with just a few animals but had built it to a fine herd. He showed Manasseh the slave quarters for single men and the one for



couples. He explained that the wives took care of the garden, the goats, and cooking for all the slaves. Then Enos proudly showed Manasseh the house that he had built for Martha. It had three sleeping rooms, an indoor kitchen, a living area, rooftop, and a back courtyard. Manasseh expressed his delight that Enos had done so well for himself. "I will give you an answer when you can come and have dinner with us this week."

"Could I come tomorrow?" asked Enos eagerly and it pleased Manasseh.

"Of course. We will expect you at sunset."

"Thank you, sir." Goodbyes were said and Manasseh and Adonijah began their walk back. Manasseh wished that he could walk alone and enjoy his own thoughts, but Adonijah kept the conversation going as they returned to Manasseh's home.

"Shalom, my friend."

"Shalom."

Dinah had enjoyed the summer with Manasseh, but tonight he seemed to be in such a deep mood. She understood his confusion regarding Jesus, and she knew he hated to hurt her family and friends by taking a stand, but she was eager to get it over with. Then she remembered that she had been a secret follower of Jesus since she was ten and still had not revealed it. She couldn't be critical of Manasseh. But tonight, even though he was quiet through dinner, he seemed content. She wondered if something had been said as they prepared for the school year, but she kept quiet. Martha was in her room and Judah was sleeping. Jacob was working on a carpentry project in the courtyard when Manasseh asked Dinah if they could talk on the rooftop. He told her about Adonijah's inquiry and about what he had seen at the farm. They discussed Enos and admitted that they had hoped that he would be the one to desire Martha. He had always been industrious and wise, but also a peaceable man. They felt the two would make a good couple and agreed to talk with Martha in the morning while Jacob watched Judah.

On Thursday morning, as Dinah and Martha cleared the table, Manasseh sent the boys outside to play and called the ladies to talk with him in the living area. "Martha, a young man has inquired about you and asked if you were ready for marriage." Martha's face expressed her pleasure and she blushed.

"Abba, who?"

"Enos."

"I would be happy with any of the young men from the synagogue, but I've always hoped that Enos would ask," responded Martha shyly.

"He has, and he's coming to dinner tonight so that I can give him an answer."

"Oh, Abba, is it true?" cried Martha looking from her abba to her mother.

"He has asked, and he meets Mother's and my approval. One thing you need to understand is that his home is about an hour's walk

from here, so you would not always be able to attend synagogue or Sabbath meals. You would be living north of town in a farming area. It is very beautiful. I went there yesterday, and I think you will enjoy living there, but it may feel lonely at times.”

“You both know that I love peace and quiet and do not crave the social life that Bethany and Abner have. Enos and I will enjoy being alone,” and then she blushed again and hung her head with embarrassment.

“We need to go to the market and prepare a special meal for Enos,” said Dinah.

“I need to clean the school and I’m taking the boys with me to help.” The ladies grabbed their baskets and left for the market.

As they walked, they planned the menu and agreed upon a lamb dish to make it special. “I wonder when the espousal will take place. Who decides that, Mother?” asked Martha.

“That will be up to Enos. But of course, your abba will have a say in it.”

“I hope it is soon,” said Martha simply, “I’m already twelve and I’ve been ready for marriage for over a year. But Enos has avoided me lately and doesn’t speak to me. I thought he had chosen another.”

“He was busy building you a house and growing his business,” replied Dinah. She knew that Martha’s tender heart would be broken if she knew of Grandfather Simon’s involvement. “We will need to plan an espousal party.”

“I just assumed Grandfather and Grandmother would take care of that.”

“You would have to ask your abba,” said Dinah.

A very nervous Enos joined them for dinner. Manasseh quickly put him at ease by announcing that they had agreed that they could make plans for the espousal. Dinah and Martha served the plates and then took their seats with the men. Jacob and Judah had already been fed and sent to their room. Together the men discussed the date for the espousal and Enos declared that he was ready tonight. They agreed to announce it tomorrow night at Simon’s Sabbath meal and ask Priest Othniel if he would perform the ceremony at the synagogue the following Friday afternoon. Then they would celebrate it with the entire synagogue. They also discussed plans for the wedding. Since Enos already had a house, there was no reason for a lengthy delay. However, Manasseh stated that he would prefer a spring wedding. Enos said he would discuss it with his dad, since he would host the wedding. Enos left a very happy man and could hardly wait to tell his parents.

Martha took extra care as she dressed to go to Sabbath dinner at her Grandfather Simon’s. She was nervous and excited, but not nearly as nervous as Dinah and Manasseh. They had kept the disagreement a secret so far, and they hoped that Simon would behave himself. After Esther lit the Sabbath candles and Simon prayed his prayer of blessing on all those present, Manasseh stepped forward and asked if he could make an announcement. Simon nodded, surprised. “I have

pledged my daughter Martha to Enos, son of Adonijah. They will become espoused next Friday afternoon.”

Dinah was watching her dad’s face intently and saw him turn red and then white. She watched him moisten his lips and she wasn’t sure what was about to happen. She realized she was holding her breath, waiting for his response.

“Manasseh, may I suggest that we host the espousal dinner here so that we’ll have room for the entire synagogue, or did you have something else in mind?” asked Simon humbly.

“I think that would be great. You have always been so generous toward your grandchildren,” replied Manasseh. The crowd erupted with clapping and whistles and shouts of congratulations to the couple. Simon invited everyone to take their seats and enjoy the Sabbath meal.



The espousal was very simple with only the young couple and their parents present. Priest Othniel presided and reminded Enos and Martha that the espousal period was a special time of preparation for marriage. He encouraged them to spend the time well in discussions about their future. He encouraged them to remain sexually pure so that their wedding would be a true uniting of their bodies. Jehovah would bless them for their discipline and obedience to the Law. The gifts were exchanged, and Martha was especially impressed by the lute that Enos gave her with the promise that he would teach her how to play so that they could play together. She said she had always wanted to learn, but there was never time. Dinah smiled because she had begged Martha to learn when she was younger, but she was not interested. *It’s amazing how the right teacher can make all the difference!*

As the guests visited at Simon’s house afterward, Priest Othniel asked Enos when the wedding would be. “I would like it to be early winter, but Manasseh wants us to wait until spring.”

“The espousal period can be a very special time if it is used well to bond your hearts and work together as a team. Many young couples rush the espousal period and regret it later. You would do well to listen to her father’s desires.”

So, while Enos didn’t want to wait any longer than absolutely necessary, he and Martha began to plan for an early spring wedding. Enos faithfully attended the Sabbath night dinners at Simon’s house and began to spend Sabbath afternoons with her and her family. Martha and her sister, Bethany, or her mother, would walk out to the house to see what was needed whenever the weather cooperated for the long walk. Dinah enjoyed getting to help her weave all the things needed to make it into a home. Bethany, who was carrying Abner’s child, came over often and helped with the embroidery on the wedding robe. Dinah treasured this special time with her two daughters.

Manasseh seemed settled at school, Jacob was doing well in his studies, and Judah was growing up much too fast. Jehovah was good.



The winter rains seemed to be finished and signs of spring were beginning to appear. Manasseh, Enos, and Jacob walked home from synagogue while Dinah and Martha and Judah lagged behind. “You are being awfully quiet, Martha, is there something on your mind?” Dinah asked.

“Yes, Mother, I am worried about Bethany,” explained Martha.

“Women have been giving birth for thousands of years. She will do fine,” assured Dinah.

“No, Mother. I know it’s selfish, but I’m afraid that she will give birth before the wedding and won’t be able to attend. She was looking awfully big this morning and was pretty uncomfortable sitting on the benches.”

“Well, they are hard benches. But I think she is still about a month away. Have you talked with Enos about it?”

“Yes, but he didn’t seem to listen. He said not to worry about it. I can’t imagine Bethany not being there and I certainly don’t want to wait forty days after she gives birth, or eighty!” exclaimed Martha, as she burst out in tears. “I don’t want to rush things, and I don’t want to wait. Do all brides feel this pressure? I want to be surprised, but I want to know that it’s soon because Bethany could have her little one any time. I just feel like I’m going to explode,” said Martha.

After they had enjoyed a snack in the courtyard, Enos asked, “Would it be all right if Martha and I took a walk? We won’t go far. I know it’s the Sabbath, but she needs some air and space,” said Enos.

Dinah and Manasseh agreed and smiled at how well Enos seemed to understand and care about what Martha needed. He would reassure her and hopefully not reveal that the wedding was planned for this week. The entire synagogue had been invited and even the school was taking an unscheduled break so that everyone could attend. Adonijah had planned for the wedding to begin on Monday afternoon and continue for three days. Both sets of parents were important players with the musicians, and they had promised Eliphaz that they would play as much as they could. Eliphaz understood and promised to try to find additional players to help out.

It was hard to keep a secret in such a tight-knit group. All the adults knew the date, but promised not to tell the schoolboys because they weren’t sure that Jacob could keep it secret. So, on Monday, Manasseh and Jacob left for school as usual and Dinah asked Martha if she wanted to go to the market with her. They took Judah, which meant that Dinah shopped, while Martha chased three-year-old Judah and tried to keep up with him. “Mother, he’s got to learn to obey!”

“Yes, dear. He does, but he’s almost as headstrong as his big sister was at this age,” replied Dinah. “Come, Judah, and hold my hand. You are making your sister tired.”

Judah quickly ran and held his mother's hand. He grinned at Martha, and she sighed at his mischief. "It's a good thing I love you!" Martha exclaimed. Dinah realized that she had made a mistake by bringing Martha. She didn't want to buy foodstuff that would ruin while they were at the wedding. She was just trying to distract her but was afraid she would notice. She bought some potatoes and other things that would keep and declared that they needed to look for thread for Jacob a new robe. Apparently, Martha wasn't paying any attention and nodded. They went to the Textile Booth and picked out some threads they agreed he would like. Then they headed back to the house. "I think I'll walk over to Bethany's to see how she's feeling."

"Okay, but I think she said she was going to visit Lilah today." Dinah hated to lie, but she knew that she needed to keep Martha home. "Do you mind finding me Jacob's extra robe so I can decide what size to make? And if you are feeling bored, you could go ahead and load the loom if you wish. I need to squeeze some juice for your abba and Jacob. They will be home soon."

"I just want to know if Bethany is going to give birth before the wedding! Oh, I hate this waiting! I know it's tradition, but it's driving me crazy. I'll start Jacob's robe." She headed upstairs to find his extra one and soon she had decided what size panels would be needed for his new one.

"Make it plenty big — he's growing awfully fast. And he's getting tall like his abba," said Dinah. "I'm going to the cellar. Watch Judah, please."

"Judah, come to sister. Let's see what size robe you will need." She pretended to measure him but ended up tickling him. *I wonder when Jehovah will send us a son. Then I will weave beautiful robes for him. And soon I will be making Enos' robes. Oh, my. Please, Jehovah, make it happen soon.* When Dinah returned, Martha hadn't even begun to load the loom but was just staring into space.

"Where's Judah?" He came out from behind the cushion wearing Jacob's robe. "Yes, we'll save Jacob's robe for you, but I don't think you are quite ready for it!" said Dinah. Both ladies laughed and Judah paraded around the room tripping over Jacob's long robe. Dinah grabbed him and pulled the robe off. "I don't want you tearing it before you are big enough to get some good use out of it."

"Mother, you spoil him too much. You would have spanked me for being so careless," complained Martha.

"He didn't tear it and it's fine," said Dinah. She almost added "and you were supposed to be watching him," but didn't want to start the tears today.

Finally, Manasseh and Jacob arrived home. They sat at the table and drank their juice and talked about their day. Martha called Jacob over to look at the thread they had selected for his new robe. He shrugged and said it was okay. Martha was disgusted with his lack of appreciation, and he escaped to the courtyard to work on the bench he was building. Then, the knock at the door happened. Dinah felt her stomach lurch as she realized that it was finally time. Manasseh went

to answer the door while Martha and Judah listened to see who it was. That familiar voice firmly stated, “Shalom. I have come to claim my bride, Martha.”

“Will you allow her a few minutes to prepare herself?” asked Manasseh.

“Yes, I will wait here for her.”

“Very good.” Manasseh called for Jacob to come inside and explained that it was the wedding day, and he should go change into his cleanest robe. Dinah had laid out her good robe and quickly changed, then she ran to help Martha. Together they slipped the beautifully embroidered robe over her head and Dinah helped her with her hair. “Don’t keep him waiting. You are beautiful and need nothing else.”

“Where are my shoes?”

“They should be by the front door. Go put them on and then go with Enos. We’ll meet you at the wedding. I just need to get the boys dressed.”

“Oh, Mother,” said Martha suddenly realizing that the day had arrived.

“Go! Go! Don’t look back — only forward,” advised Dinah as she pushed her out of her room. Her abba was standing at the bottom of the stairs. His eyes filled with tears. He handed her her sandals and then opened the door to Enos. Enos simply said, “Come.” He took her hand and led her to his parents’ home. Her thoughts were whirling, and she hoped her parents would not be late.

Manasseh had managed to get a fresh tunic on Judah, and Dinah already had packed a bag for him. Jacob was ready and the four of them plus Junos followed not far behind the couple. When they arrived, all the other guests were milling around the yard and watching for their arrival. Priest Othniel indicated that the parents should stand behind the couple. Junos took Judah and supervised him. Dinah noticed that the musicians were seated just outside the courtyard and were ready to play. Priest Othniel asked Manasseh if Enos had completed all of the things he had promised at the espousal. “Yes, he has.”

Priest Othniel asked Adonijah if Martha had completed all of the things she had promised at the espousal. “Yes, she has, and we welcome her to our family.”

“Then I pronounce that this wedding may be consummated and celebrated.”

Eliphaz gave the signal, and the music began. Martha felt like a tornado had just ripped through her world. One minute she was sitting at home feeling totally bored, and in less than half an hour, she was a married woman being swirled around by her friends and feeling like a queen.

Both sets of parents were walking around greeting the guests, and then they made their way to the musicians’ area. They saw that Adonijah had set up their benches and tuned their instruments that they had left with him after their last practice. They quickly slipped into

their places and joined the other musicians. Both Manasseh and Dinah would rather play than have to mingle with the guests. But as she played, Dinah caught sight of her mother and abba sitting quietly alone. Suddenly, she realized that they were always the host and hostess and had no idea how to be normal guests. She felt a sudden pain as she realized that they hosted to cover up their own social fears. And for the first time, she felt sorry for them. When the song was completed, Dinah motioned to Eliphaz that she had responsibilities, and she went to hug her mother and abba. She brought them some wine and cheese rolls and talked with them for just a few minutes. "I'm so glad you are here. Didn't Martha look lovely? Thank you for teaching her and Bethany how to embroider. Her dress was perfect. Manasseh and I are playing for the dancing, but if you need anything, just wave and I'll come."

"We'll be fine," said Simon gruffly. "We're just getting a little too old to dance."

"I hope you enjoy the music," said Dinah who returned to her spot and played with the musicians until dinner was called. She was sad that her parents were not seated at the table of honor with the bride and groom. Instead, Priest Othniel and his wife Bilbah were seated with the parents and the newly wedded couple. She noticed that Abner was trying to include Simon at the men's table, and Bethany was trying to entertain her grandmother.

Dinah was so glad to be able to sit down and relax. She wasn't sure she could play until midnight. It had been such a stressful day trying to keep Martha entertained. Just as soon as dinner was over, she went to check with Bethany who declared that she was doing fine, just not up to dancing. Dinah returned to the musicians and played with them. It was the perfect place to sit and watch all the activity. She could see the dancers and those who were sitting around the edges. And suddenly she was remembering the other wedding — the New Way wedding — and she wondered if anyone else remembered it. Tears ran down her cheeks as she wondered how different this wedding would feel if Jesus were at the center of it. She knew that no one would be surprised to see her crying, and she was sure they would never guess the reason for her tears, so she let them flow as she played and played and played. Eliphaz had secured two new players to cover for them, so he announced that they could take short breaks whenever they needed to, as long as the music continued until midnight. Dinah watched as Enos approached Martha and took her into the house. Her heart filled with joy, and she prayed for their marriage and that Jehovah would allow her to conceive a child soon. She smiled as she remembered her own wedding night and glanced at Manasseh to see if he had noticed. He had, and tears were rolling down his cheeks. Still the music continued, and Dinah regretted not taking a nap with Judah after noon. She was so tired, but finally Eliphaz thanked the musicians and asked them to return by the ninth hour tomorrow. Dinah carried Judah home since Junos was exhausted. Jacob trudged along behind them and declared that his

feet hurt from all the dancing. "You should learn to play an instrument and then you could sit on a bench all night," said Manasseh.

"And have your fingers fall off," declared Dinah. "Oh, Manasseh, we forgot the wedding cloth."

"They are probably already asleep. We'll get it in the morning." Both of them hoped that Simon didn't hear of their neglect of this important tradition.

"What time should we return tomorrow?" asked Dinah.

"Adonijah said they would serve breakfast from the third hour until noon. But since we are the parents, I suppose we should be there by the third hour," said Manasseh.

"Okay. Let's get some rest." There were no protests and soon the house was quiet.

