

THE NEW WAY SERIES

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*Telling the World
from
Antioch of Syria*

Dale Weatherford

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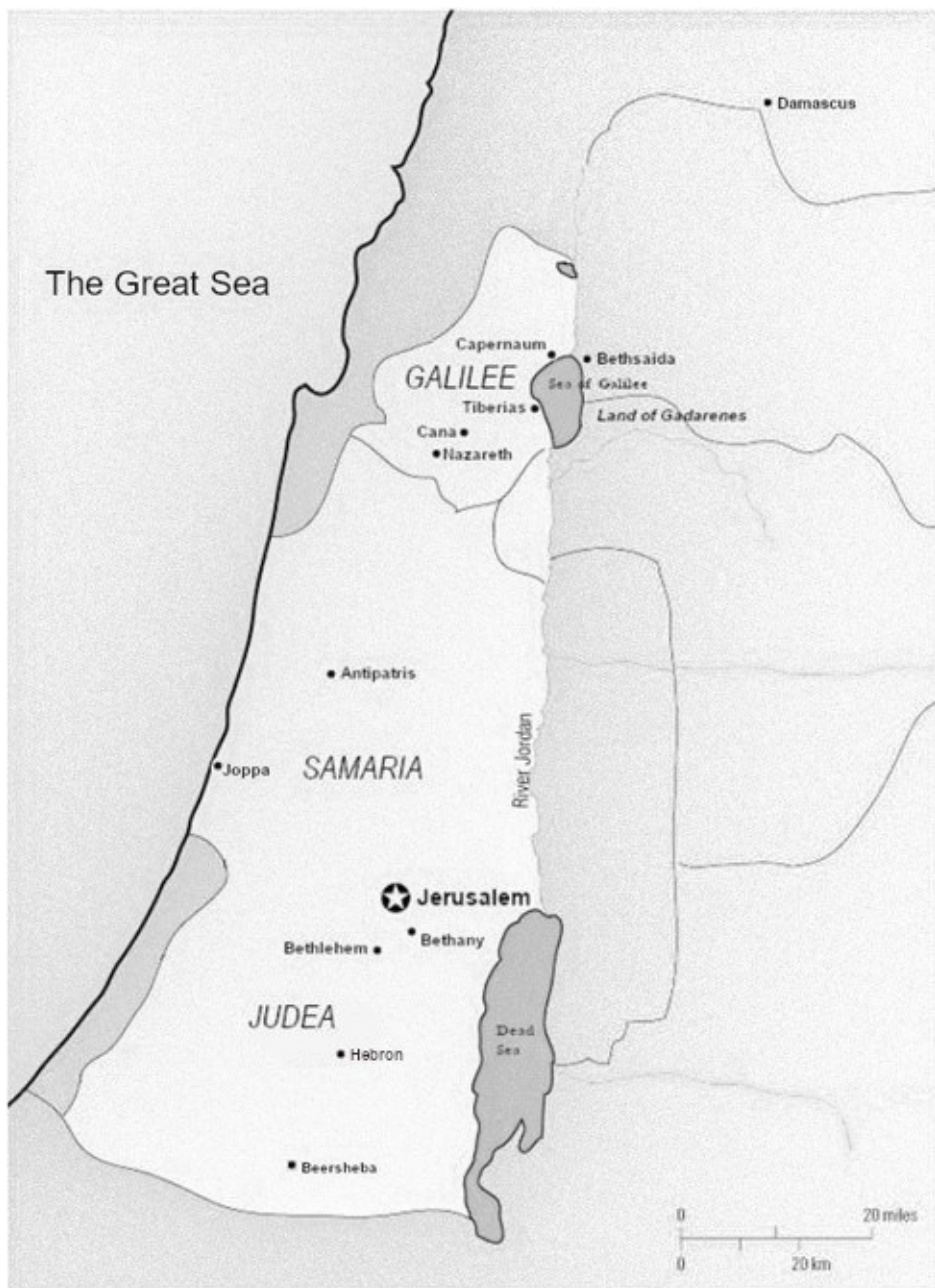
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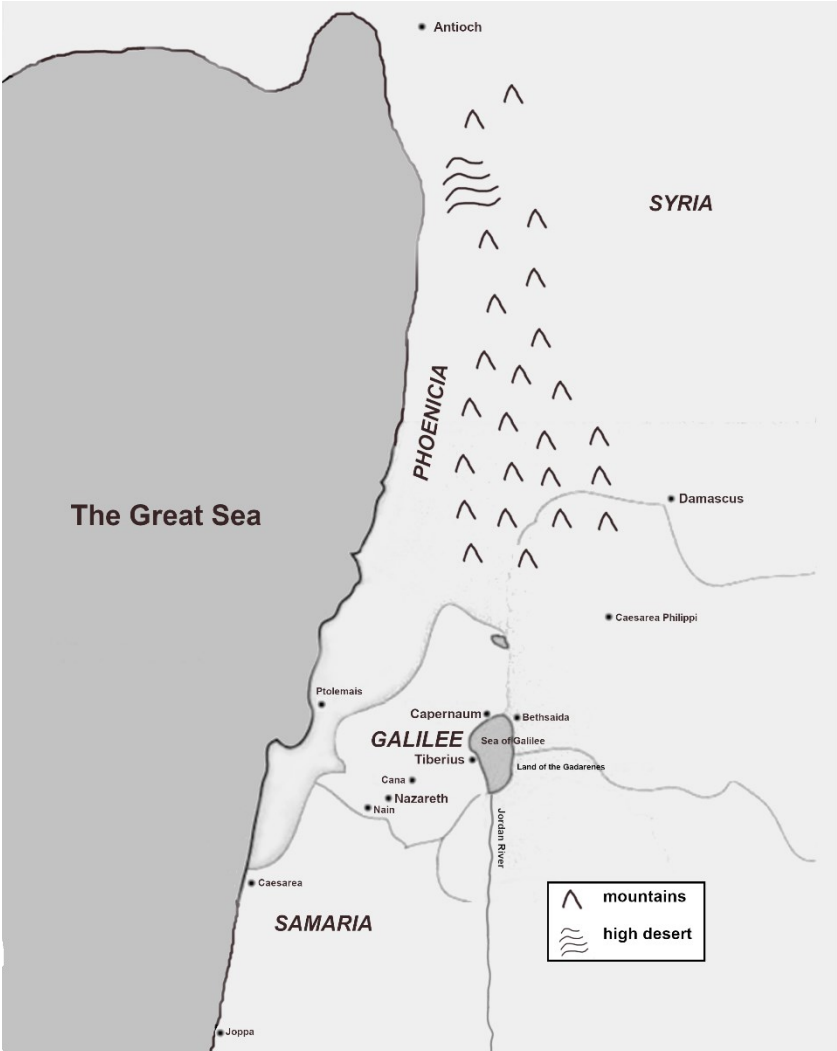
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First Century Times and Measurements

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

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

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

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

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

A handbreadth is approximately four inches.

PREFACE

THE NEW WAY SERIES #8

Telling the World from Antioch of Syria

The final book in the New Way Series parallels Luke's manuscript "Acts of the Apostles" and ends with the New Way reaching Rome and many other major cities in the Roman Empire. "Telling the World from Antioch of Syria" imagines the children who once traveled with Jesus becoming parents and grandparents and attempting to pass the New Way on to others. We see the sacrifices required to take Jesus' message everywhere. Many important events recorded in "Acts of the Apostles" happened in Antioch as it became a launching pad into Asia Minor and the uttermost parts of the world. Will the message of the New Way compel you to make similar sacrifices in order to be obedient?

Dale Weatherford

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Chapter 1

Josie, one of the three owners of the Carpentry and Fine Furniture Shop in Antioch, enjoyed having Jacob work for him. He was a real help handing him lumber and tools and he kept the construction site clean. Josie wanted to make sure he was willing to work before he tried to teach him carpentry, and so far, he had certainly earned his pay. He had learned the names for all the tools and was beginning to learn the different woods that were used for different projects. Josie discovered that he enjoyed training Jacob and was careful to not offend him since he knew that he was from a Pharisaic family. Jacob arrived on time at sunrise each morning and worked until sunset. Josie hoped that someday Jacob would ask questions about what made him different, but he would wait until he asked. He was learning to trust the Holy Spirit to guide him in such things.



Jonathan, the son of the Apostle James, had started the Christian Worship Center with his best friend, Asher, over seventeen years earlier with just a group of five Gentile families. He laughed as he remembered that he and Asher were the youngest and the smallest men in the group. They felt so totally inadequate. But they were certain that this was where God had led them. They had left Jerusalem and traveled over 300 miles to a foreign land to share the New Way with people who were considered enemies of the Jews. Now, for the first time in almost two months, he was attending the Leadership Team meeting. He had taken time off for the birth of his daughter and focused on his family for a change. It was a nice break and Jehovah had provided all the leadership they needed. Barnabas had agreed to direct the Leadership Team. Jonathan was surprised to see that John Mark was there with Mordecai. John Mark had been traveling with Peter, and Jonathan was not aware that he had returned. John Mark carried with him a box that he kept mysteriously at his feet during the meeting. Barnabas was prepared to lead the meeting and Jonathan encouraged him to go ahead. It was interesting to not be in charge. And it would be good to hear what had been happening since he had taken this time off. Everything seemed to be going smoothly. The groups were going well, new groups were being formed, and leaders had been appointed from the existing groups. They now had twelve branch groups meeting under the auspices of the nine original groups. Jonathan asked if there was a waiting list for new groups or if everyone had been accommodated. He was assured that everyone was in a group as far as they knew. "That means that we have well over 200 people that we are caring for. Has there been any discussion as to splitting into two groups in order to grow more, or building a

second building? Has anything been discussed? I'm not sure that I can properly shepherd that many people," stated Jonathan. Barnabas replied that they had talked a little about a second building, but everyone felt that the doubling of the worship and fellowship times was working well, and the discussion had been dropped. Barnabas admitted that he hadn't considered the stress that it put on Jonathan to shepherd so many people. Even though others were taking the load of teaching, everyone still looked to Jonathan for direction, counsel, comfort, and support. They determined to pray about adding another shepherd for the group.

When there were no more reports or questions, Barnabas turned the meeting over to John Mark. John Mark brought out the box. "What I have here is something that I think will be beneficial to the future followers of Jesus. It could never contain everything about Jesus' earthly life, but it is a manuscript about the things that impressed Peter and me concerning Jesus' earthly ministry. I only have the one copy, so I don't know how to do this, but I would like for you to look it over and see what you think. I will be honest with you: I am totally out of funds to buy more papyrus to make additional copies. But I would like to make copies to distribute as many as we can to the other gatherings that Peter and I have been ministering to. Many of them have no one in their groups that actually knew Jesus or what He taught or did in His lifetime on earth."

The men gathered around and started looking at the pages and pages of material. They were fascinated to read for the very first time the accounts of Jesus' healings and parables. Jonathan asked for permission to take the manuscript home and read it in its entirety and John Mark agreed. Everyone was talking at once and was so excited about the possibilities and potential for the manuscript. "Let me read it completely and then we'll discuss funding you to make another copy or two."

"I'll personally pay for two more copies," said Demetrius.

"I'll do the same. Two copies for me," said Manaen.

"I'll pay for one copy," said Samuel. "This is precious, so very, very precious to read about my Lord Jesus."

"I can't thank you guys enough," said John Mark, "but I'll need help getting that many copies made. Does anyone know of another scribe who could help me?"

"Maybe I should see if one of the older students could help. And I'll ask Absalom if he can spare some time," said Jonathan.

"Thank you. This is very encouraging. Jonathan, you take it home tonight and bring it back to me whenever you are through. Let me know if there's anything that should be corrected," said John Mark.

After some prayer, the group was dismissed, and John Mark said that he would let the men know what it would cost to make another copy. It was fifty-three pages of papyrus, and he would need to figure out how much ink it would take. Everyone left in an excited mood and Jonathan was glad to be back.

Jonathan stayed up most of the night reading the manuscript. He was fascinated at all the memories that came flooding back. John Mark had done such a good job in describing Jesus and the miracles He performed and the parables He told. Jonathan dreamed of writing his own version of the stories, telling them from his viewpoint as a child. He had never heard the adult version. He had only heard what his dad had shared with him and up until now, didn't realize how limited his knowledge of Jesus was. It humbled him. When he talked with Susanna at breakfast, she was excited to hear the news and agreed that his version of the life of Jesus would be different since he was so young. She reminded him that Basha was working on a manuscript that the Apostle Matthew had written. She suggested that Basha would probably be a good one to review John Mark's manuscript, since she was an adult traveling with Jesus during that time.

Jonathan left to go ask John Mark if he would mind if Basha read through it. John Mark decided to go with Jonathan. As they walked together, Jonathan congratulated him on the excellent work. "You know that it wasn't me. The Holy Spirit told me what to write and much of it was just writing down Peter's sermons. I was too young to remember much, and I didn't travel with Jesus. I was only around Him when He was in Jerusalem. So, it was new for me, too."

"Everyone is so excited about this work. Here's Samuel's house."

They knocked and Haggith greeted them. She called Basha, who listened as Jonathan and John Mark told her about showing the manuscript to the Leadership Team and their reaction. They asked if she would be willing to read it and said if she approved, they would start copying it.

"Has Peter read it?" asked Basha.

"Well, I read it to him last week and he gave his approval."

"I would be delighted to read it, but only on one condition."

"What's that?" asked John Mark, feeling confused.

"I have just finished the manuscript written by Matthew. Would you be willing to read it?"

"Basha, I would consider it an honor. I didn't know you were working on this."

"Very few people did. Matthew and I have worked on the manuscript ever since we were espoused. But he wrote his parts in Greek, and I wrote mine in Hebrew since I was more comfortable with that. When we put our two accounts together, we found that they were mostly duplicates. It was uncanny. But I feel the Holy Spirit just showed us what to write. So, after Matthew was killed, I moved here and have been working to get it all written in Greek since that's the more common language now and few can read the Hebrew. I've got all my parts changed over to Greek and I believe I have everything included that Matthew wanted. I'll be happy to read your manuscript, if you'll read mine."

"It would be a privilege, Basha. May I take it with me now?" asked John Mark.

“Yes, but it’s my only copy.”

“I understand. I didn’t sleep much last night knowing that Jonathan had my only copy! It’s hard to part with it.”

“You take Basha’s manuscript...”

“Matthew’s manuscript, please,” implored Basha.

“My apologies, Basha. John Mark, after you read Matthew’s manuscript, I would like to read it. Then, Basha, would you plan to attend the Leadership Team meeting at my office next week? I could come and escort you.”

“I would be delighted to share Matthew’s work. And thanks for the offer, but I can walk with Samuel.”

“Of course. This is so exciting!” said Jonathan as John Mark and Basha exchanged manuscripts. “Wow, Matthew’s manuscript is so much bigger.”

“I’m curious about what you included that Peter didn’t,” stated John Mark.

“Maybe my handwriting is just larger. Who knows? Read it and we’ll compare notes later.”

After receiving Jonathan and Basha’s verification that his facts were correct and no changes were required, John Mark began recruiting others to help him make copies of the manuscript and Mordecai allowed tables to be set up that filled his living area. The men worked laboriously to see that every page was copied precisely. It was time-consuming, hand-cramping, neck-aching work for these volunteers.



As Samuel and Basha entered the room, Jonathan stood and welcomed them. “Gentlemen, in case you do not know this lady, her name is Basha. She traveled with Jesus for the entire three and a half years of His ministry as the Apostle Philip’s wife. After they ministered in Samaria for a while, they moved to Carthage in northern Africa and led many, many people to Jesus. Philip was martyred there and Basha and her daughter returned to Capernaum. She married the Apostle Matthew, and they resumed the work in Carthage. Then they spent six years in Ethiopia deep in Africa and led many, many people to Jesus there. Once again, Basha returned a widow almost three years ago when the Apostle Matthew was martyred. She has been staying with Samuel and Haggith and I’ve invited her here to share her story. Will you welcome her please?” All the men stood to express their approval of her being present. And Jonathan breathed a little easier. He was not sure how she would be received since a woman had never attended the Leadership meeting and certainly had never been allowed to speak. The leaders showed nothing but admiration for her contribution to God’s kingdom.

“Thank you for welcoming me. Almost fifteen years ago, Matthew and I became espoused. He was ministering to a young follower who had also traveled with Jesus and was a good friend. One day that

young man, named Yanis, asked Matthew if the apostles would consider writing down an account of the life of Jesus while He was on earth. He pretty bluntly — as only the youth can do — insinuated that all those who traveled with Jesus would soon be senile and unable to remember.” Everyone laughed with her. “Matthew shared with me His desire to write down everything that he could remember about traveling with Jesus. I confessed to him that my abba, who was a priest, had taught me to read and write Hebrew. Matthew encouraged me to help him write the manuscript. We worked on it for the twelve years of our marriage as we had time. When he was killed, and our house was destroyed, one thing remained — the box containing this manuscript. I feel that Jehovah was protecting it and felt His call to complete it. I brought the manuscript here and have been copying and editing it. John Mark, Jonathan, and Samuel have read it and asked me to present it to you tonight. Yes, it is the same story of Jesus’ life on earth that John Mark presented to you last week. But Matthew wrote primarily for the Jewish followers and those that grew up knowing The Law and The Prophets. He also included a lot more of Jesus’ teachings than John Mark, so it is longer. I’m not really sure what else to say. Now that it is finished and John Mark and Jonathan say that it is accurate, I am starting to make a second copy to take to my son in Cana of Galilee and I hope I can find a scribe who will help me copy it to take to Jerusalem so that the other apostles can use it. Do you have any questions?”

“Thank you, Basha,” said Jonathan.

Suddenly the room erupted with the men asking to see the manuscript. Samuel set the box on the table and Basha distributed a handful of pages to each leader. The room was suddenly quiet as each man once again began to read the story of Jesus as told by a different author.

“This is incredible work!”

“I can tell how much time you have invested in this.”

“Basha, you are to be commended for your work.”

“I believe that we should commit funds to have this copied for ourselves if Basha is going to take her copies.”

“We need to find a full-time scribe to hire.”

“What about John Mark?”

“I have two boys who are helping me with my manuscript. They should be out of school soon, but I don’t know if they are working somewhere this summer. If we all worked together, we could make at least one copy in a couple of weeks if they are available full-time,” stated John Mark. “I’ll talk with the boys and Rabbi Absalom tomorrow if that’s all right with you, Basha.”

“Sure. Should we come to your place since you are already set up? There’s not a lot of room at Samuel’s.” Mordecai agreed and John Mark said he would meet her to start work tomorrow at the second hour.

“John Mark, what about the copies that I ordered of your manuscript?” asked Manaen.

“We’ll continue to work on the additional copies, but right now it’s just vitally important that we make a second copy of the Apostle Matthew’s work because if it were to be destroyed, it would be irreplaceable.”

“Agreed. Let’s get at least one copy of this made immediately and then you can work on getting more copies of both made to distribute.”

“Jonathan, are we going to hear reports tonight? Because I have a prayer request,” asked Paul.

“We should. Basha, would you mind waiting downstairs? We shouldn’t be long,” requested Jonathan.

Basha wished she had a table and her supplies so that she could start copying the manuscript. Fifteen years of her life she had devoted to it, and it had finally been revealed. *Thank You, Father. I think they were pleased with it. But all I wanted to do was glorify You. Show me what to do. I want to get this copy made to leave here, but I thought I could leave for Cana on Sunday. I’m grateful that Matthew left me some silver to use for the project. I’m glad he was wise enough to leave it at Sarah’s house in Carthage. Did he know that he would give his life for Your work? Does he know that it was well received? I can’t wait to take it to our friends in Jerusalem. I can’t wait to see Jordan. Father, help me not to be impatient. My goodness, there seems to be a lot of angry voices from the men. What could be upsetting them? I hope it’s not because Jonathan let a woman into the Leadership meeting. Father, whatever it is, let them settle it in peace and let them glorify You.* She continued to walk around the empty Worship Center. She looked at the scrolls containing The Law and The Prophets, and she suddenly had a vision of Matthew’s and John Mark’s manuscripts being studied by future Christians. Then she smiled and shook her head. *No, that’s just too far-fetched to even dream about. But, Father, You are a great big God and You told me to complete this work and I have been obedient.*

Samuel came down the stairs carrying the manuscript box and asking if she was ready to go. She agreed and asked, “Was any of that yelling about me or Matthew’s manuscript?”

“Absolutely not. I can’t share things that are discussed within the Leadership Team meetings, but I can assure you it was not about you. Just when things are looking good, there always arises a controversy,” said Samuel shaking his head sadly.

“I guess Satan just has to stick his finger in when things are good,” said Basha.

“Yes, but it’s so sweet when brothers dwell together in unity and harmony.”

“I hope it was resolved.”

“I’m sure it will be in time, but right now there are some wounded feelings,” admitted Samuel.

Chapter 2

Jonathan walked home grieving. The night had started out so well, and then it had all just exploded. He had tried to stay and counsel, but tempers were running too high. He would spend the night in prayer and try to tackle things in the morning. He was thrilled that Susanna was waiting up for him. She wanted to know how the men received Basha and her manuscript, and he was glad to share that good news with her. “Susanna, another matter came up, totally unrelated to Basha, and I need to spend some time in prayer before I talk with you. I’m sure you are ready for sleep and I’m going up to the rooftop to pray. Were the boys good tonight? Did they help you with little Rinnah?”

“Yes, Abba, they were very good. I wish you didn’t look so troubled. Is there anything I can do to help?”

“No. Yes. Pray for unity in the Leadership Team. We need to come to agreement. Some hurtful words were said tonight.”

“Okay. I’ll pray for a while before I sleep.”

“I’ll be down in a little bit.”

Jonathan sat on a bench and then fell on his knees and poured out his heart to Jehovah. “Father, I don’t have the wisdom to lead these men. I don’t know what is best. I’m half their age and I don’t understand how this can happen with men who are supposed to be our elders. Oh, Father, I can’t solve this. I need You.” Jonathan sat and watched the clouds playing hide-and-seek with the moon. He quietly began to sing the Psalms and worship. “Almighty God, Creator of all, Lord and Master, Almighty!” Jonathan sat still and felt God’s presence with him. He clearly heard the Holy Spirit speak. *What if this split is My will? Sometimes what you call bad, is actually good.*

“Father, how can this be good?” But he didn’t hear anything else. He prayed for a while longer and decided that he was ready for sleep. *If God isn’t upset about the split, why should I be?* And suddenly he felt peace. He walked downstairs and slept soundly.

The two older boys were working this summer. Zebedee was working full time at Demetrius’ Mercantile Store and Zerah was working mornings with Elam learning to be a carpenter. Jonathan was so proud of both of them. He stopped by his office to pray for a while before going to meet John Mark at Mordecai’s at the second hour. He was amazed that Mordecai had turned his entire living space into tables for the men and Basha to work on the manuscripts.

Basha kept the manuscript pages in order and gave each man the next page to copy. When a page was completed, she or Samuel would check it word by word. “Jonathan, are you working or just interrupting the work?” asked Basha boldly but teasingly.

“I guess just interrupting. I need to speak with John Mark for just a few minutes. But I will make sure he returns shortly,” promised Jonathan.

The two men headed for the door. "I just wanted to make sure you are okay," said Jonathan.

"Yeah, I guess. That was hard to hear last night. But I guess I'm more sad because Paul is punishing Barnabas for my behavior. That's not right. I think Barnabas should go on with Paul without me. They make a great team," said John Mark.

"But what if it's God's will for Paul and Silas to go on this trip and for you and Barnabas to do something else? You know I need both of you here."

"I know. But I also feel strongly that God is calling me to take this manuscript to my relatives in Cyprus. I know I shouldn't leave right now. Like Paul said, I never finish anything. So, maybe it is best for Paul and Silas to go teach all over the northern Great Sea areas and let me stay here and make copies of my manuscript. Maybe Barnabas would be willing to wait for me to get multiple copies made. Then we could sail later. Do you think that would work?"

"You'd have to talk with Barnabas and see how God is leading him," counseled Jonathan.

"Thanks, Jonathan, you are a real friend."

"I still wish you'd pray about staying here and helping me teach," said Jonathan. "But you know that I want you to go wherever God leads you."

"I've got to get busy."

"And I'm out of here. Nobody wants to see my Greek writing skills!" admitted Jonathan, relieved that John Mark was handling the disappointment and very public attack. Now, he needed to talk with Paul and that was going to be tricky. Paul was twice his age and an apostle. But Jonathan knew that as his friend and shepherd, he needed to at least let him know that he was praying for reconciliation and unity among the brothers.

Jonathan walked slowly to Kostakis' house. He was told that Paul was preaching at the markets, but no one was sure which one. So, instead of chasing down Paul, Jonathan decided to talk with Barnabas next. He sat down with Barnabas and asked how he was doing. "I'm sad. I'm angry that John Mark got hurt. Paul had already told me that he didn't feel that John Mark should go, but I insisted, and it led to problems. I should know by now Paul is going to be totally obedient to whatever God is showing him regardless of who thinks differently. I shouldn't have pushed. It just caused problems. But I think I'm at peace about it," said Barnabas slowly.

"Okay. You know that I will need you more than ever to help with the teaching here."

"Yes, but that's not what I'm hearing from the Holy Spirit. I don't know whether it's just because Paul and I were praying about going on the ministry trip together or whether God is calling me to a different plan."

"That's something that God will clarify for you in the coming days or weeks or months," said Jonathan.

"Yes. I intend to spend time seeking His will."

“Let me know if I can help in any way.”

“Thanks, Jonathan. Just pray for me to know for sure. I don’t want another mix up.”

“I just want you to know that I agree that John Mark is a different man from the boy who went with you guys before. I believe in second chances, and I think he’s proved himself. But I also feel that Paul and Silas will make a great team. It will be interesting to see what God does with your life, Barnabas. I sure could use you here. Your teaching is always appreciated.”

“Thanks, Jonathan. I just need time to clarify God’s direction for me.”

“I may be praying with a slant to what I want God to do,” teased Jonathan and both men laughed. “And Barnabas, you are welcome in our guest room if you don’t feel comfortable here with Paul and Silas.”

“No. But thank you. I believe that we should be able to dwell in peace even though we don’t see eye-to-eye.”

“Okay, then. Let me know if I can help with anything.”



Josie continued to attend the fellowship meal at the Christian Worship Center on Tuesdays after work and made friends with many of the men there. Most of them were married, older widowers, or young men who had not yet married, but Josie was a people lover and could make friends anywhere. He usually sat with Jonathan and his boys. Josie asked if it was time for another fishing and overnight camping trip and the boys were thrilled. Jonathan wasn’t sure, but Susanna encouraged him to take some time off. They decided to leave just as soon as Sabbath was ended and camp out for two nights. Jonathan would have to secure leaders for his men’s group on post-Sabbath night and the Sunday morning worship service. The boys and Josie would need to arrange to be off work, but they all were looking forward to a special time, and Jonathan welcomed the break.

Josie, Jonathan, Zebedee, and Zerah began their hike just as soon as the sun was down and Sabbath had ended. It was much warmer and much more pleasant this time of year than when they had fished in early spring. The men carried the lanterns, and the boys were fascinated to be outside in the darkness watching the crazy shadows that the lanterns caused. They found their camping place and threw down their blankets without even needing a bonfire. The sky was ablaze with stars and everyone was quickly asleep. It was a relaxing time for everyone. Jonathan and Josie talked about the things that Josie was learning about following Jesus and Josie shared about the manuscripts of Jesus’ life that had been completed. “Basha, that’s an unusual name. Is she the Basha that is in my family group at Elam’s?”

“I only know one Basha, but I can’t keep up with who is in which group.”

“This Basha is married to an old man named Mordecai, I think.”

"No. But yes, that's the Basha who is the Apostle Matthew's widow. But she's just friends with Mordecai and keeps an eye on him. He's at least twice her age!"

"Yes. And she's a widow?"

"Yes. Why?" Suddenly, Jonathan sat up and paid attention.

"Josie, are you interested in Basha?"

"No. She just said that she was from Cana and knew Rebecca, my sister. She's wanting to travel there to see her son. I was wondering why her husband didn't take her. Now I realize that if she's a widow, she can't travel by herself."

"Oh. She would make an excellent wife for you," said Jonathan.

"I'm not looking for a wife. I'm quite content with me, myself, and mine. Thank you!" declared Josie.

"Josie! Abba! Come look at this fish! It's the biggest one yet!"

What a great camping trip they enjoyed together. They shared old memories and made new ones. On Monday at noon, they began their hike back into Antioch. As they divided up the fish, everyone begged Josie to plan another trip soon and he agreed.



At the Leadership meeting, Paul and Silas announced that they were leaving on Sunday and planned to check on all the places Paul had preached on the previous ministry trip. They asked for the Leadership Team's prayers.

"I just want to know if you are leaving in good relationship with your fellow ministers. Last week the endeavor didn't seem to be something that God would bless," stated Lucius. "I've never seen God bless disharmony between brothers."

"I have talked with both Barnabas and John Mark, and they understand that this is the direction that God is leading us. You can ask them if they would like to speak to the question," said Paul carefully.

Barnabas spoke up, "While last week was hurtful, I still agree that God is leading Paul and Silas on this journey, and I fully support their going. I don't believe it is necessary for Paul to apologize for speaking what was on his heart."

John Mark agreed that he felt certain that God had something else in mind for both his life and Barnabas'. He reported that he was in the process of finishing the copies and it was going well. "We will finish Matthew's copy early next week and return to our work on the five additional copies of the manuscript that God gave to me and Peter. Then I'll have more time to seek God's clear direction."

"How long will it take to finish the manuscripts?"

"Right now, I have a crew of two full-time scribes and two students. Basha and Samuel have been working on checking the copies for accuracy. I estimate that it will take us another month to complete all those that have been requested. And I think this group

should be aware of all the time and energy and hospitality that both Mordecai and Samuel have provided to see this work completed. Thank you, brothers, for the use of your homes and the many meals you have provided for us.”

“Are there any other reports or prayer requests?” Jonathan asked.

“Basha is looking for a traveling companion to get to Cana. If you hear of anyone headed that way, please let her know,” stated Samuel. “She’s very disappointed that she can’t find a driver willing to take her, since they would be responsible for her safety as a woman.”

“Okay. Let’s spend the rest of the time in prayer for these needs and then we’ll close in a commissioning of Paul and Silas as they leave on their ministry trip.”

The men prayed and worshipped for a while and then Jonathan called them together to lay their hands on Paul and Silas’ back, head, and shoulders, to show their support for their ministry. Several prayed aloud for their journey and for the people who would hear the New Way for the first time. Others prayed for a strengthening of the new followers and that they would grow. It was a special time and Jonathan prayed for God’s clear direction for them each step of the journey. The men lingered as they said goodbye, knowing that this was a dangerous trip. Everyone was aware that sharing the New Way had cost other disciples dearly. They promised their continued prayers.

On Sunday morning, most of the Leadership Team was able to gather to see them off as they left Kostakis’ home walking to the seaport in Antioch. They gave them a bag of silver that had been collected by the groups.

Jonathan asked Barnabas to lead the second worship service on the Sabbath and asked the Apostle Peter to lead the evening worship service after work on Sunday. Paul had also been helping teach a group, but the original leader agreed to resume his position. Each member of the Leadership Team was at full capacity with responsibilities and Jonathan was trying to think ahead as to what would happen if John Mark and Barnabas did indeed leave. And of course, Peter was always in and out depending on where the Holy Spirit was leading him. He was glad that they were so eager to share the New Way, and he knew he would just have to trust Jehovah to guide him to new leaders.



All summer the Leadership Team had been praying for Barnabas and John Mark — ever since they had requested prayer for clarity concerning a ministry trip. Their plan was to spend time with relatives in Cyprus and then move north toward Colossae. They planned to take the manuscript with them and continue to make more copies as they could afford the papyrus and ink. Now, Barnabas announced that they felt that they should leave the following week. They could not delay much longer, or it would not be a safe time for sailing. The Leadership

Team gave them their blessings and spent time in prayer for their ministry. They sent them off with the promise of their prayers and a bag of silver to help them with their journey. Both were very grateful for the Team's support — both the prayer support and the financial and emotional encouragement.



Once again Jonathan was trying to secure leaders to cover the people's needs. But this time seemed different. They had the two manuscripts that would allow the leaders material to teach on Jesus' life. Since many hadn't known Jesus personally while He was on earth, they had felt inadequate to teach until now. Every man on the Leadership Team was recruited to occasionally teach the whole Worship Center even though they were leading as many groups as possible. Jonathan continued to provide guidance and support to all of his leaders. It was a good time and Jonathan felt that his life was rich and full and balanced between ministry and home. How he loved being home in the afternoons with Susanna, Zephaniah, and baby Rinnah, but he missed Zebedee and Zerah. His boys would soon be men, and he only spent time with them on Sabbath afternoons because they seemed to always be at work or finishing schoolwork.



"Well, I don't imagine it's very pleasant being a carpenter in this kind of weather!" declared Simon as the men from the synagogue gathered around the table for Sabbath night dinner. Manasseh cringed and decided to let the remark go. But Jacob knew that his grandfather was speaking directly to him, and he responded. "Actually, it's quite nice. When the weather is bad, we all work in the warehouse — primarily building furniture. There are three owners, and they are all excellent carpenters. I'm learning a lot from them. Then when the rains stop, my boss, Josie, says that we will work outdoors again."

Priest Othniel asked if these men were Jewish. "Oh, yes, sir. I'm not sure whether the other two attend synagogue faithfully, but my boss mentions his synagogue quite often. He has lots of friends there."

"That's good. But I'm not aware of another synagogue in our area."

"I'm sorry, I don't know where his synagogue is. I'll ask him if you would like," volunteered Jacob.

"It would be good to know," stated Priest Othniel. "We don't seem to be growing. Maybe some other synagogue is ministering in this area."

"Maybe," said Jacob.

The rest of the Sabbath dinner went well, and Manasseh relaxed. He and Dinah, Jacob, and Judah bundled up and began their long walk home in the pouring rain. Manasseh declared that they would skip synagogue tomorrow if the rain didn't let up. He didn't want Dinah to get so wet and cold. Everyone slept a little late and stayed indoors. "I hope Martha's baby doesn't decide to arrive during this storm." She knew that Jehovah didn't always send babies at a convenient time. She had her bag packed and knew that Enos' mother, Hannah, was also ready. Enos had promised to send an oxcart for them whenever it was time. It seemed like a really long Sabbath day to Dinah, who hated not being able to work, and not having the girls to visit with.



The servant and oxcart arrived the following Thursday afternoon. The servant had already picked up Hannah, and Dinah sent Judah to the school to tell his abba that she was leaving. Junos and the other servants would take care of everything the men needed and keep an eye on Judah while she was away. She sat in the oxcart with Hannah and giggled as they bumped along to Enos' farm. Dinah was glad to have a friend help her with the birthing. It was different because it was her own daughter and she wanted someone else to be there to help with decisions. Hannah had six children of her own and had helped with many, many birthings. But most important was that Martha felt comfortable with her mother-in-law. Both women wondered what stage she was in and whether Enos had allowed enough time. They finally arrived at the house and discovered Martha standing at her loom trying to finish a new robe for Enos. They both laughed with relief. She was obviously not in distress, but upon examination they both agreed that it would be soon, and the baby was in a good position for birth. The two mothers relaxed and began to enjoy the visit. Martha's servants took care of cooking, so all they needed to do was to set up a birthing room and make sure they had all the supplies they needed. They had both given Martha a list of things they would need, and she showed them the room and the things they had requested. Both mothers agreed that everything was ready except the baby. At dinner, Enos joined them and apologized for sending for them so soon. Hannah assured him that it was better for them to be there early than late. She asked what he planned to do during the birthing. He said that there was an empty mat in the servant quarters, and he would try to get some sleep there, or at least wait there until his son was born. "Or daughter!" declared Martha.

"Yes, my dear. Or daughter. I will be happy either way as long as you both are safe," said Enos wisely.

When Dinah got up at sunrise, she found that Martha had been up for several hours walking the floor. The tightenings were just beginning to get regular and they enjoyed some sweet mother-daughter time before Hannah joined them. They ate some breakfast

that the servants provided, but Martha just wanted a cup of milk. Enos had already had his breakfast and was working in the barn. The servants would know where to find him when he was needed. Just before the sixth hour of the night, a healthy baby boy was born. The servants sent for Enos, and he was thrilled to be an abba. "A boy! I told you!"

"Yes, Enos, you did. Isn't he beautiful?" whispered Martha, and the two mothers left them alone. The servants had already cleaned the birthing room. Dinah got to put her first grandson to his mother's breast, and she couldn't keep back the tears. She was the grandmother of a son of Abraham.

Chapter 3

Manasseh missed Dinah and the house felt empty without her. She was staying with their daughter, Martha, until she was strong enough to care for herself and the little one. She knew the servants would care for her, but this was special bonding time. He and Judah had walked out to visit after school on Sunday, and Enos said he would send her home in time for the Sabbath in an oxcart. Hopefully, Bethany wouldn't need her before that.

All week the servants cared for Manasseh, Jacob, and Judah, but it wasn't the same. The house felt empty. And he couldn't quit thinking about only having Judah remaining to teach. He thought about the Shema and knew that it was his responsibility to teach his children everything he knew about God. Yet, everything that he saw in The Law and The Prophets seemed to point to Jesus as Messiah. *How can I justify not getting to the bottom of this? If Jesus is the Messiah, then it doesn't matter what Simon or anyone else thinks or believes. It only matters that I teach my children the Truth.* Manasseh began to weep and could not stop his sobs. He had put it off too long and now his children were gone. He determined that he would not put it off another day.

So, on Wednesday at breakfast, he informed Junos that he had business to take care of after school and wouldn't be home until later. Just as soon as school was out, he began to walk purposefully to the house that had invaded his thoughts for these past four years. He was trembling with fear but resolved to ask his questions. *I will not go inside, I won't touch, I will simply ask my questions.* Soon he was standing at the front of the house and his stomach was lurching at the thought of speaking to a Gentile. He had told his son to not be afraid of them, but he was terrified of disobeying The Law and The Prophets. *What if Priest Othniel is right? What if Simon is right? Well, Simon said one thing and practiced another. I know that for a fact. When I worked with him at the bank, I saw him shaking hands with clients who were not Jews. He even had me draw up contracts with them. I can do this. I have to!* He resolutely walked to the front door and knocked. A servant answered quickly, and Manasseh felt totally paralyzed with fear and no words would come.

"May I help you, sir?" the servant repeated.

"Is the owner of the house home?" was all Manasseh could think to say. He didn't know his name.

"My master is a busy man. What is your purpose?" asked the servant firmly. Manasseh felt defeated. He didn't know how to explain his purpose.

Suddenly he felt a new strength flow through him and felt that he should explain his need to the servant. "I'm sorry to bother you, but four years ago, I played as a musician for a wedding here. Your

master was very kind, and I would like to ask him some questions about this man Jesus,” said Manasseh all in one breath.

The servant broke into a huge smile. “Would you like to come in, or would you feel more comfortable in the courtyard?”

“The courtyard, please,” whispered Manasseh, feeling that his knees would buckle if he didn’t sit quickly. The servant spoke to another servant and then led Manasseh through the gate and into the back courtyard. The servant indicated a bench and invited him to sit. He assured him that Master Demetrius would join him shortly. *This is where the wedding took place and right over there was where we sat and played our music.*

“Shalom,” said Demetrius when he entered the courtyard from the house.

Manasseh stood and responded, “Shalom.” He placed his hands in his robe to indicate that he did not wish to touch, and Demetrius did the same.

“I am Demetrius and yes, I am a follower of Jesus. My servant tells me that you have some questions.”

“Yes. I played music with a group for a wedding here four years ago ...”

“Jonathan and Susanna’s wedding,” nodded Demetrius. “You were an answer to prayer because they and her parents wanted the traditional Jewish wedding, but we couldn’t find anyone in Antioch who knew the music. We were so glad you came. It made the wedding very special.”

“Thank you,” said Manasseh who was beginning to be able to breathe again.

“How can I help you, my friend?”

“I saw and heard things that I cannot forget, and I came to ask questions, but I seem to be unable to think of them. I’m sorry.”

“Well, let’s start by getting a little more acquainted. What is your name or what should I call you if you do not wish to be known,” said Demetrius kindly.