Everyone slept a little late and Dinah felt the stress relieved. Martha had had her wedding and Bethany had not given birth and ruined it. She lay on her mat for just a little longer before she realized that Judah was up, and Martha was not there to watch him. She jumped up and ran to the living area where she found him unraveling the robe that Martha had started for Jacob. "No. No. No! You must stop this mischief." She considered spanking him but knew that his cries would wake Manasseh and Jacob, so instead, she carried him out to the courtyard. It looked like another beautiful day for the wedding. She checked the sky and guessed that it wasn't even the first hour yet. *Today will certainly be less stressful than all that waiting, but I dread sitting and talking all day. That has the potential to get very messy. Please, Jehovah, let Martha's wedding be happy. Please don't let my parents or anyone else ruin her special day.* She realized that she was daydreaming about the New Way wedding again and was startled to realize that it was time to get moving. "Judah, go wake up Abba and Jacob and tell them it's almost time to leave."

"Where are we going?"

"We are going back to Mr. Adonijah's house, and you can play with your friends."

"Where's Martha?"

"She will be there with Enos. They are married, and she will live with him from now on. I know you will miss her. Go quickly and wake your abba and Jacob. We mustn't be late."

Dinah discovered that she actually enjoyed sitting and visiting with the other ladies. Her parents and some of the older couples had not yet arrived and it had been a long time since she had felt relaxed and comfortable chatting with her peers. Manasseh seemed to be in a good mood and was visiting with the men. Martha and Enos were in a world of their own and were wandering around the yard talking. Jacob had found his friends and Judah was playing with three other young children and being watched by a servant. *Yes, this is going to be a much easier day,* thought Dinah.

Dinah suddenly remembered that they were supposed to collect the marriage cloth and went to find Manasseh. Together they went into the house and Manasseh tucked the cloth inside his robe. He returned



to the men, but Dinah remained admiring the beautiful wedding chamber that Hannah had prepared. Hannah appeared at the door and Dinah thanked her for making it so beautiful. "You are quite an artist with flowers. I'm sure Martha loved it."

"May I ask you a private question?" whispered Hannah as she shut the door behind her.

## Chapter 17

Dinah could not imagine what Hannah wanted to know, but she supposed it was something about Martha. “What’s wrong, Hannah? You know I will help you with anything I can.”

“No, there’s nothing wrong. Well, sorta. I was just ... it’s just ... Dinah, do you ever think about that wedding we played for a couple of years ago at the Gentiles’ house?”

“Yes, I was thinking of it again this morning. I think about it a lot,” replied Dinah.

“I do, too. I can’t get it out of my mind. I’ve talked with Adonijah, but he says I mustn’t mention it to anyone else. Dinah, sometimes I think I will go crazy if I don’t find answers. Do you and Manasseh talk about it?”

“We have, and it seems to really get Manasseh upset, so I don’t bring it up.”

“I’ve got so many questions. I’m glad I’m not the only one. I just had to know.”

“I understand and I promise I won’t tell anyone. It’s probably safer to obey Adonijah and not talk about it. But I wish the men would investigate it and explain to me why those Jews were so happy, and why we are always so scared of doing something wrong.”

“I agree,” whispered Hannah as she opened the door and they returned to visit with the other ladies. Snacks were served at noon. More guests began to arrive, and Eliphaz asked the musicians to prepare their instruments and make sure they would be ready to play at the ninth hour. When Dinah got up to go and tune her lute, she discovered that Manasseh and Adonijah were deep in conversation near the musicians’ area. She couldn’t hear everything, but overheard bits and pieces.

“They were so free.”

“...can’t quit thinking about it.”

“...change everything.”

“... check it out.”

“Who could answer ...”

“Don’t tell anyone...”

Dinah could fill in the blanks and she knew that they were talking about the Gentile wedding, too. She tuned her lute and then returned to greet Bethany who had just arrived. Bethany assured her mother that she was doing fine, but they had agreed to leave right after dinner because she was so uncomfortable sitting. Enos and Martha greeted Bethany and Abner, and Dinah realized that it was time to start the music. She quickly took her place and wondered if her parents were coming today. Eliphaz gave the signal, and the musicians began to play. Dinah was pleased that most of the people from the synagogue had arrived and were eager to celebrate. The musicians played for about an hour and then took a half-hour break to let their fingers rest.

Dinah saw her parents entering the courtyard and went to greet them. They seemed to be more relaxed and sat with Priest Othniel and his wife, Bilbah.

Tonight, there were two guest tables set up at the front. Hannah directed Dinah to sit with Martha, Bethany, and her mother, Esther, and then she joined them. Manasseh was seated with Simon, Enos, Abner, and Adonijah. Dinah was glad that her parents had been so honored, but it stifled the conversation. Martha described her new home to her grandmother. "Soon we'll get settled in and you and Grandfather will have to come and have dinner with us. I want you to see the tablecloth that I embroidered. It's not as nice as Bethany's, but I think I did a pretty good job on it."

"Do you want me to teach you how to make swaddling cloths?" asked Esther. All the ladies grinned as Martha blushed crimson.

"I think that can wait a while, Grandmother. I've just been married a day!" replied Martha.

"Yes, I guess so. Bethany, have you got everything prepared for your little one?"

"Yes, Grandmother. We are just waiting now."

"Don't forget to walk. It's important to walk a lot. It will make the birthing a lot easier."

"Yes, I'm trying to walk, but it feels more like a waddle." Dinah was so grateful that the girls were entertaining her mother. Dinah and Hannah just ate and when asked, said that they were resting up for the long evening of music.

"When did Lilah start playing with your group? I didn't know she played," stated Esther.

"She hasn't played with us before. But Eliphaz talked her into helping since we didn't know how much we would be available to play. He also got Elkanah to play for the first time. I hope they will continue to play with us. We've got to go now. I see Eliphaz motioning for us," said Hannah.

"Have a wonderful evening," said Dinah as she rose from the table and joined the other musicians. They talked a few minutes with Lilah and told her they hoped she would continue to play with them in the future. Eliphaz called the group to take their places and the music began again, and the dancers whirled and laughed and sang. Dinah was determined to not think of the Gentile wedding, nor about Adonijah and Hannah's questions. She was just going to enjoy playing the music. Finally, the sixth hour of the night arrived and Eliphaz thanked all the musicians and said they had done a fine job. Adonijah thanked them, too, and soon everyone was headed home.

Wednesday was essentially a repeat of Tuesday. Everyone who could get off work arrived earlier knowing that this was the last day of the wedding. The musicians began to play at the ninth hour and played until dinner. This time Enos and Martha were seated with just the two sets of parents at the head table. It gave them just a few minutes to visit alone. Both Dinah and Hannah agreed later that it was

a good match as they walked to the musicians' area and left the newlyweds to join their friends.

Thursday morning, Manasseh and Jacob were back in school, and Dinah and Junos were sitting in the courtyard watching Judah play in the yard. Enos and Martha arrived to collect the few things that she had not moved to their new home. She and Dinah went upstairs to collect her robes and cloak, and Dinah gave her a cloth bag to put the rest of her things in. They hugged Dinah, and Martha smothered little Judah with kisses, much to his annoyance. Soon they were in their oxcart and headed to their new home with promises to see them soon. Martha whispered that they may not return for this Sabbath but would visit them next weekend probably. Dinah assured her she understood and wanted her to please her husband.

As they drove away, Dinah and Junos agreed that Martha seemed very happy and Enos was going to be a fine husband for her. Dinah sighed as she knew that as each child left, the dynamics of the family relationship changed. She also knew that while she loved all of her children, she had been closest to Martha. Now Dinah felt alone with Manasseh, Jacob, who would be a man soon, and 3-year-old Judah.

Dinah went inside to restart Jacob's new robe. He would need a new robe before his manhood celebration, and this would be perfect. She was secretly glad that Judah had unraveled the one that Martha had started, since she wanted to make her own design.

She let Junos put Judah down for his nap while she squeezed juice for Manasseh and Jacob's arrival. They talked about the wedding and then Jacob declared that he was going to build a bench to match the other benches in the courtyard. "We need another bench for Enos."

"I'm taking a walk," stated Manasseh without elaboration.

"I need to get busy." She went inside and wove some more and then went into her sleeping room and shut the door so that she could think.

"Dinah, are you okay?" Manasseh asked as he knelt by her mat. She had been sleeping soundly and he was alarmed when he returned, because she was not downstairs ready for dinner.

"Oh, my. I'm sorry. I just came up here to be alone for a few minutes and I must have fallen asleep. Is it already dinner time? I'll be downstairs shortly." Manasseh went downstairs and called the boys to the table. Dinah quickly joined them, and the servants served their dinner. It was going to be an adjustment to not have Martha at the table, but she enjoyed listening to Manasseh and Jacob talk about the bench he was trying to copy. Manasseh promised to look at it tomorrow morning.



After Jonathan's group had met on Sabbath night, Jonathan asked Asher to walk Susanna and the boys home while he talked with

Costas. “Costas, Mordecai has been leading a post-Sabbath night group of men. He says that he needs to cut back, and I was wondering if you could fit that into your schedule. You don’t go back to work until Sunday mornings, right?”

“Yes, sir. But how would I ever replace Mordecai? He knows so much.”

“But he’s getting too old to relate to the younger guys in the group and he suggested that he thought you would be a good fit. Pray about it and let him know if you want to visit his group. Now, I hope you’ll stay with our group and let us help you with any questions or problems. We’ll always be your home group.”

“That’s good, because I’ll probably need a lot of help. All guys? That could be interesting.”

“Yes, I teach two all-men groups and the dynamics are different. In some ways, they are more intense because the men feel comfortable being themselves. Try it and see if it works for you. I feel certain that you are ready for ministry,” said Jonathan. “Shalom.”

“I’ll pray about it. Shalom.”

After the Sabbath, Costas met Mordecai and walked with him to the men’s group. Costas realized that it was a long walk for Mordecai. There were only seven men in the group and Costas already knew over half of them. He felt comfortable leading them, and they readily accepted him. He walked Mordecai home and assured him that he would take good care of them. “Mordecai, if I have any questions regarding the group, should I talk with you or to Jonathan’s group?”

“You can do either. But I may not be around much longer. These bones are getting tired and I’m looking forward to walking and talking with Jesus again.”

“I would miss you, but I understand. Shalom.”

“You’ll be a great leader if you just stay obedient to what the Holy Spirit tells you. Shalom.”



On Friday late afternoon, Manasseh and Dinah walked with Nathan and Achsah’s family to Simon’s. Everyone was still talking about the fun they had at the wedding. Simon and Esther seemed their usual selves as they hosted the Sabbath celebration, and Bethany moved to a cushion in the living area since she found the benches much too hard. Manasseh took his family home soon after dinner.



It was the first day of Nisan, the beginning of a new year, and Dinah was exhausted. She was helping Bethany take care of her firstborn daughter and was not accustomed to being awake so often through the night. She knew she could have sent Junos to help, but

then she would have missed this special mother-daughter bonding that was so precious. She treasured every second of her time with Bethany and new little Deborah, but wasn't sure how much longer she could go without sleep. "Mother, why don't you get a nap? I'm feeling stronger today, and if you lay Deborah here beside me, I think I will be fine."

"I'm afraid I'm going to have to. I can't seem to keep my eyes open and this little one seems to think nighttime is the right time to be awake and play with Grandmother."

"Maybe that's the problem. Maybe you make it too pleasant for her to be awake!" giggled Bethany.

Dinah was too tired to protest. She tucked Deborah beside Bethany and made sure she had everything she needed. How good the mat felt as she shut her eyes. Bethany promised to call if she needed her.

When Dinah awoke, she heard voices in Bethany's sleeping room and wondered who had come to visit. When she saw that it was her mother, she tried to slip back out the door, but her mother called to her and was questioning why the swaddling band was not as tight as it should be. Dinah told her that the midwife had placed it, and she hadn't noticed that it was loose. She was certain that her mother would change it whether it needed it or not. But Bethany was upset. "Mother, please leave the swaddling band alone. The midwife said it should not be removed for at least a week and you are upsetting Bethany," Dinah pleaded.

"Well, if it's too loose, it's not doing any good. It needs to be tighter."

"I haven't noticed any blood, so I think it's fine. But if you insist, I will go and get the midwife to check it. She was just here this morning and felt that everything was fine," said Dinah.

"No, no. I guess they just don't place them as tightly as we used to. You keep a good lookout for bleeding. I don't want my great granddaughter bleeding to death."

"She's fine, Mother. Please don't upset Bethany."

"I'm not upsetting Bethany, you are. Bethany said you are keeping the baby up at night to play."

"Yes, Mother. I enjoy walking the floor with her at all hours. She's only four days old and hasn't figured out her nights from her days, but she's getting better. Would you like some juice, Bethany?"

"Yes, that would be nice. Thank you, Mother." Dinah gratefully left the room and went outside and into the cellar to get some plums to squeeze. She hoped her mother wouldn't stay long. She had just returned to Bethany's room when she heard Manasseh and the two boys enter downstairs. Everyone wanted to see baby Deborah for the first time. Dinah slipped out of the room and left them to visit, hoping that Bethany would be okay without her.

"You need to come home and let Abner spend time taking care of his own family. They have a couple of servants to help, don't they?" asked Manasseh as he followed her downstairs. "You are too tired to go to your parents' tonight."

“Yes, that would be fine. Mother is here right now. I’ll instruct the servants and tell Bethany I am leaving. Abner should be home soon.”

Dinah took three-year-old Judah by the hand and Manasseh was calling for Jacob to hurry. It would soon be the Sabbath and they had quite a walk, since Abner and Bethany had found a house on the west side of Antioch closer to his parents.

When they arrived home, the servants had the Sabbath meal ready. Manasseh quickly washed at the ceremonial water pots and joined the family inside. After dinner, Jacob and his dad were discussing school while Dinah put Judah to sleep. It was a quiet, restful, Sabbath evening.

On Sabbath morning, they made their way to the synagogue and greeted all their friends. Priest Othniel and Mahlon entered with a visitor. Priest Othniel prayed for the people and then asked Mahlon to lead them in some Psalms of worship. Everyone was excited to have a guest speaker and wondered if he would bring news from Jerusalem. Priest Othniel introduced him as a fellow Pharisee and member of the Sanhedrin. “We trained together under Gamaliel. This is Saul of Tarsus.” Paul, who had changed his name after meeting Jesus, sat down on the stool provided for him and began by bringing greetings from Jerusalem. He told them about the famine and asked them to pray for fellow Jews who were suffering there. He read from the scrolls of Isaiah and Micah about the coming of Messiah and how the Jewish people had waited for many, many years for this promise. He told about his zeal to kill those who claimed that Jesus was the fulfillment of this prophecy. Paul told about requesting permission from the High Priest to travel to Damascus and arrest the New Way groups that were forming there. He planned to bring them back to Jerusalem so that they could be put to death. Then he told them about his encounter with Jesus as he approached Damascus. He told them about the bright light that blinded him and the voice that spoke to him from Heaven. Suddenly, the men were on their feet. There was booing and jeering. Priest Othniel’s face was so red and angry, Manasseh worried that he might have a stroke. The men bodily lifted Paul and threw him out of the synagogue. They began to gather stones, while Mahlon, Manasseh, and Adonijah began to yell for them to stop. They reminded the others that the officials of Antioch would hold them accountable for murder if they killed Paul. Some still threw their rocks but didn’t aim to kill. They yelled and hissed at him and warned him to never come back and threatened him if he didn’t leave their city. Paul picked himself up and confronted the men. “Jesus is the promised Messiah. It does not matter what you do to me. You cannot change the Truth. Search your Scriptures!” They rushed at him and would have beaten him except Mahlon and Priest Othniel were ordering them to return to the synagogue. Paul slowly walked back to Kostakis’ house where he had been staying.



“Oh, Master Paul, you are hurt!” cried the servant who opened the door. Quickly the servants gathered to wash and bind his cuts and bruises.

As they ministered to his physical needs, he wept and told them, “I would gladly give my life if they would just listen to the Truth that Jesus is the Messiah. He died to give them eternal life. Do you know Him?” They assured him that Kostakis had told them about Jesus and they were all now followers. Two of the menservants told Paul about their meeting with Jonathan once a week to learn more about Jesus. They indicated that when their time of slavery was complete, they intended to travel back to their homelands in Asia Minor and tell their relatives. Paul spent the rest of the morning encouraging them and teaching them. Barnabas was speaking at the Christian Worship Center and Kostakis and his family were visiting friends.

Around noon, Paul decided to walk over to Jonathan’s house to enjoy the remainder of the Sabbath, but discovered that his hip was a little sorer than he had anticipated. He had landed hard on his left hip and a large bruise had formed. The servants persuaded him to take it easy and they brought cool wet cloths to place on the bruise. Paul was not used to being on the receiving end of care, but appreciated their ministrations. He moved to the courtyard and continued to teach those servants who desired to listen. He answered their questions and felt that it was a productive afternoon.

“Another synagogue, I see,” commented Barnabas as he took one look at Paul’s bruised and lacerated face. “When will you give up trying to reach the Pharisees?”

“When the last one knows that Jesus is the Messiah. You know that. If only one of them would open his eyes, these wounds would be worth it. Jesus suffered a lot more for me,” said Paul emphatically.

“I know, Paul, but one of these days ...” Barnabas didn’t finish his thought.

“How did it go at the Worship Center?”