“Manasseh. I am a scribe and rabbi of a small Hebrew School. I should be able to speak, but all my questions have disappeared.”

“I believe that you have made a tremendously hard decision to go against everything that you have been taught and instead follow what Jehovah is speaking into your heart. I commend you for making that decision. Do you remember that at the wedding, a friend of mine provided you with kosher food?”

“Yes, that was very kind of you and him.”

“His name is Mordecai. Do you think you would be more comfortable talking with him?”

“Oh, yes ... I don’t mean to offend you,” stated Manasseh.

“No offense taken. I understand that you are not comfortable with Gentiles. Let’s walk over there and see if he is home. It’s not far.”

“Oh, thank you, sir.” Demetrius told the servant that he would walk alone with Manasseh to Mordecai’s house. Soon they

approached a much smaller house and Demetrius knocked and called out, “Mordecai, it’s Demetrius, I’ve brought a friend. May we come in?”

“Welcome,” an old man called out. He was seated on a cushion in the living area and invited both men to take a seat.

“No, this is Manasseh. He has some questions about Jesus, and I don’t want him to be uncomfortable. He will tell you his story and you can answer his questions better than I can since you both have the same heritage.”

“Thank you, Demetrius. I’ll see you tomorrow night. Shalom.”

“Shalom, and I will be praying that you can answer Manasseh’s questions.”

“Welcome to my home, Manasseh. You look like my youngest son.”

Manasseh repeated his story of playing for the wedding and seeing and hearing things that he couldn’t forget. “Demetrius said that Jehovah was calling me to follow Him instead of The Law and The Prophets. Isn’t that heresy? You seem to have found something that brings you peace. What makes you and your friends so free? I can’t forget the love and kindness I felt that night. What makes you so different from everyone else? How can you associate with Gentiles and slaves and even the bride was a cripple? I’m sorry, but I feel that I will explode with questions, and I think the answers have something to do with Jesus,” Manasseh blurted out without pausing. These were the questions that had haunted him for years and he didn’t want to fail to ask them.

“You are a man of many questions. But, yes, I have found the Messiah, and it has brought me incredible peace and love and joy. It is my privilege to answer your questions, but I assure you, it is not heresy. I will show you as a friend showed me that The Law and The Prophets perfectly describe Jesus as the Messiah.”

“But I’ve been taught ...”

“Yes, you’ve been taught that He is a liar, a fraud, a lunatic, a deceiver, and that if you follow Him, you are participating in His heresy. So, where do you go to find Truth?”

“I am trained as a scribe and now teach at a small Hebrew School. Everything that I have read from The Law and The Prophets seem to point to Jesus. And the Passover ceremony and the Seder seem to point to him, too,” said Manasseh.

“Yes, because everything in The Law and The Prophets is true,” assured Mordecai. “But you have not been taught The Law and The Prophets; you have been taught a Jewish religion that has strayed from the Truth. I suspect you have been taught the religion of the Pharisees. Am I correct?” asked Mordecai.

“Yes, sir. I am from the synagogue led by Priest Othniel on the west side of Antioch.”

“The Pharisee’s interpretation of The Law and The Prophets is the problem. It binds and destroys us and prevents us from being in a right relationship with Jehovah,” said Mordecai. “I was trapped in that religion for many years. I lived in Jerusalem and heard Jesus teach on

the temple steps. I knew in my heart that He was the true Messiah. He said that He had come to fulfill the Law and to become the sacrificial Lamb of God. After His crucifixion and resurrection, I searched the Scriptures with several of my friends and we all came to the same conclusion that Jesus was indeed the Messiah.

Mordecai continued, “We moved here soon after that and established a synagogue of our own, but we were unsure of what we were supposed to practice. We believed Jesus was the Messiah, but we were still trapped by the Law. The Apostle Paul came to our synagogue and taught us much. He introduced us to a teacher who had traveled with Jesus and knew His teachings and could show us how to become followers of Jesus. That was his wedding that Demetrius hosted. Jonathan taught us from The Law and The Prophets that Jesus did not come to bring a New Way, He came to teach us the old way that God intended all along. It’s very clear in The Law and The Prophets. It is not hidden. But the Pharisees and Sadducees have polluted the Scripture with pagan beliefs and with personal gain. I assure you it is not Jesus who preaches heresy. Everything that He taught is foretold in the Law. For example, what was the covenant that God made with Abraham?” asked Mordecai.

“He said that He would bless those who blessed him and curse those who cursed him,” replied Manasseh.

“Very good. That is the first covenant. But Jehovah made many promises to Abraham. What was the covenant that God made with Abraham after he was willing to offer Isaac as a sacrifice?”

“He said that He would multiply his descendants as many as the sands of the oceans or the stars of the sky.”

“Good. What else did He say about those descendants?”

Mordecai probed.

Manasseh concentrated for a few minutes and then quoted from Genesis 22:

I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.

“All the nations,” said Manasseh quietly. “The Messiah is for everyone — Jews and Gentiles. Wow!”

“When Jesus taught that He was sent for both, it was considered new and radical. But it has been Truth since God spoke it 1800 years ago to Abraham.”

“Mordecai, I will go home and search The Law and The Prophets with a new understanding.”

“And I will be available for you to ask questions anytime you wish. My prayer is that you will continue to pursue Jesus until you discover that He is Messiah. Then you will experience the peace and love and

joy that you crave. Do you have any other questions that we need to talk about today?"

"No, sir. You have been most helpful, and I am eager to go home and study. I'm sure that I will have more questions soon. Thank you for your kind offer to help me."

"Manasseh, my greatest joy is to point you to Jesus. He will satisfy your deepest, most pressing desire by putting you in a right relationship with God. Then we will dwell together with people from every tribe and nation for all eternity. I hope that you will come back soon. Shalom."

"Shalom." Manasseh walked home in a daze. He ate dinner quietly and then returned to the school to begin reading the scrolls of The Law and The Prophets. He wanted to start at the very beginning and read them all again looking for Truth instead of what he had been taught. He had only read a few chapters when he realized anew that the Messiah was promised in all the writings. The Scriptures seem to be word pictures of his crucifixion, pictures of his miracles and healings, pictures of his love for all people. Manasseh didn't want to stop reading, but he knew he had to teach Hebrew School tomorrow and he mustn't mention Jesus. He reviewed the text that his brother Nathan, the headmaster, had chosen for tomorrow. It was from the prophet Isaiah.

Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.

The name Immanuel means God with us. Suddenly Manasseh remembered his father-in-law, Simon, ranting and raving about Jesus claiming to be God. If he was able to trust Mordecai, then what Jesus claimed exactly lined up with The Law and The Prophets. *They killed Jesus for speaking the Truth!* These were the answers he sought. He needed to know the Truth, but right now, he needed to get some sleep. He walked home and crawled onto his mat and fell into a deep and restful sleep.

On Thursday, after school, he ran home to check on Judah and accepted a glass of juice from Junos. They shared a snack and he tried to listen patiently to Judah's description of a walk that he and Junos had taken to the market and what all they had seen. He didn't want to be impatient with his son and he knew he missed his mother, but he was in a hurry to return to his reading. He kissed Judah goodbye and ran back to the school. He was surprised to find Nathan there. They chatted for a few minutes as Nathan asked him about certain boys and how they were doing with their schoolwork. Nathan was his younger brother, but he was still the headmaster and he needed to show patience. "So, what brings you back to work? I thought you would be home with Judah since Dinah is gone," said Nathan.

"He was busy with Junos, and I just wanted to read in peace and quiet." He tried to look casual as he selected the scroll to read. He had

completed Genesis and Exodus last night. So, he would start with the Levitical Law this afternoon.

"That's some heavy reading," commented Nathan. "Should I be impressed or worried?"

"It's been a long time since I read The Law and The Prophets completely and I decided to start this week. I haven't gotten very far," explained Manasseh.

"Dinah should be back tomorrow, shouldn't she?"

"Yes, but Bethany's baby is due any day now, so, I should have plenty of time to read in the evenings."

"I think I'm finished here," said Nathan. "I just needed to select the Scripture for us to study tomorrow. I seem to be stuck in Isaiah. Here's the Scripture we'll use. For some reason I seem to be focused on the Messiah. Do you ever think about those men we met in Sychar?"

"Yes. Maybe that's why I'm re-reading The Law and The Prophets. I just want to stay grounded in the Truth."

"Have fun. If you find anything let me know. Shalom."

Let him know? Should I? What would happen if I did? Would he run to Priest Othniel and tell? He'd get us both killed. And even if they didn't stone us, we'd not be allowed to teach school. Nope. I don't think I'm ready to tell. Maybe later.

Dinah returned on Friday midmorning. The servant dropped her off first and then was going to take Hannah home. Judah ran to meet his mother and wanted to show her all the things that he and Junos had done while she was gone. She had missed him terribly and told him so. He wanted to stay close and help her with everything. She wondered how different her home would feel once he started school and she had to spend her days alone. She laughed and decided she could rotate visiting the grandchildren. Jethro's and Joab's wives were both due near Passover. *Oh my, when did I get so blessed! And I still have Judah.* She suddenly realized that if each of her six children had six children she would be a very busy grandmother. Jehovah had indeed blessed her.

She sat down with Junos and discussed the household chores that needed to be done. Junos was such a blessing and ran the house without needing her input. In fact, it was Junos who pointed out things that Dinah needed to take care of. She suggested that Dinah might want to start another robe for Manasseh since his was beginning to wear thin. Dinah agreed and she and Judah bundled up and walked to the market to look for thread for Abba's new robe. Judah helped her pick out the thread and Dinah was glad for the opportunity to get outside in the sunshine even though it was cold.

They arrived home again just as Manasseh returned from school. Manasseh hugged her and wanted to know how Martha and the baby were doing. She told him that the circumcision would be on Sabbath afternoon. Priest Othniel wouldn't be able to walk that far, and they couldn't take the oxcart on the Sabbath, so Priest Mahlon would be doing the service. He had turned forty years old, and Priest Othniel had appointed him as a full-fledged priest on his birthday. They would

need to address him properly, which would be hard to remember because he had always been a close friend.

Chapter 4

On Friday afternoon, it was cold and rainy, and Manasseh declared that Dinah was too tired to get out in this weather. They stayed home instead of walking to her parents'. Jacob wanted to get out, so bundled up and went with Nathan. Achsah and the children stayed home. They couldn't go to the rooftop to talk privately, so Manasseh waited to talk with Dinah until Judah was asleep. Then he told her everything that he had learned about Jesus. He told her that he was in the process of re-reading The Law and The Prophets and he was amazed at how clearly it pointed to Jesus as Messiah. Dinah was listening and asking questions and was amazed at the progress that Manasseh had made in just the few days he had been reading. She was feeling that it was time to reveal the fact that she had been a secret follower of Jesus, when there was a knock on the door. They both knew what that probably meant. She ran upstairs to grab her bag while Manasseh got her cloak from beside the door and wrapped her in it. "Please be safe. I will miss you!" Manasseh returned to the living area and sat and wondered if he had done the wrong thing in telling her. She would be working closely with Lilah, who he knew couldn't keep a secret.

Dinah was suddenly bombarded by the wind and rain and huddled against it as she and the servant walked quickly to Abner's house. Lilah was already there and she and two of Bethany's servants were helping Bethany walk. Dinah slipped into her role as midwife and checked to make sure the baby was in a good position. She was not happy with what she found. They tried various techniques to get the baby to turn. Finally, Dinah sent a servant to find the mid-wife who had delivered baby Deborah. She had said she probably wouldn't be available unless there was an emergency and Dinah knew that it was time to call for help. She and Lilah and the two servants continued to help Bethany walk as much as she could between tightenings, but the tightenings were getting closer, and the baby was still sideways. "What will happen if the baby doesn't turn?" gasped Bethany.

"Then you'll have a really hard delivery," said her mother. "Most babies turn at the last minute, and it will be fine." But Dinah kept listening for the door and hoping that the midwife could be found in time. Dinah wracked her brain to remember any other things to try to get the baby to turn. Bethany's pain was extreme, and she was exhausted. The two mothers and Bethany's two servants had helped her walk for eight hours and still the baby wasn't turning or moving downward. She asked Lilah if they should call Abner since Bethany probably wouldn't live much longer. She just whimpered with the tightenings and was no longer able to walk. The baby was stuck and there was nothing they could do. The mid-wife finally arrived, assessed the situation, and screamed for the women to hold Bethany upright over the birthing table. The midwife plunged her arm into the

sac and began to pull on it. Within minutes the baby was born. Dinah had never seen such a bloody or stressful delivery.

The four women carried Bethany to her mat and assured her that she had birthed a healthy son. Dinah knelt by her side and cried. She listened as the baby made his first cry. It was weak at first, but it became stronger. Suddenly, Dinah felt Jehovah's presence in a way that she had never experienced. She felt strongly that she heard Jesus speaking inside of her telling her that Bethany would live. She asked the servant to bring her a bowl of milk and a spoon. She began to give Bethany sips of milk and she was able to swallow them. The servants brought her water, milk, and wine. Dinah continued to feed her spoonful by spoonful. When the midwife was convinced that the baby was safe to leave with Lilah, she came to examine Bethany. She was surprised that she was still alive after losing so much blood. She approved of what Dinah was giving her and told her that Bethany mustn't even raise her head until the bleeding had slowed. She said she hoped the bleeding would slow, but there was really nothing that she could do, and she had others that needed her. "Should she nurse the baby, or should we find a wet nurse?" asked Dinah.

"I think she will find it comforting, but you'll need to find a wet nurse, soon. You know that she's not going to make it. I must go. I am sorry for your loss. Shalom."

"Shalom, and thank you for saving the baby," said Dinah.

Lilah had already sent for Abner, and he rejoiced in the birth of his first son. His mother laid the baby in his arms, and he was thrilled. Then he realized that this was not normal. "Where's Bethany?" he demanded.

"Son, she had a really rough time."

"No! No! Not Bethany."

"Calm down. You'll wake her. She's exhausted and needs her rest."

"I want to see her. I'll be quiet and not wake her. I must see her! Is she on her mat?"

"Yes. Dinah is with her." Abner gently opened the door and knelt on the floor beside Bethany. His tears flowed freely.

Dinah encouraged him to speak to her. "She's really tired, but she's not asleep. She will be glad that you are here. But she shouldn't be talking, and she mustn't raise her head." Abner had never seen her so pale and still and it scared him to the core of his being. "Bethany, I'm here. I held our son and he's wonderful. I'm sorry you've had such a hard time." Her eyelids fluttered and she sighed contentedly. Dinah encouraged her to take another sip from the spoon, but she had fallen asleep. Dinah motioned for Abner to follow her out of the room. She assigned a servant to stay with Bethany and to let them know if she stirred.

"Abner, the baby was sideways and wouldn't move. We called for the midwife, and she was able to force the baby out, but it caused a lot of bleeding and Bethany will have to remain flat until the bleeding slows. We need to pray that the bleeding will slow soon. We are giving

her liquids, but it will take a long time for her to heal.” About that time, the baby began to wail, and Lilah brought him to Dinah to lay on Bethany’s breast. Dinah knew that because Bethany was an experienced mother, she would be able to nurse the baby without a lot of effort. But she hated to wake her. She laid the baby on Bethany’s breast and saw a slight smile cross her face as the baby nuzzled. Dinah helped him to take his first sips of mother’s milk. It didn’t seem to tire her, and the baby was quickly satiated and fell asleep. Dinah handed the baby to Abner, and then quickly tried to slip in a few more spoonfuls of liquid before Bethany fell asleep again. Each time the servants changed the blankets, Dinah was alarmed by the amount of blood that Bethany was losing. She continued to feed her liquids but could only get so much in before she fell asleep.

At sunrise, Dinah sent a servant to get Manasseh and tell him the situation. She didn’t feel that Bethany could possibly live much longer. She was growing weaker, and her breathing was getting shallower. Dinah, Lilah, and Abner had taken turns feeding her sips of liquid all night, but they were in a losing battle. When Manasseh arrived, Lilah and Abner left him alone with Dinah and Bethany while they ate breakfast. Dinah caught him up on the situation and he knelt beside his daughter and took her hand. Dinah told him that she had experienced God’s presence during the night and felt that He had told her that Bethany would not die. She asked if he thought that his new friends would be willing to pray for her. He agreed to ask Mordecai. He kissed Bethany’s cheek and then hugged Abner and said he would return but needed to run a quick errand. Abner nodded and Manasseh ran all the way to Mordecai’s house. He knocked, realizing that it was very early, but the door was opened quickly by Mordecai himself. “Mordecai, my daughter is dying. She had a terrible birth. Her son is fine, but she won’t stop bleeding and we don’t know what to do.”

“My servant will take you to get Haggith. She is a midwife. She will know what to do and I will be praying. What is your daughter’s name?”

“Bethany. Thank you, and shalom.” The servant quickly took Manasseh to Samuel and Haggith’s house.

“I’m sorry to bother you, but Mordecai sent me to get Haggith. My daughter has given birth and will not stop bleeding. Will you come?”

“Certainly. Let me get my bag.” Samuel and Haggith quickly walked to Abner’s house. Samuel and Manasseh waited in the living room with Abner while Haggith entered the bedroom. She quickly examined Bethany and listened to Dinah and Lilah describe the birth. “Yes, she has torn badly.” She reached in her bag and pulled out a pouch of leaves. She handed it to one of the servants and told her to soak it in hot water until the water turned brown and then bring it to her. She began to massage Bethany’s abdomen and all the women cringed as she began to massage harder and harder. Bethany was crying out in pain. But all the while Haggith was massaging, she was explaining that she was trying to force the body to stop the blood flow. “Jehovah designed the body to withstand deep wounds, but if for some

reason the wounds don't close, the blood flow won't stop. I know it is painful, but we must get the body to do what Jehovah designed it to do." Dinah noticed that Bethany's distended abdomen was smaller, and it seemed the blood flow was lessening. The servant brought in the hot, brown water.

"Please feed her a spoonful of the tea and then a spoonful of fruit juice. Continue until all the tea is gone and then you can return to feeding her any liquid. The tea will be very bitter, and she will need the sweet juice to tolerate it. The leaves will make her tighten as if she's giving birth again, but it will stop the blood flow."

Dinah placed the spoonful of bitter tea in Bethany's mouth. Her eyes flew open and Dinah told her to swallow it. She then gave her a sip of juice. Each time she gave her the bitter tea, Bethany struggled to swallow it. Soon she was holding her belly and crying out in pain. Abner came to the door to see what was happening and Lilah took him back out to the living area and told the men what they were trying to accomplish. "I can't stand to hear her cry," said Abner.

"You would rather hear her cry than to lose her. The medicine is strong and painful, but we are praying that Jehovah will use it to heal your wife," said Samuel gently.

The tightenings only lasted about a half hour and significantly reduced the bleeding. "Let's raise up her head just a little so that she can get more liquids." They slipped a pillow under her head and Dinah was able to hold a cup to her lips and let her drink from it. Lilah came out and reported the progress to the men. The baby was ready to nurse again, and Dinah laid him on Bethany's breast. When he was satiated, Haggith asked if she could examine the baby. She lifted him and cuddled him in her arms while skillfully examining him from head to toe. "A manchild from Jehovah. What a beautiful blessing. Is he a firstborn?"

"No, they have a one-year-old daughter," replied Dinah. Her head was filled with questions: *Who is this lady? How did Manasseh know to get her? Is she one of the Jesus followers we saw at the wedding?*

When Bethany stirred, Haggith turned to her and said, "Jehovah is good, and He has spared your life for a purpose. You need to seek His Truth so that you can raise your children wisely. You are to teach them that Jehovah is the only true God, and you are to teach them when you lie down and when you are going about your daily work. They will follow your ways rather than your words. Teach them well. I will be going now. Please, send for me if you have any questions. I don't anticipate any problems, but I don't believe you should be off your mat for three days. After that you can give it a try, but only if it doesn't make the flow worse. Shalom."

Dinah followed her out of the room and hugged her. "Thank you for saving my daughter's life."

"Oh, I didn't. Jesus did," Haggith whispered as they hugged. Dinah gasped and hoped that no one else heard.

As Samuel stood to leave, Abner offered to pay him for their help. "Absolutely not. We are happy to help in any way we can. Shalom,"

said Samuel as he took Haggith's hand to help her down the front steps.

While the women were tending to Bethany and the baby, Abner asked Manasseh, "Who were they? Mother says that she saved Bethany's life. I just peeked in and she's looking so much better."

"That's a relief."

"Yes, but you are avoiding my question," stated Abner.

"Abner, do you remember playing for a wedding about four years ago at a Gentile house?"

"Yes, how could I forget. I have so many questions about what happened that night and what I saw."

"Do you remember that a Jewish man provided us with a kosher meal?"

"Yes, was that him?" asked Abner.

"No, but I have talked with him and today when I saw that Bethany was dying, I asked if he knew anyone who could help her. He sent me to Samuel and Haggith's house. Haggith is a mid-wife. That may make us all unclean because they associate with Gentiles, but Haggith knew what to do to save Bethany's life. Will you forgive me for bringing them here?" asked Manasseh.

"You know that I have always tried to follow what I was taught. I have never disobeyed Priest Othniel. But you know that I will do anything for Bethany. Manasseh, sir, why are you associating with unclean people? I'm just feeling confused."

"I met Mordecai, the man who provided our kosher meal, and he encouraged me to study The Law and The Prophets and let it guide me. So, I am not doing anything that is forbidden. I'm trying to learn what our own Scripture says about the Messiah. I am not sure if the Messiah has come or not, but I am learning a lot of things that I was never taught and I'm learning that a lot of things I was taught are wrong. I am trying to find Truth."

"And you are not sure that Simon and Priest Othniel have found it?"

"Let's just leave it that I am not sure at this point. I have only recently started studying The Law and The Prophets and have not reached any conclusions."

"I can't see any reason to object to that," said Abner.

"Good. It's entirely up to you if you want to report me to Priest Othniel or Simon, but until I asked Samuel and Haggith for help and brought them into your house, I had not broken any rules from The Law and The Prophets."

"Someday I would like to hear what you learn about Messiah and whether it is Jesus," Abner whispered.

Manasseh and Abner continued to visit and talk about their jobs. They talked of many things and occasionally visited with Bethany. Late in the afternoon, Abner asked. "What is the penalty for allowing an unclean person into my house?"

"Touching an unclean person or thing, makes you also unclean until evening. I did not feel that it was a problem in light of the

situation. But I violated my own rule of letting you be head of this home without my interference. I should have told you they were unclean. I was afraid that you would not allow them to help Bethany, and I didn't know whether you realized that she was dying."

"Thank you, Manasseh. You acted in my best interest, and I totally forgive you. I will not mention this to Priest Othniel or Simon. They would not understand. So, once the sun sets, this is forgotten."

"Yes. And you have your wife and the mother of your children alive instead of burying her. I'm going to say goodnight to the ladies and then go meet Jacob and Judah for dinner. They will be excited to be uncles again."



Dinah stayed with Bethany for over a week. Junos often brought Judah over to visit with little Deborah and help to entertain her. Manasseh continued to read through The Law and The Prophets and was becoming more and more convinced that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. But he was not sure what to do with his new information. On Thursday, when he had completed reading the entire collection of manuscripts, he decided to walk to Mordecai's house and ask what to do. After they visited a few minutes, and Mordecai had inquired about his daughter, Manasseh asked what he should do with this knowledge that Jesus was the Messiah.

Mordecai explained that Jesus was crucified as the Lamb of God for everyone — Jew and Gentile. And all Manasseh had to do was simply ask Jehovah to let Jesus stand in his place and pay for his sins. Then he would be in a right relationship with Jehovah.

"Just ask? Why would Jesus die for me? Why would he pay for my sins?" Manasseh asked, looking puzzled.

"Because Jehovah loves you, Manasseh. And He wants you to be in a right relationship with Him so that you can spend all eternity in Heaven."

"So, I just pray and ask Jehovah to forgive my sins?" asked Manasseh.

"Yes, and no. Remember that God is holy, righteous, and just. He cannot forgive sin without a blood sacrifice. Either you must pay for your sins, or you must ask Jesus to do so."

"Oh, I've always known that I needed a Messiah!" declared Manasseh.

"Then simply ask Jehovah to let Jesus pay for your sins with His blood," said Mordecai.

"I was there, Mordecai. I watched the crucifixion. I know what my sins cost Jesus. Oh, Jehovah, please let Jesus' blood cover my sins and put me in a right relationship with You," prayed Manasseh.

"Abba, Father, thank You for bringing this son of Israel to a right relationship with You. Bless him and teach him all that he will need to know to be Your follower. In Jesus' name," prayed Mordecai with tears streaming down his cheeks. "Manasseh, this is only the beginning of

following Jesus. The Holy Spirit will come inside you and fill you with all of Jesus' characteristics – His love, His peace, His joy, His patience. You will need to learn to listen to the Holy Spirit as He guides you. He will transform you little by little to be more like Jesus. But I need to warn you that it will not be easy. My own sons wanted me to be stoned. The Holy Spirit protected me and guided me to people who were following Jesus as their Messiah. We moved to Antioch for safety and He has used me to tell many, many others about Him. That joy is worth all the pain. I believe that God will use you to reach many for Jesus."

"Will you teach me how to become a follower of Jesus?" asked Manasseh.

"You are a follower of Jesus. What you need now is to learn to be obedient to what He tells you to do and say. I believe that that is best accomplished in a group with other followers who are trying to learn to obey. I lead such a group and you and your wife would be welcome to attend."

"Would it be like a class?" asked Manasseh.

"Yes, but not a lecture — more like a discussion. We do not meet here. We meet at my friend Dan's house after work on Tuesdays. Why don't you and your wife meet me here just before sunset and we will walk together. It's only a couple of houses away. I'll make sure you have a kosher meal, and the group will enjoy meeting you and your wife. What did you say her name was?"

"Dinah. And I must warn you, she has many questions. Her dad is a very strong Pharisee and may order us to be stoned."

"Thankfully, that is not legal in Antioch, but I understand that it may cause discomfort within the family. I will see you on Tuesday before sundown."

"Thank you, Mordecai. I can't express what I'm feeling, but I know it is good."

"I promise you, it's good and Jehovah has good plans for you. Shalom."

"Shalom, and thank you," said Manasseh.

As he began to walk home, his mind kept thinking of all the complications, but his heart kept telling him that he was on the right track and somehow peace was winning the war that raged deep inside of him. *Great Jehovah, are you guiding me? How will I know? I want to learn to be obedient, but what will that be like? Please teach me.* He walked home slowly even though it was beginning to rain again. He wanted to savor the moment and soak in the peace that he felt because he was pretty sure his world was about to be turned upside down. He wondered when Dinah would be home. If she wasn't home by Tuesday, he would go and get her and take her to the class. She said she wanted to be included. His thoughts turned again to Samuel and Haggith and wondered if he would see them again.

When he arrived home, he checked to make sure that Jacob and Judah were asleep, then he crawled onto his mat and slept soundly.

Chapter 5

On Friday morning, Manasseh woke feeling rested and relaxed. It was a strange sensation of contentment, and he ate breakfast with the boys and then walked over to the school to teach his students. Just as soon as school was over, he drank some juice with Judah and then they walked over to Abner's to check on Bethany and Dinah. Manasseh said she needed to come home for the Sabbath and Dinah nodded. Bethany was still unable to be up, but her servants knew how to care for her and the baby, and Abner would be home for the Sabbath. She was sure they wanted time together as a family. So, she packed her bag and walked home with Manasseh while Judah ran ahead of them. "Let's please not have any more grandbabies anytime soon!" declared Dinah.

"I think you are exhausted. Let me carry your bag," offered Manasseh. Dinah looked at him funny. She had never known of him offering to help her with anything. *I must look worse than I feel.* They ate dinner with Judah, but Jacob said he was going to a friend's house. Since he was an adult, they didn't ask questions and just as soon as the Sabbath dinner was complete, Dinah went to her mat and slept soundly until past sunrise. She woke with a start and then realized that she was home, and her servants would take care of things until she was ready to face the day. She lay back on her mat and thought about what a stressful week it had been. She would enjoy a quiet Sabbath with Manasseh, but she would need to check on Bethany every day next week, and she needed to check on Martha soon to make sure she wasn't overdoing. She wondered if Hannah had been out to check on her. It would be a busy week, but she could take Judah with her, and he would enjoy that. She stretched and put on a fresh robe, then went downstairs to get some breakfast. Manasseh and Judah were in the yard, and Manasseh was playing ball with Judah. *I can't remember him ever playing. He's always been busy working or studying or practicing his lyre. Maybe leaving the two alone for two weeks has helped Manasseh be a better abba.*

"Son, I need you to play outside for a while so that I can talk with your mother alone," said Manasseh.

"Okay, Abba. May I go to Uncle Nathan's house?"

"No, stay in your own yard unless they invite you."

"Okay, Abba. I understand," said Judah.

Dinah thought Manasseh would sit in the courtyard with her, but instead he took her into the house and up to the rooftop. She didn't feel comfortable so far away from Judah, but then she realized he was plenty old enough to let them know if he needed help. The servants were resting and hopefully he wouldn't disturb them.

Manasseh pulled a bench close to her cushion and sat down facing her. "We need to talk."

"Manasseh, what is wrong?"

"I told you that I was reading The Law and The Prophets again. Have you had any time to think about what I told you?"

"Honestly, I haven't had any time to breathe. All I've thought about is keeping Bethany alive," said Dinah wondering where this conversation was heading.

"I know that. I'm sorry. I just wanted to catch you up with what I've learned while you were away, but only if you are rested enough to listen and you are sure you want to know," Manasseh said tentatively.

"Of course I want to know! What have you learned?"

"Well, I finished reading The Law and The Prophets on Thursday afternoon and I was convinced that everything in the Scripture points to Jesus being the Messiah. I still have a lot of questions about some unfulfilled prophecies, but I'm convinced He is the Messiah."

"Oh, Manasseh, that's wonderful!" Dinah exclaimed.

"It is?" He was expecting her to have lots of questions and arguments, but they didn't come.

Then she realized that he might not be ready to hear her confession of being a silent Jesus follower all these years. And she tried to soften her reaction. "I just know that you have been miserable not knowing and now you have settled it. I am happy for you."

"Thanks. I went back to Mordecai's house, the man who told me to read The Law and The Prophets and let Jehovah guide me to Truth," said Manasseh.

"He's the one who is kosher, right?"

"Yes. Dinah, he invited us to attend a class and I told him that we would both attend."

"What kind of class?" asked Dinah.

"He said it would be a discussion about Jesus. He will provide us a kosher meal and then the class. We are to meet him just before sunset on Tuesday."

"That will be nice," said Dinah, and Manasseh was amazed that she didn't protest, didn't have questions, didn't raise objections — she just sat looking content. *Maybe she is still too tired and didn't really understand what I said.* They walked back to the courtyard and watched Judah in the yard. "Judah, it's getting too cold out here. Let's go into the house now. It's almost time for post-Sabbath dinner anyway."



As the new year approached, there were more and more sunshiny days where Josie took Jacob on site to help him build structures. Josie specialized in fancy and elaborate houses. Most of the time, Jacob spent his days handing Josie the lumber or tools that he requested. But all the time they were working as a team, Jacob was watching and learning. When Josie felt that Jacob was ready, he began to teach him more and more and explain what he was doing and why. Jacob was eager to learn, and it pleased Josie. They became not only boss and employee but began to respect and

appreciate each other. They talked of many things, but Josie was constantly being reminded that Jacob was a Pharisee and was careful to not offend him.

As Passover approached, Jacob remembered that Priest Othniel had asked about Josie's synagogue. So, he asked Josie about it. "Why do you want to know?" asked Josie.

"My priest was wondering where your synagogue was located since he did not find another synagogue in Antioch. I told him that you had mentioned your group that studied The Law and The Prophets, but I didn't know where it was located."

"Jacob, you are a man and can make your own decisions now. Your priest and the rest of your family probably would not approve of my synagogue since we are not Pharisees," explained Josie.

"You don't behave like a Sadducee," stated Jacob.

"No? How am I different?" probed Josie.

"Well, you are not critical or harsh. You are always laughing and filled with joy. I like being around you and look forward to coming to work each day — while I hate going to my grandfather's house. So you are not like the Pharisees, either. You are just different — but in a good way. You study The Law and The Prophets, but you are certainly different from any Jew that I have ever met," stated Jacob.

"Jacob, I am different. I am Jewish, but I follow Jesus as my Messiah. Now, if your dad knew, I don't think he would allow you to work for me. So, think carefully before you tell him," said Josie. Jacob was suddenly quiet. He knew what Grandfather Simon thought of Jesus. He knew what Priest Othniel and all the men in the synagogue thought. He remembered the day that that man had tried to tell them about Jesus, and he was thrown out of the synagogue and would have been stoned to death if some of the men hadn't stopped it. *Why?*

For the rest of the day, the two men worked together, but Jacob was deep in thought. He had never met someone who followed Jesus. His grandfather had said that anyone who followed Jesus was crazy and demon possessed, yet Josie was someone he admired and trusted. His head was spinning with questions, but he was afraid to ask. At sunset, Josie asked Jacob if he would continue working for him. Josie told him he was free to quit with no hard feelings. But Jacob assured him that he would meet him at sunrise tomorrow.

Josie remembered that it took him twelve years to follow up after he heard the truth about Jesus. He hoped it wouldn't take Jacob that long. He was eager to ask his group how to proceed. He had shared with them that his new helper was from a Pharisaical family, and they had agreed to pray that he would ask questions. They had cautioned Josie not to run ahead of the Holy Spirit's leading or to push Jacob. They said that that might cause him to reject Jesus without considering Him. Now, Jacob had asked the first question, and Josie felt a deep joy. Josie was whistling as he walked home that Monday just before sunset. Passover was next Tuesday, and he needed to plan what he should accomplish before then. He would only take three

days off but had promised to give Jacob the entire eight days for the celebration.

“So, what is your synagogue like? I mean, you seem to enjoy going to yours. I struggle to stay awake at mine!” said Jacob on Tuesday afternoon after they had worked together mostly in silence all morning.

Josie laughed and agreed, “I hated synagogue as a boy, and I quit going just as soon as I turned thirteen. I said I would never go back!”

Jacob looked at him incredulously. “What did your family do? I mean, they allowed you to just quit?”

“Well, my dad had died when I was eight and my oldest brother was the boss. When I turned thirteen, I just left home. I didn’t want anyone to tell me what to do. About four years ago, another carpenter told me about Jesus and after much thought, I started attending his synagogue. The people there were very friendly and welcomed me. It feels like family now and I look forward to it each week.” Josie felt led to stop even though he wanted so badly to invite him to come.

That answer seemed to satisfy Jacob and he once again just concentrated on their work. Near the end of the afternoon, Josie realized that he was one board short of what he needed to finish an inside wall. All he had onsite was rough lumber for outside walls. He called Jacob over and showed him how to plane the wood. It was a tedious job and required a lot of patience to smooth off all the rough places. Jacob acknowledged that he understood and began to work on the plank while Josie continued to nail the remaining wood. When he came to check on Jacob, he found that he was doing an excellent job. “Where did you learn to do that?”

“I watched some pretty good carpenters all winter,” said Jacob.

“So, instead of sweeping floors, you could have actually been preparing lumber?” asked Josie.

“Maybe,” said Jacob. “I’m pretty slow at it but I love the way the wood feels when it is smooth.”

“You’ll get faster. I can teach you how to do carpentry, but I can’t teach you to love wood. Only Jehovah can do that. I have loved wood since I was just a little boy playing at my abba’s feet.”

“Josie, could I come to your synagogue sometime?”

Josie was startled by the request but pleased. “Do you want to come this Sabbath?”

“Sure, I mean, if that’s okay,” said Josie.

“Why don’t we meet in front of the shop. It’s not far from there.” Actually, he wasn’t sure whether to take him to the Amphitheatre or the Christian Worship Center. He would ask the group tomorrow night. “Let me finish up that plank and you can clean up a little before you leave. You did a really good job on this, but I don’t want to be late for dinner.”

“Yes, sir. And thank you.” Jacob picked up the small pieces of lumber that could be salvaged and then swept out the inside of the house. Josie insisted that the house always look good in case the

owner wanted to check it out and Jacob took pride in keeping it clean. But his heart was thrilled that he had actually got to do some carpentry work today. He couldn't wait to tell his parents.

When Jacob arrived home, Junos was feeding Judah and told him that his parents had gone out for the evening. She prepared him a plate and he ate alone. Jacob went to his room and stretched out on his mat. He replayed all the information he had gleaned today and decided that he would not go to Grandfather Simon's on Sabbath night because questions might come up. And he would go to Josie's synagogue on the Sabbath. *I am a man and can make my own choices now.* That was a satisfying feeling, but the thought of being found out struck terror in his heart.



Manasseh and Dinah walked to Mordecai's house and introduced Dinah. Mordecai was waiting for them in the front courtyard and Manasseh offered to carry the box that he was taking to the class. As they walked, Mordecai explained that while Dan was Jewish, he did not keep a kosher kitchen, so Mordecai's cook had prepared food for Manasseh and Dinah. Manasseh realized that he was carrying their dinner, and he thanked Mordecai. Mordecai also told them that there would be Gentiles present in the room, but they would not be required to touch them. This would prevent them from becoming unclean according to their traditions. Both of them nodded that they understood. As they entered Dan's house, Mordecai began to introduce them to other couples and singles. Once again, they were amazed to see men and women, Jews and Gentiles, and even children present. Manasseh's head was spinning with all the newness, but Dinah seemed relaxed and at peace. Manasseh was welcomed to the men's table with the six men and Dinah sat with the women. Soon conversations about work made Manasseh more comfortable and the food that Mordecai had provided was delicious. No one seemed to notice that his food was different, and he relaxed and listened to the conversation. There were Jews and Gentiles all sitting at the same table, laughing and talking together. It reminded him of the Gentile wedding. They seemed to be speaking freely and not guarding their every word for fear of saying the wrong thing.

Dinah was glad that she had learned the Greek language because otherwise she would have been left out. The seven ladies were both Jews and Gentiles, and while advice for raising little ones was freely given, there were no demands or restrictions. She remembered the women's home group that she had attended in Jerusalem without Manasseh's knowledge. She had such good friends there and she glanced at a couple of ladies who were close to her age and wondered if they would become good friends. She hoped so. She joined into the conversation and told them she was the mother of six

and grandmother of three with two more grandchildren expected any day now. Everyone made her feel welcome.

Once the meal was complete, Dan invited the group to move into his living area where there were ample cushions for everyone. Since the men seemed to be sitting with their wives, Manasseh sat beside Dinah and waited to see what was next. Mordecai prayed that Jehovah would bless the group and help everyone to be eager to obey Jesus and to learn more about Him. He asked that everyone introduce themselves. Once more, Manasseh was surprised that the women were considered equal and spoke for themselves. He and Dinah tried to put names with faces, but about all they could remember later was that there were three single women, one single man besides Mordecai, and three other couples. When it was their turn, Manasseh spoke for both of them. "I am Manasseh, and this is my wife, Dinah. We are both seeking to learn more about Jesus." Dinah just sat and smiled.

Mordecai asked if there were any questions about last Sabbath's or Sunday's messages. "The Apostle Peter said that Jesus said He would bring division and conflict within families. I thought He would bring peace. I don't understand," stated one man.

"You are blessed by Jehovah if you have not encountered this," replied Mordecai. "When I decided to invite Jesus to be my Messiah, my only three sons decided that I should be stoned. They reported me to the Priest, and I was placed in a Roman dungeon for six days. No one brought me food or water and I nearly died. After six days I was released and went to a fellow follower's house. They cared for me until I was able to return home. But the persecution continued because my sons were angry that I had not died. A group of us who had formed a New Way home group moved to Antioch and built a small synagogue where we could worship Jehovah without persecution. Please share with the group if you have experienced division in your families."

As each shared, the overall thing that Manasseh and Dinah heard was that while many of their earthly families had been unhappy, or even declared them dead, this group and the larger gathering had become their real family, and they were happier than they had ever been in their earthly families. When it was his turn, Manasseh stated that they had not shared with their families yet, because they expected extreme persecution.

"Did that answer your question?" asked Mordecai.

"Yes, sir. Thank you."

"Now, let's quickly share one advantage you've experienced since you decided to follow Jesus as your Messiah, but you'll have to keep it short so everyone can share."