“They are certainly growing. There’s such a sweet feeling of God’s presence there. Of course, this morning was predominantly Jewish followers. But there were several Gentiles mixed in and everyone seems comfortable together.”

“Jonathan is doing a good job there. Jehovah is blessing his leadership,” said Paul.



Peter arrived at Eli’s farming village just in time for Passover. He had missed coming last year, so there was a lot of catching up to do. And yet, Peter noted, other than everyone being two years older,



nothing had really changed. “Where’s John Mark?” he asked casually as the men sat around visiting after the Seder meal.

A silence descended on the group and Peter could sense the tension. “I had to ask him to leave,” said Eli firmly.

“Did he get lazy on you?” Peter asked, knowing that John Mark had been raised to be a scribe, not a farm worker, and wasn’t accustomed to physical labor.

“No, I found out that he had associated with Gentiles and lied to me about his connection with Jonathan. I felt it best to protect the group from such heresy.”

Peter did not reply but sat deep in thought. “The boys have really grown since I was here last,” he finally said.

“Yes, and Jonah will become a man next month,” said Hiram.

“And Hezron will be right behind him on the fifteenth day of Tammuz,” said Hezekiah.

“What do the boys intend to do? Have they chosen an apprenticeship?” asked Peter. Again, that deathly silence fell, and Peter knew that he had stepped into a sticky matter. “Sorry, I didn’t mean to intrude into your business. I guess I’ve been away too long. I’m weary from my journey and would like to turn in. Do I still have a mat here?”

“Certainly,” said Eli. “You will be in the guest house as usual if that is agreeable to you.”

“You are most kind to provide for me,” said Peter to Eli, as he said goodnight to the other men.

As Peter lay on his mat, he couldn’t help but wonder what the tension was about. But it was late and soon he was sleeping soundly. He had a full week to visit and try to help Eli with whatever was going on. He and Eli had been friends since before the crucifixion, and Eli had started one of the first home groups after the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Since everyone was off work for Passover, Eli invited Peter to walk with him down to the barn. They sat behind the barn on the grass in order to be alone. Peter waited for Eli to speak. “As you probably noticed, we are experiencing quite a bit of tension in the group. None of the men have talked with me about it, but I can feel it and I know that they are unhappy. I’m not sure where this will lead and I would like to know your recommendation on whether to wait and let it blow over, or to address it,” said Eli.

“How long has it been going on?” asked Peter.

“Ever since I asked John Mark to leave,” stated Eli.

“What happened there?” Eli told him and Peter nodded knowingly. He knew that Eli was trying to follow the Law and since he, too, had struggled with the question of whether Gentiles were equal to Jews in God’s eyes, he suspected that God would deal with Eli when He was ready. So, he kept quiet. They talked of many other things, but Peter realized later that he avoided sharing with Eli all the great things that were happening with the Gentile followers. Peter had never backed down from a conflict before, but he felt reluctant to confront Eli

when he knew that his intentions were good. He simply encouraged Eli to keep praying and let God guide him. He would make the way clear.

“I’ll be talking with each of the families individually — that is, if that’s okay with you. I’ve always tried to answer their spiritual questions and encourage each one as their apostle. I’ve assumed that was okay with you,” said Peter tentatively.

“Yes, of course. You are their apostle and I think it’s wise. You may be able to discover a solution to this tension that we are experiencing. I certainly trust you,” said Eli.

Over the course of the next few days, Peter was able to meet privately with each individual family, as was his custom. But what he heard deeply concerned him and he wasn’t sure how to approach it with Eli. He told Eli that he needed a day of prayer before they spoke. After breakfast, on the last day of Passover, he slipped away to his favorite prayer place at the end of the plum orchard. There he laid out before Jehovah all the concerns that he had heard over the past week. He asked God for discernment and wisdom. His heart was broken for his friend Eli. He knew that Eli had the best of intentions, but as with all families, his family was growing up and not interested in being parented any longer. Eli either would need to change his style of leadership, or things were going to get ugly fast. *I’ve dealt with this in groups before, but never with this much at stake. Usually, the group just votes to disband, and they go their separate ways. But this is more than a group. It is truly a family. How do I help them work through this, and is it Your will for them to continue to stay together? Please guide me.* The more Peter prayed, the more he wondered if the group should stay together or whether they would be better off separated. Peter continued to intercede for his friends. Each one of them had unique needs that were not being met by the group. But the main one that God kept impressing on Peter was that each had expressed the lack of freedom to follow God’s leading for his own family. How could they seek God’s will when they were compelled to obey Eli? *Has he inadvertently become their god? And how do I talk with Eli about it?* Even though it was now long past the dinner hour, he continued to pray and seek God’s face. He knew better than to listen to his own thoughts. He had to know God’s clear direction. In the wee hours of the morning, Peter felt that he knew, but he wasn’t so sure that Eli would listen or like what he was hearing from the Holy Spirit. But finally he felt peace and stretched out on the grass for a few hours of sleep. Praying for his people was just part of his job as a shepherd of Jesus’ sheep. It was the hardest part, and the greatest privilege. He quickly slept and didn’t awaken until he heard workers in the almond orchard. He hoped Chakah had saved him some breakfast, because he was hungry after missing dinner last night. He walked slowly back to the village. Chakah greeted him and fixed him a plate. When he asked, she said that Eli had taken the donkey and cart to the market and would be returning soon.

Peter walked to the well to freshen up and to wait on Eli. When he heard the cart return, he walked out to meet Eli and asked when

they could speak. Eli stated that he had much to do today since they had just taken a week off and tasks had accumulated. Peter apologized for not being able to talk yesterday but said that he felt it was important. Eli agreed to meet him alone for dinner and they could talk then as well as afterward. He would appoint Hezekiah to lead the group's worship. All day, Peter walked around the farm and prayed to stay in tune. He worshipped and sang Psalms and took a short nap after noon. Chakah fixed him and Eli plates to take behind the barn so that they could talk in private. Peter led them in prayer and then reminded Eli that they had been friends for a long time.

"Why do I feel that you are going to tell me something bad?" asked Eli.

"Because you are a man of God and you've known for over a year that something was not right here. You asked me to tell you if I could discern the problem and I spent all day and most of the night in prayer for you and your group. You know that I will not tell you something that is not from God."

"I trust you, Peter. But I am getting old. I am afraid of what you will say."

"So, God has already prepared you to know what I heard from your people?" asked Peter.

"I think I know."

"Eli, every family grows up and changes. The parents start off by taking care of the babies. It is backbreaking work. Then there is a stage when everything works well. Everyone is contributing under the parents' supervision. Then the next stage is when the children take over the roles of the parents and the parents step back and let them become adults. The final stage is when the children take care of the parents. I believe that your group is simply changing stages. They love you and want you to guide them through the changes. But if you refuse, the group will explode into a thousand pieces and there will be extreme hurt. I don't know what it will look like, but that's what I heard from God yesterday. Let them go and let God be their guide. Is that what you have been hearing, also?"

"Pretty much. But I don't know how to do it," said Eli.

"Then I suggest you ask them as a group. They have some pretty good ideas. If you all work together, I think, with God's help, you'll figure it all out."

"Thank you, Peter. I'll need to pray some more, but you have confirmed to me what I've been feeling."

"Eli, I need to be leaving soon to check on some groups in Galilee, but if you need me to stay around for a few days, I can."

"No. I need to pray and then talk with the group. I can do it, but thank you, my friend, for the offer. You need a good night's sleep if you are going to travel tomorrow."

# Chapter 18

Jonathan looked with satisfaction at the crowds that were gathering for Sunday morning worship at the Amphitheater. It had become too crowded to meet in the Worship Center and since they had plenty of leadership, they had decided to meet in both places. He still needed to figure out what they would do once the weather turned rainy. But today was sunny with just the right amount of sea breeze. As he scanned the crowd, he noticed a group of six men who seemed out of place. He couldn't put his finger on it, but they reminded him of the Pharisees that Jesus used to encounter. He said a quick prayer that they would not be disruptive and signaled for Elios to begin the music. He led them through a mixture of both Psalms and Greek praises to Jehovah. Jonathan shared with the crowd that his focus this morning was on forgiveness. "Jesus died to forgive our sin and make us right with Jehovah. We need to ask Jesus to forgive us and come inside of us. Then the Holy Spirit directs us to forgive those around us who wrong us." He told the parable that Jesus had taught about the servant being forgiven by his master but refusing to forgive a fellow servant. "As we leave today, let's leave not only rejoicing that we have been forgiven, but joyfully forgiving those who have wronged us and will wrong us this coming week." He prayed a prayer of blessing, and everyone rose to leave. Most had to rush to work or school and get busy with their new week, but others hung around to visit. Jonathan was visiting with a new family who had recently arrived from Jerusalem when he noticed that the six men he had seen earlier were waiting for him. "Good morning, gentlemen. I don't believe we've met," said Jonathan cordially.

"I am Haran. We have been sent by the apostles and James the Just to help you instruct your people in the truth."

"Our work here is growing rapidly, but we have a strong Leadership Team. I am not alone in leading this group," replied Jonathan.

"Then we would like to meet with your Leadership Team," said Haran. "You have not offered us hospitality."

"I am sorry. I was not thinking. I don't know of anyone who could house all of you, but if you don't mind splitting up, I'm sure I can provide housing with some of my leaders. It's just that we are already housing the Apostle Paul and Barnabas, the Apostle Matthew's widow, and John Mark from Jerusalem. We are blessed with leaders, but short on housing. If you do not mind staying with Greeks, it will be no problem," said Jonathan wondering where he could put them.

"Have the Greeks become Jews?" asked one of the men.

"No. But they are followers of Jesus," said Jonathan, suddenly realizing who he was dealing with. "Who did you say sent you?"

"The apostles in Jerusalem and James the Just."

"I suggest that you camp wherever you camped last night. Our Leadership Team will not meet until after work and dinner on Thursday. Do you know where the Christian Worship Center is?"

"No," said Haran tersely.

"I'll be glad to show you if you'll come with me." He began to lead them toward the Center. He knew it would be filled with schoolboys and hoped that they would not push their way inside. "We meet at the second hour. Just come on inside and go up the stairs to my office. You will be welcome to give us your message there."

"So you have two locations?" asked one of the men.

"Yes." But Jonathan did not feel led to elaborate.

"Do you know of any other New Way groups in Antioch?"

"I'm pretty sure there's a group that has recently arrived somewhere on the south side, but you would have to ask the Apostle Paul about that. He mentioned meeting someone from a new group, but I haven't had time to locate them."

"So you are not the leader over all of Antioch?"

Jonathan laughed and said, "Absolutely not. I have enough problems keeping my own group functioning according to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Since my dad was martyred, Peter has been the apostle instructing me."

"So you are the Apostle James' son?"

"Yes. I will look forward to seeing you again to hear your word from the apostles."

Jonathan left them standing outside the Worship Center and walked directly to Kostakis' home. "Kostakis, is Paul or Barnabas here?"

"No. Jonathan, are you all right? You look like you've seen a ghost!"

"No, just some demons from the pit of Hell. Kostakis, a group of Judaizers have arrived from Jerusalem claiming to be sent by the apostles and James the Just. They are teaching that Gentiles cannot become followers of Jesus without becoming Jews first. I've seen them destroy entire groups and I need to talk with Paul or Barnabas about what to do."

"They left early this morning and I'm sure they are preaching somewhere, but they usually don't return until sunset. I could send some servants out to see if they could find them."

"Thanks. I just don't know how urgent it is to deal with it. I feel like I'm over my head."

"Why don't you go to the main market, and I'll send a couple of servants to look around at other places. Come back here by the fifth hour and we'll see if we have found them."

"Thanks, Kostakis. Shalom."

Jonathan headed to the market and quickly saw a large crowd gathered. He thanked Jehovah for helping him find them so quickly. But as he approached the crowd, it wasn't Paul and Barnabas speaking. It was the Judaizers. He quickly walked around the perimeter of the market but did not locate Paul. He checked the

Amphitheater and some of the wells, then headed back to Kostakis' house. Paul and Barnabas were just arriving. The servants had located them at one of the smaller markets and told them that Jonathan needed them. Jonathan thanked them for coming and then reported what he had learned. After the three men had prayed together, Paul and Barnabas went to the market to listen to what the men were teaching. Paul wanted to immediately confront them but knew that he needed to let his anger settle and make sure that the Holy Spirit was in charge and not his own self. But when the men showed up for the fellowship meal at the Christian Worship Center, Paul could no longer keep silent. He confronted them and asked them to leave. They insisted that they had been sent by the apostles and by James the Just. Jonathan tried to assure both the Jews and Gentiles that these men were not teaching what Jesus taught. It seemed that overnight, his years of ministry were being dissolved before his eyes.

All day on Thursday, Jonathan dreaded the Leadership Meeting. But after dinner, he kissed his family goodbye and walked to the Worship Center. There the Judaizers once again made their claims that Gentiles could not become followers of Jesus without first becoming Jews. Jonathan was relieved that his entire Leadership Team stood united and asked them to leave the Worship Center and quit upsetting the people. They asked that they leave Antioch and return to Jerusalem. Demetrius even offered to hire an oxcart and driver at his own expense to take them to Jerusalem. But they refused. "God has sent us here and we intend to fulfill our mission," said one of the men and they all agreed. They left the meeting when the Leadership Team refused to fellowship with them and would not pray with them. The group of men acted grieved and sad that the Leadership Team was so wrong. It even caused Jonathan to question whether they might actually be right. After they were gone, Jonathan confessed to the other men that Satan was attacking him, and he desperately needed their prayers. They spent the next couple of hours in prayer and felt strengthened, but still uncertain as to how to deal with the men. Before the Leadership Team headed home, it was decided that Demetrius would pay for an oxcart and driver to take Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to find out how to deal with the men.

By midmorning on Friday, Paul and Barnabas were bouncing in the back of the oxcart headed to Joppa. They knew it was unlikely that they would find Peter, but felt he would be an asset since he, too, had seen the Gentile believers following Jesus diligently without being circumcised or following the Laws. They camped along the Great Sea for the Sabbath and asked about the Apostle Peter everywhere they stopped to water the ox. They found Peter in Joppa the following Friday and he agreed to go with them to Jerusalem on Sunday. He was especially concerned about Eli's group and wondered whether it would become impossible to reach Eli if he was reinforced by these men and their teaching. Paul and Barnabas spent the Sabbath with Peter preaching in one of the local synagogues. Sunday, near sunset they arrived in Jerusalem and early Monday morning the two oxcart

drivers began their long drive back to Antioch while Paul, Barnabas, and Peter headed to the temple to talk with James the Just.



It was near the end of summer when Josie noticed a recurring thought. He kept thinking about Elam's suggestion that he meet some other followers of Jesus and that desire was growing. He also wanted to meet Jonathan. Since he had moved to Antioch, he hadn't seen or heard from his family except for one visit from two of his cousins over ten years ago, the Apostles James and John. He had a yearning to find family. That was a strange feeling for him, because always before he had wanted to be as far away from family as possible. He decided to walk to Elam's shop and ask about meeting these fellow followers. "Good morning, Mr. Josie. Dad is not here. Is there something I could help you with?"

"You are Gideon, right?"

"Yes, sir."

"Your dad said that you were a follower of Jesus, too. He said that when I was ready, he would take me to meet some other followers. I was just wondering when I could do that."

"Well, I'm not sure which one you would prefer, but there's a small group that meets on Sabbath night and a large group that meets on Sabbath morning. There's a fairly large group that meets on Sunday morning and then another small one that meets at sunset on Wednesdays."

"Oh, my. I was also hoping to meet Jonathan, your leader. Would he be at all of those?"

"No, my dad leads the small groups, and you would probably have more time to visit with Jonathan on the Sabbath. I could meet you here on Sabbath morning. That meeting starts about the second hour."

"Okay. So, what time should I meet you here?"

"About halfway between first and second hour. Would that work for you?"

"Yes, I'll look forward to it and thank you."

All week, Josie's mind was filled with questions: *What will it be like to meet Jonathan? What will it be like to meet his group? Will they be friendly? Will they welcome an outsider? Will it be boring like synagogue when I was a child?* He kept shooing the questions away and stayed determined to keep an open mind. He kept reminding himself of how nice Elam and Gideon had been to him. Elam had never criticized him for not knowing Jesus was the Messiah. He had never even criticized him for over-charging his customers. And suddenly he realized that by over-charging his customers, he had almost put himself and his partners out of business. He suddenly realized that when he was good to his customers, it was really good

for his business. He tried to look forward to meeting Elam's friends and Jonathan and tried to shove aside his fears.

On Sabbath morning, Josie was waiting at Elam's Carpenter Shop just a few minutes past the first hour. He knew he was early but was afraid he would back out if he stayed home any longer. He walked up and down and peeked in the various buildings. He greeted Elam and Gideon when they arrived and they introduced him to Nahum, Elam's younger son, who also worked at the shop. The four men walked around the market to a large two-story building with a sign on it: Christian Worship Center. "What's a Christian?" asked Josie.

"You are!" replied Elam with a laugh. "It means 'little Christ' and 'Christ' means 'Messiah.' The Seleucids nicknamed us Christians and it has stuck. It's easier to say than followers of Jesus but means the same." Josie was shocked that both men and women and children were all gathering in the large empty room. Some stood and some sat, but there didn't seem to be a distinction between male and female, or adult and child. He remembered the synagogue of his childhood where there had been a very definite differentiation. The women were not allowed to be seen with the men. It was as if they didn't exist. Several of the men spoke with him and greeted him; the women nodded. Elam and Gideon guided him through the crowd until they found Elam's wife, Angela, and their two daughters. After introductions were made, they all sat on the floor and waited for the meeting to start. Everyone around them was introduced and of course, Josie couldn't remember any names, but he did remember the warmth and love and welcome that he felt there. He tried to figure out what it reminded him of and decided it reminded him of visits to Uncle Zebedee and Aunt Salome's home, his mother's sister. When the leaders entered the platform, everyone stood to their feet and one of the men led them in singing a Psalm. He didn't know the song, but it was pleasant to hear everyone singing together. Another man led in prayer and then asked everyone to sit.

Josie assumed the man speaking was his cousin Jonathan, since he looked very much like he remembered his cousin James. It would be fun to connect with him afterward. He settled down to listen and chided himself for missing his opening remarks. "We need to stand vigilant against this heresy and not be swayed from what Jesus taught. Jesus taught plainly that there was nothing that we could do ourselves to earn a right relationship with God. That means that we can't buy it by giving alms, we can't work hard enough to earn it, and we certainly are not born to certain parents to deserve it. The only way we can be in a right relationship with Jehovah God is to receive His free gift of Jesus as our Messiah. Jesus said that He was the way, the truth, and the life. Jesus said that no man could come to the Father — that's Jehovah God — except through His blood. So, it is ludicrous to believe that now something more is required. Did God change His mind? No! A thousand times no! Don't let Satan deceive you! Jesus' blood is all that is required, and it is sufficient to cover all our sins. The only thing that we must do is ask and God will accept Jesus' blood as the



covering for our sins. Greeks do not have to become Jews. Romans do not have to become Jews. And Jews don't have to become Gentiles! God created us all and we are all different, but we come to Him through only one door. Jesus said that He was that door to God. He said that all we had to do was enter in. Please don't be confused by men who say otherwise and please don't look with suspicion upon your fellow followers who are not of your own ethnicity. I happen to have been born Jewish, but that didn't make me right with God. I had to ask for Jesus to be my Messiah just like everyone else. And when I asked, Jehovah, in His great mercy, allowed me to become one of His children and to be filled with His Spirit.

"Brothers and sisters, as many of you know, we have sent to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem asking them to assist us in debunking the lies that these men have brought to Antioch. I ask you to pray for the men who are traveling and for their safe and quick return. In the meantime, I implore you to continue to love one another and don't doubt that Jesus died to pay for your sins, and those of your friends. Jesus said that Satan would send false teachers who would lead many astray before He returned. So, hang on and keep loving each other. Dan, will you lead us in a prayer of blessing?"

Josie had lots of questions but was eager to meet Jonathan. Elam said that they would need to wait for a bit while the crowds cleared out. Elam sent Gideon and Nahum home with his wife and daughter and most of the others left quickly, too. A group gathered around Jonathan, and Josie noted that Jonathan looked exhausted. When Jonathan finally was able to slip away, he came over to where Elam and Josie were waiting for him. His face brightened when Elam introduced them. Jonathan embraced Josie and told him how happy he was to meet him and how excited he was that he had invited Jesus to be his Messiah. "Now, will you please accept my invitation to spend the Sabbath with me and my family? I have no other responsibilities until the Sabbath has ended." Josie agreed and thanked Elam again for inviting him to the Worship Center. Josie and Jonathan walked toward Jonathan's home. "Susanna has taken my three sons home. Zebedee is eleven and never sees a stranger. Zerah is eight and prefers working with wood. He's hoping to help Elam out in the summer. And Zephaniah is two and a total handful! I hope you won't mind being surrounded by children."

"Not at all, I was raised with a houseful. What news do you have from home? I haven't heard anything since your dad visited me maybe ten years ago."

"Then you probably haven't heard that my dad was killed for preaching about Jesus."

"Oh, Jonathan, not James!"

"Yes, King Herod had him killed and would have killed Peter, too, but God helped him to escape. I have to believe that God is good and knew that my dad was tired and ready to spend all eternity with Jesus."

“Now, you’ll have to take it a little slow. Remember, I’m new at this. Are you saying that your dad and Jesus are alive and well and walking around in Heaven?”

“Oh, yes. After Jesus’ resurrection, He had a supernatural body and He promised that we would all have one when we died. It was super cool. He could go through locked doors and just appear and disappear. He said that there would be no pain and no death. We would just live forever with Him. I miss my dad, but I’m not sorry that he’s with Jesus and your mother and with Grandpa Zebedee.”

“I figured Uncle Zebedee wouldn’t last much longer. He was looking pretty old at my mother’s passing. What happened?”

“He took Peter to Bethsaida and their boat got caught in a storm on the way back. He and several crewmembers were lost at sea. But he was a follower of Jesus and I know he’s in Heaven with Him.”

“How’s Aunt Salome?” asked Josie quietly, expecting the worst.

“Spry as ever. I got to visit them four years ago. Jenay and her husband Yanis have three children. Mother moved back to Capernaum after Dad passed. Uncle John and Aunt Marta are in Ephesus working with a group of new followers there. Here we are.” The two older boys came running to greet their abba and his guest.

Zebedee said, “Mother is putting Zephaniah down for his nap and we’re supposed to warn you not to come in the house or she’ll never get him down.”

“Thank you, Zebedee. Josie, just pull up a bench. Susanna will bring us some juice in a few minutes. Now, Elam told me that you have recently realized that Jesus was indeed the Messiah and invited Him into your life. How’s that going? Do you have any questions?”

“I am filled with questions! Elam and Gideon are trying to teach me to hear the Holy Spirit and be obedient. They have really been very helpful to me. They invited me to the Sabbath meeting and said it would encourage me, but I really felt more confused than encouraged.”

“Oh, I’m sorry. But thanks for the reminder. I mustn’t forget that there are people who are coming that don’t know the background,” responded Jonathan.

“Abba, Rawla is limping. Can you come look at her foot?” asked Zebedee.

“Do you know anything about goats?” asked Jonathan. “I certainly don’t!”

“Not really, but let’s see what’s up.”

Zerah held Rawla while Jonathan and Josie looked at the goat’s foot. Neither man could see anything wrong, but Jonathan promised to take her to the farmer that had sold her to them to see what he suggested. “I’ll take her in the morning,” Jonathan assured the boys. “If it’s not one thing, it’s another,” laughed Jonathan.

“You seem like a very busy man.”

“I am. My life is rich and full. I can hardly wait for you to meet Susanna. She has brought so much joy to our home. You may not

know that my first wife is also with Jesus. Susanna and I married almost three years ago. She keeps me on track.”

“Whoa, another death. Isn’t that depressing to you?”

“I hate the grieving period because we miss those that are no longer with us on earth. But Jesus promised that we would all be together again, if we are His followers. That’s going to be quite a grand reunion and I don’t see death as a terrible thing — just a temporary separation.”

“Hearing about your family makes me miss mine. Have you heard anything about my brothers and sisters? I have heard nothing since mother’s death.”

“I don’t know anything about your sisters or Jude or Simon. As far as I know they are still in Nazareth. But James is heading up all the home groups of followers in Jerusalem. There’s not many left. Probably over a hundred groups have relocated to other parts of the world to share the New Way. I don’t know how many are still in Jerusalem.”

“Yeah, I was surprised to learn that there are Jesus followers everywhere. So, James is in Jerusalem?”

“Yes. He is called James the Just to separate him from my dad and James the son of Alpheus. He’s an unofficial leader of all the followers of Jesus with the other apostles. He oversees all the home groups. Everyone just turns to him for help. He also preaches at the temple courtyard every day. You would be really proud of him.”

“It would be great to see everyone again. I don’t know about going all the way to Jerusalem, but I may schedule a trip to Nazareth soon. I’m so busy, I don’t know when I could go. Do you want to travel with me? We could rent an oxcart and do it quicker. Of course, that would be two weeks off work. It sure would be nice to see everyone.”

“You are talking to a minister who never takes time off! But I would love to go! If you ever decide to do it, let me know. Of course, I can’t leave until we get this mess cleaned up with the Judaizers.”

“Who or what are Judaizers?” asked Josie.

“Oh, sorry. Judaizers believe that in order to become followers of Jesus, you must first adopt the Jewish religion. You have to become a Jew and follow everything written in The Law and The Prophets. Jesus taught that The Law and The Prophets was written to show people that they needed a Messiah. Once that Messiah came and died, the Law would be null and void — no longer necessary. I heard Jesus teach this and I’m confident of it. But a few months ago, six Judaizers came from Jerusalem and claimed that they were sent by your brother and the other apostles and elders, and they were insisting that Gentiles could not follow Jesus without first becoming Jews. As you could probably tell this morning, our group is made up of both. But now, when I try to preach what Jesus taught, I’m just viewed as someone who is off track and influenced by the pagans around me. Our gathering has really been affected. We were reaching a lot of people and Satan will do his very best to stop anything good. But that may be

a little too much information for a new follower. Let me or Elam know if you have questions. I don't want to scare you off."

"So, are you saying that not all followers believe the same thing?" asked Josie.

"Josie, a lot of believers believe different things. I have a member of my Leadership Team who still keeps a kosher house. He doesn't require it of anyone else, he just feels better eating kosher. He knows it doesn't affect his relationship with God. There's nothing wrong with having differences. But there are essentials that Jesus taught that cannot be compromised on. Do you understand the problem with believing that you must become a Jew to become a follower of Jesus?"

"Well, I thought you made it pretty clear that it makes Jesus' blood look inadequate or insufficient to pay for our sins," said Josie.

"Hallelujah, somebody was listening!" shouted Jonathan.

"Of course I was listening! That's what I came there to do. Jonathan, you are a very good teacher. You just need to explain to the new people what is going on."

"I guess I forgot that we might still have new people coming. It seems everyone is leaving instead of coming."

"Well, it's not true, but it will be if you don't explain the situation," said Josie.

"I give up!" Susanna released Zephaniah who quickly ran into his abba's arms. "Jonathan, you can't sit right here by the door talking when I'm trying to get him down. Oh, hello. I'm sorry, I thought Jonathan was talking to the boys."

"No, Susanna, this is my cousin, Josie."

"I'm so glad to meet you, but we have a very strong-willed two-year-old who absolutely will not nap if Jonathan is home." Josie laughed and said he remembered his mother wrestling to get his little sisters to sleep. They were twins and could outlast her by keeping each other awake. "Oh, that would be the end of me if I had two of him!"

"You are fearfully and wonderfully made, my son!" declared Jonathan as he held Zephaniah on his lap. "But you'd better learn to mind your mother or you're going to be in big trouble with me. Do you understand?"

Zephaniah nodded and Jonathan called for Zerah to keep an eye on him as he ran toward the older boys and the goats. "You sit," Jonathan said to Susanna, "while I get us some juice."

## Chapter 19

“Where are you from, Josie?” asked Susanna.

“I was raised in Nazareth, then moved to Antioch sixteen years ago. I own the Carpentry and Fine Furniture Shop. I have recently accepted Jesus as my Messiah. Elam has been answering my questions. When I found out that Jonathan was his leader, I couldn’t wait to meet his family. I haven’t been very close to family in a long time.”

“Well, I hope that changes and you feel welcome here anytime. We will keep you entertained with one crisis after another! Yes, Zerah, what is it?”

“Did Abba tell you that Rawla is sick?”

“No, he didn’t. What’s wrong?”

“She’s got a sore foot and Abba said he would take her to the farmer tomorrow to see what is wrong.”

“Good, because I certainly don’t know anything about goats. Did you tell Mr. Josie that you like to work with wood? He’s a carpenter. Would you like to show him the boat you made for Zephaniah?”

Zerah brought the boat to Josie and Josie commended Zerah on his excellent work. “If you keep learning and being very careful about the details, I’ll certainly hire you to help me when you get a little older and stronger. How old are you?”

“I’m eight and my brother is eleven and Zephaniah is two.”

“Well, I’ll tell you something special,” said Josie. “My oldest brother was Jesus. And then I had three other brothers, and twin sisters. We were always doing things together. Can you guess what Jesus’ favorite thing to do was?”

Zerah asked if he liked to carve boats. And Josie agreed that Jesus was a very good carpenter, but his favorite thing to do was to fish. “We were very poor, and he would catch fish and cook them for the family.” Zerah ran off to play with his brothers.

“Josie, that’s amazing. You actually grew up with Jesus?” Susanna asked in surprise.

“Yes, but I didn’t know that there was anything different about Him until after He started preaching and claiming to be God. I actually thought He was crazy and tried to get Him to come home and let us hide Him somewhere. I didn’t even know He was only my half-brother until my mother’s passing. Uncle Zebedee told me.”

“So, you grew up thinking He was just a normal older brother. Wow! How special.”

Jonathan brought out a tray of fruit juice and the boys came running. He made them sit down and talk with the adults for a few minutes while they enjoyed their snack. Zebedee seemed to be deep in thought and not as talkative as usual. Both boys were concerned about the goat and Jonathan hoped that was all it was. They finished

their snack and ran back to check on Rawla. Zephaniah had settled in Jonathan's lap and was fast asleep.

"That boy loves his abba," said Susanna.

"And all this talk about family makes me love my boys. They are growing entirely too fast."

"What is Zebedee interested in?" asked Josie.

"He's working at the Mercantile Store right now with one of our group members. He's not sure whether he wants to apprentice there or with a scribe. He loves people and is a very good teacher. So, I don't know God's plan for him. We'll have to wait and see.

"Let me tell you about the group that I will be leading tonight and see if you are interested in visiting. We divide our large gathering into smaller groups of about twelve to fourteen people each. They meet once a week so that they can function as a family unit. There is a leader and a host. The format is really casual. They usually talk about something related to following Jesus or something that He taught and then they pray for each other. We ask everyone in the big group to participate in at least one worship service either on the Sabbath or on Sunday morning, and one small group. Your small group leader is your spiritual shepherd. This group that I teach tonight is all men. Elam teaches two different groups — both are mixed groups, families and singles, men and women. One of his groups meets Wednesdays after work and one meets on Sabbath evening. Have you visited either one of them?"

"No. Not yet," said Josie.

"You can visit any group and decide what is best for you whenever you feel ready for more growth."

"It is a growing experience because you hear what other people are struggling with, and realize you are struggling with the same thing. Sometimes you can help them and sometimes they help you. But there's a tightly knit bond between the people in each group," explained Susanna.

"I think I would enjoy going with you tonight, if you are sure it's okay. I usually take Sabbaths off, just because I'm Jewish. My partners are also Jewish, so we just close the shop. The rest of the week, I often work late into the night because I don't have a family to go home to. I could take off on Wednesdays at sunset if I wanted to, I guess. I may visit both and then decide."

"Susanna will fix us a post-Sabbath meal and then we'll have to walk back to the Worship Center. Hopefully, you'll learn something helpful and not just hear the fussing and feuding about the Judaizers. It's been really hard on some groups and others are more spiritually solid. I like to think that my group is fairly mature. But they can surprise me!" said Jonathan.

"What's Zebedee up to?" Jonathan asked Susanna. "I'm surprised he's not here and pestering Josie with a thousand questions."

"I don't know. I haven't seen him except for the snack. And he was awfully quiet."

“Excuse me, Josie, but I need to check on my son.” Jonathan handed Zephaniah to Susanna, and he didn’t stir.

“Certainly.”

Jonathan walked around the yard and didn’t see Zebedee anywhere. He asked Zerah where he was and was told that he was hiding behind the barn. Jonathan peeked behind the barn and found Zebedee on his knees praying. He didn’t want to disturb him but wanted him to know that he cared. He went and knelt beside Zebedee and quietly asked if there was anything he could do to help. “Abba, I’ve got homework due. I need to be working on it, but it’s the Sabbath and I don’t want to do something that would displease Jehovah. I’m asking God to help me get it all done after the Sabbath, but there’s a lot of work and I don’t want to disobey Mother by staying up late. I don’t know when I’m supposed to do it when it is assigned on Friday, and I had to work until sunset. It’s due tomorrow.”

“Yes, I can see that would be a dilemma. But I don’t think God would be displeased with you doing schoolwork as long as you acknowledge that it is the Sabbath. I’ll talk with Rabbi Absalom and see what he thinks. I’m proud of you for wanting to please God. That makes me very happy. But I think it will be fine. I work on the Sabbath by taking care of people and teaching, so I think it will be okay for you to be studying. Why don’t you go inside and get started?”

“And Abba, Zerah said that Jesus liked to fish. Could we go fishing sometime? We’ve never gone fishing.”

“I don’t know when I would fit it in or where, but yes, I’ll look into it. Now, get busy and let me return to my guest.”

“Okay, Abba. Should I milk Rawla tonight or is she too sick?”

“She will definitely need to be milked. If you don’t milk her, she would be in a lot of pain. I’ll help you boys if you need me to.”

“Thanks, Abba.”

Zebedee seemed to be back to his usual cheerful self and went into the house and started his homework. Jonathan made a mental note to ask Absalom why he was assigning homework over the Sabbath. This was something new. He whispered to Susanna and Josie what the issue was. “But I thought we were free from the Law,” stated Josie.