"Guidance."

"Peace."

"Protection."

"Provision."

"Joy."

"Contentment."

“Purpose.”

“Love.”

“Sanity!”

“Can I say security? Because I just feel secure that He’s in charge and everything will be okay.”

Manasseh spoke up, “I think I would say relief. I have searched for answers for so long but was too afraid to ask for help. Now I am just filled with relief.” Dinah felt that she shouldn’t share.

Mordecai asked the group to state their prayer needs for the week. Not everyone shared, but one couple asked for prayer that Jehovah would send a baby soon since they had been married for two years. Another man said that he needed courage to speak to a co-worker about Jesus. Mordecai reminded them to pray for each other during the week, then he closed in a prayer of blessing. Dan said that next Tuesday was Passover and they would not be meeting until the following week.

Manasseh and Dinah walked Mordecai home and carried the box of empty dishes. They thanked him and said shalom. As Manasseh and Dinah walked, he asked her what she thought. “It was interesting. I wonder how and when we should tell our family? And Manasseh, there’s something that I need to tell you. I hope it will not cause a division between us.”

“What is it, Dinah?” He was afraid that she would say that she was not ready and didn’t want to pursue this. So he was totally shocked by her revelation.

“Manasseh, I began following Jesus before I even met you. I have kept it a secret all these years because I was afraid. I see now that that was wrong, but I can’t undo it.”

“What!? How? When?” asked Manasseh.

“Do you remember that I told you Mother hired a chaperone to keep an eye on me until I was safely married? That chaperone, Yavonna, was a follower of Jesus, but my parents didn’t know it. She told me everything that she knew, but He hadn’t been crucified yet. After we were married and you were working at the bank all the time, I met some followers of Jesus at the well. They welcomed me to their home group, and I invited Jesus to be my Messiah while I was carrying Joab. I have wanted to share it with you many, many times, but the Holy Spirit told me to just be a submissive wife and He would tell me when the time was right. It just never was,” said Dinah apologetically.

“Until tonight,” he said. “And Dinah, I really needed to hear that tonight. Thank you for telling me. Now, we can face the future together. I don’t know where to start.”

“God will guide both of us and we’ll know,” assured Dinah.



During Sabbath dinner, Samuel and Haggith began talking about checking on Abner and Bethany to see if she was recovering well. It

had been almost three weeks since she had given birth, and both were feeling led by the Holy Spirit to check on her. They knocked on the door and hoped that they would be alone on Sabbath afternoon. Abner greeted them and invited them in without hesitating. Bethany was sitting on a cushion nursing the baby. "We felt the Holy Spirit was guiding us to check on you two and see if you were getting your strength back," said Haggith to Bethany.

"It seems to be taking forever, but we are so grateful for your help," said Bethany.

"Mother Dinah said that Bethany would have died if you had not come," admitted Abner.

"We were happy to come and so glad to see your progress. Yes, you were very close to death when I arrived, but it was not me who healed you, it was Jehovah God."

"Of course," said Bethany.

"You see, since we have found the Messiah, Jehovah has been guiding us and using us to help others. We are happy to be used wherever we can help. But it is His work, not ours," said Samuel.

Abner licked his lips and took a deep breath. He knew that they were inviting him to have a conversation about the Messiah, or he could refuse it. He looked at Bethany and wondered how she would feel if he allowed this discussion. They couldn't force him to listen, but he genuinely wanted to hear what they had learned. But then what? All these thoughts crossed his mind in a matter of seconds, and he quietly said, "I would like to hear how you found the Messiah when it is our belief that the Messiah has not yet arrived."

"I understand your beliefs because we, too, were raised in Jerusalem as Pharisees. I heard Jesus teach, and I demanded that He be crucified. But when He came back to life after the crucifixion, I knew with all my heart that He had to be sent from God. I heard the Apostle Peter preach on Pentecost and he said that we Pharisees loved our position and power more than we loved God. He challenged us to search The Law and The Prophets and that's what I began to do. I began to see that everything pointed to Jesus, and that we had crucified not only an innocent man, but our Messiah. I was horrified but had no one that I could talk with. One day I was going to the temple for another meeting with the Sanhedrin when I stopped and listened to two men preaching on the temple steps. They explained how I could find the answers I needed and the peace I craved. I accepted Jesus as my Messiah there in the temple courtyard and was invited to join a home group led by Mordecai. Our home group moved here soon after that. I didn't come here to preach to you. We simply came to check on Bethany and your son. You must raise him to follow Jehovah in Truth. That's an abba's job. Shalom."

"Hold it. I mean, could you come again and tell us more about Jesus?" asked Abner.

"Of course. When would you like us to return?"

"Could you come next Sabbath afternoon? We are usually alone then."

“Yes, I think that would be possible. Shalom.”

“Shalom.”

“Oh, Abner, what have we done? You know our parents will be so upset.”

“I just want to hear what he has to say. I talked with your dad about them being in our house and he said that according to The Law and The Prophets, we are now unclean. But it's only until sundown and then we become clean again. I don't know how, but that's what he said. So, as long as we don't touch them, or eat with them, we are safe,” declared Abner.

“We may be safe, but I don't want to deal with what the synagogue and especially my Grandfather Simon would say,” said Bethany.

Chapter 6

On Sabbath morning, Jacob had already eaten breakfast and left before Manasseh and Dinah got up. They had agreed to get some extra rest since she had been busy helping the girls all week and was exhausted. Manasseh knew that he should go to synagogue but didn't want to. He would be questioned, but he had strangely lost his fear of Dinah's abba, Simon, and since Priest Othniel had stepped down from his leadership of the synagogue, he had no fear of Priest Mahlon who had been a life-long friend.

Jacob had promised to meet Josie in front of his shop before the first hour. Josie had decided to take him to the early service at the Christian Worship Center so that he could introduce him to Elam's family and maybe Jonathan's. Josie explained to Jacob that if he wanted to really learn about Jesus, he would probably enjoy going to the family group with him after work on Wednesdays. "The carpenter that I told you introduced me to Jesus, Elam, leads that group. It's small enough so that you can ask questions and get real answers," explained Josie. "I learn a lot there. But let me show you our synagogue first."

It was already crowded when they arrived, and Josie pushed through the crowd until he found Elam's family. He knew that they would welcome Jacob because, they, too, had been praying for him ever since he started work for Josie. Jacob was introduced to Elam and all his family. Josie noted that Jacob's eyes lingered for just a moment when he was introduced to Rachel, and he wondered if Elam had noticed. Maybe Elam was used to it since she was indeed a beautiful young lady. They had barely settled themselves on the floor when someone began leading them in singing several Psalms. Jacob recognized them and joined in the singing. *How strange to hear the female voices mixed in. I am used to only hearing men's voices.* Being raised in a musical family made him appreciate the beautiful harmonies that the women added. But there was something more that he couldn't put his finger on. The people sang as if they genuinely meant the words. It was not rote repetition. It somehow came across as real and genuine praise to Jehovah. He had never realized how dull and lifeless the singing was at his synagogue and he didn't think it was just the presence of the women. The leader asked them to be seated and another man came and took a seat on the platform. Jacob supposed he was the priest.

"Twenty years ago, Passover began on Thursday night. My mother, sister and I had helped cook the Seder meal for Jesus and His apostles. I'll never forget that night. I was only eight years old, and my twin sister and I were asleep in the olive grove across from the temple on Passover night. Jesus and all His apostles and followers were there. We woke up when the temple guards came to arrest Jesus. But we didn't know what was going on, we just heard everyone shouting to

run! Run! Now when you wake up in the middle of the night hearing that, what do you do? You run for your lives. At least that was what my sister and mother and I did. We ran to a wooded area and stayed hidden until sunrise, then we went to my uncle's house in Jerusalem and stayed hidden! We didn't know if my abba was alive or not. My mother left us with my aunt and went out to see what she could learn. She watched them crucify Jesus. She watched as two very brave men took his dead body down from the cross. And she followed them to Joseph of Arimathea's tomb. But because it was so close to sunset, she left to get back to us as the men wrapped his body in cloths and spices. She had seen my Uncle John at the crucifixion, and he assured her that our abba was just hiding somewhere and was safe. We, and all the other followers, were in such shock. We had believed that He was the Messiah and now all our hopes had been literally killed. But on the third day, on Sunday, Jesus came back to life, and walked and talked with us for another forty days before He left this earth and returned to Heaven. Today, I want to ask you, 'Who killed Jesus?' That was an often-asked question in the weeks and months after his death.

"Was it the Jewish authorities? Yes! They were responsible for His arrest, and they plotted to kill Him to protect their religious beliefs and their position in society. Was it the Romans? Yes! They carried out the crucifixion to protect their political power. But I believe it was you and me! Throughout The Law and The Prophets, God had promised to send a Messiah to die for anyone who had sinned. Then, he declared that we all needed a Messiah from the first man and woman ever created, to every man and woman on the face of the earth. Jesus died for your sins and mine. You killed Jesus! At least your sins did, because He died for every person's sins: past, present, and future. Jesus loved you so much that He died so that you wouldn't have to. God had declared that the price for sin was a blood sacrifice. He died for you, and you, and you, and for me. All we have to do is ask Him to be our Messiah and He will set us free from all of the penalties that we owe. As we celebrate Passover this week, take time to remember the great price that was paid for your sin. Then celebrate that He conquered the evil one and death to set us free. Thank You, Jesus!"

"Thank You, Jesus!" shouted all the people. Elam, Gideon, and Dan stayed to visit with Josie and Jacob for just a few minutes, then Josie introduced him to the speaker. "Jonathan, I want you to meet my new employee, Jacob. He wanted to know what my synagogue was like."

"I hope you enjoyed yourself this morning, and if you have any questions, I'll be glad to help," said Jonathan.

"Thank you, I just need to think about all that I've heard this morning. It's very new to me," said Jacob.

"Yes, every one of these people can tell you that it was once new and very strange to them. But now they are growing and learning to follow Jesus here. I'll be praying for you as you examine The Law and

The Prophets to determine what it says about Jesus. We believe that He most certainly is our Messiah. Happy Passover. Shalom.”

“Shalom,” replied Jacob. “Josie, you don’t have to walk me home. I know the way from here.”

“Do you have any questions that I need to answer before tomorrow?” asked Josie.

“Too many! I have much to think about. Thank you for inviting me. I’ll see you tomorrow. Shalom.”

“Shalom.” Josie was disappointed that Jacob didn’t want his help to sort things out, but he remembered that he didn’t want anyone to tell him what to believe at that age either. He heard the Holy Spirit reminding him to trust Him to lead Jacob.

Jacob wasn’t sure where he wanted to go, but he knew he didn’t want to talk with his parents. He wanted a place to think. He turned and began to walk toward Enos’ house. He hadn’t been to see the new baby and the walk would be nice even though it was farther than allowed on the Sabbath. He hoped they wouldn’t mind company. Once he was out of town, the rural countryside helped him to relax. He found a grassy area beside a well and sat down. He began to replay the message that he had heard. *I know that Grandfather Simon was one of the Pharisees that had Jesus arrested and crucified. He brags about it. What was it the speaker said? Something about that they did it to protect their own religious beliefs and their position. Yep, sounds right. I’ve always thought Priest Othniel and his family just got rich off of the people’s offerings, but I’ve never heard him offer to help me answer my questions. I wonder what he would say if I asked him about Jesus.* Suddenly Jacob remembered the men stoning that man that came to the synagogue and talked about Jesus. *I guess asking Priest Othniel or Priest Mahlon would not be a smart thing to do. How will I know Truth? I wish I could talk to my parents, but they would never understand. And I’m pretty sure Grandfather Simon would have me stoned for even mentioning Jesus. Oh, he would be so upset to know that I’ve visited Josie’s synagogue. He would say that I have been polluted and am now unclean. If I’m unclean, how do I get clean again?* He puzzled over that a while. *I think I have to go to Priest Mahlon and give him some money — but how does that pay for my sin?* Jacob realized if he was going to visit with Enos and Martha, he had better get to walking. But he couldn’t turn off his thoughts. *Since I rested in the middle, does it make it okay that I walked more than six miles today? Is that six miles total, or six miles on any one trip?*

He knocked on the door and the servant invited him in. Enos and Martha were thrilled that he had come. Unfortunately, he couldn’t give them a lot of news since he hadn’t been attending the Sabbath night gatherings at Grandfather Simon’s and hadn’t been to synagogue in weeks. He told them about his new job and how much he was enjoying it. He got to hold the baby and assured Martha that he was the most beautiful nephew ever! “Well, he’s your first nephew — but I don’t want any competition between the cousins. I can say he’s the best, but I don’t think you are allowed to say it,” chided Martha.

The servant brought them all some juice and some cheese-filled rolls. Jacob asked Enos if he raised goats, too. “No, but I do keep two little nanny goats so that we will have enough to drink and make butter and cheese. I really don’t like cow’s milk. Why?”

“Judah has been pestering me to get him some goats to milk, but I think they would be a lot of problems.” They discussed the pros and cons of getting goats for Judah and then Jacob said he needed to get back before dinner since he was working an extra-long day tomorrow because of Passover.

“Thank you for coming. Come back soon. Shalom.” He hugged his sister, Martha, said his goodbyes, and started home.



As promised, Samuel and Haggith returned to visit with Abner and Bethany. They had prayed all week that the Holy Spirit would prepare their hearts and open their ears to hear the Truth about Jesus. They knew that with their backgrounds, it could be months or years before they were ready to listen. “Our job is simply to be obedient as the Holy Spirit leads us. He will work in their hearts when the time is right,” said Samuel. Abner opened the door quickly and invited them in.

Bethany was looking stronger and Haggith reminded her to not overdo even though her forty days were almost complete. Bethany admitted that she still tired quickly, and she still experienced some pain in her belly if she stood too long. “Sometimes Jehovah sends us pain to remind us to be careful,” said Haggith.

Abner seemed impatient with the women’s talking and asked Samuel if he wanted to talk on the rooftop. Bethany immediately stated, “No. I’m sorry I was visiting, but I want to hear about Jesus, too. Please don’t leave me out,” she pleaded.

“I, too, apologize. You invited us here to learn about Jesus. We are ready to listen,” said Haggith.

Samuel smiled and said that one of the things that Jesus taught was that He came as God in the flesh to show us how much He loved us. “So caring for people was a high priority for Him and for us. But that’s getting ahead of what I think you want to know. You were taught The Law and The Prophets, weren’t you?”

“Yes, I attended Hebrew School and synagogue all my life, and Bethany’s Abba is a scribe and rabbi, so she, too, knows much about the Holy Scripture.”

“Good, because what the Pharisees and Romans in Jerusalem began calling the New Way is really based on the old way that God outlined long, long ago. Let’s start with where Jesus was born. Do you remember from your studies in Micah?”

“The Messiah is to be born in Bethlehem,” responded Abner.

“Jesus was born in Bethlehem.”

“I was told he was from somewhere in Galilee,” said Bethany.

“Yes, but because of the Roman census, his parents traveled to Bethlehem, and he was born while they were there because Joseph was of the lineage of King David. There are over 300 prophecies that are just tiny details, but when you add them all together, it is phenomenal. Then there are the Scriptures that describe the crucifixion in detail. Did you know that when these verses were written by both King David and Isaiah, crucifixion had not even been invented yet? It has only been used extensively since Alexander the Great brought it here. Many think he learned it from the Persians or Assyrians who invented it about 400 years ago. Yet, when did King David live and write?”

“About a thousand years ago,” said Abner quietly.

“Can you quote Psalm 22?” asked Samuel.

“Whoa, I’ve been out of school for a while. I’m afraid I’m too rusty,” admitted Abner.

“There’s a section in the middle that describes crucifixion. Let me quote it for you. King David wrote:

I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint.
My heart has turned to wax;
it has melted within me.
My mouth is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth;
you lay me in the dust of death.
Dogs surround me,
a pack of villains encircles me;
they pierce my hands and my feet.
All my bones are on display;
people stare and gloat over me.
They divide my clothes among them
and cast lots for my garment.

“I watched the crucifixion and can attest to all of these minute details. But friends of mine who traveled with Jesus have told me that Jesus told His apostles and followers several times during their last year together that He would be scourged before He was crucified and that after three days, He would conquer death and be alive again. He very calmly told them to meet him at a favorite fishing spot in Capernaum afterward.”

“So, Jesus knew he was going to be crucified ahead of time?” asked Abner. “How horrible!”

“Jesus said He came to earth to show us how much God loved us and to pay the ransom for our sins.”

“We were taught to look for the Messiah,” said Haggith. “But no one told us what the Messiah would do for us. Yet, the Scripture is clear, He came to be the sacrificial Lamb of God.”

“I was taught that the Messiah would free us from Roman rule,” said Abner.

“So was I,” agreed Bethany.

“Yet, The Law and The Prophets teach that He came this first time to be our Messiah and will return soon to be our conquering King. It’s hard to separate the prophecies sometimes. As I’ve studied, I’ve marked the ones He fulfilled during His time on earth and all the others, I believe, will be fulfilled when He returns,” said Samuel.

“So, you believe Jesus was the Messiah?” asked Abner.

“Yes, I do.”

“Why? I mean, personally.”

“Okay. First, I told you I heard the Apostle Peter’s preaching about the crucifixion and resurrection and how the Pharisees had tried to cover that up in order to stay in power. Then I began to search The Law and The Prophets for myself instead of just trusting what I had been taught. It became very clear that there was a difference. But, to be honest, I didn’t really know for sure until I asked Him to be my Messiah. Suddenly, I was filled with this incredible sensation of peace. I felt that I had finally found what I had been looking for my whole life. I literally felt His Holy Spirit come into me and fill that empty spot deep inside. He began to guide me and started changing me to be more like Jesus.”

“He did! I noticed the change in Samuel almost immediately after he came home. He was different. He had never been mean, but he was more gentle and caring, more patient. He was different,” said Haggith. “He became a really great husband to me, and I wanted what he had found. He taught me about Jesus, and I, too, invited Him to be my Messiah.”

“I’ve never told Bethany, but our musician’s group played at a wedding at a Gentile house about four years ago. We stayed kosher, I assure you. My dad and Priest Mahlon saw to that. But as we watched the wedding, I was just blown away by what I saw. I still think about it all the time. There was so much love and peace there.”

“Yes, that’s what I’m talking about. I think that change deep inside of me and the assurance that Jehovah is speaking to me and walking beside me through this life is confirmation that Jesus is the Messiah,” said Samuel. “But Abner, and Bethany, I want you to know that we did not come here to sell you on anything. We are simply being obedient. The Holy Spirit said that we should encourage you to search for Truth. It will set you free. We need to be going now and let you two enjoy your Sabbath. Shalom.”

“Thank you for talking with us, Samuel. I’ve always wondered why the people at the wedding were so different. Shalom.”

Samuel and Haggith walked slowly home. Both were praying that Abner and Bethany would invite Jesus to be their Messiah, but they also knew that they were deeply entrenched in the religion of their birth. All they could do now was pray.



Jacob arrived home just as post-Sabbath dinner was being served. He told his parents that he had walked out to visit with Enos and Martha and meet his nephew. Mother wanted to know how they were doing.

“They looked and sounded fine to me. Dad, I have a question.”

“Okay, let’s hear it.”

“Can we talk later?” asked Jacob.

“Sure. I’m finished with dinner, let’s go to the rooftop.” Manasseh wondered what he would be facing and hoped he would have the right answers.

“So, as you probably know, I’m trying to grow up and become a ‘Son of Abraham’ as you call it.”

“Okay. How can I help you?”

“Well, today I walked farther than the six miles allowed for the Sabbath, and I was wondering if that’s a sin.”

“Yes. According to the Pharisees. Do you want to know what the synagogue teaches or what it says in The Law and The Prophets?”

“I guess I want to know what it says in Scripture.”

“Well, the only mention of how far to walk on the Sabbath in The Law and The Prophets says that the Israelites were not to walk anywhere on the Sabbath. That was during the time of the Exodus when Moses wrote that they were not to collect manna on the Sabbath, but to stay home. If we applied it today, you shouldn’t even go to synagogue. You are to stay in your own place.”

“So, why did I think it was six miles?” asked Jacob, totally perplexed.

“It’s tradition or religion. Whatever you want to call it. It’s what the Pharisees have come up with to make sure everyone comes to the synagogue. I have just recently re-read The Law and The Prophets and found many, many things that I have not been taught, and I found that many things I have been taught are not there! It’s been enlightening to say the least. Oh, and you should know that some groups of Pharisees say that about three quarters of a mile is all you can walk. So it differs with different groups.”

“That’s confusing. But maybe I should read it for myself,” said Jacob.

“You are certainly welcome to borrow the scrolls from the school.”

“But that doesn’t really answer my question. My question is, if it’s a sin to walk somewhere on the Sabbath, then how do I get rid of that sin, or does it just accumulate for the rest of my life?”

“That’s where the blood sacrifice is required,” said Manasseh.

“But we are not allowed to sacrifice anywhere except the temple in Jerusalem,” protested Jacob.

“That is correct, so Priest Othniel, or Priest Mahlon, lets us give them money to cover the sin and have it forgiven since we can’t travel to Jerusalem every time we sin.”

“So, he gets rich when I sin. And how does that pay for my sin when God has said that he requires a blood sacrifice? Dad, I just don’t

get it, but I would like to read The Law and The Prophets again. Where did you start?"

"I just started with Genesis and read all the scrolls up to Malachi."

"Thanks, Dad. I'm too tired tonight and I'll be working late tomorrow and Monday, but then I'd like to start reading."

Jacob went to his room, but Manasseh sat on the rooftop and cried and prayed. How he wished he could tell Jacob that Jesus died to set him free from the Law. "Trust me," he heard the Holy Spirit say clearly. Manasseh sighed deeply. "Thank you, Jehovah. I do trust you. Help me to know when and where and with whom to speak. Guide me."

Chapter 7

Manasseh and Dinah walked with Judah and Junos to Dinah's parents' home for the Day of Preparation. She knew that it would be a very hard day for her because both Bethany and Martha were still in confinement from the birth of their babies. The Law and The Prophets said that they couldn't enter the synagogue, but the Pharisees taught that they were unclean and couldn't be out of their own houses for forty days after the birth of a son, and eighty days for the birth of a daughter. She didn't know whether either of her daughters-in-law would be there since both of them were carrying babies that were due any day now. She suspected she might be alone with her mother all day and that was not a pleasant thought. She and Manasseh had prayed for strength to be pleasant and honor her parents.

After the initial greetings and being chided for not joining them for several weeks and missing synagogue as well, things seemed to settle down. Dinah shared with her mother all the details of first Martha's and then Bethany's birth — leaving out the fact that they changed midwives in the middle because the first one didn't know what to do and left with Bethany bleeding to death. Telling her mother that they secured another midwife would open her up to more questions.

They talked about Jacob not being present and that it was important that they guide him to honor his elders and to honor God. Mother emphasized that Joab and Jethro had never strayed from the synagogue and Dinah wisely refrained from pointing out that she was their mother and had guided them properly. And she distinctly remembered her brothers refusing to attend once they turned thirteen. But she resisted because it would only make Mother fussier. Mother wanted to know whether Judah was going to join his grandfather and brothers at the bank and Dinah reminded her that he wasn't even six years old yet. "I don't think he would be much help at the bank right now."

Late in the afternoon, Joab and Jethro arrived with their wives, Nancy and Abigail. Dinah was thrilled to have her daughters-in-law there to distract her mother. It hurt to see how sweetly Esther treated them, praised everything they did, and bragged about their accomplishments. Dinah prayed that she could be as loving and sweet toward all her children's spouses. But she knew that it went deeper than just this feeling of her mother's rejection. She knew that her mother truly considered Joab and Jethro to be her own. She had taken them and molded them into the sons that she had left in Jerusalem. *Jehovah, forgive me. Help me to show Your love and care. You know it hurts.* She wanted to shout, "Just call her Mother instead of Grandmother." And suddenly for the first time she realized that it was not her mother's rejection of her that hurt so deeply — it was Joab and Jethro's rejection. She suddenly stood and left the room while the three ladies were busy talking about their upcoming births. Dinah

walked around the grounds and found Junos watching Judah play. *Where is this feeling coming from? Is it truth, or is it coming from the liar? Why do I feel that I have lost my two firstborn sons? I don't feel like the mother of six. I feel like the mother of four. Why? Because she controlled everything! No! Because I let her be their mother to keep the peace. Jehovah, I wasn't the mother that I should have been. I let her be the mother. Forgive me. Forgive me. I wonder if Manasseh feels the same way. He was so dominated by Abba and so afraid of him.* She suddenly realized that she had not been invited to attend the births and wondered if she should ask, or whether she should just stay home and wait to be summoned or not. She didn't know. *Jehovah, what should I do? What should I say? I confess that I wasn't the mother I should have been, but I want to be. Please guide me.* "Ask them." She knew that the Holy Spirit had spoken, and she returned to the house ready to be the mother-in-law that these young ladies needed. Instead of being afraid of them, she felt filled with confidence. She sat down with Nancy and Abigail and asked if they would enjoy a walk around the grounds.

"Oh, yes, Mother Dinah. I get so tired of sitting."

"Me, too. I feel I can't breathe when I sit too long."

"We'll be back in a little bit, Mother. Why don't you get some rest."

They left the room together and walked slowly around the grounds. Dinah asked if they had felt any tightenings and if they knew what they would feel like.

"The midwife has explained all that, but I haven't felt anything except very, very fat and a lot of kicking. Does that mean it's a boy?" asked Abigail.

"No. Girl babies kick just as much, I promise. Are you wanting a girl?"

"I just want a healthy baby, but I know that Jethro wants a son."

"All men want a first-born son, but they quickly discover that a first-born daughter is just as rewarding," assured Dinah. "I assisted with the births of Bethany and Martha, but I don't know what you two want. You have a midwife, but it's nice to have other women around to help. I suppose your mothers are coming to help, and I certainly don't want to impose. But I do want to offer. Do you have ladies who are going to assist you?"

"We weren't sure whether you would be able to help after being so busy with Bethany and Martha. But we'd love for you to come."

"My mother can't come," said Nancy. "She'll be helping my little sister who is carrying twins. And I don't think Abigail will be much help to me!" Nancy laughed.

"No, you two seem to be in a race to see who will be first. I wonder if you will birth on the same day. At least your houses are close. Do you have two midwives or just one?"

"Just one."

"Well, if you want my help, I'm certainly available and I think any of the ladies from the synagogue would be willing to assist. I especially enjoyed working with Hannah. She has lots of experience."

“When should we send for you, I mean, how will we know it’s time?”

“Well, first babies usually take a lot longer to progress. But I prefer to be there whenever you start feeling the tightenings so that I will have time to figure out what all is going on and where things are. Has the midwife given you a list of things you’ll need for the birth?” They discussed what would be needed and the girls seemed to appreciate her help.

“From the looks of things, I would say you are at the stage of any day now to up to two weeks away.”

“The midwife thinks I’ll be first and then Abigail,” said Nancy.

“We’ll just have to wait and see what Jehovah’s plan is. But no heavy lifting or overdoing. Let’s have a nice, healthy birthing.”

Both girls agreed and they returned to the house to discover that Jacob had joined the men. Soon Simon was leading the traditional Seder meal and Dinah felt a contentment that she had never felt. *Was I rejected or did I just interpret it that way? Father, teach me how to be a mother and a mother-in-law.*

Jacob walked home with Manasseh and Dinah, and Junos and Judah led the way. Jacob seemed quieter than usual, and Dinah asked if there was something troubling him. “Sorry, I was just thinking about a lot of things.”

“I’m glad you came to the Seder. It made your grandparents very happy.”

“I’m glad I came, too,” said Jacob, but he didn’t elaborate. Inside his head, his thoughts were swirling. *The Seder seems to be a foreshadowing of the Messiah’s blood being shed to cover the sins of the people. Did Jesus die for me? Did he die to pay for my sins?* He would talk with Josie on Friday when he went back to work after the Passover. Until then, he intended to start reading The Law and The Prophets for himself.

Manasseh and Dinah spent a lot of time talking about the changes that they were feeling deep down inside. Dinah tried to put into words the revelation that she had had toward Joab and Jethro and their wives. Manasseh agreed that he, too, had probably just let Simon parent his two oldest sons. They both realized that they had neglected their God-given responsibilities and had allowed Dinah’s parents to overstep their bounds. Dinah went upstairs and packed her bag. She wanted to be ready whenever Abigail or Nancy needed her. She was determined to be the mother and mother-in-law that she needed to be if her two oldest sons would allow her back into their lives.



After dinner, the knock on the door was Jethro’s servant letting Dinah know that she was needed. He offered to escort her, but Manasseh said he wanted to come and be with Jethro for just a few minutes. They left Junos in charge and quickly hurried to Jethro’s

house. It was a long walk across town, and Dinah hoped everything was okay. The midwife had just left and had assured them that the baby was in a good position and to let her know when the tightenings became regular and painful. Jethro was surprised that his dad had walked across town just for him. Soon, Abigail's mother, Lilah arrived. Dinah was comfortable working with her because of what they had been through with Bethany. Of course, they had not told Abigail about that nightmare. And now it was Lilah's daughter instead of Dinah's, so Dinah assumed her role would just be support.

Manasseh visited with Jethro for a while, and assured Jethro that he didn't have to leave the house until the tightenings were regular and the birthing was starting. "Esther ordered me and Simon out of the house when Dinah had her first tightening. Neither one of us liked being apart, but we tried hard to honor our parents' wishes. It was two more days before Joab was born. First babies usually take a while."

"So, I won't be unclean if I stay here for a while?" asked Jethro.

"There's nothing in The Law and The Prophets that says you can't stay. That's just tradition taught by the Pharisees. Now, you don't want to touch her flow, that is forbidden. But you could probably comfort her and pray with her and be a distraction for her until things start really happening. Mother will kick you out when it's time."

"Thanks, Dad," said Jethro, feeling closer to his dad than he ever had.

"There's no school tomorrow, so I'll be back to check on you around noon. Will you be at Joab's?"

"Yes, that's the plan unless Jehovah sends his baby at the same time."

"I hope you have a back-up plan because the girls look really close."

"Yeah. We'll both go to Isaac's."

"Okay, I'll find you if you aren't still here. Shalom, my son."

"Thanks, Dad. Be careful. Shalom."

After Manasseh left, the ladies came downstairs and visited for a while. Finally, Dinah suggested that she and Abigail's mother be shown a guest room, and everyone try to get some sleep. It was going to be a while. Lilah confided to Dinah that she didn't feel comfortable being in charge of the birthing. She would be glad to assist Dinah or the midwife.

The next morning, Jethro was off work because of Passover and showed the ladies around the house and helped them to get to know their servants. Dinah checked out the birthing room and was pleased that she found everything that would be needed. They oohed and aahed over the baby shawls and swaddling cloths that Abigail had prepared. Dinah instructed Jethro and Abigail to take long walks around the grounds since the weather was perfect. The day passed slowly with no signs of her being needed. While everyone was eating dinner, Abigail let out a scream and grabbed her belly. "Sorry," she said. "That was a big one." After they had moved to the living area, she had another strong tightening.

Dinah suggested that Abigail let her examine her upstairs. As they walked up to the bedroom, Abigail had another one. "It's very unusual for a first baby to come so quickly, but every baby has different ideas. Some are just in a hurry." Dinah checked and heard the baby's heart racing. It was in a good position and seemed to be pushing down quickly. Abigail was complaining of back pain and feeling the baby pushing downward. Abigail's mother, Lilah, told Jethro it was time for him to leave and to send a servant after the midwife. He quickly told Abigail goodbye and told her he would be praying for her. Dinah left them alone, but soon Abigail was screaming again, and Dinah shooed Jethro out. Dinah and Lilah insisted she get up and walk around. Two maid servants helped them to support her and rubbed her back and legs with spices that would distract her from the pain. Before morning, Lilah laid a healthy first-born son on Abigail's breast and Dinah sat down to eat some much-needed breakfast.

Jethro arrived quickly and went to meet his son. He reported that Nancy had had her first tightening last night, but nothing had happened all night. Dinah hoped she would wait another day and let her rest, but since the midwife still had not arrived, she knew that she would be on duty for a few more hours before she could sleep. She congratulated Jethro and instructed him in how to care for the newborn. She assured him that Abigail would need to sleep most of the day, and he had Lilah and their servants to help him. She promised to be available if he had questions, but she needed to check on Nancy.

Dinah found Nancy sitting alone in her living area sobbing uncontrollably. "Nancy, what's wrong?"

"Oh, Mother Dinah, I'm so scared. I haven't felt the baby kick since early this morning."

"That's perfectly normal. If the baby has moved into the birthing position, then, it doesn't have room to kick. I know it's scary, but your midwife should have warned you. Has she examined you this morning?"

"No, I haven't seen her. She didn't even come last night when I had my first tightening."

"Well, she knows that first babies usually take a while, but Abigail has a first-born son, and he was one of the fastest deliveries I've ever done! Why don't you show me your birthing room and let's check your supplies. I also would like to meet your maidservants and make sure they know what to do."

"Oh, Mother Dinah, I have two maidservants who help me, but they are young and have never seen a birth. They are scared and don't want to help."

"I see," said Dinah. "I'll talk with them and explain what I need them to do. I'm sure I can't do everything myself, but they don't have to watch the birth if they don't want to. And Joab certainly is not allowed to help during the final stages of the birth! Let's start with your supplies so I'll know where everything is and if the midwife hasn't come, we'll peek and see where this little one is. Okay?"

Nancy visibly relaxed and after checking the birthing room let Dinah examine her. "Now, let's go check on Abigail. The walking will do you good and the sunshine is wonderful today."

"Are you sure that's okay?"

"Yes, but if you decide to do a quick delivery — there's plenty of supplies at Abigail's!" They both laughed and Nancy agreed to walk with her. Abigail and her mother were doing fine, and Dinah suggested that she use her monthly rags so that she could get out of bed and move around. The maidservant helped them to sit her up and when that worked well, they helped her walk around the living area. Dinah reminded her to not lift the baby and that she should not be on her feet for long. She encouraged Abigail to be wise and let her mother and her servants help her. Her primary job was to rest and heal and feed the little one. She assured Lilah that she would be available if they had any further questions. Then she and Nancy walked back to Joab's house. Dinah examined her again and was a little concerned that while the baby was in the right position, she had had no more tightenings. She wished the midwife would come and tell her if everything was all right. But she needed to not think about Bethany's terrible experience.

About noon the next day, Manasseh visited both homes and was pleased that Nancy had waited so that Dinah was not managing two births at once. She asked if she could talk with him while Nancy went to her room to rest. "The baby is in the right position but is not moving and she hasn't had any more tightenings. I don't know whether that is okay or not. Would you mind going and asking Haggith? I just have never seen that, and I don't know what is going on." Manasseh agreed and began to run toward Samuel's house. He knocked and asked to speak with Haggith. Haggith listened and asked when the first tightening was. She assured Manasseh that it was perfectly normal for first babies to be lazy about leaving their mother. She searched through her supplies and handed him a small sack of leaves. "This will start tightenings but will be painful if you steep it too strong or give her too much. Tell Dinah to pour hot water over this but then remove the leaves immediately. Then save the sack of leaves in case she needs more later. I think she will do fine but come get me if Dinah needs more help."

"Jehovah bless you. Shalom," said Manasseh as he began to run back to Joab's.

He gave the sack of leaves to Dinah and told her what Haggith had said. She went upstairs to check on Nancy but found her and Joab sleeping soundly. Dinah decided to leave them alone since they would probably need their rest for the night ahead. Manasseh and Dinah sat and visited in the living area. Joab and Nancy joined them for dinner and Nancy was feeling worried again. Dinah told her that she had consulted a midwife friend of hers who had sent her some tea to help get the tightenings started. Her friend had assured her that first babies were often slow getting started and there was nothing to worry about. Joab asked when they could use the tea. Dinah said they could take a small sip tonight or they could wait until morning. It was their

decision. Manasseh prayed for the three of them and that Jehovah would guide them and send a healthy baby soon. Then he said shalom, hugged all three and left to visit with Jethro and Abigail before returning home. Joab and Nancy went out on the courtyard and decided to try the tea tonight. Dinah asked the servant to boil some water and then Dinah prepared the tea as instructed.

She also squeezed some plum juice to take away the bitterness of the tea. After taking a sip, Dinah told Joab that what Nancy needed the most was to walk. They were to stay in the yard but try to walk as much as possible. She went to her room and enjoyed a good nap. When she got up to check on the couple, they reported that Nancy had had two fairly strong tightenings about an hour apart. It was approaching another hour, and everyone wondered if the tightenings would continue. They did. Dinah told them to either walk or sleep, but that sitting was not a good position for birthing. She went to bed assuring them that they could call her if anything changed. Just a few hours before sunrise, Dinah heard Nancy trying to suppress a scream. She got up and asked how close the tightenings were. She said that they were about half an hour apart but were gradually getting closer.

Nancy didn't feel like joining Joab and Dinah for breakfast, but instead drank a cup of juice. She continued to walk while they ate. Dinah suggested that Joab might want to go to the bank since Passover was now over, or he was welcome to stay and help Nancy walk while they waited for the birth to start. "You mean this isn't the birth?" asked Nancy incredulously.

"Yes, the tightenings are pushing the baby down, but until the tightenings are very close together, it's not really the birth and you can stay until then." Dinah was pleased that Joab sent word that he would be staying with his wife and not be in to work today. All morning, Joab and Nancy took walks around the yard. When Dinah would check, the baby was definitely moving downward, but oh, so slowly. She suggested that they take another sip of the tea, and both agreed. Dinah brought her the cup as well as a cup of juice and within the hour, her tightenings were getting closer and stronger. At the ninth hour, she told Joab that he needed to leave, but warned him that it might take another day or so. He said he would be at Jethro's.

Dinah and two handmaids who had never seen a birth were left to help Nancy. Dinah instructed them in how to support her when she was having a tightening. She instructed them to massage her back and shoulders with spices to distract her. And gradually, gradually, the baby moved down until around the sixth hour of the night, finally Dinah could see a mass of dark hair and could feel that the baby's heartbeat was strong and healthy. She cried with relief and had to assure Nancy that they were tears of joy and fatigue. She let Nancy rest for half an hour and then they got her up to walk some more.

Just as the first rays of sunshine were appearing, a healthy son was born. Servants were sent to get Joab and also to inform Manasseh. Joab arrived breathless and looked with wonder at his wife

and son. Joab sent a servant to tell his grandfather about his son and that he would not be in to work until Sunday.

Dinah stayed until Friday and assured Joab and Nancy that she would return after the Sabbath to help Nancy until she was ready to be on her own with her servants. She was sure that Joab needed time to bond with his new son and Nancy was progressing nicely. Dinah promised to return early Sunday morning because Joab would need to work. Nancy would still need some help with the baby. She had never cared for a newborn and was afraid to be alone since Abigail was not available. Manasseh escorted Dinah home for a Sabbath day of rest.

Chapter 8

On Friday, Jacob reported to work at the jobsite and joined Josie in finishing some shelves in one of the sleeping areas. While they worked together, Josie asked if Jacob had a good Passover. Jacob told him what he felt during the Seder and that he had been reading through The Law and The Prophets again and was surprised at how many things he had been taught that weren't there, or had been modified. He found other things that he had never been taught at all. He told Josie about the six-mile walking limit and what the Law actually said. Josie laughed and said that he'd always wondered about that. As they cleaned up the site and prepared to leave, Jacob asked Josie if it would be okay if he came to his synagogue again. "Of course! Everyone is welcome anytime. And remember that you would be welcome to come to the small family group that I attend, too. We meet at Elam's house, and I go straight from work on Wednesdays. Oh, the food won't be kosher, so if that's a problem, you would need to bring your own."

"You eat non-kosher food?" asked Jacob with surprise.

"Yep! Jesus says that it's not what you eat or drink that makes you in a right relationship with God, it's whether you allow Him to be your Messiah. He was always accusing the Pharisees of getting it backward. They were more interested in the little things and missed the big thing — the Messiah!"

"I'll meet you at the Worship Center at the first hour, right?"

"Yep, I'll be there, and you know where Elam likes to sit, don't you?"

"Yeah, I'll find you. Shalom."