“We are and we aren’t. There’s a lot of confusion. Because we are Jewish, we were all raised with the Law. It’s hard to know how to function without it. But you are right, we are free from it affecting our salvation. Jesus taught that the Sabbath was good for us and so we try, as a rule, to observe it. But some Sabbaths are my busiest days. Josie, you’ve got the boys wanting to go fishing. Do you know where we would do that? Do you ever go fishing?”

“No, not since I moved to Antioch. I’ll ask around and see if I can find a good spot. Maybe we could take the boys and give you a little rest and relaxation.”

“Fishing does sound good. It’s something my dad and I did a lot.”

They continued to reminisce even though they were a generation apart. Family was family and it was good to be together. Susanna

brought them a tray of food so they could eat before sunset. Once the boys finished milking, they joined the others, and everyone enjoyed the fresh goat milk. Josie thanked Susanna and the boys for a lovely day, and Jonathan told the boys to be good and kissed them goodnight. He kissed Susanna on the cheek.

Jonathan and Josie walked back to the Worship Center and lit a lamp near the stairs. He took Josie up to his office and began to arrange the benches for the group. Josie noted that Jonathan's office was more like a conference room or classroom with a worktable at one end. He supposed a lot of meetings took place here. Before the other men began to arrive, Jonathan told Josie that he was welcome to participate at any level that felt comfortable. He could share as much or as little as he wished. He was welcome to just sit and observe, or he was welcome to share anything he wanted. Josie nodded that he understood. Jonathan began to greet the men as they arrived. He introduced Josie to each one without mentioning that he was his cousin. They were apparently used to visitors and welcomed him heartily. The men looked normal enough. Some were Jews but most were Gentiles and Josie was okay with that, but it was different from the way he had been taught. His work had always taken him into contact with Gentiles, but it seemed strange to see Jews and Gentiles greet each other with embraces and genuine goodwill. He was intrigued. Most of the men were talking about their work and he surmised that a couple of them were stone masons. Another man was talking about his need for sleep with a newborn in the house. The men seemed to really care. One man sat beside Josie and asked if this was the first time he'd visited a group. When Josie admitted that it was, the man shared about the first time he went to a group and it made Josie feel comfortable realizing that every one of these men had been where he sat tonight — new and uncomfortable, yet curious. Jonathan called for the meeting to start and led them in prayer. Then another man led them in singing a song that Josie was not familiar with. It was nice and by the end, he was humming along. Jonathan introduced Josie as "our new friend" and didn't mention that he was a cousin. *I guess he meant it when he said that I could share or not share. He's not going to share for me! I could remain anonymous. That's nice.* Jonathan asked if there were any questions about the weekend teaching.

"Yes," said one of the stone workers. "You said that Satan was leading the Judaizers, and I don't know a lot about Satan. How do you know if you are being led by him?" Several of the other men agreed that they needed to hear that answer, too. Josie thought to himself: *That's a good question.*

Jonathan responded, "Okay, first of all, Satan is the enemy, the antithesis of Jesus. So, if you are hearing something opposite from what Jesus taught, you can be pretty sure it's from Satan. Also, Jesus told my dad about a time when he was directly tempted by Satan. He said that Satan often uses three specific lies that we need to look out for. Be wary if what you hear makes you feel unloved by God. Be wary if what you hear makes you feel that you are orphaned or alone and



have to make a decision by yourself or defend yourself. And be wary if what you hear is a shortcut or deviation from what God has already told you. So, if God has said go to Joppa and you are hearing, 'Well, you don't have to go all the way to Joppa, you could stop in Caesarea or stay where you are,' that's a pretty good clue that it's not God speaking. Let's take time to share. What has been your experience? How do you determine when it is the Holy Spirit speaking and when it is not?"

"I'm not sure I've heard Satan speak, but I know I hear myself speak. I think that may be harder to figure out."

"True. I get confused sometimes because what I hear doesn't make sense. I want to rely on my own logic or understanding. It's really hard to be obedient when what I hear doesn't make sense."

"But how do you know that it's God speaking and not Satan when it doesn't make sense?"

"I guess the longer I follow Jesus, the more I recognize His voice. One thing I've noticed about Satan's words is that he condemns and accuses me, while Jesus is always encouraging me and is kind even when I've messed up."

Josie realized that that was the way Jesus had always treated him when he was growing up. Even when he messed up big time, Jesus was always gentle and kind and helped him clean up the mess. He wanted to say that to the men but was afraid it would distract from the discussion, and he wanted to learn more than he wanted to talk.

"Yeah. I've noticed that Satan often tells me I shouldn't have done something after it's too late to correct it. Jesus always warns me ahead of time. Do you know what I mean?"

"Like it's a good warning, but too late, and it usually makes me feel terrible."

"Can you give an example?" asked Jonathan.

"Well, the other day, my boss asked me to work late, and I didn't respond very kindly. In fact, I told him that I didn't see him working late. Things got pretty ugly fast, and I said some things I shouldn't have. All I could hear in my head was 'And you call yourself a Christian,' and 'Now you've lost his respect, and you'll never get it back.' I wrestled with it for a while, then I asked Jesus for direction. All I heard was, 'Go clean it up and I'll be right here with you.' I went in and talked with my boss and apologized. I told him that I responded without respect for his position, and I regretted it because it hurt our relationship, but it also hurt my relationship with Jehovah God. He seemed intrigued and I told him that I was a follower of Jesus and wanted to always please God, but sometimes I messed up. It was pretty neat to get to tell him who I was."

"Thanks for sharing that. When we are obedient to the Holy Spirit, He can turn our messes into good stuff. Let's move to prayer requests. How are Elizabeth and the baby doing?" asked Jonathan.

"Getting better; thank you for your prayers. The midwife said she will need to stay in bed for a few more weeks. I'm grateful for all your wives who are helping out. Otherwise, I wouldn't know what to do."

Others shared their personal needs and then the men began to pray for each other. Josie had chosen to remain quiet and just listen. But when he was on his knees and everyone else was praying out loud, he very simply said, “Jehovah, thank You for sending Jesus to be my Messiah. Now help me learn to hear Him.”

Josie thanked Jonathan for a wonderful day with his family and slipped away. He knew that tomorrow would be a busy day meeting with another customer that Claudius had sent his way.



All fall, Jonathan and the rest of the Leadership Team watched the Judaizers rip apart their gatherings. Sometimes the six would preach together at the markets, or in front of the Christian Worship Center, or at the Amphitheater. At other times, one of them would manage to get an invitation to a home group. By winter, Jonathan didn't have to worry about what to do when the rains came. The Christian Worship Center could easily accommodate all those who were still attending, and they quit renting the Amphitheater for additional space. Once again, Jonathan began struggling with his own lack of joy and found himself going through the motions. He dreaded each gathering because of all the chaos, confusion, and questions. Susanna encouraged him and supported him in every way she could, but she was just as concerned as he was. Lives were being ripped apart. Gentiles were questioning their relationship with God, and Jews were returning to kosher rules and following The Law and The Prophets. Many were convinced that Jonathan and the rest of the leaders were wrong and were being influenced by the pagan people around them. A dark cloud seemed to hang over the followers of Jesus — both those who supported the Judaizers and those who did not.

The Leadership meetings were the only bright spot in the week as they were united in their belief, but even so, they spent most of their time trying to put out fires. Each week, they prayed for the safe and quick return of Paul and Barnabas with news from Jerusalem.



Josie had been inundated with work all summer and fall. His business was booming, and while he often thought of Jonathan and Elam, he felt he needed his Sabbaths to rest and prepare for the new weeks ahead. But as the rains came and things began to slow down, he decided he would try to make time for the Sabbath worship services and maybe visit Elam's group sometime. He had really learned a lot on that one visit to Jonathan's group. But deep down inside, he wondered if Elam's family group might meet his need for

family. He didn't want to intrude on Jonathan and Susanna's time, although they made him feel welcome.

On the Sabbath, he walked to the Christian Worship Center and tentatively entered. He once again was greeted warmly and he felt the peace and love within the room, but he also felt the grief and gloom and realized that the crowd was much smaller than when he had visited before. He guessed that the Judaizers were still tearing the people apart and he wasn't sure he wanted to be there. He looked around for Elam and found him and his family sitting in the same area as before. He walked over and joined them. He shook hands with Elam and was introduced to Gideon's new wife. He was invited to sit with them, and Elam once again invited him to visit his small family group. He told Josie that he should come around sunset on Wednesday and dinner would be provided. "What should I bring?" asked Josie.

"Just yourself! We'd love to have you."

"No promises, except that I'll try my best to be there. But you know how work goes."

"Yes, I understand."

The worship service started with a man leading some Psalms and the crowd began to sing. Jonathan didn't seem to be there. Instead, a man named Samuel brought a message about Moses walking and talking with God. He mentioned his times of discouragement and failure, but he emphasized that God provided him with helpers to assist him and encourage him at just the right times.

Afterward, Josie visited with Elam and his family. He asked where Jonathan was and was assured that he occasionally took a sanity break, but that everything was fine. Josie remembered that he had promised to find a fishing spot for them. He said his goodbyes to Elam's family and once again congratulated Gideon on his marriage.

As Josie walked toward home, he realized that he was looking forward to visiting with Elam's group on Wednesday. He wondered what it would be like to be in a mixed group. *I've never really spoken with a woman except Susanna that one time. Well, except for my family. Yes, it will be interesting!* Josie realized that he had hoped to spend the afternoon with Jonathan and was disappointed. *My goodness, I've been alone since I moved here. Why am I craving friendships now? My work buddies will be back tomorrow, and I need to plan the week.*

All week Josie continued to look forward to the family group at Elam's. In some ways it made the week seem to fly by, and in other ways, it seemed like forever. Thankfully, he was busy with work and didn't have a lot of time to dwell on it. On Wednesday, his fellow workers left him to close up the shop as usual. Just as soon as they were gone, he pulled the curtain over the door, locked up, and began to follow the directions Elam had given him to his house. A young couple with two small children were approaching the door at the same time. They introduced themselves and welcomed him. He was surprised that they didn't even knock — just went inside and called for

Elam. Elam waved at them but was busy talking with another man who looked to be closer to Josie's age. The living area was quickly filling with adults and the children were sent upstairs to play. Soon, Elam welcomed his guests, introduced Josie, and invited everyone to take a seat. Josie followed the men to a table separate from the women. The servants served their plates and soon the men were talking about their week. There was a lot of laughter and teasing and Josie felt himself relaxing and enjoying the banter. These men seemed to behave more like brothers than he had expected, but he wasn't sure what exactly he had expected. They seemed to know each other well. In a way, it made him feel left out, but on the other hand, it gave him a hunger for being a part of the group in the future, and the food wasn't bad, either! When dinner was over, everyone moved to the living area and found cushions or benches to sit on. Gideon and his wife and the young couple he had met earlier sat on the floor and leaned against the wall. Josie chose a bench and one of the ladies led the group in a couple of songs. Josie didn't know either of them but enjoyed listening. It seemed that everyone else was in couples except for Nahum, Elam's son. Elam asked if anyone had questions about the messages this past Sabbath. When no one did, Elam said, "Samuel pointed out that God always provided encouragement for Moses when he became discouraged. How has God encouraged you recently?" Two men and a lady shared. Then Elam asked them to think of ways they could encourage another follower this week. Some of the women mentioned cooking a special dish for a friend, some of the men mentioned a person they needed to visit. Josie realized that what he really wanted to do was take Jonathan and his boys fishing. He asked, "Does anyone know of a good fishing spot? I would like to take a friend fishing, but I don't know where to do that."

"Are you new in Antioch?" asked one of the men.

"No, I just haven't taken time to go fishing and a friend mentioned that he'd never been. I just thought it would maybe encourage him and help him to not be so stressed." The others agreed that it was a good idea and two men gave him directions to their favorite spots.

Elam asked them to share prayer requests and Josie asked them to pray that his friend would make time to go with him. He realized that now he was committed to taking some time off himself but felt that it was important.

After a short time of prayer, everyone said their goodnights and headed to their homes.

On Thursday afternoon, Josie found himself really busy, but also felt strongly that he needed to keep his promise. First, he went to the Mercantile Store and bought fishing hooks and string. Then he walked to Jonathan's house and found Jonathan at home with his family. He told Jonathan that he wanted to take him and the two older boys out for a fishing trip and fish dinner. They checked Jonathan's schedule, and the only possible time would be for them to go on Tuesday right after school and miss the fellowship meal that night. They agreed to meet at the Christian Worship Center and the boys seemed really

excited about it. Jonathan knew that he could get someone to cover the fellowship meal, and Susanna's brothers could escort her there and back.

Of course, Tuesday morning dawned cold and rainy. Josie was disappointed and knew that the boys would be. He wished he hadn't offered to take them fishing. He kept watching the sky as he smoothed out some wood for a customer's bed. He decided he would just keep working. They would figure out that he wasn't going to take them fishing in this downpour. As it neared time to leave to meet the boys and Jonathan at the Worship Center, he heard a quiet voice inside of him telling him to go to meet them anyway. He looked around to see if his partners had noticed anything. They didn't look up from their work. *Is that You, Jesus, speaking to me? It reminds me of Your voice.* He prayed silently. *This is awesome!* He quickly grabbed his cloak and told his partners he would be out for the rest of the day. "You aren't going fishing in this weather!"

"No, but I promised the boys, so I'm going to go meet them. I'll see you tomorrow." He hurried out the door and toward the school. Jonathan was talking with a group of servants who were waiting on students when Josie arrived. "Josie, I can't believe you came out in this storm. We can't fish in this weather."

"No, but Jonathan, I just heard the Holy Spirit say to come and meet you anyway."

"Boys, come on, let's head home. We can't fish in this weather, but we can visit with Mr. Josie." The four of them headed to Jonathan's house and Susanna greeted them and welcomed Josie to their home. Once they were all inside, Susanna served them juice and they sat around the little living room and visited. Josie told the boys that he had located a fishing place that they needed to check out. They decided that fishing just might need to wait until spring arrived and the rains quit, because it would be too hard to plan.

"How about if we make it a definite plan to go fishing during the week of Passover? The rains are always gone by then and you'll be out of school and I'm going to propose that we kidnap your dad and do an overnight camping trip. Would that be agreeable with you, Susanna?" asked Josie. Jonathan got a faraway look in his eyes and Susanna noticed the tears. She knew that he was missing his dad and possibly his whole family. She heartily agreed that it would be something wonderful for them to look forward to.

"Josie, we've already made arrangements to miss the fellowship meal with the Center tonight, but when the rains began, I made a dish for us to take. I hope you will join us," said Susanna.

"I knew you had something planned at the Worship Center, but Elam hasn't told me about this. Can you explain what it is? I don't want to impose," said Josie.

"Boys, you need to go to the table and do your homework before Zephaniah wakes up. You know he will want to play when he wakes up and discovers you are home," reminded Jonathan.

“Zebedee usually works at the Mercantile Store for a couple of hours after school,” explained Susanna. “But he took off today to go fishing.” She turned to Zebedee, “Now you can get your homework done so you won’t be up so late.”

“Josie, I’m surprised Elam hasn’t told you, but we come together as a large gathering after work on Tuesdays to share a meal. The home groups in Jerusalem do it and we started it here just as soon as we had a building,” explained Jonathan. “Everyone brings a dish to share, and we just enjoy fellowship together. It will probably be a small crowd tonight because of the rain.”

“I’m game, if you are sure I’ll be welcome. I don’t have a dish to share,” said Josie.

“Susanna will take care of that. But Josie, something is different about you today. You seem ready to give this a try,” said Jonathan.

“I attended your group several months ago and that was great and it answered some questions for me. Then last Sabbath I visited Elam’s family group, and something just felt right. I can’t put my finger on it, but it meets my need for family. And I actually felt comfortable sharing. But then this afternoon just blows me away. I heard my brother, my half-brother, speaking to me when he has been dead for fifteen years. I heard him as clear as day. You guys talk about hearing the Holy Spirit speak and guide you, but I’m positive that I heard Jesus. What does that mean?”

“You are not the only one who says that the Holy Spirit sounds like Jesus’ voice. And if you think about it, He said that after He went back to Heaven, He would send His Spirit to live inside of us. He said that He would not leave us as orphans. And I remember Him saying He would be with us until He returned. I’ve never thought about it, but maybe it is His self that lives inside of us and guides us. It is His Holy Spirit. Remember that we serve one God, not three separate ones. So, I guess it would either be God’s voice or Jesus’ voice, and Jesus said He and God were one,” mused Jonathan.

“Josie, I agree that it’s a very special moment when you recognize His voice for the first time. I don’t know if everyone hears it exactly the same way. Some people are just given thoughts, while He speaks to others. But once you figure out what His voice sounds like, then He can begin to lead you step by step and you can talk with Him and ask Him questions,” said Susanna. “May I ask what He said to you, or is that too personal?”

“Sure. I was debating whether it was worth stopping my work and walking to the school just to tell you that it was raining, and we couldn’t go fishing. That seemed pointless to me, and I knew you would figure it out for yourselves. But I heard very clearly, ‘Go meet them anyway. They are expecting you.’ So, I grabbed my cloak and ran to the school and here I am. I’ve really enjoyed visiting with your family this afternoon and I would like to go to this fellowship meal if I’m welcome. But I’m trying to figure out what fellowship means,” said Josie.