"Shalom"

On Wednesday as it neared sunset, Josie and Jacob finished cleaning the jobsite. The house was almost finished, and they hoped to show it to the owner early next week. Josie had asked Elam if it was okay to bring a guest to the group and he had been assured that Jacob would be welcome. Josie explained that the purpose of the small group was to allow everyone who attended the Christian Worship Center to have a place to call home. He explained that each group had a leader and that Elam was his. Josie told him how nervous he was the first night he attended. He asked Jacob if he had packed a kosher meal or if he was going to eat the non-kosher food that he and Elam's family ate. "I didn't pack anything, so I guess I'm willing to try non-kosher."

"Yeah, that wasn't as scary for me because I quit keeping a kosher kitchen when I left home. I mean, it's a lot of work. And I just never went back to it after I got a cook. Those are the kinds of questions we talk about at this group. Elam says that when Jesus died, He fulfilled the purpose of the Law. He says that the only purpose of the Law was to prove that everyone messed up and

needed a Messiah. Once you accept the Messiah that God has sent, you don't need to keep the Law."

"You seem pretty sure that Jesus is the Messiah, but Grandfather says that many, many men have falsely claimed to be the Messiah," protested Jacob.

"Yes, they have. But have any of them done the miracles that Jesus did? Were any of them able to heal like Jesus? Did any of them fulfill the prophecies of His birth? And most of all, did any of them come back to life after they were killed? No. Only Jesus fulfills the Scripture. Then there is something that I haven't talked with you about. When someone asks Jesus to be their Messiah, something happens on the inside, deep down inside. You become in a right relationship with Jehovah, and He sends His Holy Spirit to live inside of you. He begins to guide you and speak to you. I talk to Him and He talks to me."

"Whoa. You are saying that you talk with Jehovah God?"

"Well, I talk with His Holy Spirit. It's incredible and I don't want to overwhelm you, but that's the difference you see in me. I'm guided by the Holy Spirit."

"Overwhelmed is not the word for it!"

"So do you still want to go with me to Elam's?"

"Yeah! I want to hear what they have to say."

"Then we need to get going." Josie and Jacob walked in silence to Elam's house. They were greeted by Gideon and Nahum. Nahum, who was also single, invited Jacob to sit with him at the men's table. Josie was surrounded by friends.

Nahum connected well with Jacob, and he shared that he had been working for his dad since he was a small boy. Jacob explained that he had started work for Josie when he turned thirteen. "I think it would be incredibly hard to start at thirteen and try to learn everything all at once," said Nahum with admiration.

"Yeah, I didn't even know the names of the tools. So are you allowed to build things or does your dad do all the building and you just help?"

"Well, I was the youngest for a long time, but now Dad has hired Jonathan's son, and he gets the clean-up duties. So, I've been promoted to prepping the wood and occasionally get to build a bench or simple table." They enjoyed the delicious dinner and then the men and women sat in family groups for the discussion. Jacob sat between Josie and Nahum, and Elam asked Josie to introduce him to the group. "Jacob is my assistant at work, and he's got a lot of questions about Messiah. You guys, and ladies, have helped me learn so much about Jesus, so I invited him to visit and see if he would like to be a part of this group." Everyone welcomed Jacob and made him feel comfortable.

Elam led them in prayer and then asked if anyone had a question about the services on Sunday. "I thought Jonathan did a great job of making the purpose for the crucifixion so clear. But it made me feel a little uncomfortable to think that I killed Jesus because of my sins,"

said one of the ladies. Jacob was fascinated that the women were allowed to speak.

“I don’t think Jonathan was trying to make you feel guilty. I think he just wanted you to appreciate what Jesus did for you. I mean if we hadn’t sinned, He wouldn’t have had to die, but throughout The Law and The Prophets we see everyone messing up. No one could fulfill the Law. It was too hard.”

“Jonathan has said that Jesus taught that the Law was created to make sure that everyone knew they needed a Messiah,” said one of the older men.

“I know I needed a Messiah and now that I’m in a right relationship with God, the Holy Spirit is directing me more and more. I don’t have to feel sorry for my sins — that’s similar to trying to pay for them myself. All I have to do is confess them to my Messiah and He has already paid for them,” shared Angela, Elam’s wife.

“Let’s sing some Psalms and praise songs, Dan.” Dan led them in singing and everyone joined in. Jacob knew the Psalms, but just listened to the others sing the praise songs. Once again, he appreciated the beauty of hearing the male and female voices join together.

“We’ve already had some good discussion and great singing, but I wanted everyone to have a chance to share if you want to. How did you spend Passover and make it special?”

Elam went around the room and called each of the people by name. There was quite a variety of responses because some of this group were Jewish and some were Greek or Roman. It was interesting to hear. When Elam called his name, Jacob felt comfortable sharing. “I stayed at home alone and began reading The Law and The Prophets to try to discern the difference between what I had been taught and what the Scripture actually says. I have found a lot of discrepancies even though I am not even done with the history portion. Anyway, then I went to my grandfather’s house for the Seder meal with my family.”

Josie shared, “I spent Preparation Day and the Seder with family, but on the third day I went fishing! I took my friend and his two sons, and we had a blast. He taught me a lot about following Jesus and we all came home refreshed.” Some people shared, while others passed. Elam led a prayer of blessing over each one present and Josie and Jacob visited with the men for just a minute before they headed their separate ways. Jacob promised to meet Josie tomorrow morning at the construction site.



It seemed the tension had been building since Passover. As the families at the village farm took time off from their busy schedules, they had more time to bicker and fuss. Everyone felt out of sorts. It was a little easier now that they were hard at work in the fields, but even the evening worship time was suffering from the lack of unity. There was more bickering than Eli had ever seen, and he knew it was

because the Apostle Peter had not come to visit over Passover. When Peter had dared to preach to the group about Gentiles becoming followers of Jesus, Eli had asked him to leave. That had been just over two years ago and there had been rumblings of discontent ever since. Now Eli felt disgruntled and worried. He felt the distance in his marriage and with all the families, and he wasn't sure what the outcome would be. Tomorrow was the beginning of Shavuot and he needed to plan some kind of celebration to remember the coming of the Holy Spirit. He knew he also needed to address the tension but had no idea what to say or do. It was lonely at the top.

On Wednesday, the Day of Pentecost, everyone gathered in the yard and the ladies cooked food from their own fields. It seemed that everyone's mood lifted as they praised God for the first-fruits of their labors. He asked those that were present at the first Pentecost in Jerusalem to please come and stand beside him. Hezekiah and Naboth both came, and he asked them to share what had happened on that day. The men looked at each other and decided that Naboth would begin. Naboth told about the Holy Spirit coming and the power all the disciples felt. He told how they were filled with boldness to preach in the streets and how God supernaturally gave them the ability to speak whatever language was needed so that everyone in Jerusalem heard Peter's sermon repeated in their own native tongue. Tears rolled down Naboth's cheeks as he told of the 3,000 people who came to know Jesus that day. He stepped down and allowed Hezekiah to speak.

Hezekiah was already crying as he stood and could hardly speak. "It has been a long time since I have truly remembered that day. Thank you, Naboth, for reminding all of us. Because of Pentecost, we began to search for a home group and Eli helped us to bond together. He taught us how to be obedient to the Holy Spirit and not to listen to the Pharisees. He taught us to obey quickly and to never make a decision without first clarifying what the Holy Spirit was saying." Hezekiah paused and looked like he might faint. Naboth and Abram quickly stood and supported him. "I have not obeyed quickly," said Hezekiah, "and I'm struggling to obey. I need to do what the Holy Spirit has told me to do. I need to tell you that I have not listened to the Holy Spirit for many years. I have listened to a man named Eli. I have let him tell me what to do, what decisions to make, when to rise, when to lie down, when to plant, and when to harvest. I have shut my ears to the Holy Spirit calling me to share the New Way with people who don't know Jesus. I look around and I see no growth. I don't see Antioch coming to know Jesus. I see the same group that moved here eight years ago, and I am horrified that I have wasted my life following a man instead of Jesus my Messiah. I don't know where the Holy Spirit is leading me, but I am committed to following Him from now on."

Eli tried to stand. He wanted to protest and convince the group that it was not true. But as he stood, his knees buckled and he sank to the ground, his body paralyzed. All he could do was weep and beg for Jehovah's forgiveness. Peter had warned him. He had started out as

their leader, but Hezekiah was right. He had not taught them to follow Jesus; he had taught them to be obedient to him. The men gathered around Eli and carried him to his mat. Chakah knelt beside him and cried out to Jehovah to heal her husband. All through the long night, they cried and prayed together. Chakah knew that everything Hezekiah had said was true. She had seen it happening, yet had kept her mouth shut and not confronted her husband. She knew he would not have listened. But she also knew that she was equally guilty of ignoring the Holy Spirit's leading. The second day of Shavuot passed and the ladies came in and out to bring fresh water or a plate of food, but still Eli was unable to move. He just lay on his mat and cried and begged God for forgiveness. Chakah stayed close and prayed for him. At times she paced the floor and wondered what was happening among the group.

On Friday, Eden was the one who brought them breakfast. Chakah learned that all the families were in grief and were spending time in prayer and seeking forgiveness for their own failure to follow the Holy Spirit. Eden offered to stay with Eli and let Chakah take a walk in the yard, but Chakah would not leave him.

Once again a plate was delivered for their Sabbath meal, but Eli was too weak to eat. Chakah walked out to the yard and told the group that Eli was getting weaker and if they wanted to come and pray over him for healing, they should do it now. All five men followed her into the hut and knelt around Eli and prayed for his strength to be restored. He opened his eyes and asked each man individually to forgive him. They each responded with their own confession of guilt and assured him of their forgiveness.

She hoped that he would feel stronger in the morning, but during the night she woke up startled and realized that she was not hearing the steady breathing that she had heard for the last forty years. She lay still and remembered their arranged marriage. *How hard it was for me to leave my parents and siblings to marry this stranger. But he has been gentle and kind, and we have grown in our love for each other. Our five children are scattered all over Israel and didn't understand God's leading us to Antioch. It is the Sabbath. I wonder where they will bury him. I wonder what will happen to me. I feel that half of me is gone — no, much more than that. I've given him my whole life. I'm not sure there's any of me left.* Yet, she didn't feel afraid. She just felt numb. She didn't feel ready to let the others know and she knew that soon someone would bring them a breakfast plate. *I'll just wait until then.* When Eden brought the breakfast plate, Chakah told her that Eli had passed during the night. Eden gasped in horror, but Chakah assured her that God's timing was perfect. He had entered Heaven in a right relationship with God. "There is no sting to death when you know you will be with Jesus. The sting is for the ones left behind. It hurts."

The men quickly buried Eli behind the barn where he loved to sit and watch the sunrise and pray. They honored him as a man who had loved them and taught them much. Hezekiah spoke boldly that if he

had followed what Eli had taught him, he wouldn't have allowed Eli to get off track. "We are all in this together and we need the Holy Spirit to guide us out of it. We know that Eli is already in Heaven with Jesus, and I pray that he will be able to look down and be pleased with our obedience to the Holy Spirit's guidance." Abram prayed a prayer of blessing on everyone, but especially on Chakah. She allowed two of the women to walk her back to her hut and remove Eli's mat. They spent eight days in grief for Eli, but each family did what they considered to be essential, and Chakah felt that they were working better together than she had seen in a long time. There was a lot of spontaneous singing, and she sat in the yard and enjoyed watching the children play around her.



On Sunday after the Shavuot break, Josie met Jacob at the Carpentry Shop and they walked together to meet with a new client who wanted to enlarge his current house. Usually, Josie met with clients alone, but he had felt the Holy Spirit instructing him to be available to Jacob. Josie was proud of the way Jacob conducted himself. As they returned to the shop Josie asked, "What did you learn?" He had expected Jacob to tell him what he thought of meeting the new client, or the ideas he might have for what the client wanted.

"I learned that Jesus's death is what gives you peace," said Jacob with a faraway look on his face. Josie was taken aback since Jacob hadn't mentioned his visit to the worship service or to Elam's group at all. That had been over six weeks ago.

"Would you like that peace?" asked Josie.

Jacob looked at him with tears in his eyes. "I would. But you don't understand. I can't. It would kill my grandfather and grandmother. It would destroy my family. I can't do it."

"That's okay. You are honoring your father and your mother as the Law commands, but will you come with me to worship or to Elam's group so that you can learn more about Jesus?"

"I don't know. I'll think about it."

Chapter 9

On the eighth day after Eli had died, Barak called the families together and asked that each share what they had heard from their times of prayer. “I feel God’s call to take my family further west. I keep hearing Thessalonica, but I have no idea where that is, or whether it’s just something I remember from school days. Please pray for me and my family as we continue to ask for clarity,” said Hezekiah.

“How would you go there, since none of us have any money?” asked Hiram.

“I would need to sell my house,” replied Hezekiah.

“I’ve been wondering how to divide up the savings, the land, and the houses so that it’s fair to everyone. If you are feeling called to leave, we need to do that so that you’ll have funds. Those that stay need to know how much they have for operating expenses. Chakah, do you know where Eli kept the silver and the books?” Hiram asked.

“Yes, but there isn’t much. We didn’t make much profit. We spent it on living expenses and a lot of months we ate more than we made.”

“That’s true. A farm is not year-round income,” agreed Hiram.

“I was wondering if anyone else would like to stay on the land and continue as a group. We would have to work out who would do what, but I think I would like to stay — but I’m not sure I’ve heard the Holy Spirit say that,” admitted Naboth.

“I wouldn’t mind staying, but I feel led to spend some of my time preaching at the market while the women and children take care of the selling,” shared Barak. “I would also like to have my property be separated out so that I can control my operating expenses. And we would like to invite Chakah to stay with us and be a grandmother to our children even though they are mostly grown. That’s about all we’ve figured out so far. I mean, we don’t mind living here, but we want our finances to be our own.”

“What about a spiritual leader? Has anyone prayed about that?” asked Hezekiah.

“I think it’s too soon and I don’t know who to trust,” said Abram.

“That’s why we need to spend time in prayer. I suggest that we meet every night after dinner to share and spend time in prayer and worship together,” said Hezekiah.

“Could you lead that, Hezekiah? I mean if it’s all right with everyone else.”

“Sure. But let’s call it a night tonight so that everyone can pray with their own families.”

Chakah headed to her own hut, but Eden invited her to join them. She said she would prefer to be alone right now until things were more settled, and Eden agreed. “I’ll see you in the morning.”

Over the next few months, it was decided that Hezekiah would sell his home to the rest of the group. He agreed to accept the same amount that it had cost to build it two years earlier. He declined to sell

his land but instead gave it to the group for their use saying that Jehovah would provide for him and his family if they moved in obedience. The price of the house would pay their passage to Thessalonica, and he didn't want any hard feelings with the group. He encouraged them to contact Jonathan or the Apostle Peter for someone to provide spiritual support, but even though they discussed it, Eli's teachings had sunk deep into their hearts. They were determined to follow the Pharisee's laws, remain kosher, and separate from the New Way believers who were not. They elected Barak to be their spiritual leader, and Hezekiah knew that he would simply follow Eli's teachings. Hezekiah considered that selection to be a final confirmation that he should move his wife and four sons away from the friends they had loved and worked with for eight years. It was a sad farewell, but deep down, Hezekiah knew that he was being obedient to the leading of the Holy Spirit and he must not look back.

On a Tuesday in mid-summer, Hezekiah and his family walked into Antioch each carrying a small travel bag and a bag of bread and fruit. As they walked through the heart of town, they saw the Christian Worship Center. They knocked and were greeted by Rabbi Absalom. He led the family up the stairs to Jonathan's office. Jonathan answered the knock at his door and welcomed them. Hezekiah had been a good friend when they lived in Jerusalem together. Jonathan listened to their story and cried with them about the decisions that the village farm had made. How sad that the impact of one man could affect so many lives. Jonathan reminded them that they would all be re-united in Heaven someday. He invited Hezekiah and his family to come home with him and spend the night before starting their journey, but Hezekiah reminded him that Peter taught him, "Once you know the Holy Spirit's leading, you need to act immediately."

"Did you know that Peter is in town? We might be able to locate him," said Jonathan.

"No, you tell him the news, and please, please pray for us as we do not know why God would send us to Thessalonica. I speak very rusty Greek and my family doesn't know the language at all. We do not know how we will support ourselves. We will simply follow as God leads."

Jonathan got up and went to a storage box and removed a bag of silver. "This is a gift from our Worship Centers to help you on your journey. We collect money to support ministry trips and as long as you believe that Jesus is Messiah — not only for the Jews, but for all people — then we will support you with our silver, and with our prayers. My Leadership Team will be praying for you. Send word of God's blessings when you get a chance. Shalom."

"We were not expecting this but are very grateful and accept it as a provision from God. Shalom, my friend, and thank you." Jonathan accompanied them down the stairs and watched them walk away.

Jonathan's heart struggled to process all that he had learned. He was so proud of Hezekiah, but feared for him as he faced the unknown with his little family. His heart was broken over the choices that the

village was making. He needed to talk with Peter but wasn't sure where he was preaching today. He walked to Kostakis' house and found that Peter had left yesterday and was headed to Joppa. Kostakis had informed Dan who had already covered his ministries and groups and planned to report it to the Leadership Team when they met after work on Thursday.

Jonathan stopped by Demetrius' Mercantile Store and was greeted by Zebedee. "May I help you, sir," he asked with a smile on his face.

"Yes, do you sell hugs? I could sure use one right now."

"We only have small ones, but I'm sure that I can have a much larger one delivered to your place by dinner tonight."

"That sounds wonderful. I need to speak with Demetrius if he is available," said Jonathan.

"Yes, sir. He will be right with you." Zebedee sent for Demetrius who greeted Jonathan with enthusiasm.

"Your son is doing a great job for me. I hope he chooses to apprentice with me next year. He could easily become the steward of this store in two years!" raved Demetrius.

"Can we talk in your office?" said Jonathan.

"Sure. What's wrong?" He suddenly noticed that Jonathan was struggling to hold it together. "Come and take a seat."

Jonathan told Demetrius what he had just learned about Eli's village, about Hezekiah and his little family moving in obedience, and about Peter being out of contact. "I need to determine if I should go and try to talk with them again. I feel a definite desire and a very definite repulsion. I don't know God's will. I need you to pray for me."

"Personally, I would recommend that you wait and let the Leadership Team help you determine God's will. There are several men there that understand the Judaizer beliefs better than I do."

"You are right. I guess I'm scared that Barak will start preaching in the markets here in Antioch and we'll have confusion all over again. I don't want to sound like I just want to protect my people. I love those four men. I grew up with them in Jerusalem. I want them to know the Truth and be working for Jesus. They could do so much good. I know that they know Jesus to be the Messiah, but they are wasting their efforts by refusing to obey the Holy Spirit."

Demetrius let Jonathan talk it out and then prayed for him. How sweet it was to have a Christian brother to depend on in times of need. How counter to his early teachings that that would be a Gentile brother! Jonathan walked home to spend a few hours with Susanna and the little ones before they would return to the Christian Center for the fellowship meal with people from all the surrounding nations.



Manasseh said shalom to Nathan and hurried out the door. He had been trying to avoid Nathan and there had developed a strain

between them. Manasseh knew that he wanted to finish out the school year before he told his brother that he was certain that Jesus was the Messiah. He didn't know what would happen, but he was absolutely sure that he wouldn't be teaching at the Hebrew School as a rabbi! He wondered if his brother would stand with the other men from the synagogue to stone him. *No, I can't think of that. I need to just finish out the school year and then decide when and who to tell. If Dinah could keep it a secret all these years – then surely, I can!*

Dinah met him at the door and told him that Judah needed help with his homework. She could speak Greek, but still struggled with spelling it. Five-year-old Judah was sitting at the table crying and had already managed to smudge his entire page. Manasseh took a deep breath and asked if he had had a snack. Dinah brought them both juice and Manasseh began to talk with Judah about his goats. Judah wanted to grow up and raise animals just like his brother-in-law Enos. When Judah had finished his juice and was calmed down, Manasseh started Judah on his homework again, assuring him that he could master the letters and reminding him of all the tips he had learned in school. "Not many boys get the rabbi's help after school!"

"Thanks, Abba."

"You are welcome, Son. Now finish up and then we'll go to Mr. Dan's tonight and you can play with your friends."

"Yippee!"

"Judah! Don't spill the ink!"

"Sorry, Abba."

"It's okay. But calm down. You don't want to have to start all over on homework."

Dinah watched her husband interacting with her son and was so grateful that she was able to see the peace and gentleness that she had seen in other followers of Jesus. *He is so patient with Judah. Is that Jesus growing him, or us just getting old and finally figuring out how to parent?*

"What are you laughing at?" Manasseh asked Dinah.

"I'm just happy. We'd better get started." The three of them walked to Dan's house and greeted their friends. One of the ladies announced that she was now pledged to be married. She thought she would be living in her Abba's house forever, but Jehovah had provided for her deepest desire. Everyone was excited for her, and Dinah felt a contentment and sense of belonging like she had never known. For eighteen years she had been a secret and very lonely follower of Jesus. Now she was surrounded by sisters and even brothers, Jews and Gentiles. It was more than she could comprehend. But then she remembered that it was still a secret, a very dangerous one that could rip apart everything. *What will happen to my children, my friends who don't know that Jesus is the Messiah?* And suddenly, she realized that it was not about what would happen to her, but what would happen to them! They needed to know that Jesus was truly the Messiah. For the first time, she realized that she had to tell them, or they would be forever separated. Her eyes filled with tears and her throat closed. She

felt like she would faint, and all the ladies looked at her with concern. She pushed away from the table and said she just needed some air. Eve walked outside with her and asked her what was going on. "Oh, Eve, I've been so scared to tell my family that I've invited Jesus to be my Messiah. I've been so scared about what would happen to me. But suddenly, I was just overcome with the question: What will happen to them if I don't tell them? I just have this incredible desire to tell them. They must know. It doesn't matter what happens to me! I want them to be with me in Heaven for all eternity. That feeling is so strong, I felt I couldn't breathe. I'm sorry."

"No, don't be. I think the Holy Spirit is preparing your heart to tell. But you'll need the prayers of the whole group. Are you ready to go back in and share?"

"Yes, I think so. Thank you, Eve. And thank you for letting us come here and experience this peace and love and joy."

"You are very welcome. Watching you and Manasseh grow has been worth it all."

The two ladies hugged, then quickly returned to find that the others were gathered in the living room singing a praise song. Dinah took her place beside Manasseh and enjoyed hearing his voice joining with hers in praise and worship. Mordecai asked if there were any questions about any of the messages this past weekend. "Yes, I really didn't understand any of the message. I mean, I heard what Jonathan said: Jesus' last command was for us to tell everyone. But I didn't understand what he meant about baptism. I guess I got distracted trying to figure that out and missed the rest," said Manasseh.

"I expected that question. How many of you found that confusing the first time you heard it?" Everyone agreed. "How many of you have been baptized?"

Only Dan and Eve and the three single ladies raised their hands. "Okay, let's spend some time learning about baptism. It was used to indicate that a Gentile was becoming a Jew. Many other Gentile groups use baptism as a way to identify with a particular religion. But that was not what Jesus was talking about. Dan, tell us about John the Baptizer's baptism and what it meant."

Dan explained that John the Baptizer preached that everyone needed to confess their sins and turn their eyes toward the Messiah. "He preached a baptism of repentance. To be baptized by John meant that you intended to try harder to please God and to watch for the Messiah."

"Exactly. Now, can someone tell me why Jesus was baptized?" asked Mordecai.

One of the single ladies spoke up. "Jesus was sinless, so He didn't need to confess or repent, but He was baptized to indicate that He was beginning His ministry and to signal to John to announce Him as the Messiah."

"Very good. But none of those were the kind of baptism that Jesus was talking about to His followers."

"Okay, so now I'm really confused!" said Manasseh.

“Rabbi, how many times a day do you tell your students to be patient?” Mordecai reprimanded.

Manasseh admitted that he was being impatient. “Okay, Mordecai, I’m listening.”

“Good. Now who would like to tell us what Christian baptism means?”

Eve explained, “A person who has decided to accept Jesus as Messiah should be baptized in obedience to Jesus’ command and example. It is a combination of all of the above baptisms. It identifies you as a follower of Jesus, it represents your repentance from guiding yourself and instead letting the Holy Spirit guide you, and it is a picture of you beginning a new life with Jesus.”

“It’s also a picture of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. And you can think of it as death to your old way of life, surrendering yourself to Jehovah’s plan, and then starting a whole new life as a follower of Jesus. It’s a very beautiful picture and I will never forget the day I was baptized,” added Mordecai.

“Why weren’t we baptized?” asked Manasseh.

“Well, if you remember, it was very cold six months ago. I don’t think it would have been wise. But I apologize for not teaching you about it. Apparently, I’ve been neglectful about that for many of you. Why don’t you pray about it this week, and next week we’ll schedule a baptism for all of you who want to be baptized.” Everyone agreed and Mordecai asked if anyone had anything they wanted to share with the group.

“Yes,” said Dinah and she shared what the Holy Spirit had revealed to her during dinner. “Now, may I ask a question?” Mordecai nodded.

“Will the baptism be just for this group, or could we invite all our friends and relatives to attend as our way of announcing our decision to follow Jesus?”

Mordecai’s eyes twinkled as he said, “I’ve seen some baptisms where whole towns have turned out to watch. It will be up to those who are ready to be baptized to decide whether they want a private ceremony, a small ceremony, or an all-out party. Think about it, pray about it, and come back next week ready to plan your baptism service.” Mordecai led them in prayer, and everyone hurried home because it was a weeknight, and no one could stay late.

All week Manasseh and Dinah talked and prayed and talked and prayed some more. They prayed privately and they prayed together. They discussed the pros and cons and by Wednesday afternoon, they were absolutely certain that the Holy Spirit had given them clear directions for their baptism. They were united in their decision. They knew it would cost them dearly, but their hearts were ready, and they wanted obedience more than they wanted their own safety. As they walked toward Dan’s house for group, they held hands. Just before they arrived, Manasseh stopped and turned to Dinah. “Dinah, are you completely sure that you are ready? I don’t want to force you in any way.”

“Yes, Manasseh, I am not only ready, but I am excited and eager. We must let our children, our friends, and even my parents have the opportunity to hear about Jesus. And yes, I am ready to die for the privilege of telling them. I know that it is illegal for the synagogue to kill us, but I know what happened in Jerusalem, and know that it is possible that my own abba will order my secret death. I want you to know that while I am afraid, I am not terrified like I used to be. I know that this is where God is leading me. Do you agree?”

“Yes. I am ready no matter what it costs. Let’s go.”

It was a serious group that gathered at the fellowship tables. The men could sense that something momentous was taking place in Manasseh. The unity and support were strong, and Manasseh was encouraged. The ladies surrounded Dinah with words of encouragement and her heart was lifted. As dinner was completed, the group moved into positions in the living area almost in silence. The little bit of talking was whispered, and the air felt heavy with anticipation. Mordecai prayed for the group but didn’t call for songs of praise. He knew that the discussion was too important. “One thing we did not discuss last week was who is eligible to be baptized. If you have invited Jesus to be your Messiah and you are certain that the Holy Spirit has come into your innermost core and is making changes and guiding you, then you are eligible to be baptized and acknowledge this change. Like I said last week, this can be a private baptism and simply requires that one believer baptizes you. Or we could plan a baptism and invite just this close group of friends and fellow followers of Jesus. Or we could make it an evangelistic tool and invite family and friends and neighbors. Let me hear who is ready to be baptized and what your thoughts are.”

One of the couples declared that they were ready to be baptized and would like to invite some of their friends to witness the event, but they were okay if the group wanted something different.

Mordecai quickly pointed out that not everyone had to be baptized at the same time and they didn’t have to all agree on it being private or public.

“Oh, good, because I would prefer to be baptized with just this group present. I would be too nervous if there were a lot of people,” said Elena.

“Okay, we can arrange that,” said Mordecai. “Do you both agree to that, or do you want something different, Julius?”

“Yes, I agree with my wife. I would prefer just this group to be present. I think I could relax and really focus on the significance if there wasn’t a huge crowd.”

“I’m ready to be baptized and I’m okay either way. I don’t have any family here, but I would probably invite some of my buddies from work. So, I guess I’m leaning to a larger celebration.”

“We have spent the week in prayer, around other things, of course, but mostly in prayer,” began Manasseh. “We have made our decision to announce our becoming followers of Jesus at the baptism. We would like to invite the entire synagogue which will include our

grown children and Dinah's parents. We are ready to face the consequences to ourselves if we can use our baptism as a way to expose them to Jesus."

"Most of them have never heard the Truth about Jesus because of Priest Othniel and my abba, Simon the Pharisee. He is proud of the fact that he assisted in having Jesus arrested and crucified. He has voted to have many home groups stoned to death and would have stoned Paul to death when he tried to preach the Truth to our synagogue," added Dinah.

"We don't want to endanger any of you, but you must know that this event will not be easy for us, and I can't promise your safety. It might be better if we had a separate baptism," said Manasseh.

"But you are welcome to be there if the Holy Spirit leads you. Please pray about it," said Dinah.

"Shall we wait another week to pray about who wants to be baptized with Manasseh and Dinah, and who doesn't?" asked Mordecai. There was whispering among the couples.

"We want to be baptized with them. We, too, want their family to see and hear about Jesus," said Niko, and Theodora nodded that she agreed.

"I know that I want to be baptized with them. We are a family and I want to be there to support them," said Mario.

"We will be there to support Manasseh and Dinah, but we still want just the group for our own baptism," said Julius as Elena nodded.

"Okay," said Eve, "I need to know how many guests we should plan on. It will be an outdoor picnic, so we will just serve snacks, but I'm assuming that your family will want kosher food. We need to get together to talk about that."

"Shall we plan on it for next Sabbath afternoon so that everyone will be off work or is that too soon?" asked Dan. Everyone agreed the sooner, the better. Directions to the place were given and the ninth hour was agreed upon. Julius agreed that they would wait until the following Sabbath afternoon for their special group baptism service.

Manasseh and Dinah walked home in silence. The magnitude of what they had planned was heavy on them. As they lay on their mats, Manasseh asked, "And how, exactly, are we going to invite the whole synagogue?"

"All I know to do is pray, and maybe God will reveal it to us. I don't know." They both slept restlessly that night.

On Thursday morning, Manasseh and Judah left for school and Dinah went to Eve's house to talk about preparing a kosher table for her family to enjoy at the baptism. Mordecai was already there and the three of them planned what to serve. Mordecai suggested that if Dinah's servants would make enough Sabbath bread for their friends, Dinah could purchase cheese or butter at the market, and he and his servant would prepare trays of fruit. "How many people are we expecting?"

"It could be as many as sixty and as few as zero. I have no idea."

“So, I will set up for sixty and we’ll pray that they will all come,” said Eve.

“Will you also pray for us to figure out what to say to invite them?”

“Why don’t you tell them that it’s an end of the school year celebration and you have a big announcement that you want them to hear,” suggested Eve.

“Mordecai, would that be okay? I mean, to not tell them about the baptism?” asked Dinah.

“If you tell them about your decision to follow Jesus, they probably will not come. But if you tell them you have a big announcement, they might. On the other hand, they may feel tricked when they discover that this is your way of exposing them not only to Jesus but also to Gentiles.”

“You could tell them that everything will be kosher, but you’ve invited some Gentile friends, too,” suggested Eve.

“I’ll talk it over with Manasseh. Surely the Holy Spirit will give us the right words.” Mordecai and Eve both prayed for Dinah before she left. She walked to the market and bought the supplies she needed to make enough Sabbath bread and enough kosher goat cheese and butter to serve sixty people. She had everything delivered and instructed her servants to begin preparing the food. She prayed that it would not be wasted. Then she realized that she would not be able to transport all the bread and cheese to the baptism site because it would be the Sabbath.

She sat down to wait for Manasseh and Judah to arrive home from school. So many decisions had to be made. She hoped he would not be late. It was still early, so she slipped to her knees and began singing songs of praise and worship. As she relaxed, she suddenly realized that because the baptism was this Sabbath, it ruled out making an announcement at the synagogue. They had no choice but to individually invite each family. She felt much better about that. They might stone them at the baptism, but at least they would hear the announcement. Maybe some of them would come to follow Jesus.

Manasseh and Judah arrived, and Manasseh sent Judah outside to play just as soon as he finished his snack, since there was no homework assigned for the last day of school. She caught Manasseh up on everything that had been discussed with Mordecai and Eve. They agreed to not mention the baptism and would let the Holy Spirit guide them for the right words for each family. They realized that they needed to get started immediately. They agreed to go alone and split up the families between them. “Do you want me to talk with your parents?”

“No, I want to invite them. I will go in the morning. I think they will not be as suspicious if I invite them. Although I probably will warn them that we’ve invited some Gentile friends, too. But I’ll let the Holy Spirit guide me. I may not tell them. I don’t know. All I know is we need to get busy. Do you want to take Judah with you to Enos and Martha’s?”

“He would enjoy that, but I need to hurry, and he will want to stay and visit, so I will just go now.” They agreed that instead of an end of

school celebration, it should be a Sukkot celebration. Many Jewish families used that feasting time to get together.

"I'll take Judah with me. I'm going to Hannah's and do some of the easier ones first. I'll be home in time for dinner. Let's pray before we go," suggested Dinah.

Manasseh held Dinah in his arms as they prayed for each other. Then with a quick shalom, he was out the door. Dinah called Judah and told him about the party without mentioning the baptism. She told him they needed to hurry so they could invite everyone. They headed to Hannah's house first. Everyone seemed eager to attend their party and while they raised their eyebrows at the mention of Gentiles, there didn't seem to be any negative comments. She was able to invite another family from the synagogue and then her daughters-in-law, Abigail and Nancy. Nancy wanted to know if the announcement was that she was with child, and Dinah quickly assured her that she was not! She and Judah hurried home just in time for dinner. They ate without Manasseh, and Judah told Jacob all about the party. Jacob said he would be there. He stated that he worked with Gentiles all the time, so it was no problem for him, but expressed surprise that his parents had Gentile friends. "Just some friends we met and wanted to invite," she tried to say lightly.

"Won't that make Grandfather and Grandmother upset?" he asked.

"I don't know, Jacob. But your dad and I have quit worrying about what they think of us. We are living as obediently as we know how according to The Law and The Prophets. We'll be outdoors and we won't be eating their food."

"It's okay, Mother. I'll be there and will look forward to time to visit with my new nephews. I'm going out for a while."

How she longed to hold him in her arms and tell him everything. The thought of losing her children or causing them to be harmed because of their announcement was too great to bear. She told Judah that she was tired and was going to her room. She stretched out on the mat and wondered where Manasseh was. He slipped onto his mat after she was sound asleep.

Chapter 10

At breakfast, Manasseh said that last night he had returned from Enos' and decided to talk with Abner and Mahlon. He had stayed for dinner and enjoyed his time with Mahlon who was struggling with his role as priest and needed someone to talk with. "You didn't tell him about our decision, did you?"

"No. He promised to come, but was so wrapped up in his own questions, he didn't seem to notice. But Priest Othniel is near death, so Mahlon and his brothers may not be able to come if he passes. I guess we shouldn't invite Bilbah since she will need to be home attending to him."

"Oh, Manasseh, if Priest Othniel passes, no one will come to the party. They, and we, would be in mourning. Isn't it forty days for a priest?"

"It varies. But Dinah, we have to trust that God is arranging everything just as it should be. We must rely on the Holy Spirit not only to guide us, but to orchestrate everything that needs to happen. Remember, nothing will happen outside of God's plan. I've got to get to school and then I'm talking with Nathan afterward. I'll send Judah home, but I'll stay and talk with Nathan. I may tell him."

"Wouldn't he just run and warn the others?"

"You'll have to trust me to listen carefully to what the Holy Spirit says," he kissed her quickly and called for Judah to hurry or they would be late for the last day of school. *Not only the last day of the school year, but the last day I will ever teach in a Hebrew School. I wonder what God's provision will be for next fall. I can survive financially until fall, but I will need to find a job soon — if I'm alive, he thought wryly.*

Once they had gone, Dinah walked toward her parents' home, then decided that she needed more prayer. She turned and walked to Eve's house again. Eve welcomed her and she told her that so far the response was good from everyone, but she was just feeling the need for prayer support before she talked with her mother. Eve agreed and the two ladies prayed together.

Dinah was welcomed by the servant and invited in. Her mother quickly greeted her and made a comment about not seeing her recently. Dinah apologized and said that helping with the grandchildren was wearing her out. She inquired about her mother's health and her abba's. "I wanted to invite you to a party that we are having tomorrow. We are planning an outdoor picnic, but I'll make sure you and Abba have benches to sit on. Then you'll be surrounded by all of your new great-grandchildren. They are all planning to be there. We have invited some other families from the synagogue, and some other friends that we've met. We have a big announcement to make and want you and Abba to be there."

“You’ve never been one for entertaining. How many guests are you expecting?”

“There’s close to fifty from the synagogue,” said Dinah truthfully.

“Close! You need to know exactly how much food you’ll need. Why did you wait so late to invite people? You didn’t give them time to let you know and now you don’t know how much food to provide.”

“Everyone I’ve invited has said they would be there, so I don’t think we’ll have too much food wasted. Mother, I’ve got a lot to do today, so I need to run by the market and get started. Shalom.”

“You should have gotten started earlier,” called her mother as she left.

Yes, I probably should have. But maybe they will come and listen.

Her mind kept replaying how angry her Abba had become when the Apostle Paul had tried to tell the synagogue about Jesus. *I mustn’t think about that. The Holy Spirit guided me to invite my parents and now that is done.* She walked to Eve’s again and reported that the invitation had been issued and she wasn’t positive, but she thought her parents would come. She asked Eve if she could provide benches for her parents since it was too hard for them to sit on the ground, and they couldn’t stand for long. Eve giggled and said, “Then maybe we shouldn’t provide them a place to sit!” Both ladies giggled and the tension melted. Eve assured her that they had planned to take some benches from their courtyard so that people could sit if they preferred. “So your count is still around sixty?”

“Yes, I think so. Is there anything else I can help you with? When should I send the bread and cheese? I forgot that I need to send water jars, too. Would they be safe if I sent them over this afternoon?”

“Yes, my servants are taking the benches and tables over this afternoon, and they will camp out to protect everything. We will set up a table for your kosher food, but do you have a label to put on it so they will know it’s kosher?”

“I can make one.”

“Why don’t you fill the water jars and let my servants pick them up this afternoon in the oxcart, otherwise you’ll be making a lot of trips. They can pick up the bread and cheese and whatever else you are sending.”

“How much water will I need for sixty people?” They decided on eight jars of kosher water. Then they both began to giggle again about the ludicrousness of trying to obey all the Pharisaical laws. Dinah’s servants and Eve’s servants would fill their water jars from the well; one would call it kosher and one would call it non-kosher.

“One more day, and we won’t have to pretend anymore. But Eve, there’s a sadness that even if I’m not killed, I may never see my children or my parents or my friends ever again. Sometimes I can’t bear it.”

“It is hard, but remember that the purpose in this big announcement is letting them know that they can spend all eternity with you. Don’t focus on the short-term, think about all of them coming

to know Jesus because of this announcement. We are all praying for that to happen!”

“Okay, I still have six more families to invite. I need to get busy.”

“Yes, you do! And so do I. Shalom, sweet sister.”

“Shalom. Keep praying!” called Dinah as she hurried to finish her list of families to invite.

Since everyone from the synagogue lived close, Dinah was able to make the invitations fairly quickly and got home just in time for Judah to emerge from his first year at Hebrew School. *I wonder where he will go to school next year. I wonder if there are schools for Christian boys. Maybe Manasseh will need to start one!* Her servants were busy making Sabbath bread for seventy just to make sure they had enough, and Dinah hoped there would be enough for post-Sabbath dinner. She prayed for Manasseh as he talked with Nathan. She didn’t know if he would turn in his resignation today or not.

She tried to keep busy but found herself wandering around the house, not able to function. She finally decided to help the servants get everything packed. She began to pull out the water jars. But before she could call Judah to help her, Manasseh arrived looking excited. “You look happy. How did it go?” she asked.

“It was really easy. I’m sorry I couldn’t let you know, but he wanted to get everything cleaned up and put away so that he wouldn’t have to come back and do it later. I felt really good about helping him because after tomorrow, I probably won’t be allowed anywhere near the school.”

“Did you invite them?”

“Oh, yeah. That went fine. I just told him we had never thrown a large party and wanted to invite all our friends and family for an end of school celebration. He thought it would be great and said they would be there.”

“We need to take water jars to the well and get them filled. Do you want to go with me, or are you too tired?”

“Let’s just send the servants. They can do it faster.” They sent the servants to the well and as they returned, Dinah covered each jar with a cloth. They packed the Sabbath bread and cheese. Dan’s servants had the oxcart filled with tables and benches, but they had saved room for her kosher supplies.

Finally, the day was done and Sabbath had arrived. They enjoyed a quiet dinner alone with Judah. “How did it go with your mother?” Dinah told him and they both felt that they would have a good turnout.

“Have we invited everyone?” They reviewed who they had invited, and Dinah said she would talk with Junos and Cronus about attending the party. As servants, they really had no choice, but they usually spent the day resting, so she needed to warn them tonight that she would need them tomorrow.

They decided to take a walk after dinner and ended up at the baptism picnic site. “Eve has been such an encouragement to me today. She said for me to quit focusing on the short term and what

may happen to us, but to focus on all of these people sharing eternity with us and with Jesus. That really helped. Are you doing okay?"

"I think so. I've been trying to keep busy. Waiting will be the hardest part, I think. Shall we go to the Worship Center in the morning?"

"Of course! I don't want to miss," said Dinah. "Judah, don't run so far ahead of us, and you need to be more careful crossing the street. That's a busy road, and chariots don't slow down for little boys."

"Yes, Mother."

It was a long Sabbath evening of waiting. Dinah talked with Junos and Cronus about wanting them to attend the party and they, of course, agreed to be ready.



It was good to be surrounded by their friends at the Worship Center. Manasseh, Dinah, and Judah attended the second service and sat with Mordecai and others from their group. Everyone was excited about the afternoon and wanted to hear how the invitations had been received. Demetrius taught the lesson this morning and Manasseh remembered that it was the wedding at his house that started this journey of getting to know Jesus. He wondered if it was too late to invite him and his family to the baptism. Demetrius continued to talk about Jesus' last message to the apostles before He returned to Heaven. This morning he focused on teaching others about Jesus. Demetrius emphasized that no one was excluded. Everyone was commanded to tell.

As Manasseh and Dinah walked home with Judah, Dinah could feel the stress building. She set out a bowl of apricots for the guys in case they were hungry and said she wanted to get a nap if she could. Manasseh sat in the courtyard and tried to relax. He had not allowed himself to think beyond this point. *What would he say? When would he say it? Should he allow Dinah to speak? Would Mordecai do the speaking and he and Dinah just let their family watch?* He decided he should probably ask Mordecai, since he'd never seen a baptism. *Will the baptism be first, or will there be visiting time before? What do I say when my family realizes that it's not just our party, but a larger gathering? Oh, man. This is going to be a mess!* His heart was racing, and he was feeling nauseated. He was glad to see that Dinah was up and had their extra robes packed. He asked if she was ready to go and they decided it would be easier to wait at the baptism site, especially if some of their group was there. They called for Judah, Junos, and Cronus, and together they walked toward the site. Manasseh and Dinah carried two bowls of butter that she had forgotten to pack, and a bag of knives to spread the cheese and butter. They hoped they didn't meet anyone from the synagogue because there was no way to hide that they were breaking the Sabbath rules.

“Manasseh, no matter what happens today, I want to tell you that you’ve been a good husband to me, and I love you. I’m so proud of you.”

“Thank you, Dinah. You’ve been a good wife to me, and I love you. Whatever happens today, we will be in Heaven together for all eternity.”

They walked the rest of the way in silence. They arrived almost an hour before the party was supposed to start, but already there were people milling around. They didn’t recognize anyone from the synagogue. They found a place in the grass and put down their bags and blankets. They placed the rolls of bread on the platters and set out the butter and cheese and serving knives. Shortly, Mordecai arrived with his servant carrying the trays of fruit.

Enos and Martha arrived with his parents, Adonijah and Hannah. Hannah was holding baby Nehemiah, who was at that adorable six-month-old stage. He quickly became the center of attention and Dinah could hardly wait to get him in her arms. Soon, more families were arriving and surrounding Dinah and Manasseh. Now, it was beginning to feel like a party.

Two-year-old Deborah came running to Grandmother Dinah and it was all Dinah could do to keep from crying. They hadn’t been all together as a family since Passover a year ago because of the four grandsons that had been born. She wondered if her parents would come or not, but it was time to start, and Dan stood on the platform that he had built and called for everyone’s attention. “Could we please sing Psalm 150? It’s a favorite of Manasseh and Dinah’s. On this Sabbath, let’s lift our voices in praise to Jehovah.” Everyone joined in. While they were singing, Dinah’s parents, Simon and Esther, arrived, and Dinah made sure they were comfortable on their benches.

Dan said that Manasseh wanted to make his announcement first and then the real celebration could begin. Manasseh was not expecting this but strode quickly to the platform. “First, thank you for coming. It means a lot to me to have my family all together. Jehovah has blessed us with six wonderful children, four extraordinary children-in-law, and five of the most wonderful grandchildren in the world. We are also happy to have with us Dinah’s parents, Simon and Esther.

“During our move here, six years ago, I met a man named Philip who went out of his way to help me and my family continue our journey to Antioch. He helped us find an ox after my brother’s ox became lame. It really made a big impression on me that he would not accept pay and said that his intention was simply to obey the Holy Spirit’s instructions to help anyone he could. I could not get him out of my mind. Four years ago, I met another man who was so incredibly kind and gracious. He went out of his way to help me. His name is Demetrius, and he is here somewhere. I hope you will meet him while we visit afterward. He introduced me to his friend Mordecai who has taught me so much from The Law and The Prophets. When I needed help because my daughter was dying, Mordecai introduced me to a midwife and her husband who came immediately even though it was in

the middle of a winter storm. All three of them are also here today. Samuel and Haggith, thank you for saving the life of my daughter, Bethany, and my grandson, Hosea, last winter. Once again, they would not accept payment and said that the Holy Spirit had called them to help anyone they could. When my oldest son's wife began to have complications birthing little Shalti, you can imagine who I ran to. Once again Haggith gave me advice and medicine to help her deliver safely. So many people have helped me on my journey.

"Dinah, my wife, will now join me. Dinah, would you like to speak for yourself, or shall I tell your story?"

"I want to tell," she whispered. While she was listening to Manasseh, she felt the Holy Spirit guiding her in what to say. "I want to thank my abba and mother for allowing me to learn much of The Law and The Prophets and explaining it to me from my birth. And I want to thank them for hiring a woman to chaperone me during my final years of childhood. At the age of ten I became a secret follower of Jesus. I continued to honor my parents and to follow their teachings, but I felt that I could not reveal my own personal decision to follow Jesus. I want to thank my parents for arranging my marriage to a man who loved to answer my questions and taught me to love The Law and The Prophets. I want to thank my parents for understanding that all I've ever wanted was to love them, honor them, and find Truth. I nearly drove them crazy asking questions. Eighteen years ago, I invited Jesus to be my Messiah. I have tried to be obedient to the Holy Spirit's leading, and He instructed me to continue to honor my parents, to obey my husband, and to keep my decision a secret. Recently, He has been showing me that the time is now right to reveal that Jesus is my Messiah and I have asked Dan, our small group leader, to baptize me."

Manasseh stepped forward and stated, "I have asked Dan to also baptize me because I asked Jesus to be my Messiah six months ago and the Holy Spirit has been guiding me step by step. We have invited you, our family and very best friends to witness our baptism today."

Dan led them into the water and explained to their guests that baptism was simply a picture to show what had happened in their lives. When they submerged their head under the water, it meant death to their old way of life, depending on themselves, and their own understanding. Then when they stood up out of the water, it would represent a new beginning, a New Way of living that would be led by the Holy Spirit of Jehovah. Dan baptized Manasseh first and then Dinah. The couple walked out of the water together hand in hand. She dared not look at her abba. She simply picked up her dry robe and went behind the trees to change. Manasseh did the same. In the meantime, Mordecai called Niko and Theodora to join Dan in the water. "Niko and Theodora have also invited friends and family to observed their special day. Niko, have you invited Jesus to be your Messiah?"

“Yes, almost a year ago. But I only recently heard that I should be baptized to show my desire to be obedient to everything the Holy Spirit tells me,” said Niko.

“Theodora, have you invited Jesus to be your Messiah?” asked Dan.

“Yes, at the same time as Niko. And I, too, want to be obedient to everything the Holy Spirit tells me. I want to learn everything I can about following Jesus.”

First Dan baptized Niko and then he baptized Theodora. They exited the water holding hands and grinning at their friends and family as everyone clapped and whistled.

Mordecai called Mario to the stand and asked if he wanted to speak. “I brought a few friends with me. I just want you to know that I, too, have invited Jesus to be my Messiah and Jehovah God to be my one and only God. I did this about six months ago and I hope that you have seen a difference in my life. I am happier than I have ever been. The Holy Spirit is guiding my life, but He’s also changing me and teaching me to really care about people. I want you to know that I really, really care about you guys and hope that you will investigate Jesus for yourself. I’ll be glad to answer questions, but it’s a personal journey that’s between you and Jehovah God. People can hurt you, or even kill you, but it doesn’t change your relationship with Him. That will last forever. Today, as I’m baptized, I want you to not only see the picture of the death to my old ways and my start to live the New Way, but I want you to see Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection.” He walked into the water to join Dan. Dan baptized him and they walked out of the water arm in arm — one a Jew, the other a Gentile, and both followers of Jesus.

As leader of the Christian Worship Center, Jonathan was present for the baptisms. Mordecai had warned him that there might be problems from Dinah’s family, but so far everything seemed quiet. The people from the synagogue seemed to be in shock at what they had just witnessed. Jonathan remembered his parents talking about Simon the Pharisee. And here he was! Today Simon the Pharisee was hearing about Jesus and watching his daughter be baptized. He hoped that things would remain peaceful.

Mordecai led them in a prayer of blessing. “Jehovah God, we ask you to bless each one of these who have been baptized today. But we also ask that you bless those who are witnessing this baptism and hearing these testimonies. I pray that their hunger for knowing the Truth will grow and grow, and that it will bring them to the Truth that will set them free. In Jesus’ name.”

Manasseh and Dinah hugged all of the group members that were waiting for them, and then Dinah invited them to come and meet her family and friends. Jacob spoke up boldly. “Dad and Mother, and everyone else, I am so happy for you two. I, too, believe that Jesus is the Messiah, but I was afraid to tell you. I’ve been searching ever since I turned thirteen.”

“Oh, Jacob, we wanted to tell you, but were afraid.”

“Well, if we’re revealing secrets, Bethany and I have been meeting with Samuel and Haggith several times since Haggith saved Bethany’s life. They have been teaching us about Jesus and we, too, are ready to accept him as our Messiah,” announced Abner.

Dinah ran to hug Bethany and express her joy.

“And yes, Dad, we want more information about Jesus. I’ve seen a tremendous change in your life, and I want to know more about what you’ve learned,” said Joab.

“Manasseh, can we talk? I mean privately,” asked his younger brother, Nathan.

“Manasseh, you are fired! Why didn’t you tell me what you had found? I didn’t know that you had become a Jesus follower. It’s the end of the school! You have ruined me.”

“Have I? Or have I shared with you something that will bring you more peace and joy than you have ever known? You said yourself that you wanted to know what made Philip in Samaria different. I’ve found it. It’s available to you.”

“Can we talk tomorrow? I don’t want you to miss your party. I just can’t imagine you giving up the school. I mean what is going to happen to us?” asked Nathan.

“I don’t know, but I know that Jehovah already has a plan and I trust Him. Let’s talk tomorrow. I don’t want Dinah to have to deal with her dad alone.”

They returned just in time to hear Simon speak. “Priest Mahlon, what are you going to do about this? Manasseh has brought us here under false pretenses and has exposed the entire congregation to this heresy. We are now unclean, and he must pay the price for his deceit.”

“Simon, I know that you want me to call for him to be stoned. But we cannot do that here. All we can do is ban him from ever entering the synagogue again. Manasseh, you and Dinah and any other persons who decide to follow Jesus as Messiah are removed from the synagogue.”

“But ... but ... that doesn’t keep him from talking with your people outside the synagogue!” protested Simon. “Apparently, he has distributed his lies to the entire group!”

Priest Mahlon turned on his heel and left without another word. Simon turned to Manasseh and started to speak, but then spit full in his face. “Come!” he roared at Esther. She followed without saying goodbye, but everyone could tell that she was devastated.

Manasseh wiped the spit from his face. He stood calmly and without anger. “They did worse things to Jesus,” Manasseh explained to those around him. “I will be praying that Jehovah will show Simon and Priest Mahlon and the rest of you the Truth. Please don’t reject Jesus. Please search and see that this was Jehovah’s plan all along.”

Mordecai joined the group and put his arm around Manasseh’s shoulder and spoke to those gathered around. “My own sons put me in the temple dungeon in Jerusalem when I announced that I was following Jesus. I had no food or water for six days, but Jehovah sustained me. He will sustain Manasseh and Dinah and give them

strength because they have chosen to follow Him. I was a Pharisee and a member of the Sanhedrin, yet Jehovah was able to show me the Truth. I am praying for all of you to seek the Truth as revealed by The Law and The Prophets.”

Japheth and Zipporah got up from their benches and walked away without comment. Elkanah and Isaac apologized and said that they should probably go. Eliphaz spoke. “I, too, played for the Gentiles and cannot get the wedding out of my mind. I saw things that I never thought possible. I am not saying that you have found the Truth, but I would like to hear for myself what you have found. I cannot read The Law and The Prophets for myself, but if you would meet with me, I would like to hear what you consider to be Truth.”

“I, too, would like to hear,” said Adonijah. “You know that. Thank you for inviting us to be a part of your special day. I applaud you for being brave enough to stand up for what you believe. I’m not saying that I believe it. But I do admire your courage.”

“I’ve been meeting with a group and learning about Jesus,” said Jacob. “Maybe we could meet together somewhere and let you teach us.”

“Nathan, could we use the school building for that purpose?” asked Manasseh.

“Let’s talk tomorrow. I just don’t know”

“That’s okay. We can meet in my yard. I will plan to meet with anyone who wants to hear what I have learned about Jesus next Sabbath at the eighth hour.”

“Will it just be men or are you including the women?” asked Adonijah.

“Jesus welcomed both, but if you are more comfortable, we can split into two groups and let Dinah lead the women separately,” said Manasseh. “I don’t want the women to miss out.”

Jonathan and Dan approached Manasseh and Dinah’s friends. They seemed to be deep in conversation. Manasseh introduced them as two of the priests at his new synagogue. “Manasseh, I think a better description for me is spiritual shepherd of the flock, or pastor. Congratulations on your baptism,” said Jonathan as he hugged Manasseh. “I just want you to know that I’m available at any time to answer your questions and if I can help you in any way, please let me know.” He turned to the group and stated, “And that goes for any of you. If I can help you in any way, just let me know.”

“And I’m Dan. My wife and I host the group that Manasseh and Dinah have been attending. We think they are a very special couple and have become good friends. I, too, am available to answer your questions or help you if I can.”

“Then maybe you two can help us with this one.” Manasseh addressed both men. “My family and friends would like for me to meet with them to discuss what I’ve learned about Jesus. We would like to start a men’s group and a ladies’ group on Sabbath afternoons. Since we are so new at this, I was wondering if there would be anyone who

could help me and Dinah in case questions come up that we can't answer."

"I'm sure we can find someone to help you, but that is usually handled by the Leadership Team," replied Jonathan. "I'll get back to you on Friday to let you know who will come to help you. Of course, I think it would be best if you do the teaching and let them just be a backup for you. Your friends and family want to know what you've learned so far. Where would you meet?"

"In my yard for now," said Manasseh.

"Okay, I'll see you around noon on Friday. You are out of school now, aren't you?" asked Jonathan.

"Yes, out of school now and forever. As of today, I have no job." Jonathan nodded knowingly.

"I'll be praying regarding that, too. I can think of two different positions that you might be interested in," volunteered Jonathan. "We'll talk on Friday. Does anyone have other questions?" When no one did, Jonathan suggested they enjoy the food and celebrate with everyone else. Dinah suddenly realized that she had forgotten to label the table and she quickly informed everyone that she and Mordecai had made sure that everything was kosher; she had just forgotten to label it. Jacob started the line, and everyone enjoyed the food. And since it was close to sunset, most were getting hungry. There was still a stark difference between the friends of Manasseh and Dinah and the rest of the guests. There was much laughter and fun happening all around them and Dinah wanted her family to know the joy that only Jesus could bring. Right now, her family and friends looked and sounded more like they were attending a funeral. But deep down inside, she was thrilled that each one of them had heard the good news, and she knew that things would never be the same.

Chapter 11

“How big of a celebration do you have in mind? We can’t fit more than twenty in our yard.”

“I just want him to know that it is a special day and that I’m very proud of him.”

“I don’t want to put a lot of pressure on the other parents. There will be at least three other boys becoming men this summer.”

“Yes, but we don’t want Zebedee’s to be so small and all the other boys to have bigger ones,” said Susanna.

Jonathan and Susanna suddenly looked at each other startled. “What are we doing? This fretting is not like us, and why should we care what the other parents are doing? This discussion must stop right now, and we need to pray about what God wants us to do for Zebedee. He knows what is best,” said Susanna.

“Oh, how easy it is to get caught up in the weeds of this world,” agreed Jonathan. “I’ll be praying that God will give us both clarity. But we must decide soon. His birthday is only a month away. Susanna, have I told you how much I love you and how much I appreciate your helping me to stay on track? You are a great wife and a great mother. Jehovah has indeed blessed me,” said Jonathan.

“Thank you, Jonathan. I am the one who has been blessed,” she replied.

“Mother!” Quickly Susanna raced to Zephaniah. He was trying to carry baby Rinnah out of the barn, but she was protesting and was too big for him to handle. “She won’t mind me! I let her come in to see the goats, but now she won’t come out.”

Susanna picked up Rinnah and scolded her for not listening to Zephaniah. “I’m sorry, Zephaniah. Sometimes she just doesn’t know right from wrong. She focuses on what she wants and doesn’t care what anyone else wants. But she will grow up and learn to obey. And you have an important role to play as you show her how quickly and carefully you obey your parents and older brothers. Do you need a break? Abba and I can watch her for a while.”

“Are we having juice? I’m hungry,” said Zephaniah who was almost four and was always hungry.

“That sounds like a good idea.” Susanna handed Rinnah to Jonathan and went indoors to squeeze the plums to make juice for just the four of them. The two older boys had asked to spend the Sabbath afternoon with Elias and Adam at Asher and Sharon’s house since they had very little time to visit with their good friends. Jonathan and Susannah missed them but wanted to allow them freedom to grow up. They knew Sharon would send them home for the post-Sabbath meal. “I wonder what Elias is planning on doing when he turns thirteen? Has Sharon said?” asked Jonathan.

“You know that he has been working for Chillion as a stone mason, don’t you?” asked Susanna.

“No. I find that surprising. I thought Elias would study to become a scribe like Asher.”

“I think he wanted the muscles. I haven’t talked with Sharon for a while. Elias won’t turn thirteen until the end of the summer, but we need to get busy thinking about Zebedee’s party.”

“Let’s pray about it and talk tomorrow afternoon. I hope the boys come home soon. I’ve got men’s group tonight.” Susanna knew that Jonathan was dreading seeing his boys grow up, but all she knew to do was to encourage them to keep communicating and loving each other. The boys showed no sign of wanting to escape their home and she knew that Jonathan had done a great job raising them. He had really invested in their lives, even though he was gone so much. She hoped they would stay close. Her own little brothers worked for her dad and seemed to be content to stay nearby.

On Sunday afternoon, Jonathan and Susanna decided that they would only invite the boys in the oldest group of students who were all close friends. There would be eight of them who would all be turning thirteen this year or next. By the time they invited them and all their families, and the two rabbis and teacher and their three families, there would hardly be room to move in the yard. Susanna suggested that instead of a sit-down meal, they just serve snacks, and people could sit in the courtyard or on the grass in the yard. They would ask Zerah to build a platform for the ceremony. Jonathan promised to talk with him about it, but then realized that Zerah really wouldn’t have time. “I think that Zephaniah and I will build it. It will give us a project for the afternoons.”

“I’m sure that Rinnah would be glad to help, too,” laughed Susanna.

“Are you laughing at me? I have a lot more free time than Zerah and I did a pretty good job on the goat pen, don’t you think?” said Jonathan teasingly trying to sound offended.

“Yes, you did, my dear husband. I think it would be a grand idea and it would be good for you and Zephaniah to have a project. But you’d better get started on it soon. You never know what will come up between now and then.”



Sunday morning, Jacob met Josie at the construction site. Josie was already working when Jacob arrived. “Am I late?” asked Jacob looking at the sky.

“No, I just wanted to get an early start,” said Josie as he showed Jacob what needed to be done.

“You are not going to believe what I did yesterday!” declared Jacob.

“Well, you attended the worship service with me. So, it must have been in the afternoon.”

“Yes, I watched my dad and mother get baptized!” Jacob was grinning from ear to ear. “And I think I did it right, but last night I prayed to ask Jesus to be my Messiah.”

“That’s wonderful news!”

“And even better news is that my whole family wants to know more, so we are going to start meeting on Sabbath afternoons to learn more about Jesus,” stated Jacob.

“Even your grandparents?!”

A deep sadness suddenly came over Jacob. “No, my grandfather spit in my dad’s face and they left.”

“I’m sorry, Jacob. I’m sure your dad was expecting that and had already decided that following Jesus can be very costly.”

“I guess. He didn’t seem to be upset by it. And Mother seemed okay with them leaving. I think they expected all of us to leave. They seemed really surprised that we were interested in learning more.”

“What group are your parents in?”

“They are in Mordecai’s group and have been following Jesus for about six months.”

“Then he’ll help your dad get the family group started.”

“And it’s not just the family. There’s a couple of other families from the synagogue, too,” said Jacob.

“I can’t wait to tell Jonathan!” said Josie.

“Oh, he was there, and he promised to find leaders to help Dad and Mother teach their groups.”

“Perfect. Now, let’s get to work. Did you announce that you were following Jesus?”

“I told them I was investigating Jesus, but I didn’t make the decision to invite him to be my Messiah until late last night.”

“It’s the best decision you’ll ever make. Let me know if you have questions, but we’ve got work to do.”



Joab and Jethro set off for the bank as usual on Sunday morning, but there was nothing usual about it. “Do you think we still have jobs?” asked Jethro.

“I don’t know. Nancy and I talked, and we have enough saved up to tide us over for a while. I’m sure we could locate new jobs somewhere else.”

“But we haven’t even decided to follow Jesus,” protested Jethro.

“But we sided with Dad, and you know how Grandfather feels about that,” said Joab.

“So, are you two going to this class that Dad is teaching?” asked Jethro.

“Nancy wants to, and I think I do, too.”

“Yeah, Abigail says she wants to check it out, too. I just don’t think it’s going to sit well with Grandfather. My guess is that we will find ourselves without jobs this morning,” said Jethro.

“We have done nothing wrong! If he wants to fire me for trying to find peace and joy and what Dad calls Truth — then, so be it. I’m not sure I want to work for him!” declared Joab. “But let’s try to act normal and just do our jobs. Okay?”

Joab used his key to open the door, and they entered their own offices without incident. Grandfather apparently hadn’t arrived yet but there was always work to be done and soon they were both settled into their normal routine. It was almost noon when Joab heard Grandfather Simon arrive. He went straight to his office. Usually, he stuck his head in to let them know he was available, but today he stayed in his office. Each time Jethro entered the room, Joab jumped, but neither of them saw their grandfather all day. When it was time to leave, they knocked on his door and both told him goodnight. “Shalom,” they said in unison.

“Shalom,” replied their grandfather sadly. As they walked home, they discussed what might be happening, but felt that their jobs were not secure. They would just continue to work and hope that this would pass. Sooner or later, they would need to consult Grandfather about a client or an account. Both dreaded that, but they would deal with it as it happened.



On Sunday mid-morning, Nathan arrived at Manasseh’s door, but discovered that he was pulling weeds in the yard. “I thought you might sleep late on your first day of summer break.”

“No, I’ve got so much on my mind, I got up earlier than usual,” laughed Manasseh.

“Are you too busy to talk?” asked Nathan tentatively.

“Not at all. I just realized I needed to pull some weeds. I seem to be behind. Shall we go to the school? Let me tell Dinah.”

Nathan was amazed at how relaxed Manasseh seemed. “Nathan, I realize I’ve put you in a terrible spot. But I had a choice to make and knew that I couldn’t live the way I had in the past. I waited until school was over so that you wouldn’t have to teach all the boys by yourself, and I promise I have not mentioned the name of Jesus to any of them. They are too young to be involved in this debate anyway, so I don’t think I did any harm.”

“I’m just glad I’m answering to Priest Mahlon and not Priest Othniel,” said Nathan.

“Yes, that would be harder.”

“So, you and I met Philip, and we heard about Jesus. I haven’t been able to quit thinking about that day, but you seemed like you didn’t want to talk about it. So, what’s changed?”

“Well, that day was the first time I had heard the Truth about Jesus, and I began to realize that all my life, I’ve just followed the traditions of my fathers and hadn’t really investigated it for myself. And like you, I couldn’t forget what I heard. Then like I said yesterday, our musician’s group played for a Jewish wedding, but it was at a Gentile’s

house and all of us were blown away by the kindness and peace and joy that we saw there. It was like Philip, only about a hundred of them — men, women, children, and servants. And when Demetrius realized that we wouldn't eat his non-kosher food, he went to a friend's house and asked him to bring us kosher food to eat. I can't tell you how impressed I was. We were very careful to not touch anyone, and we were outside in the yard while they were all in the courtyard. So, we didn't do anything wrong. But that nearly drove me crazy. It took me three and a half years of misery before I dared knock on that man's door to ask for more information. Sometimes I would walk there and then chicken out. But I finally knocked, and he took me to meet Mordecai, the man who was kosher. You know what he told me?"

"No."

"He said to re-read The Law and The Prophets. I think I told you that. He said to read it and ask Jehovah to interpret it — not what I had been taught by men. I read it and was amazed at how many differences I found between what Scripture says and what the Pharisees and Sanhedrin teach. I mean, did you know that there's no place that says we can't talk with Gentiles or enter their houses? The Law does say we mustn't marry them or eat meat offered to their idols, but that's it. And did you know all these things that make you 'unclean' only make you unclean until sundown. It's not a big deal to Jehovah. And half of the rules aren't even in the Law. Jacob asked me about the rule of not walking over six miles on the Sabbath and I couldn't find it anywhere. The closest I could find was that the Israelites were not supposed to collect manna on the Sabbath and shouldn't leave their tents. Well, we certainly aren't enforcing that Law!"

"So, most of the laws that we try to live by are just made up?" questioned Nathan.

"That's what I found. It especially made Jacob mad that Priest Othniel was collecting money as a sin offering when Jehovah made it clear that only blood could forgive sin."

"Is that why he quit going to synagogue?"

"I think so. But I didn't know that he was talking to his boss about Jesus. His boss is Jewish and promised me that he would protect Jacob from anything that would make him unclean. But Jacob is a man now and he was doing his own investigating. I took all my questions to this man, Mordecai, who had told me to read The Law and The Prophets. He answered my questions, and Dinah and I started attending a class to learn about Jesus. Then we started attending the worship service on Sabbath mornings. That's why we haven't been coming to synagogue recently. And Nathan, I hope you've noticed, but I feel such an incredible peace and freedom. I'm no longer tied up by the Pharisees' laws. Jesus paid for all my sins, so I am really free. Everything feels different. And I want you to research it, too, and find this peace."

"I guess I need to start by re-reading The Law and The Prophets," said Nathan.

"Yes, I think that would be a good place to start."

“I’ll let you get back to your weeds. We probably should both be looking for a place to teach next year.”

“I want to wait and see what Jonathan has in mind before I start looking,” said Manasseh.

“Oh, yeah. That was really nice of him. And he’s like your priest?”

“Yes, he’s the leader of this gathering. He says he’s the shepherd.”

“Let me know what he says on Friday, and I’ll try to not fret about it until then. I’ve got some weeds of my own to pull. Shalom.”

“Shalom.”



On Monday it happened. Joab needed to make a decision about a client who had not paid back his loan from the bank on time. Sometimes, Grandfather extended the time, and sometimes he sent Joab to collect it. He sat and stared into space. He wished he knew what to expect, but he didn’t. *I guess now is as good a time as any to get fired.* Joab knocked on Grandfather’s door and was told to enter. He showed his grandfather the account in question, and they discussed it. Simon told Joab to go and ask what the situation was and decide whether to collect it or extend the time. Joab swallowed hard. This was the first time that his grandfather had left the decision up to him. He wasn’t sure how to respond. “Shalom. I’ll let you know what I find out.” His grandfather only grunted. Joab told Jethro where he was going and said he might not make it back by quitting time. “If I’m not back, would you mind letting Nancy know I’ll be home as soon as possible? This guy lives north of town, out toward Enos. I may stop and talk with Enos.”

“Sure, no problem.”

Joab didn’t usually enjoy being out of his office, but today it was a relief to be away from the tension. He hoped that Jethro would be safe alone with Grandfather. He followed the main road that went through the heart of Antioch and then a much smaller dirt road that headed northeast. He stopped at a well to catch his breath. His head was so filled with questions about the future, he could hardly concentrate on any one thing. He hoped he didn’t mess up this encounter with a client. He took a deep drink of water and then started on his way again. He knocked on the door, forcing himself to focus on the matter at hand. The woman who answered the door looked frightened but invited him in when he asked to speak to Adullam. When he entered, he saw him lying on a mat with his leg heavily bandaged. “Adullam, what happened to you?” asked Joab as he knelt beside him.

“I didn’t get out of the way in time!” replied Adullam trying to make light of the situation. “I got gored by a new ox I was training.”

“I just came out to check. You’ve always been good about paying your loan on time, so I was pretty sure something was wrong.”

“Joab, I can pay some of it today, but I haven’t been able to sell any oxen for a couple of weeks. This leg is getting better, and once I’m able to hobble around, I can get back to work.”

“Adullam, you know I didn’t come here to take food off your table. I just wanted to know what was wrong. I’ll check on you again in about a month if I haven’t seen you by then. May Jehovah give you a quick recovery and quicker movement to get out of the way! Shalom,” said Joab with a smile.

“Thank you, my friend, thank you. Shalom.”

Joab was relieved that the visit was over and hoped that his grandfather would approve of his decision. It was only another mile to Enos’ house and he could visit with Martha. He couldn’t make it back to the office before quitting time anyway. So, he walked toward Enos’ farm. He had grown up with Enos and knew him to be a deep thinker. He hoped he would be available.

Martha was sitting in the grass playing with baby Nehemiah. She greeted Joab and asked if everything was okay. She said Enos would come to the house in about half an hour if he could wait, or she could send a servant to get him now. He agreed to wait, and they sat and played with the baby. He explained about coming to check on a client, and they both tried to pretend that nothing was different. Finally, Martha commented, “I think you are in the hardest position because you are so close to Grandfather.”

“Yeah. Jethro and I could lose everything either way. We either lose our family or our jobs or both. I don’t see any way to avoid trouble.”

“I wish Mother had just stayed quiet about her beliefs,” said Martha softly.

“I think Dad just didn’t think about what all the fallout would be for the rest of us,” stated Joab.

“Do you think he’s right?” asked Martha.

“I really haven’t thought about it. I mean, I don’t understand why Jehovah would reveal it to just a few people and not everyone. Something feels fishy. Priest Othniel and Grandfather Simon obviously don’t believe it, and we’ve been taught all our lives to be obedient to whatever they tell us because they are our spiritual leaders.”

“Have you heard anything about Priest Othniel?”

“No. Just that he’s near death and the family is all gathered and waiting.”

“Are you going to Grandfather’s on Sabbath night?” she asked.

“I plan to, unless he fires me before then. How about you two?”

“I think I want to go just to check on Grandmother. She looked pretty devastated, and I want her to know we love her,” said Martha. “But we plan to go to the meeting at Abba’s on Sabbath afternoon. It’s such a mess. But it seems pretty important to them. How do we honor both?”

“I guess we just wait and see and hope we don’t have to decide between them,” said Joab.

“Joab, welcome!” said Enos as he approached them from the barn. “I hope everything is okay.”

“Yes, everyone is fine. I had to visit a client and was close by, so I thought I would stop to say hi. How’s the cattle business?” said Joab.

“It’s going well. Are you looking for a job?” laughed Enos.

“No, not yet. Everything has been quiet so far.”

“That’s good. I was wondering what would happen when you decided to stay and listen,” said Enos.

“It’s pretty tense and I suspect that things will come to a head after I attend Dad’s meeting on Sabbath. I mean, we had no way of knowing what that baptism stuff was, but this meeting will be a deliberate violation of the Law.”

“Actually, the way I see it, it will not. As long as we are just listening and not agreeing with it, we can please both men and not get in trouble either way. I don’t remember any Law that prohibits listening to a new idea,” said Enos passionately as if he had spent quite a bit of time thinking about it.

“So, we can sit in the yard and listen without becoming unclean, but what about the food? Mother will expect us to eat,” stated Joab.

“As long as it is kosher, I don’t see a problem,” answered Enos.

“Except that it will be prepared with unclean hands,” said Joab sadly.

“I don’t think that’s a problem. Even if it is, uncleanness passes at sunset, so it doesn’t make you permanently unclean. And I assume you’ll go to synagogue on Sabbath morning. So, it should be fine.”

“I just don’t know. I’ve got to get back to town. Nancy will worry if I’m too late. I’ll see you both on Sabbath night. Shalom.”

“You are welcome to stay for dinner,” said Enos and Martha agreed.

“No, I need to get back. Shalom.”

“Shalom,” they replied in unison.

All the way back to his home, Joab re-ran everything that he had seen and heard at the baptism service. Suddenly his thoughts turned. *Dad could be stoned for this. They could be killed for doing this. They were expecting to be killed. So, what’s so important about Jesus that they would be willing to do that?* His mind continued to whirl, and he hurried to reach home before dark.



At the Leadership Team meeting, Mordecai, Dan, Samuel, and Jonathan excitedly gave the update on the baptism that had happened last Sabbath afternoon. Elam gave the update that Josie had told him that one of the sons, Jacob, accepted Jesus the following day. Samuel reported that one of the daughters of Manasseh and her husband, who they had been teaching, had not yet made their decision. Mordecai and Dan reported that they would be baptizing one other couple privately this Sabbath. They intended to start teaching more about the

life of Jesus since their entire group were now followers. Others reported progress or problems with their groups. Then Jonathan raised the question: "Can any of you spare the time to help Manasseh and Dinah teach their family and some couples from the Jewish synagogue about Jesus? They want to split into a men's group and a ladies' group and teach the class themselves, but they need a couple to supervise them. They will be meeting on Sabbath afternoon. And for now, they would need a Jewish leader."

The four Jewish men all shook their heads, and everyone admitted that they didn't feel they had anyone in their groups who was mature enough at this point to become leaders. After a few minutes of discussion, Mordecai spoke. "Now this is just an idea, I'm not saying it will work, but I want us to pray about it."

"Okay, let's hear it," said Jonathan knowing that he would somehow have to make a way to meet with Manasseh and Dinah's group. He had promised and he would not, could not, let them down.

"Basha has been telling me about a simple leadership plan that was first used in Cana and then duplicated in Capernaum and was used by the Roman Christians in Jerusalem. It is a pyramid plan where one person teaches a small group and they repeat that lesson to their own small groups, and that continues to repeat so that one teacher can teach hundreds to follow Jesus. The Apostle Matthew and Basha used it in Africa to reach many, many people. If Basha is willing, she would meet with Manasseh and Dinah and teach them one lesson at a time and supervise them. I think since Manasseh is a scribe and rabbi, he would do fine teaching his own group, and Dinah is very intelligent, and she would do equally well teaching the ladies."

"But would Manasseh be willing to be taught by a woman?" asked Lucius.

"At this point, we need to find out if Basha would be willing to teach," said Jonathan. "Let's move to prayer requests with this being top priority. Then, I'll meet with Basha tomorrow morning and see what this system of hers is all about."

The men enjoyed a time of prayer and worship and then dismissed. Jonathan hurried home knowing that Susanna would be waiting up for him. How he loved going home and sharing with her. When he told her about Mordecai's suggestion of using some plan that Basha had used, Susanna told him what she had learned from Basha. "She has been eager to get it started here but has been busy with the manuscript until recently and she felt you had a pretty good plan for leadership, so she hasn't talked with you about it."

"So, you think she might be willing to meet with this couple and teach them?" asked Jonathan.

"Oh, I know she would, if Manasseh is willing to be taught by a woman," said Susanna.

"Let's get some rest and I'll meet with her in the morning."



Jonathan headed to Samuel's house and hoped to catch Basha before she left. He knew that she spent her days visiting in the community and helping wherever she was needed. When he arrived, Basha answered the door and invited him in as she called for Samuel. "No, I came to speak with you," he explained. She invited him to take a seat and listened to his request. As Susanna had suggested, she was thrilled. Then she realized that if they were starting tomorrow afternoon, she would need to meet with Manasseh and Dinah today. Jonathan said that he had told Manasseh he would meet with him about noon to let him know the leaders who would assist him. He explained that he didn't know whether Manasseh would let a woman teach him and Basha brushed him off and said she had dealt with worse and there was no time to waste. She needed to review the first lesson and she would meet Jonathan at the Worship Center at or just before noon so they could walk together.

As Jonathan walked home, he shook his head and laughed. *When I was a boy, I was amazed at how quiet and shy the Apostle Philip's wife was. She always focused on raising the children. Now, she has become a dynamo in God's kingdom, and I really believe that Manasseh will allow her to teach him. At least I hope so. I can't add another ministry to my week. And I didn't even find out what she is planning on teaching!*

Chapter 12

It was almost noon on Friday when Simon called both Joab and Jethro into his office. The brothers exchanged glances and then greeted their grandfather. "Are you and your families coming to dinner tonight?" asked Simon.

"We were planning on it, unless we are not welcome," said Joab tentatively.

"Well, that depends on whether you have become Jesus' followers or not!" declared Simon angrily.

"No, sir. My family and I have not," said Joab.

"And we haven't either," said Jethro. "But we do plan to check out what The Law and The Prophets record because we want to know the Truth."

"Well, the truth is that this Jesus fellow has caused a lot of trouble for the Sanhedrin, and they had a right to put him and his followers to death. He was nothing but trouble and still is. We thought when we killed him that that would be the end of our problems, but his followers are forever popping up all over the place. Your dad would be dead if this kind of thing happened in Jerusalem. And you two would do well to stay away from him and all those like him."

"We understand your view but need to check it out. I hope you won't hold it against us that we want to develop our own walk with Jehovah so that we can teach your great-grandchildren without doubts or questions," said Joab confidently. He had no idea where those words came from.

"Yes, yes. Of course. I was young once and questioned everything. It's not good to follow blindly — but promise me that you will be very, very careful to not be deceived. Many smart people were deceived and killed for it. My best friends, Joseph and Nicodemus, got caught up in it and lost everything." Simon stared into space and his eyes filled with tears. Suddenly, he seemed to realize that the men were still there. "I'll see you tonight. I think I'll go home early. You boys can handle things here."

"Shalom," they said together. Joab was glad to see that Simon's manservant was with him. He was looking more and more fragile.



Jonathan and Basha arrived at Manasseh and Dinah's home soon after noon and introductions were made. Dinah served them juice and fruit in the courtyard and asked Junos to take Judah for a walk to allow them to visit without interruption. She handed Judah a couple of apricots and sent them on their way. As they took their seats, Jonathan said, "Manasseh, I wanted to share some good news with you to start off. I talked with Rabbi Absalom at our Christian

School, and he would like to meet with you on Sunday at the first hour to talk about you teaching for him in the fall. We've got more boys than we know what to do with!"

"Thank you, Jonathan. That is indeed welcome news."

"I've invited Basha to tell you what she has in mind for your two groups. Please hear her and let me know if this is agreeable to you. I personally think it will be a very workable solution," said Jonathan. *Should I add that I have no idea what she's going to suggest?!* But he kept feeling the Holy Spirit saying to trust Him.