“Fellowship. Hmm. If you’ve got the Holy Spirit inside of you and I’ve got the Holy Spirit inside of me, and we’re both being obedient to

Him, then there's a special bond that makes us closer than brothers and sisters. We have the same insides," said Jonathan.

"I like to think of it as a pair of gloves. You are a glove and I'm a glove, but it's the Holy Spirit who's got His hands inside both of us, so there is perfect unity and harmony. It's totally different from friendship or even marriage. We are joined together by a common guide," explained Susanna. "I didn't realize we had so many Christian words. You can help us by pointing out things that you don't understand. There are probably a lot of others who don't understand either."

"I'm glad my ignorance can be of some value!" said Josie with a grin and Susanna knew that she had not offended him. "All I know is that I definitely heard Him speak and I want to always be obedient. It's an incredible feeling and I need to make some changes to my life so that I can make it a priority to grow and learn everything I can. There's this urgency or something inside of me that wasn't there before," said Josie.

Jonathan helped the boys finish up their homework and Josie went with them to milk the goats. He asked about Rawla's sore foot and was told that the farmer had found a thorn in her leg, and she was perfectly well now. After they delivered the milk to the cellar, everyone walked quickly to the Christian Worship Center and found a group gathering for the meal. Susanna added her food to the table already filling with dishes and joined the women. Jonathan put Zephaniah down and let him chase after his brothers. There were plenty of adults to help keep an eye on him. And it seemed to Josie that there were children everywhere. He was introduced to several of the men and greeted Elam and Dan and another man he had met at the group meeting on the Sabbath. Asher, Jonathan's friend, led them in prayer and invited the men to begin filling their plates. Josie was happy to join in and enjoyed the lively conversation all around him. Once again, he was amazed at the feeling of family even though it was a much larger group. After dinner, a lady led them in singing some songs and Josie recognized one that he had heard recently and was able to sing along. Asher spoke about the peace that only Jesus could give. He said that this peace was not like the world's peace that was easily shattered by troubles, but instead was sturdy and strong and unshakable. Josie realized that Jonathan had that kind of peace and wondered if his own peace would grow. Everyone quickly said their goodnights and Josie promised to see Jonathan on Sabbath morning for worship. "I'll be going back to Elam's tomorrow night to check out his group again. I really enjoyed that."

"Thanks so much for a great day of fishing! We all enjoyed your visit, and we'll look forward to spring and a camping trip. Shalom," said Jonathan.

Josie pulled his cloak tightly around him and began to talk aloud to Jesus as he walked. "Jesus, if indeed You are the One who lives inside of me, thank You for this new life. I feel so different. I don't feel so driven to make money, but instead feel content and satisfied. I don't think I've ever felt this way before. Help me to be obedient to what You

tell me and help me to hear You. Thank You for this peace. In Jesus' name." Josie slipped into his house and hung his cloak up to dry. He wasn't even aware of what a wet, cold, miserable day it had been. All he felt was a deep, abiding joy.



## Chapter 20

Basha and Susanna had led several classes for women that they had met at the wells. Sophia, Irini, and Sharon often joined them so that the discussion became larger and felt safer for the other women to join in. They had decided that this was their last group visit to the well. It was getting too cold to sit and visit and they had a group of five women ready to do a class. Basha taught the classes, but Susanna felt that maybe next spring, they could divide into two teams. It was a fun way to share the New Way and it opened the door to many women who could not attend the Worship Center. Susanna knew that she would miss the fellowship with Basha and the other women through the winter, but she would look forward to resuming the ministry in the spring.



Josie became a regular attender and looked forward to the fellowship meal at the Christian Worship Center. He contributed his dish of vegetables or fruit. He also attended Elam's home group and was gradually learning everyone's name. He heard about their journeys as followers and was beginning to feel comfortable sharing his own personal journey. He knew that he was growing and changing, and his partners noticed and commented that he had become a softie. But instead of it prompting fights, he would just smile and agree. He told them that he had become a follower of Jesus and invited them to come to the Christian Worship Center with him. They worked together inside the warehouse during the long, cold days. But work was abundant, and they very seldom had slow days. Josie still worked late most nights, but on Tuesday and Wednesday afternoons, just before sunset, Josie would close up the shop and attend the two times of fellowship that helped him to grow and learn more and more about following Jesus.

As Josie walked toward Elam's house on Wednesday, he felt the Holy Spirit prompting him to share about his childhood with the group. He felt that it might be time and wondered if it would be a distraction. Immediately, he felt that check — that twinge deep inside — and he quickly apologized for debating what he had clearly heard. Yes, he was growing, and he wanted to be obedient. "I don't know why, but, yes, I will share about You being my earthly half-brother," he said as he walked.

He greeted his friends and realized that their time together was uniting them into a strong family group. He actually felt closer to these people than he did to his own family. He realized that he wanted to share with them and let them know his past. He tried to focus on the conversations around him and joined them in singing songs of worship. Elam called for questions and answered them. Then he finally

asked if anyone had something they wanted to share. Josie politely waited a few seconds to see if anyone else had something to share, then said, "I do."

Elam and the rest of the group encouraged him. "I come from a family of five boys and two sisters. We were raised in the city of Nazareth in Galilee. My mother passed about fifteen years ago and at that time I learned that my older brother was really my half-brother. It was a very strange discovery and stressful, since I had not known this fact about Him or about my mother. My dad had passed years earlier when I was just a child. I spent the next fifteen years of my life trying to deny and forget what I learned about my older brother. But thanks to Elam reaching out to me and demonstrating Jesus' love, now I call my elder brother Messiah." Everyone gasped and began talking all at once.

But one lady blurted out, "You are Josie, Rebecca's big brother. I have prayed for you for years! Oh, I am so happy!" Josie tried to answer all the questions that were being asked, but he wanted to talk with the lady who seemed to have some knowledge of his family. He looked to Elam for help.

"Basha, I think Josie wants to know what you know about his family since he has not seen any of them since his mother's passing."

"Well, I haven't seen them very recently. My son leads a New Way home group in Cana and after my first husband passed, I lived there for a while and got to know Rebecca and her husband, and their younger son, Levi. They have all become followers of Jesus. When I left, your Uncle Kenan was trying to connect better with Jude and Simon at the Carpentry Shop."

"What about Ruth?"

"We're not sure whether she believes or not. She's married to a Pharisee who is a very high-ranking member of the Sanhedrin. He forbids her to have anything to do with the family, but Rebecca thinks she is a believer. Ruth and her husband came to Rebecca's baptism, so she has heard the Truth."

"Oh, that is good news. Thank you. Please tell me your name," begged Josie.

"It is Basha, and I'm so glad you've come to know the Truth."

"Thank you," whispered Josie. Elam asked for prayer requests and the group moved on, but afterward, there were more questions and Basha slipped away with her friends before Josie could talk further with her.



Barnabas knocked on Kostakis' door and the servant quickly invited the nine weary travelers to enter and warm themselves at the fireplace. Paul asked if Kostakis was available and was told that he would not return until sunset, but that they and their guests would be welcome to rest there until he returned. "Should we send messengers

to Jonathan to let him know you have arrived?” asked the servant as he served the men juice and some bread and cheese.

“No. I will go to him myself. Thank you for the refreshment.” Paul and Barnabas left the other men at Kostakis’ house while they hurried to find Jonathan.

“Praise Jehovah, you have returned safely. Is the news good?” asked Jonathan eagerly.

“Of course. We have brought a letter back from the apostles and elders.” They handed the letter to Jonathan and waited while he read it. “Judas, Silas, and Peter are waiting at Kostakis’ house along with four other men from the church in Jerusalem. I was thinking if we could find a scribe to copy this letter, we could divide up into two groups and read it to both the Worship Center and the Amphitheater on the Sabbath and on Sunday.”

“I can certainly ask my friend Absalom to make a copy of the letter, but I need to let you know that we are no longer renting the Amphitheater. Everyone that is left easily fits into the Worship Center. But we also need it to be read to each of the groups. Can you and the others come to the Leadership meeting tonight? It would be such a relief to have you there. Everyone is so weary of this mess.”

“Yes, we will be there, but we need to return to Kostakis’ and rest for a while before we join you tonight.”

“I will take this to Absalom right now and see how quickly he can copy it for you.”

“Shalom.” Jonathan wanted to run home and tell Susanna the great news but knew that he needed to get to Absalom’s as soon as possible. So, he tucked the precious letter inside his robe and pulled his cloak tightly around him as he raced to Absalom’s house. Absalom looked at the letter and said that he could certainly make one copy for him while he waited. Jonathan agreed that that would be perfect. He watched as Absalom found the right sized papyrus and began to brush the ink ever so carefully. After Absalom checked the letter to make sure it was completely accurate, Jonathan tucked the two letters in his robe and hurried home to Susanna.

Susanna greeted him and knew immediately that something good had happened. Jonathan was walking taller and strode into the room like a man with a purpose and plan. She waited eagerly for him to catch his breath and remove his cloak. He stood and read the letter to her, then held her in his arms. Tears ran down her cheeks as she listened and prayed silently that Jehovah would heal the rift between the Christians in Antioch. Jonathan was so excited he could hardly eat his dinner. He reviewed Zebedee’s and Zerah’s homework and then quickly kissed his family goodnight and rushed back to his office.

The Leadership Team arrived slowly and quietly. But as each one came through the door and saw Paul, Barnabas, and Peter, excited greetings were exchanged. Silas and Judas were introduced as prophets and leaders from the church in Jerusalem and they were welcomed. The other four men had been left at Kostakis’ to rest. Jonathan grinned as he realized this was the noisiest this group had

been in a long time. He asked everyone to take their seats and let Barnabas report. Silas read the letter to the group and each one gave a sigh of relief. Jonathan reported that Absalom had made an additional copy for them. Manaen suggested that instead of reading the letter multiple times to the various groups, they should instead contact all of their current and former members, as well as all of the leaders that they were supervising, to let them know that the letter would be read on Sabbath morning at the Worship Center. It would be read again on Sunday morning and at the fellowship meal. He suggested that they also read it at the market each morning of the following week and at the Amphitheater. Since the Judaizers had involved the entire city in this debate, Paul felt that it was important that the letter be shared with all who wanted to hear. They decided to dismiss early in order to get started contacting their group members. It would be quite a job to locate everyone before Sabbath morning.



Jonathan and Susanna arrived at the Worship Center early. Two-year-old Zephaniah loved chasing after his older brothers in the big empty room as they waited for others to join them. Susanna reminded them not to run on the Sabbath and soon they were surrounded by other families. Paul, Barnabas, and Peter were warmly greeted by everyone, and Judas and Silas and the four other guests from Jerusalem were introduced and welcomed. When it was obvious that the room was not going to hold all the people, Paul and Silas and the four other men began to direct people into the backyard grassy area and promised to read the letter to the people gathered there. Jonathan began to sing a Psalm of worship and all the people joined him. He called Barnabas to the front and asked him to speak. Barnabas reported; "Paul and I took the Apostle Peter with us and met with the other apostles and elders of the church in Jerusalem. They immediately set aside a time to pray and then discuss the questions that we had brought before them. The question, of course, was whether or not Gentiles could become followers of Jesus without first becoming Jews. Everyone had a chance to discuss all aspects of the question. Many followers of Jesus, both those who had originally walked with Jesus and those who had recently invited Him to be their Messiah, were allowed to speak. Some former Pharisees insisted that all followers should become Jews first. Peter stood and gave his report to the elders about the Holy Spirit leading him to go to a Roman Centurion's home in Caesarea. He reported that the Holy Spirit had come upon the Gentiles just like He had come upon the Jews at Pentecost. Paul and I spoke and told what we had experienced on our ministry trip and how the Gentiles were following Jesus and were filled with the Holy Spirit just like the Jews. Nicanor, one of the church leaders, spoke about The Law and The Prophets pointing to the Messiah dying for the sins of the whole world. And James the Just

spoke of the Prophets Amos and Isaiah saying that the Gentiles would be filled with God's Spirit. After much prayer and seeking God's face, the entire group, including the former Pharisees, came to a complete agreement. They composed a letter and sent it to you. Then they appointed six men to travel back with us to make sure that you know the truth. Judas and Silas are both prophets of God who are well known in Jerusalem and the other four men are deacons and leaders in the Jerusalem church. Judas will now read the letter to you."

Judas came to the front and read:

The apostles and elders, your brothers,  
To the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia:

Greetings.

We have heard that some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said. So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul— men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore we are sending Judas and Silas to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing. It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things.

Farewell.

Then Judas began to preach and encouraged the people. The entire group was worshipping and praising Jehovah and they began to reconcile with their brothers and sisters. Jonathan slipped out to see what was happening with the group meeting in the yard, and saw that Silas was still preaching. He could tell by the look on the people's faces that they were repenting from following false teachings and were ready for reconciliation. It was a joyful day as everyone celebrated their unity.

Jonathan suddenly realized that there were still several months of cold, rainy weather and wondered how they would accommodate all the people as they returned to worship. He decided to leave it up to the Leadership Team. It was a good problem to deal with. Today was a day for celebrating — not fretting about logistics.

The nine men who had just returned from Jerusalem visited with Jonathan's family for Sabbath afternoon. It was good to hear all the news from friends in Jerusalem. It was decided that Peter and Paul would lead the worship service on Sunday morning at the Christian Worship Center and then move to the Amphitheater. Jonathan, Judas, and Silas would go to the market to read the letter.

Jonathan needed to rush away to the men's group that he led after dinner. Peter went with him and took a copy of the letter.

Together they updated the men, most of whom had attended the worship service that morning. There was a great sense of joy among the group, but they wanted to know what should be done about the Judaizers. Peter suggested that once they realized their lie had been exposed, they would leave quietly — at least he hoped they would. Peter answered questions from the group and those that had not attended the Sabbath worship promised that they would attend tomorrow morning.

On Sunday morning, the same scene played out. The Worship Center was overflowing with people, and some met outside with Paul and Silas. Jonathan warned them that they needed to vacate the building in time for school to start, so Silas and Judas had to limit their preaching time.

On Monday morning, Silas addressed the students at the Christian School. He read the letter again and explained how the Jerusalem church was organized and answered the boys' questions.

By the time of the fellowship meal after work on Tuesday, most of the Christians from the Worship Center had reunited and reconciled and were ready to move forward. Unfortunately, there was little room for everyone to enjoy the fellowship meal. Jonathan was stressed to see that once again there was bickering and fussing about who would get to stay and who should go home. He wished he could miraculously create space for everyone, but he could not, and many went away disappointed. Growth came at a price, especially when it happened literally overnight.

At the Leadership Team meeting, everyone shared their ideas for how to accommodate the sudden growth. It would be another three months before the rains stopped and they could return to the Amphitheater. In the meantime, they had to find solutions — and fast! They decided to double all the worship times, so that there would be two worship services meeting on Sabbath mornings, and two meetings on Sunday, one in the morning, and one after work to celebrate Jesus' resurrection and the start of a new week. It wasn't ideal, but it would possibly tide them over. The fellowship meal would be held after work on both Mondays and Tuesdays. Everyone agreed to help with the additional teaching load.

Peter asked Paul if he would accompany him to speak with Eli's home group tomorrow morning. "Peter, we need to discuss that. Barnabas and I were not well received when we tried to talk with him before. Are you still in fellowship with them?"

"Yes. When I first came here, Eli offered me a place to stay, and I serve as their apostle and spiritual mentor. I have been helping them and answering questions. But through the years, Eli has not embraced the changes. He has actually become more isolated," said Peter.

"He is a Judaizer and told me and Joel to leave his group alone since we were unclean and would pollute them," said Jonathan.

"I stayed there for a while until he found out that I had been working with Gentiles and went on your ministry trip. He asked me to leave. That's when I came back here," said John Mark.

“Peter, that forces me to ask: Do you or do you not believe that Gentiles can become followers of Jesus without becoming Jews?” Paul asked forcefully.

“Paul, you know that I do, and I boldly testified to that before the apostles and leaders in Jerusalem. You heard me tell of my experience with the Gentiles in Caesarea and my deep friendship with all the Gentiles here in Antioch.”

“Then my next question has to be, does Eli know it?” demanded Paul.

Peter hung his head. “So, you associate with the Gentiles here and deny their right to become followers of Jesus in front of Eli and his group,” stated Paul more angrily than anyone had ever heard him speak.

“I haven’t lied about it. I just haven’t told them about it yet,” said Peter defensively.

“Yes, I will go with you tomorrow and let you read the letter to him and together we’ll explain what happened in Jerusalem. You can tell him about your experience in Caesarea and your work here with Jonathan,” stated Paul decisively.

“Paul, are you trying to force me?” asked Peter defiantly.

“No. You know what you need to do and I’m offering to stand beside you. I imagine any of these men would offer to go with you, if you prefer their support.”

Peter put his head in his hands and stated that it didn’t just affect Eli. “It will affect five other families that live together and farm the land together. I’ve been praying that God would reveal the truth to Eli without my having to confront him.”

“So, you would leave five families with young children to be taught that Jesus did not die for the Gentiles, when you know it is wrong. How can you justify that?” asked Paul sadly.

“Gentlemen, let’s move to prayer and pray for unity among us. Anything less than that will result in Satan’s victory,” said Elam.