"My name is Basha and I've met you two because I live at Samuel's and I'm friends with Mordecai and keep an eye on him. I'm actually part of a group that your son, Jacob, attends. The plan that I suggest that you use for your groups was written by a Jewish man, Orly, who lived in Cana and wanted to explain Jesus to his Gentile friends. Then the plan was re-written by another Jewish man named Yanis, who lived in Capernaum who used it to teach fellow Jews."

"Oh, Yanis was a really good friend of mine and is now my brother-in-law," added Jonathan. "I should have told you that Basha traveled with Jesus for the entire three and a half years of His ministry and can answer all of your questions about Him."

"Thank you, Jonathan. This plan has resulted in thousands of people coming to accept Jesus as Messiah. My late husband and I used it to reach pagans in Africa. Now, the way it works is that I will meet with you and teach you the first lesson. Then you will teach it to your groups and meet with me the next week. We'll discuss any questions or problems and I'll teach you the second lesson. We'll continue that way. I'll be available if you need me to attend the group, but for the most part, they don't have to ever know who is teaching you step-by-step. Now, do you have questions?"

"How many lessons are there?" asked Manasseh.

"You should tell your group that there are seven. But in actuality, there are only five. Instead of the sixth lesson we hope to have a baptism. The seventh lesson is a celebration and the beginning of a new phase. Your group can decide whether to continue learning about Jesus as a group, or to start attending the worship services at the Christian Worship Center."

"And you condense everything they need to know into only five lessons?" asked Jonathan incredulously.

"Yes. The essential things are pretty simple — learning to put it into practice by obedience to the Holy Spirit takes a lot longer."

"That sounds okay with me. I just was in hopes someone would be here to answer any questions that came up," said Manasseh.

"There will be. Manasseh, you said when you were baptized that you had the Holy Spirit guiding you," said Jonathan. "He will grow you and help you to become incredibly dependent on Him to provide you with everything you need to lead your family and friends to Jesus. How about you, Dinah, how are you feeling about this plan?"

"I'm like Manasseh. I think I wanted someone else to teach it — not me. I feel so inadequate."

“Actually, that’s the best place to be. If we feel that we can do it without the Holy Spirit leading us, we will fail miserably. But if we can keep our ears open and only speak what He leads us to speak, we are in the right position to see great results. Now, we are in a little bit of a time crunch today. I would prefer to teach you on Thursday afternoons and give you time to pray and prepare for your group, but I understand that you will be starting tomorrow. So, why don’t I take a little walk around the yard and let you and Jonathan decide if you want to do this plan or wait until we can find leaders available to teach for you.”

Basha didn’t wait for an answer; she just rose from her bench and started walking around the yard. Manasseh and Dinah hesitantly agreed to give it a try. “It’s just that so much is riding on this tomorrow. I don’t want to mess it up,” said Manasseh.

“I understand,” said Jonathan. “I think every new group leader feels that way and most of them don’t have a coach to guide them. Meeting with Basha weekly will give you a place to learn and give you very specific things to teach.”

“Dinah, if you are okay with it, I’m willing to give it a try,” said Manasseh.

Jonathan was pleased that he never once protested a woman teaching him. They called Basha back to join them and told her their decision.

“Then I can go over your lesson plan right now or return after dinner tonight. Which do you prefer?”

“I’m ready right now, if it works for you and then you should join us for Sabbath dinner if you can. We’d love to have you. Our old synagogue usually gathers at my abba’s home for Sabbath dinner, and we haven’t attended recently.”

“Did your abba move here from Jerusalem? Would I know him?” asked Basha.

“He was known as Simon the Pharisee and had several run-ins with Jesus.”

“Oh, my! I do remember him. We’ll just keep praying that he and his entire family would come to accept Jesus as Messiah.” But what she was really thinking was: *Both of my husbands have been martyred for sharing Jesus. Is it my turn?* Then she immediately began to focus, knowing that the liar was trying to distract her.

“First of all, how many people do you expect tomorrow?” Basha asked.

“It could vary from zero to eleven for the men,” said Manasseh.

“And I think zero to seven for the women,” said Dinah.

“Those are perfect sizes. You don’t want it too big, or too small. I’m praying that they will all show up. Now, as I’ve said, I’m going to give you the teaching points that you need to cover, but you will need to rely on the Holy Spirit to lead you for everything else. The number one rule is don’t answer a question if you don’t know the answer. It’s okay to say, ‘I’m really new at this and I’ll find out the answer before we meet next week.’ Now, I don’t usually talk about it being a seven-week class. I suggest you meet with them, have fun with them, do the

teaching session, and then invite them to return next week if they are interested in learning more.”

“I really need to be going, so I’m going to leave you with Basha, and I’ll want a report after you meet with Absalom on Sunday morning. Shalom,” said Jonathan. They all wished him a happy Sabbath and he promised to be praying for their first groups.

“Okay, our first lesson only covers the first 1800 years of Jewish history,” said Basha. Dinah looked at Manasseh with eyes wide open, wondering what in the world she had gotten herself into.

“Jesus’ style of teaching was a mixture of lectures and stories, but He excelled at including whoever He was teaching by asking them questions. Are most of the men in your group familiar with The Law and The Prophets?”

“Oh, yes, we’ve all been trained in Hebrew School and there’s one other rabbi, two priests-in-training, and our current priest.”

“Then, Manasseh, feel free to let them do most of the teaching by simply asking questions of them. They should know the answers! Now, Dinah, your group of ladies may need to be taught differently. I’m assuming most of them have attended synagogue all their lives but probably won’t know the Scriptures and may need to be prompted more gently about the details.”

Basha went over the six points that they were to cover and then bid them goodnight just as the sun began to set. She would be late for the Sabbath celebration at Mordecai’s, but knew it was more important to answer Manasseh and Dinah’s questions and pray with them.



The next morning, Jacob left for the first service at the Christian Worship Center. Manasseh and Dinah met him returning as they walked to the second service. He asked if there was anything he needed to do to help them prepare for the groups. Manasseh replied, “I don’t think so. Mother’s group is meeting in the house and mine will meet in the yard. I just hope someone shows up, but I’m trying to leave that up to God.”

“Yeah, I’m excited, too. I’m eager to hear what you have to share, Dad. I was so proud of you last Sabbath. I asked Jesus to be my Messiah after your baptism last week. I plan to tell my synagogue friends today if they come, and I’ll be praying for you both the whole time.”

“Oh, Son. That is the best news and so encouraging.” Tears streamed down all their faces as they realized that God was at work in their family. At least they would have one son in Heaven with them. But it was a bittersweet joy, because they knew it could cost him dearly. “We are almost too excited to breathe. We need your prayers, Son. Shalom.”

“Shalom.”

Manasseh and Dinah joined Dan and Eve at the Worship Center and waved to Basha and Mordecai as they came in. Mordecai was not looking healthy. He was leaning heavily on Basha and the whole group was concerned.

The music soothed Manasseh's and Dinah's nervous energy and helped them to focus on Jehovah. Jonathan's sermon was on Jesus' words that He would not leave them as orphans. He would send the Holy Spirit to give them strength and wisdom, and teach them what to say, and what the future would hold. It was an encouraging reminder for them to rely fully on Him. Everyone in the group promised to be praying for them and they walked home reminding Judah to not run on the Sabbath.

Jacob had carried the courtyard benches out in the yard in case some of the men didn't want to sit in the grass. He had set up the living area for the eight women. And then the wait began. They had agreed to meet with them at the eighth hour, but many began to arrive around noon. Before the appointed hour, everyone that they expected, except Priest Mahlon, was present. Dinah invited the women to join her in the house and Manasseh asked the men to join him in the yard so that they wouldn't disturb each other.

Manasseh thanked the men for coming and said that they had been attending a group and would use a similar lesson plan so he could make sure to cover everything. He explained that Dinah would teach the same lesson with the ladies. About that time, Priest Mahlon arrived and apologized for being late. He announced that his dad was getting increasingly weaker and did not feel he would make it through the night. Everyone expressed their concern. Manasseh asked Adonijah to lead them in a prayer for Priest Othniel and his family.

Jonathan began the lesson. "I know some of you may be rusty, but what is the first hint given in The Law and The Prophets regarding a Messiah? Anyone?"

Abner answered. "It was right after Adam and Eve had sinned and God said that the serpent would attack His heel (meaning not a deadly blow) and He would give Satan a fatal blow to the head. But we're not told who He is referring to."

"Very good. But it is a possible first reference to the Messiah," said Manasseh.



Dinah welcomed the seven ladies into the house. Just as soon as they were away from their husbands the chatter began and everyone wanted to talk at once. It took Dinah a while to get them settled and to understand that this was a structured class, not a time for girl-talk. "You can stay and talk as long as you wish afterward. But I promised Manasseh we would cover the same material as he is covering with the men because Jesus taught that men and women are equal spiritually." Once again, the chatter started. Dinah got them through the first point and then asked: "Does anyone know the promise that

was given to Abraham after he was willing to offer his son Isaac to Jehovah?”

“I never understood that story. I mean why would Jehovah require that?”

“It’s pretty strange if you ask me.”

“Ladies, let’s stick to the question, or we’ll never finish. We need to cover six main points today if we want to keep up with the men! Can anyone tell me what the promise to Abraham was after this event?”

“Isn’t that when Jehovah promised Abraham that Israel was His chosen nation?” asked Hannah.

“Yes, but Jehovah says something very specific that I want you to see. First, He tells Abraham that his seed or descendants would be as many as the stars in the skies or the sands on the beaches. That’s a lot of grandchildren! Then He promises to bless Abraham and says that through him all the nations of the earth would be blessed. That means that Abraham’s family was chosen to be the birth family of the Messiah, but that the purpose of the Messiah was to bless all the nations, not just the Jews.”

“I don’t think that’s in there. God doesn’t love Gentiles, they are the ones we are supposed to avoid because they always get us in trouble,” said Achsah.

“Achsah, it’s definitely in The Law and The Prophets. Ask Nathan. He’ll tell you. And it was said by Jehovah to Abraham over 1800 years ago.”



Manasseh’s group had successfully navigated point number two because the men could quote it from Genesis 22 and there was no question about what it said. The men were beginning to see that Manasseh was teaching them from The Law and The Prophets and they began to be less defensive and more open to listening. Manasseh asked them if they were ready for point number three of Jewish history. They all agreed. “This one is harder because there’s no one verse that summarizes it, but what was Moses’ role in preparing us for the Messiah?”

“Wasn’t he a symbolic picture?” asked Enos.

“Yes, but Moses was a picture of a political messiah and that can throw you off if you are not careful. Other Scripture indicates that Messiah would be primarily spiritual initially and political only when he returns as King and Judge.”

“He’s coming back again as a political Messiah?” asked Joab. “I didn’t know that.”

“Yes, He is. He promised. But right now, the question is what role did Moses play in preparing us for the Messiah?”

The men were stumped. Manasseh reminded them that he organized and wrote down God’s Laws that would help them to be God’s chosen people to receive the Messiah. “If you think of the

Israelites as being chosen to raise the Messiah, God wanted them to be prepared to be good parents.”

“So, all the Laws are to help us. Boy, it doesn’t feel like it!” said Elkanah, Priest Mahlon’s younger brother and a priest-in-training.

Suddenly, Manasseh felt a check in his core. He remembered that he had answered Basha wrongly and she had corrected him. He had given them the standard answer but missed the main point. Now, the Holy Spirit was telling him to get it right. “But there was another reason that God gave Moses the Law,” stated Manasseh. “His primary purpose was to show us that we could not be in a right relationship with Jehovah without His help. We would need a Messiah.”



Dinah and the ladies made it through point number three, but then little Hur woke up and demanded to be fed. Abigail quickly put him to her breast and that started a cascade of hungry babies all waking and demanding attention. Some of the ladies needed a break, and Dinah wondered if they would ever settle down. She served some juice and rolls with goat cheese that she had prepared because the nursing mothers would be hungry. She knew the next section was going to be hard to teach and she could feel herself tightening up. She excused herself and went to her room. “Jehovah, I can’t do this. You are the One who calmed the storms. Please settle these ladies and babies down if You want them to hear this material. I can’t do it, but I’m willing to be obedient to whatever You show me.” Suddenly, she knew what to do. She returned to the living area and asked Hannah to help her lead the group to sing Psalm 19:7-14:

The law of the LORD is perfect,
refreshing the soul.
The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy,
making wise the simple.
The precepts of the LORD are right,
giving joy to the heart.
The commands of the LORD are radiant,
giving light to the eyes.
The fear of the LORD is pure,
enduring forever.
The decrees of the LORD are firm,
and all of them are righteous.
They are more precious than gold,
than much pure gold;
they are sweeter than honey,
than honey from the honeycomb.
By them your servant is warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.
But who can discern their own errors?

Forgive my hidden faults.
Keep your servant also from willful sins;
may they not rule over me.
Then I will be blameless,
innocent of great transgression.
May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart
be pleasing in your sight,
LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.

When they had finished singing, they all took their seats and quietly waited for Dinah to begin teaching. Dinah was amazed. "Okay, let's quickly review. Point one: There's a hint of the Messiah after Adam and Eve sinned. Point two: Jehovah promised Abraham to send the Messiah into his family and make that Messiah a blessing to all nations. Point three: Jehovah instructed Moses to write down His Laws so that the Israelites would understand what was required to be in a right relationship with a holy God and so they would understand that they needed a Messiah. Now, we are ready for point four. Almost immediately, the Israelites failed to live up to God's requirements for them to be the bearers of the Messiah. They worshipped idols. They married Gentiles. They disobeyed God's Laws. And God sent judges and prophets and kings to try to get them on track. But the Israelites often killed the prophets and didn't listen or obey Him. They would obey only long enough to get out of trouble and then go right back to doing as they pleased. Jehovah sent other nations to conquer Israel and punish them, and he even sent them into captivity. Jehovah wanted them to accept their role as a separate and holy people, so He could send them the Messiah He had promised."



Manasseh told the men there were only two more points to this first lesson. He asked if they wanted to take a break or keep going. They all indicated that they were ready for the next point. "Okay, this was actually one that I didn't know. But maybe one of you can answer it. What happened to the Israelite nation between the time of the Prophet Micah and about fifty-five years ago? It's a period of approximately 400 years. Anyone want to guess?" After waiting a few minutes and hearing nothing, Manasseh said, "You are exactly right! There was total silence. God quit speaking to His people. And Israel's spiritual state became a mess. The Sanhedrin became more political than spiritual and became more concerned with keeping their power than caring for the Jewish people. They began to add laws and forgot God's Laws. They quit reading The Law and The Prophets and added laws from the pagan religions around them. They added laws that would benefit themselves. They added so many laws that they couldn't remember them all. The chief priest and council became corrupt with greed and political aspirations. The people were just confused and

overwhelmed. Much of what you and I were taught came from this time period. I call it the 400 years of darkness.”

“So God didn’t send any prophets or leaders during that time?” asked Asher.

“Nope, God just stepped back and watched for 400 years,” replied Manasseh. “I know I grew up with thousands of laws and it was a heavy burden because I was always messing up. I felt that I could not connect with God because I couldn’t do anything right. But God was getting Israel ready to acknowledge their need for a Messiah.”



The ladies listened as Dinah covered point number five and seemed eager to hear point number six.

“I wonder if the men are almost finished, too?” asked Lilah, who indicated that the bench was getting hard. Dinah asked if she would prefer to sit on the floor and several of the ladies moved to a more comfortable position sitting on the floor and leaning against the walls for support. Dinah assured them that they were almost finished. “The final point is that approximately fifty-five years ago, God spoke to a priest while he was in the Holy Place of the temple. His name was Zechariah. And that ends our lesson for today.”

“What did God say to him?”

“You’ll have to come back next week if you want to learn more about that! But I promise that Jehovah told Zechariah amazing things that greatly affect us today and everyone from the High Priest to the common people were excited about his prophecy. One of our friends knew Zechariah personally and can attest that his prophecies came true. But I know you are tired, and we’ll start there next time. The men will stop in this same place so we can all learn together. Martha, will you step outside and see if you can tell which point the men are on?”

“Mother, they seem to be finishing up, too. I don’t think it will be long.”

“Can you and Bethany lead us in a Psalm? I’m exhausted,” said Dinah.

“Sure, let’s sing.” The ladies sang and Dinah realized once again that God was watching out for her so that the ladies would not bombard her with questions. As she suspected, the men were ready to start home as soon as the lesson was completed. Everyone wanted to get some rest before the Sabbath ended.

Manasseh and Dinah sat in the courtyard nibbling the cheese rolls and laughing with relief. They had survived teaching their first group. Jacob and Judah joined them, and Jacob said that he felt his dad had done an excellent job. “I was watching their faces and I think they will all be back next week. Elkanah was the only one who looked skeptical when you were talking about the 400 years of darkness. But then, he’s a priest-in-training and may have felt offended.”

“Yes, and from what I hear, his dad may not live through the night, so he and Isaac and Priest Mahlon had a lot on their minds.”

Manasseh and Jacob began talking about the things that Josie had taught him. Jacob told them that he had been attending a small group with a man named Elam and the early morning Sabbath service at the Christian Worship Center. Manasseh told him that they had been attending a small group, too, and had been attending the second worship service with their group at the same Worship Center. It was an amazing feeling to sit and talk about Jesus with their son. Dinah felt her heart could not contain her praise for God allowing this. *I had despaired of ever sharing with my husband, and now my husband is leading a group. And we are sitting here sharing with our son. God is so good to me. Father, unite our family again. Please, please use our efforts and bless them.*

Chapter 13

Basha had spent the Sabbath afternoon in a wooded area near Mordecai's house. She felt the need to pray especially for Manasseh and Dinah, but also for her desire to see her son, Jordan, in Cana. As the sun began to set, she returned to Samuel and Haggith's house and accepted the plate that Samuel's servant handed her. Just as she finished, a servant knocked and asked her to check on Mordecai. They walked to his house together and the servant explained. "He is on his mat. He said he didn't want anything to eat." Basha immediately ran to his mat and knelt beside him. She took his hand, but it was cold, and she knew that he was already with Jesus. She cried because she wished she could have been there to say goodbye and she cried for the memories of her two husbands who had both been killed for sharing Jesus. At least Mordecai had died peacefully in his sleep and not violently. She was certain that he had been welcomed into Heaven by Jesus saying, "Well done, good and faithful servant." She called the servant and told him that Mordecai was dead. She asked if he would go and tell Samuel so that they could bury him. It was too warm to wait until morning. Samuel and Haggith came quickly and sent their servant to notify Jonathan and the other leaders. Dan began to notify the small group. When Dan arrived and told Manasseh and Dinah the news, they quickly notified Junos and left to be with Basha. They were amazed that the Leadership Team was singing Psalms and praise songs instead of dirges. They were celebrating that one of their beloved friends had entered Heaven. It was a strange concept for Manasseh and Dinah, but it gave them a better understanding of what their friends understood about Heaven. The men buried him in a grassy area near the back of his property and then Jonathan said a prayer of blessing thanking God for the life that Mordecai had lived. He also prayed for Mordecai's three sons, wherever they were, that they would come to know Jesus. Samuel and Haggith walked home with Basha and promised to return tomorrow. Some of the women promised to return in the morning to give the house a deep cleaning since the men would need to work. Manasseh and Dinah walked home near midnight and quickly went to their mats. It had been a long and emotional day.

Sunrise seemed to come too quickly, but Manasseh reminded Dinah that he had an appointment to meet with Rabbi Absalom about a job. They were still rejoicing over the successful groups that they had led with their friends. *Was that only yesterday?* Dinah and Judah headed to the market and walked part way with Manasseh. Then Manasseh went to the Christian Worship Center for his job interview. He sat and got acquainted with Rabbi Absalom, the headmaster. As he told about his background and about teaching with his brother these past six years, Rabbi Absalom assured him that he would welcome his help. He explained that they had started out with forty-five

boys, two rabbis, and a Gentile teacher, but every year they had grown, and it was hard to find experienced teachers who were Christian. They had started an apprenticeship program and would probably assign a couple of boys to train under Manasseh. Manasseh assured him that he would enjoy that, since he had raised four boys of his own.

“Are any of them wanting to teach?” asked Absalom.

“Not that I know of. Two of them are bankers, one a carpenter, and I still have a six-year-old at home that needs to be enrolled in the school, if possible.”

“We only accept eight- to twelve-year-olds.” Manasseh knew that Judah would be ecstatic to have some time off.

“You could pray that my brother Nathan would become a follower of Jesus and then you could hire him, too,” volunteered Manasseh.

“I will certainly do that.” Absalom and Manasseh discussed the pay and hours and expectations, then Absalom asked, “Are you available to begin work at mid Elul? I hope to hire some Gentile teachers and maybe your brother. We’ll need a couple of weeks to train together and decide who is teaching what. Will that work for you?”

“Yes, sir. It would be incredible. Thank you. I’m supposed to meet with Jonathan this morning and I don’t know where his office is. Could you direct me?”

“Just go up the stairs and knock. Although I haven’t seen him this morning, you can try. Sometimes I miss his arrival.”

“We were up late last night with the death of Mordecai. He may still be busy there.”

“Oh, my, I hadn’t heard. So, Mordecai is with Jesus. I imagine he’s having a grand time seeing all his old friends,” said Absalom. “Shalom.”

“Shalom and thanks again. I’ll look forward to the new school year.” Once again, Manasseh was fascinated at the confident expectations regarding death for a follower of Jesus.

Manasseh went up the stairs and knocked, but Jonathan was not there. He decided to check on Basha. She was not at Samuel’s, so he returned home to tell Dinah the good news about teaching at the Christian School. “Jehovah is so good!” she exclaimed. “Now, we can relax and focus on the groups. I wonder when Basha will teach us this week? I can’t wait to hear the lesson.”



Priest Mahlon, Elkanah, and Isaac walked together back to their parents’ home after their class at Manasseh’s on Sabbath afternoon. They intended to check on Priest Othniel before going to their own homes. When they arrived, they knew that they would not be leaving anytime soon. Their dad was struggling to breathe. The men took turns sitting with him. Priest Mahlon moved to the courtyard and began

to remember what his dad had said when he appointed him priest. *"You are now the priest. Don't be so friendly with the people or they will not respect you. Deal harshly with those who would try to usurp your power. Separate yourself so that you will be treated with honor."* Now as Mahlon sat and listened to the labored breathing, he recalled Manasseh's words about the 400 years of darkness, and he couldn't get the thoughts to quit playing over and over in his head. Finally, about the fourth hour of the night, Priest Othniel breathed his last and the room was quiet. Isaac went to get his mother and she began to wail and cry. All the servants joined in and sent for the synagogue to come together. Eliphaz sent for Manasseh and Dinah and the other musicians to play dirges and since there were no professional mourners to wail and cry, they all did their part to express their grief at Priest Othniel's passing. Bilbah announced that instead of the standard eight days, she wanted twenty days of mourning because he was their priest. Priest Mahlon didn't have the heart to disagree, but this was not Jerusalem, and times were different now. He knew that the people of the synagogue had jobs that they could not afford to lose. The bank and other businesses closed for one week, but even Simon couldn't afford to lose his clients. Manasseh and Dinah were thrilled to be included with the musicians and helped out when they could, but they were shunned by Simon and Esther and the other older couples, so they stayed with the musicians. Some days it was only Manasseh, Dinah, and Hannah playing because the other men had to work. Several asked if they were going to continue their class or wait until the mourning period was over. After prayer, they realized that their best answer was to say: "We'll be available to teach. You are the ones who wanted the information. You can come if you wish, or we'll repeat the information later." It was a very stressful week.

Manasseh and Dinah explained their busy week to their small group. All of this group had attended Mordecai's burial. Dan taught them what Jesus had said about death and the group discussed the difference between the two men's passing and the reaction of the friends around them. "For the Christian, death is just a temporary separation, and it brings a sense of sadness and grief, but for those who don't know Jesus, it brings a permanent separation that is very hard to bear."

Dan asked if the group could gather on the Sabbath for the private baptism of Julius and Elena. They decided to go to the river immediately after the second service. They were not inviting other guests, but Eve and Dinah planned to bring some fruit to share together afterward before everyone started home. Manasseh and Dinah said they wanted to plan to be home by the seventh hour just in case someone from the synagogue came.



After working all day, Jacob and Josie walked to Elam's house for dinner on Wednesday. Jacob reported that he had invited Jesus to be his Messiah after watching his parent's baptism. "I didn't mention it last week because there was a lot of drama at their baptism, and I just needed to process it." Elam assured him that that was perfectly fine. The group rejoiced with him.

Elam asked him if he had thought about his own baptism. "Yes, sir. My dad has started a group for the men from the synagogue. Would it be okay if I wait and see if that results in a baptism service? I would love to be baptized with my friends — I mean, I want you guys to be there, too, but ..."

"It's perfectly fine and we understand," assured Elam. "Now, I want to call for questions, and I know there's a lot going on. You may have questions about baptism, questions about Mordecai's death, or questions from this week's sermons or anything else that concerns you. Please feel free to ask." There were indeed a lot of questions and only a little time left at the end for prayer time.

Jacob asked, "Would you be willing to pray for the people from the synagogue who came to learn about Jesus last Sabbath? Please pray that they will come back this week. But the priest died this week and I think my dad may have to cancel the classes. I don't know what he's going to do."

"Of course, we'll pray for your friends. We want them to know Jesus, too. But you have to learn to be patient and let Jehovah direct things. He'll work it out in His time as long as we're obedient," said Elam.



Basha arranged to meet Manasseh and Dinah on Thursday at noon, and they began to hear the plans for the groups. They caught her up on the death of Priest Othniel and she encouraged them to let everyone know that they would be available but understood that they needed to pay their respects to Priest Othniel. Manasseh and Dinah were eager to teach them about Jesus but were willing to wait until the synagogue groups were able to concentrate. They prayed about it and felt strongly that they should encourage the groups to honor Priest Othniel's memory. So, while Basha went ahead and explained the lesson to them, they decided to cancel the groups until the twenty days of mourning were over. It would only be two more weeks to wait.

All day on Friday, Manasseh and Dinah made sure that they contacted each person who had attended the first class and told them that they would wait for two weeks before doing the second class. The general response seemed to be disappointment that the class was postponed, but Manasseh and Dinah felt it was the way the Holy Spirit was leading. They played with the musicians until one hour before sunset on Friday and then packed up their instruments and walked home for the Sabbath. They felt an incredible sadness at not being able to share with the new groups over the Sabbath. But they also

knew that they were extremely fatigued from playing the sad, sad dirges over and over. They enjoyed their Sabbath meal with just Jacob and Judah and discussed the differences between the two griefs. One was full-throated and filled with wailing and sorrow, the other filled with sadness but characterized by incredible joy.

On Sabbath morning they walked to the Worship Center and thoroughly enjoyed the worship music and time to be with their group of friends who were encouraging them and praying for them. They walked home and enjoyed a snack and then both of them crawled onto their mats and fell into a deep, deep sleep.



After synagogue, the crowds went to Priest Othniel's house and sat with Bilbah all afternoon. At least the dirges were not being played, but the silence was palpable at times. The women whispered when Bilbah and Esther and the other older women were not around that they wished they could be with Dinah. And the men whispered among themselves and talked and took walks two-by-two discussing what they had heard last week at Manasseh's and wondering what he would teach them next. They had all watched Manasseh grow up with them and he was highly respected. They were eager to learn what he knew about Jesus and their eagerness just grew by having to wait.

On Sunday morning, Manasseh and Dinah returned to the musicians' group and began to play. All week they played the dirges over and over and over. But on Tuesday afternoon, just before sunset, they left to meet with Dan and their group and give them the update. They explained that Dinah's dad and mother were present but had not spoken to them. All those who had attended the first class seemed eager to return. Dan encouraged them to be patient and wait until God's timing was perfect. They asked for special strength because they were exhausted from the constant physical playing, but also from the tension and emotions of the people. Each night they left before dinner was served so they wouldn't offend anyone. The three weeks felt like an eternity.

Finally, on the nineteenth day after Priest Othniel's death, Eliphaz thanked the musicians and reminded them that tomorrow would be a day of mourning for just the family, and no musicians would be needed. Everyone felt like cheering, but they refrained. Eliphaz especially thanked Manasseh for taking charge of the group while he was working. Manasseh said, "We are your friends, and we want to be of service to you in any way we can. We will resume the class teaching you about Jesus on Sabbath afternoon at the eighth hour. We will look forward to sharing with you when you have gotten a little rest."

At sunset, Manasseh and Dinah walked to Dan's house and collapsed on the floor. They tried to describe that they had successfully completed nineteen days of playing the same seven

songs over and over and over surrounded by life-long friends and family — half of whom would like to see them stoned. “Sounds like Jesus’ final year on earth. Yet, the Holy Spirit sustained Him and has sustained you. Will you start your class again on Sabbath afternoon?”

“Yes, and several indicated they would be there. It will be like starting all over,” Dinah added.

They felt strengthened by the praise songs and Psalms they sang. Dan and Eve had the men and women lay hands on Manasseh and Dinah and pray for them to rely fully on the Holy Spirit.

They prayed for others who were struggling, and everyone left early to get a good night’s rest.

Manasseh and Dinah were eager for Basha’s visit. She arrived at noon on Thursday and reviewed the lesson for Sabbath afternoon. She was pleased that they remembered all the main points. And on Sabbath night they enjoyed a quiet dinner with just Judah.



After worship on Sabbath morning, they were thrilled when their children and grandbabies and friends from the synagogue began to arrive. Everyone that had attended the first class returned to learn more, and Manasseh and Dinah were thrilled with the opportunity to tell them about Jesus. They invited them to sing a Psalm together in the yard before they split into the two groups. They remembered the first time they had ever heard male and female voices mixed together and wanted their friends to experience it. As the ladies made their way into the house, they all expressed how beautiful it was to sing together.



Manasseh looked at the eleven men who were so eager to learn. He began to teach. “Approximately fifty-five years ago, an angel appeared to a priest name Zechariah in the Holy Place and gave him two messages. One was that he would have a son even though he and his wife were very old like Abraham and Sarah. The other was that this son would be a prophet who would announce the arrival of the Messiah. If you decide to study more about Jesus’ life, we can get into the details, but right now, all you need to know is that all the priests and Pharisees and even the Sanhedrin were discussing this good news and wondering what He would look like, and when it would happen. The son born to Zechariah was John the Baptizer. He preached all over Judea and even up into Galilee and great crowds followed him. His message was for the people to get ready for the arrival of the Messiah. I know people who were present the day that John the Baptizer introduced Jesus as the Messiah. Were any of you present that day?”

“I was just a small boy, but I have never forgotten it. I heard God speak from Heaven and I remember the people being so excited,” said Priest Mahlon with tears in his eyes.

“Do you remember what God said when He spoke?” asked Manasseh.

“No, I know it was something about God being proud of His Son.”

“That’s exactly right. I wasn’t there, but my friends tell me that God said, ‘This is my beloved Son. I am pleased with Him. Now, listen to Him.’ He spoke from Heaven and everyone there knew that they had heard God’s voice.”



Dinah helped the women to get comfortably seated on blankets on the floor. They seemed more comfortable there than on benches. “So, who was this prophet? You said last time that God sent a prophet. And you left us hanging!” All the women agreed and sat eager to learn. Dinah covered the same material as Manasseh, but no one in the group had heard John the Baptizer preach because they were too young.

“Now, I want to ask you a question. I know you have heard a lot of negative things about Jesus from our leaders, but what positive things have you seen or heard about Jesus’ ministry?” There was silence and everyone seemed afraid to say anything good about Jesus.

“Then, I’ll begin,” said Dinah. “I was ten years old and my abba was throwing a Sabbath night party, when a prostitute came in and washed Jesus’ feet and anointed His head with a cheap perfume. Dad was furious, but Jesus spoke kindly to the woman and told her that her sins were forgiven. I’ll never forget how gentle and kind He was and the look of compassion and care in His eyes. That was the night I found out His name and began my search to find out more about Him.”

“I remember him healing people, a lot of people,” whispered Achsah.

“My uncle had been crippled since birth and Jesus healed him,” said Lilah more boldly.

“Jesus healed my little brother. I wasn’t there, but Abba took him to Jesus because he was always screaming and throwing fits. Abba said that Jesus removed a demon from him. I just remember what a sweet little boy he was after that. I loved him so much and I was so grateful to Jesus for healing him,” said Hannah. “Then I remember going to the temple with my mother and seeing people lining up to be healed by him. My mother insisted I not speak about it, but yes, I saw him heal what looked to me like hundreds of people. But we weren’t allowed to mention it.”

“Jesus’ first two years of ministry were primarily characterized by His healing of all kinds of diseases and demon possession, and doing miracles, like feeding thousands of people with one portion of food and

stopping storms. Now my question for you is: How did He do those things?” asked Dinah.

“He was a great prophet,” whispered Hannah.

“He was a miracle worker!” said Lilah.

Dinah continued, “Throughout Jesus’ ministry, He continually told His followers that it was not Him doing the miracles, but the Holy Spirit of God that dwelled inside of Him. The way His apostles understood it, is that He had a body just like ours — well, it was male.” The ladies giggled and agreed that was not exactly like theirs! “But it was human and physically like our husbands’. Then He had a self that was inside. You know what I’m talking about: that place where we think and plan and ask questions and have feelings and moods. It’s the place where we have desires and attitudes. Does everyone know what I’m talking about? Because this is important.”

They all nodded. “Okay, Jesus had a physical body and a self just like we do, but He claimed to have an even deeper spot that was filled with the Holy Spirit. He said that it wasn’t Him doing the miracles, it was the Holy Spirit of Jehovah. The Holy Spirit directed Him to go to certain places. He gave Him the supernatural power to accomplish miracles. The Holy Spirit of Jehovah lived inside of Him and even told Him secrets about the people around Him so that Jesus knew what they were thinking or feeling.”

“That’s amazing. So, he was just a man, but he was filled with Jehovah. Is that what you are saying?” asked Hannah.

“Close. He was more than just a man because He was God’s Son. But for today’s lesson, that’s close enough. I want you to picture these three parts: your physical body, your self, and then a deeper place that I call the core — the very center of your being.”



The men were listening to Manasseh’s every word and seemed to hardly be breathing. The four men who were Manasseh’s age shared things that they had seen Jesus accomplish and the other men were fascinated because they had never heard about this. Manasseh continued. “Now, during the Passover Seder that the Galileans celebrate on the 14th of Nisan instead of the 15th, Jesus met with just His head men, His apostles. On that night He told them something that was incredible. They all understood that He was filled with God’s Holy Spirit, but on this night, He told His apostles that they, too, had a core in the center of their being. So I’m telling you today: You have a core in the center of your being. What do you think is in your core?”

“Sin,” replied Elkanah.

“Good answer, but wrong,” Manasseh smiled and assured him.

“What is inside of me, at my deepest core? I would say hunger,” said Adonijah. And everyone roared with laughter. “No, I don’t mean hunger for food, I mean, a yearning, a longing, a hunger to know the Truth.” As he expressed himself, everyone grew serious.

“Yeah, I agree,” said Joab.

“Me, too,” said Abner.

“Every person that God has created, and that’s all of us, has an empty core at the center of our being. And most of us spend our entire lifetime trying to fill it with something. King Solomon said that he tried wine, women, and song. Others try to fill it with family, or wealth, or busyness. But Jesus said that He came to fill it and satisfy that hunger. That’s where we are stopping today. Please think about what you are trying to put in your core, and we’ll continue this discussion next Sabbath. Let’s pray. Jehovah, please fill each man here with the desire to learn more about Jesus and bless their week. Especially be with Bilbah and all of Priest Othniel’s family as they continue to grieve. Please give Priest Mahlon extra wisdom to lead the synagogue well. In Jesus’ name. Thank you for coming and I’ll see you next week.”

They heard the women singing a Psalm and knew that they had finished at about the same time. Most of the men left, but Joab, Jethro, and Abner stuck around to talk with Manasseh and Jacob for a while. Manasseh invited them to stay for post-Sabbath dinner and they agreed. How good it was to sit together in the courtyard and enjoy family. Dinah had thought that it would never happen. She sat with Nancy, Abigail, and Bethany at the second table. Each one held a son on her lap and little Deborah played nearby. She felt incredibly blessed.

Chapter 14

Josie and Jacob walked to Elam's house after work on Wednesday as usual. But for Josie it was anything but usual. It was all he could do to pay attention. God had placed a thought in his head, and he wanted to talk with Elam about it after group. He was distracted and wasn't really listening to the men's discussions at the table or even the worship time. He heard bits of Elam's teaching, but only gleaned a section about seed growing best in fertile soil. His mind was so focused on talking with Elam afterward, he could hardly sit still. Finally, goodnights were said, and Josie told Jacob that he needed to stay and talk with Elam. He would meet him in the morning at their construction site. Jacob agreed and said shalom. Josie and Elam went to the rooftop for privacy. Josie licked his lips and couldn't find the words to say. "What is troubling you, my friend?" asked Elam gently.

"Elam, I'm certain that God spoke to me this week, but I am scared to death."

"Okay. Can you give me more information?"

"It's just that I've never been married!" blurted out Josie.

"I see," said Elam, putting the picture together. Now he understood Josie's discomfort and remembered his own when he asked Angela's father for her.

"Who is this lady that God has placed on your heart?" he asked.

"That's the problem. I don't think she would have me. I mean, she's been married to an apostle, two of them, and I'm so new to this and don't know anything. Oh, Elam, what do I do?"

"Are you certain that it was God speaking and not your own desires?" counseled Elam.

"I have not even considered marriage. I've been alone and just assumed I would remain alone since the gray hairs have come. Then on Monday, Jacob was working out in the yard, and I was inside finishing a wall when I distinctly heard, "Marry Basha and take her to Cana." I thought it was Jesus speaking, but then I decided it must have been Jacob teasing me. I looked outside and he was busy working. I came back in and just sat and prayed for a while. I didn't hear anything else, but I told God I was too old for this and argued with Him, I admit. Then I told Him I would be obedient if He would show me what to do. But I don't know what to do and I felt I should talk with you."

"Yes. I am your spiritual leader, but I think she considers Samuel to be over her since Mordecai has died. I believe you should talk with Samuel. Do you know him?" When Josie indicated that he did not, Elam offered to walk over with him anytime.

"Will he be home during the day, or should I go after dinner tomorrow?"

"He's actually pretty hard to catch. I'll stop by his house in the morning and let him or his servant know that we'd like to talk before

sunset tomorrow. You meet me at my shop at the eleventh hour and we'll walk over together. Hopefully, he will be home then." It was agreed and Josie thanked him and said his goodnights.

On Thursday afternoon, Josie left Jacob saying that he needed to meet with Elam at his shop. Jacob had plenty to do and would clean up at sunset. Josie hurried to Elam's Carpentry Shop and Gideon greeted him and called for his dad. Josie and Elam walked to Samuel's home and found that he and Haggith were waiting for them. They would need to leave shortly to teach one of their family groups. Elam asked if they had time for a quick question and Samuel and Haggith agreed. The men went up on the rooftop and Josie told Samuel what he had heard the Holy Spirit say.

"I don't know what to tell you. She's a grown woman and very independent. She will make up her own mind. I guess my best suggestion is that you join us for the Sabbath evening meal and tell her what God has revealed to you. I can't make that decision for her."

"Thank you for understanding my dilemma. I will see you on Sabbath evening. Shalom," said Josie.

The next two days were incredibly long. Josie questioned whether he had really heard the Holy Spirit and regretted that he had talked with Elam and Samuel. One minute he would be so excited about the possibility of marriage and then suddenly be terrified that she would not be interested. He got very little accomplished, and Jacob was beginning to be concerned because he always seemed to be daydreaming and not paying attention. He just claimed to have a lot on his mind.

On Sabbath night, Josie was welcomed to Samuel's home. They sat opposite Haggith and Basha and got acquainted during dinner. Samuel questioned Josie about his following Jesus and Josie shared with him about being raised with Jesus as his half-brother. He told Samuel and Haggith how surprised he was to learn of this at his mother's death, when his Uncle Zebedee had told him. Samuel got a faraway look in his eyes and said that he had spent the night in Zebedee's home during a ministry trip many, many years ago. "You have an incredible heritage."

"Yes, but I wasted many years by not listening to Jesus when I was young. Now, when I hear the Holy Spirit speaking to me, He sounds just like Jesus' voice," said Josie.

"I've heard other people say that — people who knew Him well," said Basha.

"Let's move to the cushions. Josie told me something that the Holy Spirit said this week and I thought you would want to hear it, Basha." They moved to the living area and got settled again. Basha was waiting expectantly for him to begin. He looked at her and repeated what he had told the two men. Her eyes widened and she expressed surprise.

"I have been married twice and both of those times God revealed His plan to me long before the men were aware of it. I waited patiently

for them to receive God's plan. I am not opposed to marrying you, but I am not prepared to give you an answer until God gives me clarity."

"I would not want anything less," assured Josie. "Now, I will say shalom unless you have further questions."

Samuel walked him to the door and Josie knew that it was going to be a long Sabbath. He worshipped as usual at the early service with Elam and his family and Jacob. He was surprised that he was able to enter into worship and actually hear the message. He knew that he had acted in obedience to what he had heard, and he also knew without a doubt that God would work it all out. He wasn't sure how, but he had learned to trust.



Manasseh and Dinah were surprised that they had barely finished their midday snack when their family started arriving. Junos brought everyone juice and fruit to eat and they enjoyed playing with the babies. No one mentioned the classes or what they were learning or why they had arrived early, but Manasseh and Dinah could feel their eagerness for the others to arrive. Everyone was present before the eighth hour, and they began by singing a Psalm in the yard. Almost before the ladies were out of hearing, the men began questioning Manasseh. "You said Jesus would fill the empty core. How does he do that?" "What do we need to do?" "How can that be?"

"Let me tell you what Jesus taught two very different people. The first one was a Samaritan woman. When she asked Jesus how to get her empty core filled, He told her that all she had to do was ask." Once again the men broke out in questions and whispering among themselves. "Later, one of the leading rabbis named Nicodemus came to Jesus and asked the same question. He was a member of the Sanhedrin and was well versed in The Law and The Prophets."

"Grandfather Simon said that Nicodemus was one of his best friends," said Joab.

"When did he tell you that?" asked Manasseh fascinated.

"He was talking to me and Jethro and asking if we were attending your classes right after the first class. He said that his best friends Nicodemus and Joseph had followed Jesus and it had cost them everything," replied Joab.

"He seemed really concerned that we would do the same thing," added Jethro.

"Yes, making the decision to follow Jesus can cost you family, friends, jobs, prestige, and power. In some places like Jerusalem, it could cost you your life."

"So, what did Jesus tell Nicodemus?" asked Enos.

"Sorry, I was just thinking. Well, Jesus told him something a little different. He said, 'You must be born again.' Then he explained that what was born of water was flesh, but what was born of the Spirit was Spirit. Nicodemus was really confused because Jesus often used conundrums when he was speaking to the religious leaders. He

wanted them to think and figure it out for themselves. So, to the simple, uneducated woman He said, 'Just ask,' and to Nicodemus, He said, "Be born again." The apostles taught that what Jesus was saying was that all we have to do to have our empty core filled is to simply ask. But when we do, the Holy Spirit comes inside and is birthed inside of the empty core so that He's always inside of us guiding us, empowering us, filling us with Jehovah's plans and ideas."

"Just ask?" questioned Joab. "Ask what?"

"Ask Jesus to be your Messiah. Ask Jehovah to let Him be the sacrificial lamb for you. You see, Jesus died for everyone — past, present, and future — but only those that ask Him can have their emptiness filled."

"Just ask him to be my Messiah?" inquired Eliphaz.



Dinah had also been bombarded by questions from the ladies and they had been fascinated that Jesus had spoken to a woman and answered her question. They couldn't believe it was so simple. Now, Dinah posed a different question: "Why do we need a Messiah?"

The ladies puzzled over that one and talked among themselves.

Dinah reminded them that God had first hinted at sending a Messiah to pay for Adam and Eve's sin. "Then He promised to send a Messiah for all the nations of the world. John the Baptizer proclaimed that Jesus was the Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the whole world."

"Do we need a Messiah because of our sins?" asked Lilah. "But we don't sin, do we?"

"God is holy. Sin simply means missing the target. God gave us some rules to make sure we understood that every single person is a sinner and cannot be in God's presence. I don't want to embarrass you, but yes, I guarantee you that you have sinned. Have you ever taken short-cuts on your kosher preparations? Have you ever lied or cheated? Have you ever coveted what someone else had? Have you ever spoken in anger? Have you ever missed synagogue or worked on the Sabbath? Did you ever disobey your parents? I assure you, you are not holy enough to please God!" said Dinah.

"So, we need a Messiah," said Bethany slowly.

"Exactly. Throughout The Law and The Prophets we are taught that we are not holy enough to come into God's presence. So, there's no way we can live with Him in Heaven unless we find a way to pay for those sins. Let me tell you what Jesus did for you."



“Did any of you see Jesus’ crucifixion? I did,” said Manasseh. Two of the men said that they had seen it and would never forget it. They agreed that it was worse than any crucifixion they had ever witnessed.

“How so?” asked Manasseh.

“Because they scourged him first,” said Priest Mahlon.

“Ugh! Then they crucified him? That’s just wrong!” said Abner.

“For the entire last year of Jesus’ ministry, He told His apostles and followers how He would die. He told them the date; that He would be scourged and beaten; that He would be crucified; and that three days later He would rise again; and even told them to meet Him in Capernaum for their first assignment. But they couldn’t understand Him because their heads were filled with their own ideas about what a Messiah should be. And He certainly shouldn’t die! But on that night after they had completed their Galilean Seder, He taught them until almost midnight, then they walked to the olive grove. He was arrested just as He predicted. He was scourged and beaten. He was crucified and every drop of His blood was poured out for you and me. He was the Lamb of God sacrificed to pay for our sins. I was there. I saw it. And I have never forgotten it.”

“He knew ahead of time that this was going to happen? Then why did He come to Jerusalem?” asked Jethro.

“Because that was His purpose. God had sent Him to die for our sins. He told Nicodemus that God sent Him to die so that whoever believed that He was the Messiah would have their sins paid for and they could be in a right relationship with God. It was not the Romans, or the Pharisees, or the Sanhedrin, or anyone else who killed Jesus. He said He would lay down His life as a ransom for all, and He did.”

Chapter 15

The women were horrified by the price that Jesus paid for their sins. Dinah finished up the main points by teaching the last section. “After three days, on Sunday morning, Jesus rose from the dead. He came alive again. He appeared to His apostles and followers. I have many friends who ate with Him and talked with Him after He came back to life. For forty days He continued to meet with various ones and give them instructions, then He returned to Heaven. If a man can predict his own death and resurrection and carry it off — I believe He is the one and only Messiah. I have accepted Him as my Messiah. Now, I want to summarize what we’ve learned today. Yes, Achsah?”

“I was just wondering how you know all these things and why we don’t?”

Dinah knew that she had to be very careful. “I believe that we were all blinded by our traditions. But Jehovah knows that, and He is continually trying to get His people to recognize Jesus as Messiah. He keeps sending people to tell you the Truth — but it’s entirely up to the individual whether they choose to have their empty core filled, or to remain empty. God is not hiding the Truth. He’s constantly offering it to you. Let’s summarize because I think the men are already through. First, we said that if you simply asked Jesus to be your Messiah, He would pay for your sins and put you in a right relationship with God. Then He sends His Holy Spirit to be birthed inside your empty core and begins to direct and empower your life. Finally, that same Holy Spirit will take you to Heaven to live with Jehovah for all eternity. And that’s where we’ll wrap up today. Next week we’ll take more time for questions. Let’s pray: Father, please bless each one of these ladies and help them consider the price You paid for their sins. Thank You for sending Jesus. In His precious Name.”

“Mother,” whispered Bethany, “will you talk with me when the others leave?”

“Certainly. Give me just a moment to say shalom to the group.” They walked out in the courtyard and watched as the women joined their husbands. Dinah and Bethany went up to the rooftop to talk. “How can I help you?”

“Mother, Abner and I have been meeting with Samuel and Haggith and I think I understand enough. I want to ask Jesus to be my Messiah.”

“All you have to do is ask. Do you want to pray first or do you want me to start? You’ll have to do your own asking!” said Dinah.

“Jehovah, thank You for sending Jesus to die for my sins. Please forgive me and let Jesus pay the required price. I want Him to be my Messiah and to send His Holy Spirit to guide me,” prayed Bethany.

“Jehovah, my heart overflows with praise as Bethany comes before You and asks You to let Jesus be her Messiah. Bless her as she learns to listen to Your voice and follows You day by day. In

Jesus' name." Dinah held her grown daughter in her arms with baby Hosea squished between them. He didn't seem to mind. Dinah watched as Bethany ran to tell Abner and her abba what she had done. There was a lightness about her, and she was glowing with joy. Dinah said a quick prayer for Abner that he would not be upset by her decision.

"Manasseh, I'm ready to ask, too. We've been meeting with Samuel and Haggith and I've made my decision," said Abner.

"Do you want to go to the rooftop for privacy?" asked Manasseh.

"If it's all right, I would like to do it in the presence of my wife and family."

"That's fine." So right there in the yard, Abner prayed to ask Jesus to be his Messiah. They stayed for post-Sabbath dinner and Dinah prayed for the day when her family would be complete.



On Tuesday, Basha walked to Josie's Carpentry Shop, but he was working on site. The steward wasn't sure when Josie would be back in the shop but offered to send for him. She decided to wait until tomorrow night and left feeling disappointed. She had spent the past two days in prayer and had received the confirmation that she needed from the Holy Spirit that this marriage was indeed His will.

On Wednesday at sunset, Basha walked to Elam's house and enjoyed dinner with the ladies in the group. She enjoyed the worship time, the teaching and the prayer time, and then asked Josie if he had time to stay and talk. They asked Elam's permission to use his rooftop and he agreed. With a twinkle in his eye, he added, "But remember you are not yet espoused, so I will be checking on you."

Basha began, "Josie, God has confirmed to me that this is indeed from Him, but I have no idea what should happen next. I would like to hear what you have in mind."

"Basha, I have been a loner and I see nothing wrong with selling everything and heading out of here tomorrow. But I realize that God is changing me, and I need to consider your needs. I would like to take you to Cana and settle down either in Cana or Nazareth if my family is still there. I would like to check on kinfolk in Capernaum, too."

"I was hoping to take my manuscript to Jerusalem for the apostles to use."

"I don't see why we couldn't do all of that. My brother, James, is still in Jerusalem as far as I know. It would be good to reconnect with him, too. I will sell my business and my home here and we should be able to travel for a while before I will need to work again. I can find work just about anywhere."

"Josie, are you just doing this out of obedience, or do you feel anything toward me?"

"Basha, I will be honest with you. I have admired your enthusiasm for ministry and your love for people. I was blown away when I learned

that you helped write Matthew's manuscript. I would say the word was admiration. But I have been alone all these years and never wanted a dependent wife to have to take care of. When the Holy Spirit spoke and said to marry you and take you to Cana, I agreed to it because I wanted to be obedient. But when I talked with you at Samuel and Haggith's house and I realized that you might say no, I had to admit that what I felt toward you was more than admiration. I want to be the one to journey beside you and care for you and share life with you. I don't know if I know what love is, but I think that love grows with time. That's all I know to tell you. I want to be with you. But I want you to want to be with me, too."

"Josie, you deserve the same honesty. I had not ever considered marrying for a third time. I have had a good life and I intended to end my days just serving God alone. I spent two days in prayer. The first day was just submitting to whatever God wanted. But when He confirmed to me that this was from Him, I got excited in a way that I haven't been in a long time. I can see us serving God together. I have no idea where we'll settle or if we'll settle, I just want us to walk in obedience together."

"Then can we make plans to be espoused, and when should the wedding be?"

"Do you want a wedding celebration or just something small?" asked Basha.

"Like I said, I'm okay to just pack up and leave. But what do you want? I certainly will plan a wedding celebration for you if that will make you happy."

"No, I've had plenty of celebrations and I would rather get on the road to Cana," said Basha.

"I can rent an oxcart and we'll be out of here. But I do need to sell my business and house. I don't know how long that will take."

"I'm teaching that class with Manasseh and Dinah that has two more weeks to go, and I would like to make one more copy of the manuscript to leave with Manasseh so that he can begin teaching about the life of Jesus after he finishes. I wonder, since he's out of school, if he would help me with that."

Elam and Angela joined them and asked how it was going. "I think we are ready to announce that we would like to be espoused. I don't know whether Jonathan can do it at group next week or maybe Samuel. Then we'll be married just as soon as we can wrap up here. I need to sell my business and house and rent an ox. Basha has got about two or three weeks of work before she can leave. We'll probably just do a private wedding and then get on the road to Cana. There's a lot of little details."

"It sounds exciting," said Angela. "But I'll miss you both!"

"Josie, I think you should consider buying an ox and cart since you don't want to be obligated to return it. Let us know how we can help," said Elam.

"Shalom. May I walk you to Samuel's?" asked Josie.

"No, Samuel's servant is waiting on me. Shalom," said Basha.

“Shalom.” Josie walked home slowly and tried to figure out what needed to be done next. He was almost through with his current project. He needed to let his partners know that he wanted out of the business. He began to wonder if Jacob was ready to become a business partner. He was turning out to be a good carpenter. He would talk with him tomorrow.



Basha was thrilled as she listened to Manasseh’s and Dinah’s reports. Then she asked if Manasseh might be available during the days to copy a manuscript for her. She explained that she and her late husband had prepared a manuscript about Jesus’ earthly life. Once they finished teaching the seven weeks, they would probably want to just read through the manuscript aloud with the group. But they would need a copy of their own. Manasseh agreed and promised to pick up the manuscript later today to get started copying it. He had plenty of papyrus and ink left over at the school that he could use. They covered the lesson for Sabbath afternoon and then Manasseh walked home with Basha and returned with a copy of her manuscript. He set it in the schoolhouse before he returned home and joined Dinah, Jacob, and Judah for dinner.

Jacob reported that Josie had decided to leave Antioch. He was going to sell his business and his house and wanted to know if Jacob wanted to purchase either of them. “You haven’t even started your apprenticeship. How could you own your own business?”

“I don’t have enough money for either, so I think he was just asking to be polite. He did say that he would talk with his friends about hiring me and continuing to train me. I’ve learned a lot and he promised to not just leave me stranded.”

“I would really like for you to have an apprenticeship so that someday you could own your own business. You need to be able to build a house from start to finish and be the owner, not the helper,” said Manasseh.

“I understand. Maybe Elam would let me apprentice with him. I could ask. But I would like to see what Josie has in mind.”

On Friday morning, Manasseh began copying the manuscript written by Matthew. He was fascinated to read about Jesus’ life and could hardly wait to share it with the group. He imagined that all those who had accepted Jesus as Messiah would sit in family groups around the yard and he could read it to them, and they could discuss it together. But first he had to teach them this Sabbath and it was going to be a tough one.



The synagogue gathered at Simon's house for Sabbath night dinner. It was the first time since Priest Othniel had died. Bilbah sat with the other ladies and reported that her servants took care of all the work, and her son, Elkanah, who lived next door, was being very attentive. Simon and Esther were the ultimate hosts, but several noted later that there seemed to be a sadness about him. Abner and Bethany were there and seemed to be extra happy. Some of the ladies wondered if she was carrying a third baby for Abner. The dinner was excellent, and everyone agreed, but the conversation was harder because so many of them were keeping secrets that they didn't want to share with Simon or the other members of the synagogue. Most left early with some excuse or another.

On Sabbath morning, Priest Mahlon read Psalm 22 aloud to the synagogue and then brought a message indicating that God would send a Messiah that might not be so much a political Messiah as a spiritual one. He encouraged his people to pray that their hearts would be ready for a Messiah that would free them from their sins, as was promised to Abraham.



On Sabbath morning at the Christian Worship Center, Manasseh and Dinah were amazed to see Abner and Bethany enter with Samuel and Haggith. They stood to greet them and explained that Jacob attended the earlier service with friends from his group. It was thrilling to see their faces as they looked around and even more fun when they all sang together.

Abner and Bethany walked home with her parents, and they discussed whether they would announce that they had accepted Jesus as their Messiah, or whether that would cause a rift in the group. Manasseh encouraged them to let the Holy Spirit lead them. He asked if they had heard Him speaking and they assured him that they had. Jacob was thrilled with their decision and told them about his. They promised to be praying for all the others.

Before the eighth hour, everyone had arrived, and Dinah led them in a Psalm of praise. Then they divided into the two groups. The ladies didn't seem as talkative as usual and there was a seriousness about them that Dinah had never seen. She asked if there was something troubling the group but received no answer.

"Let's begin with prayer. Jehovah God, we praise You and thank You for the opportunity to learn about Your Son, Jesus. Please guide me and Manasseh as we answer questions today and try to explain these truths. In Jesus' name. I want to ask if you have any questions about anything we have covered so far."

"Not really questions. I think you've been a great teacher and I really understand a lot. But I guess I'm sad because if I choose Jesus as my Messiah, I'm afraid I'll lose all my friends that I've grown up with," said Abigail.

“Abigail, remember that was part of why I hid my relationship with Jesus. But I want you to know that I was miserable. I felt that I had no one I could tell — not even my husband. It was very hard. But I also wanted to be obedient to the Holy Spirit and He was telling me to be quiet. If I had not obeyed the Holy Spirit’s directions, I would have been stoned. Here, that is not a high likelihood. But the truth is, you do not have to reject your friends. They may choose to reject you, but you can still love them and pray for them every day. I love my parents dearly. They have rejected me, but in some ways, it has only made me love them and pray for them more. And if you choose to follow Jesus, the Holy Spirit will guide you to know when to reveal that you have become a follower and when to keep quiet. Anyone else?” All the others shook their heads. But now Dinah felt that she understood better what the sadness was all about.

“Okay, today’s lesson covers some of the questions that people have about following Jesus. The first question is: Who do we pray to?”

“You pray to Jehovah,” said Hannah.

“Yes. Jehovah is the only One who can answer our prayers. Have you noticed anything that is different about how I pray?”

“You pray in Jesus’ name. What does that mean?” asked Lilah.

“I pray in Jesus’ name because Jesus is the One who died for me, and He told His apostles during His last Seder to always pray in His name and God would gladly answer their requests because such a high price was paid.”

“Wow, that’s good,” said Lilah.

“Yes, it is. Have you ever thought about how prayer works?”

“I guess you just pray, and Jehovah hears you,” said Achsah.

“Yes, God hears every prayer that everyone on earth prays, but for Jesus’ followers, the Holy Spirit that is inside of you is God’s Spirit. So, the very second we pray, God hears it in His Spirit or self. And that’s the way He talks back to us. We hear His thoughts through the Holy Spirit speaking into our inner core. It takes a little while to learn to recognize His voice, but it’s incredible once you realize that Jehovah God is speaking to you. And you want to obey as quickly as possible.”



The men were quickly grasping the concepts that Manasseh was teaching. “Okay, let’s go way back in The Law and The Prophets. Could someone please quote the first two verses of Genesis?”

“That’s about as far back as you can go!” laughed Abner and then he quoted:

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.

Manasseh taught, “Here we see that the Holy Spirit is not a new idea created by the followers of Jesus. He was present at Creation. Throughout the Jewish Scripture, we see Him taking an active role in equipping the prophets and judges and kings to lead the people. But He came for a specific purpose and time and then left. Jesus said that He would send the Holy Spirit to permanently indwell those that accepted Him as Messiah. Learning to hear His voice and obey it quickly will be a very important aspect of following Jesus.”



Dinah dreaded teaching this next section because she wasn't totally sure what she believed yet. She faced the ladies and began to teach. “This next section may be confusing to you. It was hard for me and still is. Because I'm Jewish and was born and raised as a Jew, I understand both sides. But you need to know that keeping the Law will not make you be in a right relationship with God. Jesus said that once He fulfilled the Law, it no longer had a purpose. What He meant is that it did not give you forgiveness of sins or a right relationship with God. What you need to know is that some Christians, which is another name for followers of Jesus — it actually means ‘little Christs’ or ‘little Messiahs’ — what you need to know is that some Christians have thrown away the Law completely. Some, like the Gentile Christians, have never kept it. Other Christians keep the Law very strictly. And most Jewish Christians do a mixture of both. They keep the Laws and traditions that feel right and are meaningful to them, and they throw away the rest.”

“You mean we wouldn't have to keep a kosher kitchen?” asked Lilah, who had no servants.

“That would be up to you and your husband,” said Dinah.

“Do you keep a kosher kitchen?” asked Hannah pointedly.

“Yes, we do. We decided that we have family and friends who would prefer our staying kosher and it's the style of food we grew up with. But it does not make us better or worse than other followers of Jesus. When we are in the homes of Gentiles, we eat the food they provide for us, as long as it does not contain blood and was not involved with idol worship.”

“Doesn't that make you unclean?” asked Nancy.

“According to the Pharisees, yes. But according to Jesus, no. He says that it is the inside of the cup that determines whether you are clean — not the outside or appearances. What He was saying is that the only thing that matters is whether you are in a right relationship with God. And how do you get in a right relationship with God?”

“By asking Jesus to be your Messiah,” replied Bethany.

“Exactly. Then there's only one thing you need to do. Obey the Holy Spirit and He'll keep you clean.”

“So, you asked him if it was okay to eat non-kosher food?” asked Achshah.

“Yes, we did. We prayed about it for several weeks until we were absolutely sure. We also talked with other Jewish Christians who stayed kosher at home but ate with the Gentiles. They assured us that any combination was okay, as long as we were sure the Holy Spirit was leading us. We pray about how to keep the Sabbath. We pray about everything and try to be obedient to what we hear. Sometimes we are not sure, so we just wait until we are clear. Right now, I want so badly to visit my parents and let them know how much I love them, but the Holy Spirit keeps saying to wait. So, I’m waiting.”



Manasseh said, “Jesus simplified the rules in many, many ways. He said that He only had one rule. He said that we should love others the way He loved us. Now, that sounds simple, but I’ve found it to be very hard to do. That completes our points for today. But we’ve allowed time for questions. Feel free to ask me anything! I probably won’t know the answers, but you can ask!” Everyone laughed. “Seriously, if I don’t know the answers, I’ll ask until I find out because your questions are important to me.”

“So, if being an Israelite doesn’t put you in a right relationship with God, what do you do with all the verses that indicate that Israel is God’s chosen people?”

“Oh, the Jews are certainly God’s chosen people and had an incredibly special role to play so that the Messiah could be born at exactly the right place and time. God worked to make sure that first the Jews and then the whole world would recognize their need for a Messiah. He blessed and preserved us in so many ways, and I’m proud of my Jewish heritage. The problem comes when you get the cart before the ox. We were supposed to be looking for the Messiah described in The Law and The Prophets, but somewhere during those 400 dark years, our leaders got confused. When we come back to The Law and The Prophets and especially the verses written by the Prophet Isaiah, we can see clearly that Jesus fulfilled those prophecies in exquisite detail.”

“But he didn’t fulfill all of them,” protested Priest Mahlon.

“No, He said that at His first appearance He would come as a Shepherd and Healer for the people and die for their sins. But when He returns the second time, He will come as King and Ruler and Conqueror.”

“When will that happen?” asked Jethro.

“No one knows. Jesus gave us a lot of signs to be looking for, but He said that no one except Jehovah knew the date. Jesus indicated it would be soon and it’s been twenty years, so I would guess any day now,” said Manasseh. “Next week will be our last lesson unless you have further questions and want to meet longer. Jehovah, please

bless these men as they lead their families this week. Help them to seek You and Truth. In Jesus' name." The men scattered around the yard and waited for their wives and visited until they were finished.



Simon called Joab and Jethro into his office at the bank early on Sunday morning. He invited them to sit and looked at them sternly as if trying to determine their thoughts. Joab asked, "Is there something that you need, Grandfather?"

"Yes. You said you were going to investigate these claims that your dad is making. You said you would give me a report. You have been attending for a month now and I want to know what you have determined."

Joab swallowed hard and said, "I cannot speak for Jethro, but as for myself, I am impressed with the work that Dad has put into his research. Most of what he has taught in the classes are simply a repeating of The Law and The Prophets and a history of the Jewish nation."

"But what has he said about Jesus? That's what I want to know," demanded Simon impatiently.

"He feels very strongly that Jesus fits all the criteria given in The Law and The Prophets to be the Messiah," said Joab.

"He was just a peasant that managed to get a following. He was a nobody that will get you killed!" raged Simon.

"Grandfather, we are no longer living in Jerusalem, and Jesus was crucified twenty years ago. Why is this so important to you?"

"WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?! WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?! Do you know how many people have died because of this man?! Do you know how many men, women, and children have been killed because of him?! I have seen it with my own eyes. Jews turning against Jews and murdering each other. Yes, it is important. And you young people know nothing about the horror of watching your best friend being tortured to death because he followed this man. It is all his fault. He came to destroy the Jewish nation and everything dear to us. He destroyed the Sanhedrin and divided them against each other, and now he's destroyed my family and turned them into enemies."

Chapter 16

“Grandfather, our family has not been torn apart. You and Grandmother are the only ones who have chosen to exclude our parents. Our parents have not excluded you.” Joab knew that he had spoken more boldly than he intended. He certainly didn’t want Grandfather to turn on him. But instead of raging as Joab and Jethro expected, Grandfather Simon put his hands over his face and cried. “My daughter, my only daughter, precious in my sight, has turned against me and won’t visit me or her mother. It’s killing her mother. And there’s nothing that I can do to change it.”

Joab and Jethro looked at each other and Joab suddenly spoke decisively. “Grandfather, if you want your daughter and her husband back in your lives, all you have to do is invite them. They feel that they are unwelcome. The choice is yours.” Then he got up and walked out saying that he needed some air.

Jethro wasn’t sure what he should do. So, he got up and returned to his work.

About noon, Jethro looked up and was startled that his grandfather was standing and watching him work. “Do you think she would come?”

“I can’t answer for her, but knowing my mother, she would be in your arms in a heartbeat.”

“I’m going to go talk with her,” said Simon.

“Do you want me to walk with you, sir? It’s rather warm today and it’s a long walk.”

“No, thank you, I’ll be fine. Is Joab back?”

“I think so; I’ll check.” Jethro got up and peeked into Joab’s office. He was busy at his work. Jethro returned and assured his grandfather that Joab was back and busy.

“He can take care of anything that comes up,” said Simon.

Simon wanted to talk with Dinah desperately, but he knew that Manasseh was out of school and would most likely be home. *Am I ready to face him? Let’s just hope he’s not home.* Simon had to rest several times before he arrived, and it was early afternoon before he approached their house. He saw six-year-old Judah building something in the backyard and he waved to him. “Grandfather!” he called and ran straight into his arms. “I’ve missed you, Grandfather. Where’s Grandmother?” asked Judah.

Dinah ran out into the courtyard and greeted her abba with open arms. She realized he was exhausted and had him sit in the courtyard in the shade. Junos brought him juice to drink and water to refresh himself. She offered to wash his face to help him cool down. “Abba, is everything okay? Is Mother okay?” asked Dinah.

“Yes, yes. Can’t an old man visit his daughter?” fussed Simon.

“Of course. We’ve missed you.”

“Why haven’t you come to visit us?” demanded Simon.

“Because you indicated that we would make you feel unclean since we don’t follow the Pharisees’ rules, but that doesn’t stop our loving you and caring for you and wanting the best for you. We tried to explain that. I have no problem visiting with you as often as I can, but we felt unwanted, so we stayed away.”

“Now that you are a follower of Jesus, don’t you have to stay away from Pharisees?” asked Simon.

“Oh, no! We try to love everybody if they will let us.”

“Dinah, I have missed you so much. Will you please come and bring Judah to visit us soon?”

“I’ll come tomorrow to visit with Mother if it’s all right with you,” said Dinah.

“Will you stay for dinner tomorrow night?”

“No, I need to be home with my family before sunset.”

“Then I will come home at noon to visit with you. I need to start back, or I will be late.”

“Tell Mother I’ll be there by mid-morning.”

Dinah ran to the schoolhouse and flung open the door. She was startled to see Nathan helping Manasseh with the copying of the manuscript. “Dinah, don’t do that! I almost ruined a whole page,” scolded Manasseh.

“I’m sorry. I just wanted you to know that my dad came to visit, and he asked me to visit Mother tomorrow. I was so excited and I’m sorry I wasn’t careful. Can you fix it?”

“I think so,” he said holding the scroll up to the sunlight and squinting at the incorrectly made letter. “But Dinah that is great news. I’m happy for you, and I want to hear all about it at dinner.”

“Would you two like some juice?”

“No, thank you,” said Manasseh absently, already back to work. Dinah slipped out the door quietly. She paced the yard, wondering if Manasseh would forbid her to go. She kept praying, but she realized that she had not asked permission to go to her parents’ house. She had assumed that it would be okay with him. By the time he arrived home for dinner, she was in a tizzy. But she knew better than to try to discuss it in front of Judah and Jacob. Finally, they sat down to dinner and Manasseh shared that he had been working on the manuscript written by Basha and her late husband, the Apostle Matthew, about Jesus’ time on earth. He excitedly told them that he had just gotten started when Nathan came in and asked what he was copying. “I showed him, and he became as excited as I was. He asked if he could help copy it. We were reading it together. It tells all about Jesus and what He taught and the things He did. I can’t wait to share it with all of you. Basha had suggested that we simply read it aloud and discuss it after we finish these classes about Jesus.”

“Has Uncle Nathan invited Jesus to be his Messiah?” asked Jacob.

“Not that I know of. But he was really excited to read the manuscript. I’m pretty sure that he will be back tomorrow to work some more. With his help, I’ll definitely have it finished in two weeks.”

Dinah realized that all her fears were unfounded as Manasseh was just so excited about the manuscript, he had not really heard what had happened. Now, she felt she could share with the family. “Judah, did you tell Abba and Jacob who came to visit you this afternoon?”

“Grandfather came!” declared Judah. “But Grandmother didn’t, so we are going to go and visit her tomorrow. Yippee!”

“Manasseh, I hope that’s okay with you. Abba thought we were staying away because we were forbidden to associate with Pharisees. I assured him that it was the other way around. I am free to love everyone, and I told him that he had made it clear that he didn’t want us to come, so we hadn’t. Anyway, it seemed like he really listened. He asked when I could visit Mother and I told him tomorrow. He has not asked for my forgiveness or for yours, and he didn’t mention inviting you, so if you don’t want me to go, please tell me and I’ll do whatever you think is best.”

“I think this is a very positive step in the right direction. And I’ll be busy with the manuscript, but I’ll be praying that you can show love and honor to both of your parents,” agreed Manasseh.



“Dinah, you’ve always asked too many questions. Your two brothers were a lot easier to raise than you were!”

“Yes, Mother, I know. But none of my six children are exactly alike. Jehovah made each one unique.” Dinah had hoped that their time apart would soften her mother, but it seemed that she had saved up the barbs just for her. But at least her mother was thrilled to see Judah and doted on him. Her mother avoided talking about why she had not come to visit — just fussed as if it was totally her choice. She insisted that at her age, Dinah should be more diligent in checking on her, since she was almost as old as poor Priest Othniel. Dinah was used to her mother’s complaints and could generally pacify her, but she was relieved to see her abba walking toward the courtyard. She was startled by how old he looked. It was a much more pleasant visit after he arrived, but there was still no mention of Jesus or the baptism service. They didn’t even insist that she attend the Sabbath night gatherings of the synagogue. It seemed to Dinah that they just wanted her to visit occasionally, and she hoped that someday soon she would be able to share more deeply. Right now, she was intent on just showing them Jesus’ love. She hugged and kissed them both as she and Judah started home in plenty of time for sunset.



The following week, Josie discussed with Elam and the rest of the men around the table his desire to sell his part of the Carpentry Shop.

Elam said that he needed more space but did not want to partner with men who were not followers. He asked Josie to ask them if they would be willing to sell out as owners and he would be glad to hire them to work for him. Josie agreed to talk with them and let Elam know.

The group gathered in the living room and Eve led them in a Psalm. Jonathan and Susanna slipped in while they were singing and joined the group. After Elam prayed, Jonathan announced: "I am here to perform the espousal ceremony for Josie and Basha." After the initial shock, everyone began to clap and whistle, and both Josie and Basha blushed. "Because neither have relatives in the area, except I am Josie's cousin, they have requested that their group participate. So, I'm asking you, her closest friends, to present Basha." Several of the ladies mentioned that she had helped them when they were sick or unable to care for their families. They talked about her always being willing to help anyone in need. Susanna spoke of their ministry at the local wells and how Basha had helped her to become more comfortable sharing her belief with others. One lady mentioned her diligence in completing the manuscript that her late husband had written. Jonathan stated, "At the age of eleven, her abba, who was a priest, pledged her to Philip. The Apostle Philip and Basha traveled with Jesus for His entire ministry on earth. After Philip was martyred in Carthage, Basha lived in Cana with friends. They had enjoyed fifteen years of marriage and Basha now has a grown son living in Cana of Galilee and a daughter and family living in Carthage in North Africa. Both are serving Jehovah faithfully teaching the New Way to those around them. Basha stayed in Cana until she was pledged to the Apostle Matthew, and they returned to Carthage. He was martyred in Ethiopia and Basha came to Antioch. So, this is a third marriage for Basha." Then Jonathan turned his attention to Josie and asked the group, "How about Josie? How would you present him?"

"He's one of the best carpenters that I've ever met."

"He learned from his older brother, who just happened to be Jesus."

"He has been so enthusiastic in learning about Jesus. He's been incredibly dependable and faithful in his attendance to the group."

"He's been a great teacher and boss for me," said Jacob.

"Josie," said Jonathan, "do you bring gifts for the bride?"

"Yes, my first gift is this stack of papyrus and ink which is, I hope, enough to make one more copy of the manuscript. I want it to represent that I support your many ministries. My promise is to always encourage you to be obedient to Jehovah first of all."

"Thank you, Josie. You know this will allow me to give away another manuscript. Thank you."

"My second gift represents the journey we are about to take." He gave her two lanterns. "We are called to be light in a dark world, but we'll also need lanterns as we travel to Cana." Basha broke into a grin as she thought about seeing her son, Jordan, again.

"And my third gift may seem a little strange." He handed her his hammer. It was well-worn and obviously not new, "I surrender this

hammer to you and to Jehovah. With it, I will provide for our needs, but I also commit to you that carpentry will no longer be my first priority. I will submit my work to God's authority and only work in order to share the New Way with others." Basha couldn't suppress the tears. She realized that God had provided her with a husband who shared her desire to spread the New Way to others and would be able to support the ministry without it interfering. Elam may have had the biggest smile because he remembered how focused Josie was on making money when they first met. How good God was to transform men and allow them to grow and change. How privileged he felt to be a part of Josie's changes.

Jonathan pronounced their espousal and stated that the couple would marry privately on the morning before they left for Cana.

"When do you think that will be?" asked Dan.

"Just as soon as I can get my business and house sold and my one employee, Jacob, settled. Basha has a couple more weeks of classes to teach, too. So, at least two weeks, maybe longer."



On Thursday at sunset, as Josie and Jacob finished their work for the day, Josie said, "I have a meeting in the morning, so you will need to come here and get started. I've marked off the area, but you need to establish the walls for the sleeping areas. Do you have any questions?"

"No, sir," said Jacob. "I can do that."

"Shalom."

"Shalom." Jacob ran all the way home. He was so excited to tell his dad that he would finally be allowed to work alone. He had patiently watched and been tutored. It had been hard to wait.

On Friday morning, he arrived at the site just as the sun was rising. He wanted to work quickly so he could prove to Josie that he could do it, but he knew he must go very, very carefully, or it would be a disappointment to both himself and Josie.



Josie and his two partners had talked, and they wanted to hear what Elam had to offer. The partners were happy to take on a new partner but were not willing to give up their share of the ownership unless the price was right. Elam and Dan arrived, and the five men sat in the front of the store and discussed possibilities. They could not come to an agreement, but Elam asked Josie to take a walk with them afterward. Once outside the shop, he asked where Jacob was. "I left him working at a job site just north of here."

“We would like to see his work,” said Dan. “I’m thinking that I might be willing to hire him or provide him an apprenticeship and continue to mentor him in following Jesus.”

The three walked out to the job site and found Jacob hard at work. He stopped and greeted the men. They seemed to be exploring the site, but then he realized that Josie was pointing out his work. Suddenly, he wondered if he would be asked to work for them. He was so excited he could hardly think and almost messed up a board by nailing the roughest part on the inside. *I know better than that. Oh, please, let them see that I can do good work.* But soon he noticed that they were saying their goodbyes and he called out, “Shalom” to them. *Oh, well. Surely, one of Josie’s partners will take me on as a helper even if they aren’t as skilled as Josie.*



That night, the synagogue gathered at Simon’s house for Sabbath dinner. Simon and Esther seemed to be less gregarious than usual. Several noted later that he seemed tired or distracted, and Priest Mahlon noted that Abner and Bethany were not there. He correctly guessed that they would not show up at synagogue the next day either. He sighed deeply and wondered what was going to happen to his synagogue. Tears filled his eyes as he realized that his dad’s legacy just might end with him. *I can’t remain a priest and follow Jesus. And the decision is too hard. I guess I’ll just live dual lives until the Holy Spirit tells me what to do.* He was shocked at the thought that he might even consider inviting the Holy Spirit to live inside of him. *Does that mean that I believe what Manasseh is teaching?* He had so many questions.



After singing a Psalm together in the yard, Manasseh invited the two groups to get started, even though it was well before the eighth hour. Everyone seemed to be eager to begin and they all came with questions.

Dinah welcomed the ladies inside and they were just getting settled when Martha asked Bethany, “Did you go to the Christian Worship Center with Abba and Mother this morning?”

“No,” replied Bethany honestly, “we went with some friends of ours who have been teaching us about Jesus. But we sat beside them.”

“What was it like?”

“You would love the music, and I enjoyed the teaching portion. There is so much to learn and everyone is so happy there and welcoming. I mean, I actually enjoyed being there. It wasn’t sad like the synagogue.”

“But doesn’t that make you unclean? Aren’t you making all of us unclean?” asked Lilah scooting away from Bethany. Martha looked pleadingly at her mother.

“No, it doesn’t. Nothing makes you unclean with God except not having your sins covered by His Messiah. But even if you decide to believe that the Laws given by Moses are still in effect — even though Jesus says they are not — you would only be unclean until sundown. But if you are concerned about it, Bethany can sit here beside me. I’m not under the Law anymore. Jesus says I’ve been set free. Are there any other questions? Remember, that’s the whole purpose of this class. I want to answer your questions about Jesus.”

“Why are you two the only ones who know about this Jesus?” asked Lilah.

“We’re not. There are thousands of followers all over the world. No one knows how many. On the first Pentecost after the crucifixion and resurrection, over 3,000 accepted Him as their Messiah. And then home groups started forming all over the world as these Jews returned to their homes and told their friends. Then just as Jehovah had told Abraham, the news of the Messiah passed from the Israelites to the Gentiles. Jews started telling their Gentile neighbors and who knows how many of them believe. There’s probably close to 500 that are part of our Christian Worship Center. It is very crowded, and we are doing two services and talking about adding a third worship time on the Sabbath. Basha, a friend of mine, told us that the synagogue in Cana all accepted Jesus on the same day when they realized that Jesus was the Messiah. And the Christian Worship Center has sent people out to tell other people in Asia Minor and Africa so that they will know,” said Dinah.

“But we’ve lived without Jesus for so many years. I still don’t understand why you have to go and upset everything right now,” Lilah continued to protest.

“First of all, this is not something I’m doing to upset you. I’m sorry that it does upset you, but my only reason for telling you about it is so you won’t miss out on the best thing that has ever happened to us,” said Dinah. “Jehovah sent Jesus and He died for our sins about twenty years ago. Then He rose from the dead so that we could be in a right relationship with Jehovah. I wish I could have told you much earlier, but I was too scared. I was scared of losing my husband, my children, my parents, and at that time I would have been stoned to death. When we left Jerusalem, I was determined to tell Manasseh, but I just couldn’t. We had the six children to think about and I thought I could just keep quiet. I thought it wouldn’t matter. But it did matter, and it does matter because Jesus is the Messiah. If you miss that, you miss eternity in Heaven. That’s more important than whether you like me or not! When the Holy Spirit made it clear to me that it was time to tell everyone, I was obedient.”