After the men had prayed, Peter asked the Team if it would be okay with them if he approached Eli alone. He would read the letter to him and hopefully to the entire group. “Eli trusts me and generally allows me freedom to instruct and teach. I believe he will allow me to gather everyone together after the Sabbath meal tomorrow night. I want to share this with everyone, not just Eli. Will you pray specifically for me at that time?”

All of the men shared words of encouragement and understanding with Peter, and Paul especially encouraged him to break off his fellowship with Eli in order to bring him to repentance and understanding.

Peter left the group and walked for a while before he went to Kostakis’ rooftop to pray. He had seen Jesus spend many nights in prayer. Now Peter prayed all night in preparation for his time with Eli.

The Leadership Team asked Paul if he hadn’t been a little too rough on Peter. Paul replied, “Jesus said that where much has been given, much is required. I believe that Peter is one of the greatest of

the apostles and was given the hardest assignment by our Lord. Jesus asked him to be a shepherd to all of us. That is a huge task. It is our responsibility to support and encourage him to stay on track. He cannot let friendship get in the way of Truth. Let's spend some time in prayer for him. He will have a really hard day tomorrow." The Leadership Team stayed late that night praying for Peter and for Eli and his farming group.



"Greetings, my friend!" Eli called as he saw Peter approaching the village. He stopped his work and ran to greet him. "What brings you to Antioch before Passover?"

"I was in Jerusalem and traveled back with friends. You remember Silas and Judas, don't you?"

"Yes. Great men of God. I did not know them well, but I heard of their ministries and teachings."

"Since they were coming this way, and I have been praying for you and your group, I felt led to check on you."

"Come and sit and we will visit. Things have been going much better here. I've let my little group grow up. They are helping me make decisions. I've given them choices and Hezekiah and Abram chose to build houses on the other end of their property in order to have more autonomy. They still attend Sabbath dinners with us but make their own decisions and rent their farms from the group. I think everyone is happier and things are going smoothly."

"That sounds like really good news. I am proud of you, Eli. It is hard to let children grow up."

They sat and talked of many things and Peter asked if he still had a mat. When Eli assured him that he did, Peter took a nap and slept deeply for several hours. When he woke up, he felt God's presence with him and worshipped. He knew that he would be asked to speak to the group after the Sabbath dinner and he felt an eagerness to be totally obedient to what the Holy Spirit was saying, but he also felt a deep sadness because he felt certain that it would be the end of his fellowship and friendship with Eli.

When he walked to the central yard, several of the families had returned from their work and greeted Peter enthusiastically. The children gathered around him, and he sang Psalms with them and exclaimed about how much they had grown. Tears came to his eyes as he realized his love for each one of them. He enjoyed his time with the men at dinner, but for the first time, he realized that while he was their overseer and apostle, he was not in fellowship with them. He knew that his eyes had been opened and that tonight would be the end of something that was not good. He had considered it precious and had clung to it because he loved the feeling of belonging. But he knew that God was calling him to walk in obedience even though the price would be high.



When Eli called on Peter to speak, Peter was ready. He shared that he had been to Jerusalem for a called meeting to deal with a controversy that was happening in the Jerusalem church. They had discussed it for several days and spent a great amount of time in prayer. Now, as their apostle, he would read to them the letter that they had all agreed upon to be sent to each New Way group all over the world. When he had finished reading it, he made himself available for questions. Eli said, "I'm not sure I understand. That letter was not addressed to us, it was addressed to Gentiles."

"Yes, you are correct."

"So, what was the controversy about?" asked Eli pointedly.

"We were discussing and praying about what The Law and The Prophets say, and what Jesus taught about whether Gentiles could become followers of Jesus without becoming Jews," answered Peter.

"And the result was?" prompted Eli.

"The result was that we all agreed that both The Law and The Prophets and Jesus taught that the Messiah would be for the whole world."

"Peter, what do you believe?"

"I agree. Let me tell you what God revealed to me..."

"This is heresy! You are no longer welcome here!" Eli was shaking in anger. "You know what I believe, and yet you have made us all unclean by your presence here today. Leave! Get out before I call for you to be stoned! Don't ever come back here!"

Peter stood still for just a moment and looked into the confused eyes of the families surrounding him, then he slowly walked away. The road was dark, and he didn't have a lantern, but he left and didn't look back. His heart was burdened, but there was a tiny, growing awareness of peace. He had finally been obedient, and he felt closer to God than he had in a long time. He knew that sharing the Truth was what Jesus had asked him to do, and tonight, these precious families had heard the Truth. Now, it would be up to them what they did with it. He wished he had brought a blanket, so he could just stop and be alone, but instead he continued to Kostakis' house. There he found Paul, Barnabas, Silas, Judas, Kostakis, and the other men from Jerusalem praying for him. When he entered, they welcomed him and rejoiced with him for his obedience. Then they prayed for Eli and for each of the families that had heard the Truth.

## Chapter 21

At Eli's village, Barak and Hiram both spoke to the group regarding The Law and The Prophets and the rules for not associating with Gentiles. They declared that the house where Peter had slept must be thoroughly cleansed, and each family should spend time in prayer and repentance. They declared that the Sabbath should be a day of fasting and prayer. There was no discussion. Each family quietly moved to their houses, but the Holy Spirit was speaking in each heart. Questions demanded answers.



Both services at the Christian Worship Center were packed on the Sabbath. Paul preached at the first one and Silas preached at the later service. Jonathan felt that he needed to be present for both, but Sabbath afternoon he was finally able to spend time alone with his family. As Jonathan and Susanna watched the boys play, Susanna shared, "I overheard Zerah talking with Gideon on Sabbath night. He was asking Gideon about becoming an apprentice at Elam's Carpenter's Shop. He wanted to drop out of school and start work. I was really impressed with the way Gideon encouraged him to stay in school and become a good student. You need to thank Gideon for his wise counsel." About that time, two-year-old Zephaniah ran into his abba's arms and hugged him tightly around the neck. "And this little man is growing up way too fast!" declared Jonathan. "We don't have a baby anymore."

"Well, just for a little while. By midspring you can enjoy watching another one grow up too fast," declared Susanna.

"Susanna, what are you saying? Has Jehovah blessed us with another little one?" She nodded, pleased with his response. "Susanna, are you doing okay? Is everything all right? I haven't really been available to you since this whole Judaizer thing happened and now the ministry is exploding. I promise I'll spend more time at home. What can I do to help you?" Susanna just laughed and declared that she thought when she married him, she would at least see him occasionally. They both acknowledged that the life of a minister and his wife was a hard one that required a lot of sacrifice and understanding. "You are an amazing woman. I love you. Are you happy?"

"I would be happier if this little one would quit punching my ribs, but yes, Jonathan. You know that God called me to be your helpmeet and I am very happy, and content, and feel that I'm fulfilling my calling."

"That's good because I need you desperately. But if he's punching you in the ribs, that means you've known for a long time, and you haven't shared that with me. That makes me sad."

"It's been a hard time for you — for all of us. Now, things will be better."

"Are there other things that you are not telling me?"

"No. I just didn't want the baby to weigh you down. The finances were getting tighter and tighter, and I didn't want to add another burden on you," said Susanna.

"Oh, Susanna. A baby is never a burden. He is a wonderful gift from God, and I am thrilled. Don't ever keep secrets from me."

"He?"

"Of course. I wouldn't know how to parent a girl after these three rambunctious boys."

"You'll learn."

"So, you think he's a girl, I mean, that she's a girl?"

"You never can tell, but Basha and Sharon think so," said Susanna with a twinkle in her eyes.

"Do the boys know?"

"No, just my two closest friends. I haven't even told my mother."

Susanna and Jonathan enjoyed the slow afternoon, but all too soon, he had to eat and run to the men's group. As he walked, he made the decision to talk with the Leadership Team about relieving him of some responsibilities and letting him relax a little.



Sunday morning Asher led the worship service to start the new week. Afterward, John Mark asked Peter if he had time to talk with him as he walked to work. "Peter, I am working for Elam doing some basic carpentry, but I've spent most of my free time writing down my memories of Jesus. You said that that was your desire and that you would need a scribe to help you. I just want you to know that if you can provide my food and lodging, I would be glad to work with you to prepare a manuscript about our time with Jesus on earth. I've just about completed everything I can remember, and it's not much. I only heard Him teach and saw Him heal when He was in Jerusalem. I want to write about your experience with Him for those whole three years. Is that still something that you feel called to do?"

"Yes, it is! But would you be willing to travel with me to Joppa? I have lodging there, and the perfect place to work."

"When do you want to leave? I need to let Elam know."

"I always say that when you hear clearly what God wants you to do, you need to obey quickly. Can you be ready to leave tomorrow?" asked Peter excitedly.

"Certainly. I just need to let Elam and Mordecai know. Oh, I'll need to let Jonathan know, too. I'm leading three groups and he'll need to find new leadership for them. When I left with Barnabas and Paul, I sorta' left him in a lurch with four groups. The Leadership Team was pretty upset with me. But Jonathan supported me and encouraged me to do whatever the Holy Spirit was telling me. Anyway.

I'll be ready to leave at sunrise tomorrow. Where shall we meet?" John Mark spent the rest of the day letting everyone know that he would be leaving Antioch.

John Mark and Peter headed to Joppa early on Monday morning. It was a cold, rainy day, but both felt a new sense of purpose and clear direction. John Mark had never walked along the Great Sea Coast and was fascinated by its beauty. It was a 300-mile journey, but Peter had friends all along the way that welcomed them and sent them on their way, well fed and well rested.



As Jonathan led the Leadership meeting, he announced that Peter and John Mark had left on Monday headed to Joppa. "We now have three groups without a leader and will need to fill those positions. Do any of you have men or couples in your groups who could lead? There's one men's group, and two family groups."

Silas spoke up and said that he felt that the Holy Spirit was leading him to stay in Antioch for a while longer to help out. He agreed to take on all three of John Mark's groups. Jonathan asked him if he would be able to lead the worship service after work on Sundays, and Silas agreed. He asked where he might find employment as a potter and was directed to a fellow follower who had a booth in the market. Elam laughed and said with John Mark's sudden departure, he also had an opening for a beginning carpenter. Silas thanked him and promised to let him know.

Judas and the four other men from Jerusalem said that they would begin their journey on Sunday to return home. Judas thanked them for their welcome and provision and for the opportunity to see the New Way spreading like wildfire among the Gentiles. He promised to take the report back to the church in Jerusalem.



"Son, I wanted to talk with you about your upcoming birthday. It's hard for me to believe you are so close to becoming a man. I'm afraid we haven't talked much about your plans or thoughts. I've been really distracted lately," said Manasseh as the two of them sat on the rooftop and talked about Jacob's future. "I want to hear what you are thinking."

"Well, I know I don't want to work at Grandfather's bank!" declared Jacob. "It's hard for me to sit still. I want a job where I can be outdoors and move around — not be cooped up in a box all day."

"I hear you. So, what are you thinking?"

"Abba, I don't know. I really don't know anything that I am good at. I mean, all I've ever done is go to school. I wouldn't mind teaching school, but I've been wondering about doing carpentry. I like building

things — at least I think I would. I really haven't done anything because we have servants for everything. Cronus won't let me help him."

"Son, that's my fault and I'm sorry I haven't exposed you to opportunities. Your older brothers just went directly into the bank, and I guess I've never had a son with ideas of his own. I'm very proud of you, Jacob. I'm proud of your brothers, too, but they just followed Grandfather Simon. You are a lot more like me, unfortunately," he grinned, and Jacob understood that he was not criticizing him. In fact, he felt closer to his abba than he ever had. "Why don't we take this next year to just explore before you commit to an apprenticeship? Would that work for you?"

"Sure, and thanks for understanding, Abba."

"What would you like to start with? I should have had you working somewhere already."

"Where would I learn about carpentry, and do you think that would be a good fit for me?"

"It might, and it might not. A lot of it depends on your boss and whether we can find someone who treats their employees right. I'm thinking there is a Jewish business called the Carpentry and Fine Furniture Shop close to the bank. Let's go talk with the owner after school tomorrow. Would that be okay?"

"That would be great, Abba. Thanks."

"Now, we need to decide about this birthday party. Grandfather Simon will want to do it at his house. The celebration won't be on your actual birthday since your birthday is on Passover this year. It will probably be the following Sabbath. Are you okay with that?"

"I guess," said Jacob slowly.

"What's wrong? You know that Passover is a sacred day. We can't change its date, and we want to celebrate your big day right."

"Abba, would it be terrible if we just had something small here with my school friends and not the whole synagogue?"

"Son, I think if we invited all your school friends and their families it will be the whole synagogue. What are you asking?"

"Could we have it here instead of at Grandfather's house?"

"No, Jacob. Grandfather would be offended. If you had asked earlier, we might have tried it, but it's going to be hard enough for Grandfather to accept your not working for him. Are you finished with your homework?"

"Yes, sir."

"Okay, let's talk with the carpenter tomorrow. Goodnight, Son."

"Goodnight, Abba."



It was the last Leadership Team meeting before Passover, when Paul and Barnabas announced to the group that they were feeling led by the Holy Spirit to check on the people they had met on their first ministry trip. They asked the Leadership Team to pray with them for

clarity. The Christian Worship Center had continued to grow, and Jonathan had been able to find leadership for all the new groups as needed so that he could spend afternoons and one evening a week with his own family. Susanna was close to giving birth and Jonathan felt it was important to focus on her needs right now. The leaders had been discussing building a second place to worship before next winter but were divided as to whether that was the best use of funds. Jonathan was feeling weary and asked if they could just spend time in worship and prayer. Asher offered to lead and let him rest and Jonathan gratefully accepted. Asher led them in singing some Psalms and they scattered around the room to pray alone. *How good it is to worship with my brothers. But I am craving time alone. Passover will begin on Sunday evening. Maybe Wednesday during Passover week will be a good day to set aside for prayer, but then Josie is talking about a camping trip while the boys are out of school.* He tried to get his brain to focus on prayer, but all he could think about was how he would cover all of Paul's and Barnabas' responsibilities while they were away. With all the worship services doubled, it was going to be a stretch. He was grateful that Asher was leading the worship tonight and letting him rest. He certainly wasn't focused enough to lead anyone in worship. As he sat and fretted instead of praying, he felt hands being laid on his back, shoulders, and head. He heard pieces of the prayers that were being offered to Jehovah.

"Strengthen him."

"Give him peace."

"Sustain him."

"Protect him from Satan's attacks."

"Surround him with Your presence."

"Lift him up."

"Encourage him."

Jonathan began to weep and felt the stress and tension melt away. He was not alone. He felt the Holy Spirit reminding him that Jesus said He would not leave them as orphans, yet he had been thinking orphan thoughts. He thanked the men for their support and words of encouragement. It was late when the prayer and worship time ended, but all felt renewed and ready to face whatever new things lay ahead.



Just as soon as school was finished on Friday, Manasseh and Jacob walked to the Carpentry and Fine Furniture Shop on the main road through Antioch. When they entered, no one came to greet them. "Hello. Shalom. Is anyone here?" he called out.

"Sorry. We were all working in the back. How can I help you, sir?"

"I would like to speak to the owner."

"There are three equal partners in this store, and I am one of them. How can I help you?"

“My son is turning thirteen next week and thinks he would like to explore the carpentry trade. I was wondering if you might have a beginning position for him.”

“I don’t, but my partners might. Excuse me, and I’ll go ask. Please wait here.”

Suddenly, Josie heard Jesus’ voice clearly telling him to hire the boy. Josie’s partner returned to the back and stated, “There’s a Jewish man out front who wants to find a beginning carpentry job for his son who is turning thirteen. He wants to explore carpentry. He looks like a spoiled brat, and I don’t want to hire him. Do either of you need a helper?”

“I’ll talk with him.” Josie removed his apron and walked to the front of the store. “Shalom.” After they had talked for a while, Josie explained to Manasseh, “In this business and in this town, I want you to understand that many of our customers are Gentile. Jacob will be expected to treat them with courtesy and respect, but he will not be required to touch them or eat with them.”

They talked more and Manasseh and Jacob both agreed that it was a good fit and they both really liked Josie. They agreed on the hours and the pay and that he would start once Passover had ended.

They arrived home just in time to join Dinah and Judah and Nathan and Achsah and their children as they walked across town to Simon’s house for the Sabbath dinner.



Josie joined Jonathan and Susanna for the Day of Preparation on Friday. He asked why they still slaughtered a lamb and put the blood on the doorpost if they were free from the Law. Jonathan explained that everything that God did with the Israelites was a picture of what He would do with the Messiah. “The slaughtered lamb reminds us of the price that Jesus would pay and the blood on the doorway is in the shape of the cross. Everything about the Seder is also about the Messiah. I think, as you participate tonight, you’ll see the correlation between the death angel passing over the Israelites and Jesus’ blood paying for your sins and allowing you to escape eternal death. It’s so symbolic, we’ve chosen to not give it up. It is a part of our Jewish heritage, and we want to pass it on to our boys.”

“I’ve never understood it. I just thought of it as a tradition that didn’t make any sense, but I can see it now.”

Josie and Jonathan asked Susanna if they should cancel their fishing trip. She insisted that they go even though the baby was due any day now. She knew that Jonathan and the boys had looked forward to this trip all winter and she also knew that it would do Jonathan good to quit fretting over the birth. “You may plan your trip under two conditions,” she said. “First, you must draw me a map so I can send someone after you if this baby decides to come, and two, if I’m not feeling good on Sunday, you cancel without any complaining.”

Everyone agreed and they made plans to meet at sunrise on Sunday morning. Susanna couldn't decide who was more excited, the boys or their abba.

Jonathan couldn't remember when he had felt so relaxed as he stretched out in the grass under the trees and let Josie teach the boys to fish. Of course, his mind wouldn't quit thinking about Susanna and wondering if she was all right, but for the most part, he just rested and wondered if this was why his dad had always loved camping and fishing with his family. It brought back so many good memories. He thought of Grandpa Zebedee and the Sea of Galilee. He thought of the many fishing trips he and his abba had taken alone, and the ones they had taken as a family. He remembered the fishing times as he and his twin sister, Jenay, traveled with Jesus. He prayed for Yanis and Jenay, and their ministry and safety in Capernaum.

Josie had brought the bread rolls and sliced onions. He foraged in the woods and found greens to go with the fish and bread. By the time he returned, the boys had built a huge campfire. Jonathan and Josie quickly cleaned the fish and taught the boys how to roast their fish on sticks over the campfire. All evening they talked and laughed and played. Monday morning, they ate olives and rolls and fished some more. They carried those fish home to fry in a pan for dinner. Josie thanked Jonathan for sharing his boys and the boys thanked Josie who promised they would do it again sometime.



## Chapter 22

On the Sabbath, Jacob became a man, but because it was Passover, Grandfather Simon had declared that his birthday celebration would take place the following Sabbath. Manasseh and Jacob had taken a long walk that afternoon before the Seder meal. "Son, I just want you to know that even though your celebration is not until next week, you are still a man in my eyes and your family will honor you in that way. Priest Othniel will announce it next week, but it will be old news. I hope it will still be a special time."

"It will be fine, Dad. May I call you that?"

"Yes, you may. Abba is for children. I hope you will always call me Dad and come to me as you always have, but our relationship will change and eventually, you will care for me as I have cared for you. I will grow weaker, and you will grow stronger."

"Dad, that's many years away, but yes, I will always honor you. Do you expect me to move out now that I am a man? I know that Joab and Jethro moved out before they were married."

"Yes, someday you will be expected to move out of my home and establish your own, but not until you can support yourself. Since you are unsure of what you want to do, it may take some time to establish yourself in business. But once you are established, then Jehovah will place in your heart the desire to be independent. I did not ask Joab and Jethro to move, I gave them permission to do so when they were ready. As long as you live in my home, you must abide by my rules even though you are a man. So, many men move out at the earliest possible moment so that they can escape their dad's rules."

"I think you may have to kick me out, because I really don't want to deal with having to cook."

"I'll agree, it's something to consider before moving out on your own."

They had just been wandering around and not paying attention to where they were walking. As Manasseh looked up, he noticed that once again, he was passing the house where they had played for the wedding. "I played for a Jewish wedding at this home many years ago."

"It was owned by a Jew back then?" asked Jacob innocently.

"No, it was owned by a Gentile, but we sat out in the yard and played the traditional Jewish music and ate kosher food that was provided for us. Apparently, the Gentile man was really good friends with a Jew and offered to host his wedding and abide by all the rules. It was strange. I think of it often. You will be working with Gentiles soon. You must realize that they are also created by God and worthy of respect. When I worked in your grandfather's bank, I often worked with very important Gentiles. Don't be afraid of them, Jacob. And realize that Grandfather Simon just pretends that he doesn't do business with Gentiles. He does."

“Thank you, Abba ... I mean, Dad. I was concerned about whether that would make me unclean.”

“No, I don’t think it will. It’s just a part of life living in Antioch.”

“Yes, sir.”

“We need to get back; we’ve walked farther than I intended.”

They arrived back at Simon’s just in time for Grandmother Esther to light the Sabbath candles. There were not as many guests tonight as usual, since many wanted to celebrate the Seder with their own families. Judah, who was now four years old, asked the traditional question: “Grandfather, why is this night different from all other nights?” Simon told the age-old story of God’s providing a way for the Israelites to escape the death angel if they would put the blood of the lamb on their doorposts.

Manasseh tried to block out the story and dwell on Jacob becoming a man. He tried to remember the night he was born and how happy he was to have a third son. But it was all he could do to keep from crying as he realized afresh that Jesus was the Messiah crucified for him. “Are you all right, Manasseh?” asked Esther, Dinah’s mother.

Manasseh startled and then replied, “Yes, I was just remembering the night Jacob was born. It was also a Passover, but not a Sabbath.” Judah was asleep on a cushion and Manasseh indicated to Dinah that it was time to go home. Goodnights were said, and they started across town. Jacob had decided to spend the night with Jethro and Abigail. Dinah carried the sleeping Judah who was getting very heavy. Manasseh said, “Another Passover, and I still have not answered my questions or yours. Time just slips away, doesn’t it? Now we only have one child.”

The following Sabbath, and the last day of Passover, Simon hosted Jacob’s birthday party. The entire synagogue gathered for dinner and then Priest Othniel conducted the ceremony. Manasseh and Dinah watched with pride as their son stood before the crowd and spoke confidently. “I have chosen to share with you Psalm thirty-four, verses one through six, because it is special to me. I want to always praise Jehovah and serve Him:

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.

Everyone clapped and encouraged Jacob. He had always been quiet and shy and even though his selection was short, the synagogue was like family, and they understood that it took a lot of effort for Jacob to recite publicly. Priest Othniel asked Jacob what Jehovah had led him to pursue as his work. Everyone, including Simon, assumed he would join his older brothers at the bank. But Jacob boldly stated, "I am torn between continuing my studies to become a scribe and teacher or becoming a carpenter. I will begin work at the Carpentry and Fine Furniture Shop tomorrow, but I will make my final decision later."

Dinah could see the look of anger on her dad's face and hoped that he would not make a scene. She was proud that he began the clapping, and everyone followed suit.

Simon and Esther discussed Jacob's decision long after the guests were gone. He assured her that he would invite Jacob to work with him at the bank, and maybe he had waited too late to extend that invitation. "Maybe I haven't let Jacob know that I've always planned for his future." He felt sad, but not defeated. *I'm certain that Jacob will realize his mistake. He won't enjoy such a lowly job and his pay will hardly support a family. He will grow up and learn that making money is the most important thing. He just needs a little more guidance than Manasseh can give him.*



The manuscript that John Mark had begun was becoming heavy to carry. Peter taught all along their journey, and each evening, John Mark added details to it. It was becoming a jumbled mess of notes and he hoped that when they arrived in Antioch, he would have time to get it reorganized. He had thought when they arrived in Joppa, they would sit down and Peter would dictate what he remembered, but Peter quickly became impatient with that. John Mark agreed to just listen and record what he heard as Peter taught. They had traveled to various places all over Samaria and then started north through Phoenicia. They both felt that the manuscript was close to finished. They realized that they could never write everything that had happened. There wasn't enough papyrus in the world to do that, but they wanted to write down the things that stood out and made an impression on them. They wanted Jonathan to read it to make sure they hadn't missed anything important, and to make sure that it would make sense to the Gentile readers.

They celebrated Passover with a group of Christians in Phoenicia before they started up the coast of the Great Sea and arrived in Antioch about two weeks later. John Mark asked Mordecai if he could stay at his house for a couple of weeks while he worked on the manuscript. Mordecai agreed and John Mark secluded himself to try to organize the abundance of material that he had collected about Jesus' life from Peter's sermons.

Peter, on the other hand, secured lodging with Kostakis and visited with Paul and Barnabas. As they talked together, Peter caught them up on John Mark's attempt to put together a manuscript about Jesus' life. They were eager to read it and Barnabas commented on how much John Mark had matured and grown in the past few years. He wondered if he might be ready to join them for their upcoming ministry trip if he finished his manuscript before then. "When are you leaving?" asked Peter.

"We don't have clarity just yet but are both feeling that God may be calling us that direction," replied Paul. "But I don't think I would want John Mark to accompany us. He deserted us before, and we really needed him."

"I know. But he's grown up a lot and I believe he's changed," stated Barnabas.

"We would appreciate your praying about whether God is calling us to a second trip, when it would be, and who would accompany us," said Paul.

"Certainly. I'm going to walk over and let Jonathan know that I'm back and available to help out," said Peter.

"If you could stay in Antioch a while, it would be helpful because Jonathan's baby is due any day now."

"I will pray about staying to help as well as for your possible ministry trip. And I'll be back before dinner."



Jonathan welcomed Peter into his home and apologized for the chaos. He explained, "Susanna says the baby is coming and I need to get the boys and myself moved out. The women are on their way, and I have to admit that I'm so afraid that I can't think straight."

"Yes, I remember now. Your first wife passed. Was that in childbirth?"

"Yes. And we lost the baby, too. I don't think I could do that again. Susanna is ..."

Peter interrupted, "Jonathan, don't forget that God is in control. He'll take care of everything and work it out for good. Take a deep breath and go pray with Susanna. I'll stay with Zephaniah. You are still her minister as well as her husband, and you cannot fall apart in front of her. She needs you to be strong and confident."

Peter sat down and called Zephaniah to him. He asked where his big brothers were and found out that Zebedee worked with Demetrius after school and Zerah worked with Elam. He hadn't planned on this particular ministry but had to admit that it felt good to be around a two-year-old. It was relaxing to play with him and comfort him when he heard his mother cry out in pain. Soon Susanna's mother arrived and said that Haggith and Basha were on their way. Jochebed quickly shooed the men out with promises to let Jonathan know just as soon

as his healthy baby was born. “Now, you men, get out quickly and let me take care of Susanna!”

Peter walked with Jonathan and Zephaniah to Asher and Sharon’s house. It would be a tight fit, but the older boys were going to camp in the backyard, and it was the closest house for Jonathan to stay. Asher wasn’t home yet, so the men sat in the back courtyard and visited while Zephaniah ran inside to find his friends. Jonathan asked Peter if he had any children. “I don’t remember them traveling with you.”

“No, they didn’t travel with me. My wife was taking care of her mother, so I had to leave them to follow Jesus. My oldest son chose to reject Him, and he died in the same storm as your Grandpa Zebedee.”

“Oh, Peter, I’m so sorry.”

“To lose someone who has rejected Jesus causes a terrible grief, but Jehovah has been faithful to comfort me and remind me that everyone must make their own choice. But then I have two more sons who are faithful followers. Both stayed in Capernaum and have their own businesses. My daughter, Laila, is married to Zared. I don’t know if you knew him. He was a scribe in Jerusalem, and they have moved to Caesarea Philippi to work with the home groups there.”

“What about your wife?” asked Jonathan.

“She’s with Jesus now. Laila raised the two younger boys. They were just six and eight when my wife passed. Jonathan, life is not always easy. But God has been faithful and good to me.” Peter sat deep in thought, then roused himself and stood. “I came over to let you know I was here and could cover for you for a while. What groups or services can I help you with?”

They discussed what Jonathan needed so that he could totally focus on Susanna. “You are definitely a gift from God, Peter. It will be good to just focus on my family for a few days.”

“I don’t know how long God will leave me here, but I’ll be here as long as the Holy Spirit leads.”

“Thank you, Peter, and shalom.”

“I’d better hurry if I’m going to make it to Kostakis’ by sunset. I’ll be praying for you and Susanna. Shalom.”

When Asher arrived, Sharon had already fed the little ones and sent them to their rooms. The older boys joined the three adults and while Jonathan didn’t think he could eat, he discovered that he was really hungry and thanked Sharon for the dinner. “It reminds me of old times when you were over here a lot.” Then she realized that probably wasn’t the right thing to say and apologized. Jonathan and Asher sat out in the courtyard and talked while the boys threw their blankets in the grass. Jonathan tried to stretch out on the mat in the boy’s room. He didn’t want to wake Asher, but he knew he couldn’t just lie down and sleep when Susanna was birthing their baby. Instead, he quietly slipped out of the house and walked toward his home. He could hear Susanna’s screams, and everything sounded healthy. He remembered the night he lost Orpah. *She had sounded so very, very tired and the screams just got quieter and quieter until they stopped. No. I mustn’t*

*think about that. Susanna will be fine. She's strong and healthy. I wonder if it will be a girl. Susanna says it is. Do women know?* He slowly walked back to Asher's praying for Susanna's safety.

Sharon set out breakfast for everyone. The boys headed to school and Asher left for work after making sure that Jonathan was doing okay. Jonathan assured him that he would be fine. He left Zephaniah with Sharon while he walked toward the house. As he got close, Basha came out the front door and he could hear the baby crying inside. Basha gave him a terrific smile and assured him that Susanna and his daughter were doing great. Jonathan thought his knees would collapse. He asked if he could go inside and Basha said he needed to wait until the sac was birthed, then they would let him see Susanna and the baby. Jonathan thanked her and headed back to tell Sharon. They decided not to tell Zephaniah until later since he was having fun playing with his friends and would want to go with Jonathan if he knew that Jonathan was going to see his mother. Basha knocked about the second hour and invited him to come. They walked together and Basha explained that it had been a relatively easy birth, but she would still need a lot of help for the first couple of weeks. Jonathan asked if Jochebed was going to stay, but was told that the three women were going to take turns so that no one got overtired. Jonathan appreciated the help, but wished he could just be alone with Susanna and his own family. *Forgive me, Father, and help me to be grateful for the help.*

He quickly went to Susanna and kissed her cheek. The baby was at her breast and Jonathan talked quietly with Susanna. He thanked her for his daughter and asked what he could do to help. She assured him that she was fine and asked about the boys. He was grateful that the ladies gave him this time alone with Susanna and their new daughter. When she finished nursing, Susanna reminded Jonathan that she mustn't lift the baby. He reached out and took her in his arms. She was the most beautiful baby he had ever seen. She took his breath away. "I am speechless. She is beautiful, just like her mother. Oh, Susanna, thank you...."

"Wrap her in her shawl. I keep counting her fingers and toes and she is beautiful. We'll need to find the perfect name for her," said Susanna.

"But for now, you need to rest. When do you want me to bring Zephaniah to meet her?"

"The boys won't be home until night. Please bring him midafternoon if you have time," said Susanna.

"Of course I have time. I'll be here anytime you need me." He kissed her on the cheek and took the baby to her grandmother. "I've got some work to do at the Center, but I'll bring Zephaniah over midafternoon. Susanna agreed that she needed a nap."

Jonathan felt like he was in Heaven. He let the Leadership Team and Peter take over all his responsibilities at the Worship Center and he just stayed with Susanna and baby Rinnah for two whole weeks. He spent the day taking care of Susanna and they talked and talked

about everything that came to mind. It felt like a honeymoon instead of the normal crazy schedule that they were both used to. One of the ladies came over every day and took care of the cooking and cleaning that had to be done and let Jonathan just focus on being an abba. Zephaniah loved having Jonathan home as much as Susanna did. The two older brothers were enamored with their tiny little sister and couldn't wait to show her off to their friends. Jonathan reminded them that they had to wait for eighty days before Mother could attend the worship services. And of course, baby Rinnah couldn't be away from her mother. They reluctantly agreed. As Susanna got stronger and was able to be up and about, the boys demanded why their abba insisted on some Jewish Laws and not others. Jonathan had no answers for them or for himself. "I promise, if I ever get it figured out, I'll let you know."

After they were alone, Susanna said, "I have a question, too, my dear husband."

"You know I will help if I can."

"I was just thinking about these past few years. It seems that ever since I married a pastor, my eyes have been opened to something that makes me sad."

"Susanna, are you unhappy?" Jonathan felt crushed.

"I'm not unhappy being a pastor's wife, I am unhappy with what I see. Please listen to me," she pleaded.

"I'm listening."

"Jonathan, my question is this: Why is there so much fighting and fussing between Christians? Why are there so many different beliefs? If indeed, God's Holy Spirit is leading each individual, wouldn't there be perfect unity and fellowship? I mean, Paul and Barnabas are fighting about their upcoming ministry trip; Eli doesn't believe the same as we do; the Judaizers believe everyone should accept their way. Why?"

Jonathan bowed his head for so long that Susanna wondered if he had fallen asleep. Finally, he looked up and said, "Susanna, you like to use the example of the Holy Spirit having His hands inside us and we are like gloves on His hands. He guides us and directs us and makes us to have sweet fellowship. But Susanna, I believe that until we get to Heaven, we will be constantly bombarded by Satan. He manages to rip and tear those gloves so that each one of us have scars and hurts and fears that God never intended. I believe if we all could hear the Holy Spirit perfectly, then it would be exactly like Heaven, and we would have perfect unity. But we're still living in human bodies, and we mess up and hurt each other, and hurt ourselves, and we don't always hear clearly. Does that make sense?"

"I guess so. But is it all right to wish it wasn't that way?"

"I remember Dad telling me that one of the things Jesus prayed for at the last Seder was that we would all get along and be in unity with each other. I think it makes Him sad that we don't always hear clearly. Our job is obedience, but we need His help to even get close

to what He intends. Now, you need to get your rest. Little Rinnah will be waking you again soon to nurse. I am so glad that Jehovah sent us a little girl. We must raise her wisely to serve Him with all her heart.”

## **The End (Or Only the Beginning?)**