“So, you are saying that if we decide to not believe that Jesus is the Messiah, then we won’t be in Heaven?” asked Achsah indignantly.

“That’s not what I say; that’s what Jesus taught. He said that He was the gate and that we can’t get to Jehovah any other way except by Him. If you reject the Messiah that Jehovah has provided, then you can’t have your sins forgiven. If your sins are not forgiven or paid for, then you will be cast out of God’s presence for all eternity. That’s why this is important. Can’t you see that? I’m not doing this to hurt you, I’m telling you what we have discovered. I don’t want my family and my friends to miss it,” said Dinah as tears streamed down her face.



“But how can we be sure that Jesus is the Messiah?” asked Priest Mahlon.

“Well, first of all, Jesus claimed to be One with God. He said, ‘If you’ve seen Me, You’ve seen Jehovah.’ So, you have to start there. Either He was who He claimed to be, or none of this is important and we’re just dealing with another false Messiah and that makes Him a liar or a lunatic. One of the things that absolutely convinced me was that I saw His crucifixion and then read about it in The Law and The Prophets. The things I read, written by various prophets and King David, described in exact detail what happened that day.”

“Yeah, but aren’t crucifixions pretty much alike?” asked Joab.

“Yes, and no. King David, in The Law and The Prophets, was describing a form of punishment that hadn’t even been invented yet. And where was it that it described that the soldiers would divide His clothing among them, except for His robe, and they would gamble for that?”

Priest Mahlon replied, “Psalm 22:18: They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment.”

“This is just a tiny detail, but have you ever seen the soldiers take the clothes of a prisoner?” asked Manasseh. “I’ve only seen a few crucifixions growing up, but they always threw the clothes in the fire pits and burned them with the bodies. But this was written over a thousand years before it happened, and it happened! I know. I was there.”

“There’s something else that I’ve been thinking about a lot this week,” said Nathan. “Manasseh showed me a manuscript written by one of Jesus’ apostles and it said that Jesus was born in Bethlehem. I had been taught that he was from Galilee. I asked Manasseh and he found out that Jesus was born in Bethlehem because of the census. He was from the tribe of Judah and the line of David, so his parents were in Bethlehem when he was born. Again, it’s just a little thing, but I can’t get it out of my mind.”

“Did any of you see Jesus’ crucifixion?” asked Manasseh. Priest Mahlon and Eliphaz said that they were there. “Do you see anything in Psalm 22 that stands out to you?”

“How did King David know to write this?” asked Eliphaz.

“The same way all prophecy is written. The Holy Spirit directs it — sometimes by just dictating what should be written, sometimes by just giving thoughts and letting the writer write it his own way, and sometimes by giving the writer a vision or picture and letting them write down what they saw,” replied Manasseh. “What I want to know is if you have any more questions about Jesus?”

Priest Mahlon began to weep and tried to express that he was horrified of giving up the priesthood. “I have been ordained to care for my people, and now I am unable to lead them.”

“No, Priest Mahlon, if you believe that Jesus is the Messiah and begin to follow Him, you are finally qualified to lead them to the Truth!” said Manasseh. “There are many, many priests who teach their people the New Way. They have been persecuted and many killed by the Pharisees, but they have served their people by pointing them to the Truth.”

“I feel that I would be dishonoring my father,” said Mahlon.

“I believe that every man must decide for himself. This is not a group decision. We all, individually, have to decide whether to ask Jesus to be our Messiah. When we do, we will have the Holy Spirit directing us from that point on. He will guide you and teach you and show you what you need to do.”

Chapter 17

Dinah ended the ladies' group as Basha had instructed her. "I've set snacks out for you to enjoy. I'm going into this guest room to pray for each one of you. If you have questions, or if you are ready to pray Jesus to be your Messiah, come into the guest room. But remember to allow each other privacy. Also, if you would prefer to come privately anytime in the future, you are welcome. I will answer your questions or help you with anything I can. This is the end of our formal class, but soon we will start reading together a manuscript about the life of Jesus and you are welcome to listen whether or not you have asked him to be your Messiah. Any questions?"

Dinah moved to the guest room and shut the door. She began to pray for each lady in her group. Hannah slipped into the room just when she was beginning to wonder whether anyone would. "Dinah, I really appreciate your teaching me about Jesus. I know it was really hard. I just don't think I can do it unless Adonijah does it, too. I just want you to know that I hope we can still be friends."

"Of course. Always. I am sad because I want to know that my best friend will be with me in Heaven," said Dinah.

"Yes, I know, but I'm just not ready yet."

"That's okay. Thank you for telling me. Is that pretty much what everyone has decided?"

"Oh, no one is talking about it. Everyone is visiting, but they are avoiding the question," said Hannah.

"Okay, then. I think I'll just stay here and pray for everyone," said Dinah trying to hold back her tears. But just as soon as Hannah slipped out, Martha came in. She hugged her mother and they sat and chit-chatted. Dinah asked if she had any questions and Martha indicated that if she decided to do something, she would do it together with Enos. Dinah smiled and said, "Yes, it's very, very hard to believe differently from your husband. I did that for too many years. But you know that I want you to take this seriously and investigate it thoroughly."

"We've been talking about it a lot. But Enos has some questions he wanted to get settled first. I'll wait on him," said Martha firmly.

Dinah wanted to scream that it was urgent, but she knew it would do no good. She, herself, had trained her daughter to be submissive to her husband. So, after Martha slipped out, she began to pray for the men.

No other ladies came into her room and when Manasseh came into the house, he discovered that she was still on her knees praying. He started to shut the door, but she beckoned for him to join her. "How did it go?" she asked.

"Well, not as well as I expected. Basha seemed to indicate that this would be the big day. But no one, that I know of, made that decision," said Manasseh sadly.

Dinah began to cry, "Hannah and Martha came in to talk, but said they wouldn't make a decision without their husbands."

"I think all of the men came in to talk with me about a question or concern, but no one was ready to make the decision."

"What do we do about next week? Will we meet again or not?"

"I think we'll just have to be available to answer questions and then wait and see." They compared notes and found that most of the questions were the same and they had given the same answers. So, now they would just wait. They prayed together that Jehovah would continue to work in their friends' lives. It had taken months to make their decision public, so they mustn't get discouraged. Remembering how hard it was and how long it had taken them made them feel more hopeful.

They walked out of the room and found that Jacob and Judah were sitting in the courtyard talking with Abner and Bethany, Joab and Nancy, and Jethro and Abigail. "This almost looks like a family reunion! I guess Enos and Martha had to get started back to the farm."

"They were walking back to his folks' house," said Joab.

"Are you guys ready for some food? I'm starving," said Manasseh. He went into the house and the servants helped him bring out juice and cheese rolls even though it wasn't yet sundown. Dinah was busy playing with the babies and little Deborah.

As they ate, Joab shared with his parents, "This may sound crazy, but Jethro and I had a strange talk with Grandfather last week and we wanted to tell you about it."

"Okay, what's up?"

"Well, Jethro and I have talked, and we think the reason Grandfather Simon is so opposed to Jesus is that he blames him for the death of many of his friends, the split in the Sanhedrin, and the loss of the way things were before. We think he feels incredibly scared that we'll get killed if we follow Jesus, and he might even feel guilty for being a part of all the killing. We think that's why he gets so angry when anyone mentions Jesus."

"You are probably right. I know you guys were not even born yet, but Jerusalem was a terrible place to live after the followers of Jesus began to form home groups and started sharing Jesus' love. The Sanhedrin thought they had gotten rid of Jesus, and when they discovered that they hadn't, it was really nasty. They tried to kill all the followers of Jesus. I know that your grandfather was a part of all that. I don't know that he ever killed anyone, but he certainly was a part of the Sanhedrin that ordered the killings. It was a bloodbath."

"I was a new follower of Jesus, and my chaperone told me not to tell anyone or we would both be stoned to death. So, I kept quiet. Then I didn't invite Jesus to be my Messiah until I was carrying you, Joab. I didn't dare tell your abba. I was so scared of anyone discovering that I was a follower. It was a horrible time. I know it's hard for you guys to decide what you believe, but I'm glad you don't have to fear for your lives. Abner, have you talked with your parents?"

“No, but we are going to their house for dinner tomorrow night. We intend to tell them then.”

“I feel that they are very close to making the decision, but we’ll be praying that they will encourage and support you.”

“So, you and Bethany have decided that Jesus is the Messiah?”

“Yes,” said Abner, “we decided a couple of weeks ago. We’ve been meeting with the midwife that saved Bethany’s life. She and her husband have been answering our questions and we knew we were ready to make the decision.”

“Two weeks ago, after class, Mother helped me to pray, and I asked Jesus to be my Messiah. It was an incredible feeling of peace and ... I don’t know, a deep, deep joy that I have never felt,” said Bethany.

“Have you heard the Holy Spirit speak?” asked Nancy.

“Yes, but not out loud. I just know He’s guiding me and showing me things. I get thoughts in my head that weren’t there before, and I feel myself being more patient than I’ve ever been. It’s been so relaxing to not have to constantly be wondering if I was pleasing Jehovah,” said Bethany.

“I prayed with your dad two weeks ago and this has been the best two weeks of my life,” said Abner. “Not only do I feel that relief from trying to constantly please Jehovah, but honestly, it’s such a change from always feeling the weight of my sin and wondering if there was something more I was supposed to be doing. It has been an incredible two weeks and I’m exploding to tell everyone. But we wanted to wait and tell my parents first.”

“I’m sorry, I guess I let the cat out of the bag,” apologized Manasseh.

“No, don’t be sorry. I’m glad you did. We’re family and I want you to know what we’ve decided. We went to the Christian Worship Center this morning and it’s incredible. You can feel the joy and love and life that is just pulsating there. I can’t wait to go back next Sabbath,” said Bethany.

“So, you’ve quit the synagogue?” asked Jethro.

“We can’t attend both, and we need to go somewhere so that we can keep growing and learning how to follow the Holy Spirit. I don’t think that will happen at the synagogue. We’ll go to the Sabbath dinners at Simon’s until we are told to stay away. But I tell you, right now, I would give up just about anything for this peace and joy that I feel. Dad has commented that he’s never seen me this happy — not even after Hosea was born,” said Abner.

“I believe that talking with Grandfather Simon this week has confirmed everything that I needed to know, and I believe that Jesus is the Messiah. What do I do next?” asked Joab.

“Just ask!” said several and then they all began to laugh together.

“Jehovah, I want to let You know that I want Jesus to be my Messiah and pay for my sins,” said Joab firmly.

“Me, too. Jehovah, please forgive me for my sins and let Jesus be my Messiah,” said Nancy.

“Jehovah, You know my heart is heavy with sins and I know that Jesus died to set me free. Please let Him be my Messiah,” prayed Jethro.

“And please let Jesus be my Messiah, too. And please help my parents to understand, but even if they don’t, I still want to obey and follow You,” prayed Abigail.

“Jehovah, You are so good and my heart overflows for my brothers’ and sisters’ decisions. Now we’ll be in Heaven together for all eternity. Please continue to work in Enos’ and Martha’s hearts. And please help Grandfather and Grandmother to understand. In Jesus’ name I pray,” said Jacob.

Manasseh and Dinah just sat and watched as their children ministered to each other as fellow followers of Jesus. Their hearts overflowed with praise. Abner invited Joab and Jethro to worship with them at the Christian Worship Center next week. And they encouraged Abner and Bethany to continue to attend the Sabbath dinners at their grandfather’s home. They felt that the best way to reach their grandparents was to show them Jesus’ love. Again, Manasseh and Dinah just sat and watched. “Could we meet here Sabbath afternoons, and you teach us about following Jesus?” asked Joab.

“I don’t see why not, and I’m in the process of copying a manuscript of the life of Jesus that was written by the Apostle Matthew. I think it would be beneficial to just read it together to learn more about Jesus and what He taught,” agreed Manasseh.

“So, how long have you been a follower, Jacob?” asked Bethany.

“Since the night of Dad’s and Mother’s baptism. I had been learning all I could about Jesus from my boss, Josie. I re-read The Law and The Prophets and was convinced that Jesus was the Messiah. I started attending the Worship Center and a small group that answered my questions. But I was too afraid of what Dad would think. He totally surprised me at the baptism, and I knew I couldn’t wait. I asked Jesus to be my Messiah about midnight that night. And like you, I would say it’s been the best six weeks of my life,” said Jacob. “What’s funny is that I went to the first hour worship service with my group of friends, and Dad and Mother were going to the second service, but neither of us knew that the other was attending. It’s a really crowded place.”

“We need to be getting these little ones to bed. Dad and Mother, I’m sorry we haven’t been more supportive, but we had to know for sure before we decided,” said Joab.

“I wouldn’t want you to make that decision any other way. But now, you’ve made the best decision of your lives. It may cost you dearly, but it will be worth it for all eternity. And God will provide for everything you need to follow Him. I promise. I already have another job. I don’t know whether you knew, but Nathan fired me immediately after my baptism.”

“Whoa, that’s hard. But I guess you couldn’t teach there.”

“No, I couldn’t, but Jehovah had a better plan.”

“Where will you be working?” asked Jethro.

"I'll be teaching at the Christian School. They are desperate for teachers, and they pay better!"

"We need to be going. Tomorrow will be a long and important day at the bank. Shalom."

"We'll be praying for you. Shalom."

"Oh Manasseh, it's happening. We just need to be patient," said Dinah, finally relaxing. She sent Judah up to bed and Jacob went to his room. She and Manasseh sat in the courtyard and listened to the night. They sat without speaking, understanding each other completely.

"Manasseh," whispered a voice in the darkness of the yard.

"Yes, Nathan, how can I help you?"

"Achsah and I were wondering if you and Dinah were still up."

"Yep. Come on over. Did you get the little ones all settled?"

"I got them settled while Nathan watched to see when your children left. We didn't want to bother you. Are you sure it's not too late?" asked Achsa.

"We are always available if you need help or have questions we can answer," replied Manasseh.

"What's going to happen to us? I mean, the only thing I know how to do is teach Hebrew School. You've at least worked as a scribe," said Nathan.

"I think you'll just have to leave that up to Jehovah. He has promised to provide for His children. When or if you decide that Jesus is the Messiah and you allow Him to direct your life, you will need to learn to trust Him for many things," said Manasseh.

"Well, this I know: I am convinced that Jesus is the Messiah sent from God. I believe that He is God's Son," stated Nathan firmly.

"And you believe that He can provide you a fully-trained ox that works perfectly with your existing ox without any adjustments at all, and that He can make sure we had enough hay and lamp oil to fend off lions, and a man who was willing to buy your crippled ox, but you don't think He's able to provide for your family," said Manasseh piercingly.

"Manasseh, you know I believe, but I've still got a wife and three children at home, and four servants that are depending on me to support them."

"And you think that God doesn't know that? He's omnipotent. He knows everything and He's offering to direct your path, forgive all your sins, set you free from the Law, and provide you with a right relationship that means you'll spend all eternity in Heaven with Him. What else do you want Him to do? Die for you?" Manasseh said these words forcefully, but with great compassion and love for his little brother. Dinah had heard the brothers sparring with each other ever since she had married into the family, but Achsa seemed a bit surprised by the conversation. She had apparently not heard about Nathan meeting the followers of Jesus in Samaria. Dinah realized that Manasseh and Nathan had been wrestling with this decision for six long years.

“Achsah, do you have any questions?” asked Dinah gently.

“No, I’ll let my husband do the research,” said Achsah.

“That’s fine, but it is a private decision.”

“But he knows what is best.”

“I understand.”

“Nathan, I don’t want to put any pressure on you or Achsah. But what makes you hesitate if Jesus is indeed the long-awaited Messiah? Is there any question I can answer for you?” asked Manasseh again.

“No. I know the Truth and I want to ask him to be my Messiah,” said Nathan quietly. “You can’t tell me what’s going to happen with the synagogue or all the friends we’ve grown up with. We’ve got to determine our priorities, and I think the most important thing is to be in a right relationship with Jehovah.”

“I agree. Would you like to pray here, or privately?”

“I think Achsah and I will go to the school and let me show her some of the manuscript if it’s all right with you. And then we’ll do it together — just the two of us. Is that all right?”

“It sounds perfect and that way you’ll never feel that I coerced you in any way.”

“Yes, it will be our decision and ours alone.”

“Very good, shalom,” said Manasseh.

“Shalom,” said the other three and Manasseh stood to blow out the courtyard lamps. He and Dinah went to their mats and lay awake in awe and wonder at all the things they had seen and heard today. They eventually fell into a deep sleep.



On Sunday morning, Manasseh hurried to the school to continue his work of copying the manuscript written by the Apostle Matthew. Soon Nathan joined him, and Manasseh could tell just by the way he walked that something was different. “So, you did it?”

“Yes, Achsah and I both asked Jesus to be our Messiah. I don’t feel that much different. It would help if I knew what to do about the school. I mean, it’s hard to feel peace and joy when I don’t have a way to support my family.”

“I understand, but I told you that Jehovah would take care of it. Would you like to teach at the Christian School?”

“Do you mean it?” asked Nathan incredulously.

“That’s where I’ll be teaching this fall, and I happen to know that they are looking for Christian teachers. Christian means little Messiah or little Christs.”

“But I don’t know enough to teach about Jesus!” declared Nathan. “I’m brand new at this.”

“But you could teach Greek or Hebrew or numbers or logic. They need all kinds of teachers. But you would be teaching both Jew and Gentile students. Are you okay with that?”

“I think so.”

“I’ll ask around and find out where you can meet Rabbi Absalom. I don’t know where he lives, but he’s already said that if you become a follower of Jesus, he would hire you. Let’s get busy on this manuscript.”

“You could have told me that earlier,” complained Nathan.

“I thought you didn’t want any coercion.”

Middle of the morning, Basha stopped at the house and talked with Dinah. She was thrilled with the report, and said she expected that the others would contact them sometime this week. “I guess we should have scheduled a meeting, but we didn’t. We thought it was a total bust.”

“The Holy Spirit works in different ways. I should have warned you that it might not all look the same, but just about half of them have already accepted Jesus as Messiah. I think you should let everyone know that you are available for questions again next week. Is anyone ready for baptism yet?”

“Probably not — maybe Jacob, but not the others.”

“Then why don’t you start reading through the manuscript? How is Manasseh doing on the copying?”

“Nathan, his brother, has been helping him and he accepted Jesus as his Messiah last night,” said Dinah. “You are welcome to check on them. They are working over at the school.”

Basha checked on the men and found that they were three quarters of the way through the manuscript and thought they could be finished by the end of the week.



On Wednesday of the following week, Josie informed Jacob that his two partners had bought his Carpentry and Fine Furniture Shop. He could only continue to hire him until the end of the week, and then he would need to check and see if Elam had a place for him. Jacob said he understood. He felt certain that Elam was not interested in hiring him since he had looked at his work and not said anything. It made it awkward to attend the family group, but Jacob didn’t want to miss Josie’s last time before he married Basha and moved to Galilee. As they gathered around the men’s table there was a lot of laughing and teasing and fun. Everyone seemed to be having a great time, except Jacob, and he thought about just slipping out. After dinner, Dan took him aside and asked if he would stay later and talk with him. Jacob’s hopes lifted and he wondered if maybe this was about a job. He hardly heard the lesson or the prayer requests. When it was his turn, he shared that with Josie leaving, he would need to secure a new job. Everyone agreed to pray for him.

Afterward he said shalom to Josie and said he would see him in the morning but needed to talk with Dan. “Yeah, I know,” said Josie with a big smile. Dan invited Jacob to join him on Elam’s rooftop. Once they were seated, Dan said that he had been very impressed with

Jacob's work. "I have worked for Elam for years and have just decided to branch out on my own. I have purchased a building in south Antioch, not too far from your parents' home. As you know, I checked out your work the other day and I was very pleased. I don't need an apprentice to take over my business, I just need a man who wants to continue to learn good carpentry skills and good solid Christian business practices. I think I can teach you those things while paying you a full salary for your work. Someday, maybe we can even become partners. But for now, you would just work for me, and I'll teach you everything I know. What do you think?"

"Dan, I would love to work for you! This would be my answer to prayer. Boy, God works fast!" Dan grinned and agreed. Jacob would meet him at Elam's Carpenter's Shop at the first hour on Sunday and Dan would take him to the new shop. Their first job would be to do some renovating of their own building and then pray that Jehovah would provide some clients.

Chapter 18

On Friday morning, Josie reviewed what all he needed to do. He had finished everything except the cleanup for the house he and Jacob had been working on, so he left Jacob on his own to finish. He was headed to a farm to pick up the ox he had already purchased. Then, he had bought an oxcart from a friend of Samuel's. He needed to finish moving out of his house that he had sold. The new owner would take possession on Sunday at sunrise. Once his things were in the cart, he would take the oxcart to Samuel's and load Basha's things. Yes, he needed to get busy! They had agreed to not take many household goods so they could get by with just one ox. Jonathan had encouraged them to go by way of Damascus so it would be cooler. Neither had ever traveled that way, so it would be an adventure. They would leave the copied manuscripts along the way as the Holy Spirit led them. Josie thought about Jesus' parable of the sower and the seed and decided that they were planting these manuscripts and hoping that they would grow Christians. By the end of the day, Josie had accomplished everything on his list. He joined Basha at Samuel's for the Sabbath dinner. Early Sunday morning, they met Jonathan for a private wedding in Samuel's back courtyard, and they said their final goodbyes to Samuel and Haggith and Jonathan and Susanna and the children. It was hard to leave, and yet so exciting. Josie helped Basha onto the front seat of the wagon and they began a marriage centered on Jehovah and obedient to the leading of the Holy Spirit.



Manasseh and Dinah had let everyone know that they would be available to answer questions and discuss a new class about the life of Jesus. They would meet on Sabbath afternoons at the eighth hour. Everyone they expected, except Enos and Martha, arrived. They sat in the grassy yard and sang some Psalms together. Then Manasseh said, "In the group that Dinah and I attend, we gather together and usually sing and worship. Then our leader asks if anyone has any questions or anything they want to share. It's a special time and helps us to get to know each other better. Then after a time of teaching we share things that we want the group to pray for during the week. I want you to know that my group has been praying for the synagogue for over six months now. Anyway, I was wondering if we might just stay together today and not split into two groups. I want us to just share as friends. What are your questions or concerns or needs?" said Manasseh compassionately.

"I want to share that I had been researching Jesus for several months before my parents' baptism. When they were brave enough to risk losing everything, I, too, asked Jesus to be my Messiah.

Unfortunately, I haven't been as bold in telling others. My group is praying for my courage to be baptized soon," shared Jacob. There was a stirring and whispering in the group. Eliphaz shared that he and Lilah had made their decision and invited Jesus to be their Messiah on Monday morning and it had been an incredibly good week. Abner and Bethany admitted that they, too, had invited Jesus to be their Messiah and were attending the Christian Worship Center.

Nathan shared that he and Achsah had invited Jesus to be their Messiah after last week's lesson. And all week, he had been helping Manasseh copy a manuscript on the life of Jesus and was amazed at what He taught. He encouraged them to come and hear that text read. "Are you going to start that next Sabbath?" he asked Manasseh.

"We can, if you wish. We made a copy of our own for that purpose. If you want to hear it read, we'll meet at the eighth hour as usual. It was written by the Apostle Matthew who traveled with Jesus and was martyred for sharing the New Way in Africa. It really helps me to read it and understand what Jesus taught and did while He was on this earth."

Joab and Jethro shared that they had also invited Jesus to be their Messiah. Then Priest Mahlon began to weep. "I am so miserable. I know that Jesus is the Messiah, but I also know that I have been ordained as the priest of this synagogue. I don't know how to do both!"

"Priest Mahlon, may I advise you?" asked Manasseh gently.

"Yes, please."

"I am really new to this myself, and I don't have all the answers, but this I know: Once you ask Jesus to be your Messiah, He sends His Holy Spirit to guide you and I think that He will guide you and show you what to do. I don't think He will guide you until you are in a right relationship with God. If indeed God has sent Jesus as His Messiah, then I believe He expects you to embrace Him and submit to His leading. Does that make sense?"

"So, I should just ask Jesus to be my Messiah and see what happens?"

"That's all I know to advise you," said Manasseh.

"I was worried about the school and not having a job and Manasseh told me the same thing. He said I needed to get my priorities right. Take care of the most important things first," said Nathan. "I accepted Jesus as my Messiah and this week, I was offered a teaching position at the Christian School."

Priest Mahlon continued. "I would like to discuss this with my brothers, since my decision affects them, too."

"Certainly, you are welcome to go into the house or up on my rooftop." Priest Mahlon, Elkanah, and Isaac went into the house and Manasseh led the group in another Psalm.



“You’ve heard my position. I may be the first-born, but you, too, are responsible for this synagogue. I want your input. Elkanah, what are your thoughts?”

Elkanah squirmed. “Whatever you think is best.”

“That’s not exactly what I need to hear right now. Isaac, what are you thinking? Surely, you have some thoughts.”

“Mahlon, I do. I feel that Manasseh is right, and that Jesus is the Messiah. I think that Dad did the best he could to obey the Jewish leadership, but if indeed they were off track, then he was following something that he didn’t know was wrong. We have a responsibility before God to determine what is right and follow it no matter what it costs,” said Isaac firmly.

“And you feel that Manasseh is right?” questioned Mahlon.

“I do,” said Isaac.

“Are you willing to die for that belief? That’s what it would cost you in Jerusalem. Here it may cost you the synagogue,” stated Mahlon.

Elkanah chimed in, “Well, I don’t think that either group can remove a priest. Only the High Priest can do that. But it seems that we are going to lose half of the synagogue either way we go. We will either lose Simon and Zapheth, not to mention Mother, who are the most vocal and will cause the biggest stinks, or we lose the younger generation who are following Manasseh. Politically, I think ...”

“I’m not interested in the politics! This is exactly the thinking that got us into this mess! Thank you for helping me to see my own position. I want God’s will more than I want man’s approval. I don’t care how many people do or don’t approve. As priest of this synagogue, I must determine God’s will and lead us forward. If people disagree with me, they can leave, or have me ousted, but I’ve been appointed by God to lead them.” Mahlon fell on his knees and cried out, “Jehovah, Almighty God, I desire to know Your way. I want to lead Your people as Aaron led them. I will make mistakes, but I commit to leading them as You lead me. You seem to be leading me to see the Messiah, but I need perfect clarity. Please guide me. Please guide me and show me clearly.”

He looked at his two brothers and encouraged them to seek the Truth and to lead accordingly without regard to what the people wanted or desired. “Keep your eyes on Jehovah. Let Him be your only priority. Brothers, we have not spoken of your training since the death of our dad. What day would be acceptable to both of you for us to continue that training? For the time being, I would like to meet with you together, instead of privately, but that could change in the future.” They all agreed on Monday at noon.

“We have all three been attending these Sabbath classes led by Manasseh. I will expect a report based on Scripture at that time.”

“Yes, sir,” they both replied.



When the three men had rejoined the rest of the group, Manasseh asked if there were any questions that he could help anyone with or if anyone else wanted to share. He led them in a prayer of blessing on each home and invited them to stay and visit. He reminded them that next Sabbath they would begin reading the account of Jesus' life on earth as written by the Apostle Matthew. The families stayed and talked for a while, but there was tension, and everyone could feel it.

Priest Mahlon asked if he could speak with Manasseh privately. "Manasseh, please pray for my ability to lead the synagogue as God leads me. Dad taught me so much about leading the people, but he never taught me to listen to God. I asked God for one more sign so that I would be absolutely sure that Jesus is the Messiah. If God gives me that assurance, then I will lead the synagogue as the Holy Spirit leads me. I have no idea what that will look like." Manasseh assured him of his prayers and hugged him. Then he apologized to Priest Mahlon for making him unclean by his touch. "So many rules! I need your support. I didn't feel ready to lead the synagogue after my dad passed. I didn't think I could measure up to my dad. Now, I'm certain that I don't know how to lead the people."

"And I think you will lead the synagogue better than ever if you decide to let the Holy Spirit lead you," replied Manasseh. They said goodnight and agreed to see each other next Sabbath.



Priest Mahlon sat in the synagogue waiting for his two younger brothers to arrive. They had not met for their weekly review time since their dad's death. Priest Mahlon felt uncomfortable trying to fill his dad's shoes — especially in light of the teachings about Jesus that they had recently explored. Elkanah and Isaac arrived together, and Mahlon was certain that they had been discussing his inadequacies as a leader. He was only eighteen months older than Elkanah and wondered if he should just abdicate to him. Elkanah would turn forty next month and could then be appointed as priest for the synagogue. Mahlon squirmed as he thought of the constant feeling of not being good enough and yet feeling the weight of the responsibility on his shoulders. *Will I ever feel comfortable in this role?*

The men greeted each other and pulled up benches so they could talk. "First of all, thank you for coming. I know this feels as awkward to you as it does to me. I know that Dad was meeting with you individually to train you to become priests. Do you feel that your training was completed or are there areas that I need to help you with?"

“Dad and I had been meeting weekly, but I think we’ve been finished with the teaching portion for over a year,” said Elkanah.

“We were studying the Talmud together and just reviewing the laws. Since Dad’s death, I’ve actually been looking at The Law and The Prophets and comparing the two. It’s been quite interesting.”

“I assume, like Manasseh, you’ve found a lot of differences,” stated Mahlon.

“Yes, quite a few.”

“I think, if it’s okay with you two, I would much prefer to meet weekly with both of you — but not as mentor and students, but as equals. I need a sounding board, and this will give you the best training that I know of to deal with the real problems that you will encounter as priests. Is there anything else we need to discuss before we get into Manasseh’s studies?”

“I assume the Hebrew School will close,” said Elkanah.

“That’s my assumption. Manasseh and Nathan are both unqualified to teach and I don’t know where we would find rabbis here in Antioch. But I don’t think that that’s our most pressing issue right now. Isaac, let’s begin with you. What have you learned and what is your recommendation concerning Jesus?”

“We have heard our father’s position all of our lives — that Jesus was a fraud and a troublemaker who was a false Messiah. He taught us that the Chief Priests and Sanhedrin had no choice but to destroy him. So I focused my research on the 400 years of darkness as Manasseh called it and tried to ascertain whether the leadership had indeed broken away from God’s plan. I was amazed to see that there is nothing in the records to indicate that God spoke during that time period. And we see the laws being constantly revised and rewritten to reflect whatever was needful at the time. It is curious to me that in the approximately 1100 years after Moses, there had been no changes to the Law. Yet, during those next 400 years, the laws were revised over one hundred times.”

“Whoa! That’s amazing!” exclaimed Elkanah.

“I can see why Manasseh considered it a time of confusion,” said Mahlon. “Anything else that you found?”

“I looked at some specific laws and tried to trace them, but there’s not a lot of written records and I just got bogged down.”

“So, in other words, if we wanted to know what the Law specifically said for any particular matter, it would be very difficult to ascertain,” stated Mahlon thoughtfully. “That’s incredible.”

“I’m guessing that each Chief Priest just passed down a bunch of oral interpretations, some that got recorded and some that didn’t, and the priests had to guess what was best,” said Isaac.

“Then it’s no wonder that I feel overwhelmed with how to rule this synagogue when there is no set of rules to follow,” said Mahlon.

“Exactly.”

“So, how did Dad do it so confidently? He was always so sure of himself.”

“My guess is that by being such good friends with Caiphas, the High Priest, he knew what pleased him,” said Elkanah.

“Man, this gives me a headache,” said Priest Mahlon. He took a deep breath and then asked if there was anything else to report. Isaac said that that was all he had looked at this week. “Okay, what have you found, Elkanah.”

“Well, as you know, Dad wrote down significant events in a diary that he has kept for as long as I can remember. I decided to go back and read what he wrote in his diaries during Jesus’ ministry, and I especially wanted to see what he wrote about the crucifixion and resurrection. I think that could be very crucial.”

“I agree. I had forgotten that manuscript. Did you find anything interesting?”

“Not yet. I’ve had quite a bit of trouble reading Dad’s writing. He wrote in old Hebrew but took shortcuts and used a lot of symbols that I’m not totally sure what they mean. It’s almost like learning a new language. The more I read, the better I’m getting at understanding what things mean. But I’ve only read back a few years. I think I’m still about twelve years from the crucifixion, so maybe by next week I’ll be able to tell you what he wrote. I’m getting better at it, but it’s really slow going.”

“I think that will be very valuable. I will look forward to that report. Is there anything else that we need to check out?” Both men shook their heads and agreed that they didn’t know of anything else.

“Okay, let’s meet at noon next Monday and hear your report, Elkanah. Then we’ll need to decide exactly what our position is going to be concerning Jesus.”



“Jacob, plan to meet me at the shop in the morning at sunrise,” said Dan.

“Yes, sir.” They had been quite busy over the past two months since Dan had opened the new Carpenter’s Shop on the south side of Antioch.

Jacob fretted most of the night. He was afraid that Dan would let him go, and he was really enjoying working for him. Not only was he teaching him a lot about carpentry, but he was answering his questions about Jesus. Dan knew so much more than he did.

The next morning, Jacob waited at the door of the shop before Dan arrived and still felt uncertain of what this was all about. When Dan arrived, he acted like everything was perfectly normal and asked Jacob to help him find some supplies for the house they were working on. By the time they had assembled all the things they needed to carry to the site, Jacob was totally relaxed and reprimanding himself for fretting. Then Dan said, “Come into my office,” and Jacob’s heart lurched. “I just wanted to talk with you about two things before we get going.”

“Yes, sir.”

“First of all, do you have any friends, or know anyone that we could hire to help us in a beginning position?”

“I would have to think, but not right off hand. I will ask around if you would like,” said Jacob.

“My second question may require more thought and you may want to talk with your dad. I’m ready to give you a raise. You are definitely no longer just a clean-up helper, and you deserve a carpenter’s salary. Now, I can either offer you a cash raise so that you make a denarius a day, or I can offer you your current salary and a piece of the Shop. You would become a co-owner and share a percentage of the profits. Right now that percentage would be tiny, but with each raise, I would continue to give you this choice. Now, if you are wanting to purchase a home, then you might prefer a cash raise, but if you are pretty well settled, you might prefer a piece of the ownership. As the Shop grows and as your percentage grows, it should exceed your salary eventually. Think it over and let me know by the end of the week. I’ll pay you accordingly on Friday afternoon before Sabbath.”

“Wow! That’s a generous raise and quite an offer. Thank you! I’ll let you know after I talk it over with Joab and Jethro. They are the financial thinkers in our family.” Dan pulled and Jacob pushed the wagon filled with additional supplies to the construction site. Jacob quickly began to add the walls that he had measured and marked yesterday while Dan started building some shelves in the indoor kitchen.



Jonathan sat in his office rubbing his forehead. He felt overwhelmed again and wished Josie was here to make him take some days off to go fishing. At the Leadership Team meeting last night everyone had expressed feeling stressed. They had people on waiting lists for groups, but they had no more leaders trained to lead. That reminded Jonathan that he hadn’t checked on Manasseh and Dinah’s synagogue group since Basha had left. They were brand new followers of Jesus trying to lead others with no supervision. He knew that that could go awry very quickly. He was thrilled that Susanna was carrying another little one, but he felt pulled a thousand directions all at once. The little one would arrive in the winter, and he knew that was adding pressure on him. His first wife, Orpah, had died in childbirth with their third child. He knew that Susanna was a lot stronger and healthier than Orpah, but these things happened, and it made him feel stressed. *Jehovah, I can’t continue at this pace. There are so many groups that need leaders. Jesus said we should ask You to send workers to help with the harvest. Well, I’m asking! Please show me what to do. I feel we could reach the whole city of Antioch if we just had more leaders. We can’t train them fast enough for all the new people and you know we risk contamination from other religions if we*

aren't careful. Oh, Father, protect Your people. This is not my flock — it is Yours. Please shepherd your people. Please send help! Please give me wisdom. Please help!

Jonathan was still on his knees when someone knocked tentatively on his door. He called for them to enter but rose to his feet and went to the door. He was suddenly engulfed in an enthusiastic hug. "Oh, Jonathan. It is you. We found you! Yanis, we found him!" Jonathan clung to the woman and cried tears of joy. She was quickly joined by her husband, another man, and a young boy.

"Jenay, I was just praying for God to send help. Oh, Jenay, what brings you and Yanis to Antioch?"

"I thought you said that you prayed for help. So, I guess Jehovah heard your prayer," said Yanis. "Basha told us where to find you, but we weren't totally sure of the directions." The men embraced and Yanis said, "Our son is a little bigger than you remember when you visited six years ago. This is our son Enoch. And this is our son Ephram."

"Welcome, welcome. But let's go to the house and celebrate. Did you walk all this way? It's a long trip."

"It's a long trip, but no, we brought an oxcart full of supplies and the trip was like a vacation. I was feeling the Holy Spirit saying that my work in Capernaum was done and when Basha arrived, she confirmed it. I felt it was time we followed where God was leading us."

"So, you've moved here? I mean, it's permanent?"

"Well, nothing for a follower is permanent, but yes, we've come to help."

"I can't tell you how much I need you, brother."

"Good, because just as soon as we can get settled, we're ready to work."

Enoch volunteered to walk behind the cart and let Jonathan ride with Yanis to show him the way. They arrived at the house and three-year-old Zephaniah ran out to meet the oxcart. Susanna carried baby Rinnah out to the courtyard to greet them. Everyone was talking at once. There was so much catching up to do. Jonathan told Susanna about praying for help and Jehovah sending a knock at the door. Everyone was celebrating having Jonathan's family nearby. Tears were shed as Jenay shared about the death of Grandmother Salome and their mother, Kayla. But they both knew that they had been reunited with their husbands and would spend all eternity with Jesus. Jenay also shared that she and Yanis had experienced the loss of a son who was with Jesus. And they reported that after Uncle Jaden died, Uncle Jonas and Benji had decided to sell out and move their families to teach the New Way in Damascus. "We stopped to visit and spent a couple of nights with them before continuing our journey. They seemed to be doing fine," shared Jenay.

"We were sorta' in a hurry, not only because we wanted to quickly obey, but also because it's almost time for school to start. Do you know of any schools that might need a teacher?" asked Yanis.

"You ladies visit and let me take Yanis to meet Rabbi Absalom."

“Could I come?” asked Enoch. “I could teach, too, if there’s a need, but I’m trained as an accountant.” The men welcomed him. Six-year-old Ephram offered to keep an eye on Zephaniah, who was not quite four. Susanna thanked him and said she and Jenay would be talking in the courtyard. Susanna and Jenay were quickly deep into girl talk and both knew that they would be best of friends.

The men found Rabbi Absalom at the Christian Worship Center puzzling over which students to place in which classes. Jonathan introduced Yanis and Enoch and asked if he was still wanting to hire teachers. “It depends on the subject and your experience,” replied Absalom.

“I have taught a class called The Life of Jesus for seven years now, in a Christian School in Capernaum. I traveled with Jesus for almost three years and that’s really the only subject I’ve ever taught. I had 200 students that I taught in classes of fifty.” Rabbi Absalom’s jaw dropped.

“I’m sorry, I can’t remember your name. I am amazed that Jehovah heard my prayer for help. I have plenty of teachers this year, but Jonathan has asked for a break and none of the others are able to teach about Jesus’ life on earth. We offer a class on following Jesus, but I would love for you to teach our students from first-hand knowledge. But school starts in one week. Can you be ready to teach by then?”

“Like I said, I’ve been teaching for seven years and practically have the material memorized assuming your schedule is similar. I’m used to teaching.” The two men started talking about the details and Yanis was assured that Ephram would be welcomed as a student. Rabbi Absalom would make room for him somewhere!

Jonathan invited Enoch up to his office to get acquainted while the men talked. “So, you are an accountant. I have a Leadership Team that I’m sure will know of a position for you, if you can wait until then. So, what made your parents pack up and move so quickly?”

“We have been really uncomfortable in Capernaum for a while now. There are so many Pharisees in town, and it seemed to us that everyone had heard the Good News and made their decision to either follow or reject Jesus. We were feeling that our knowledge was just wasted there. Dad and Mother have always felt that God had called them specifically to Capernaum. But that changed about the new year, and we’ve been praying that God would show us what He wanted. I’m certain that the Holy Spirit was leading me to leave Capernaum, but I’m not as certain that He is leading me to stay in Antioch. I may move farther on, but I think I’m supposed to stay here, at least for a while, to get better acquainted with the Greek population. I’m very comfortable with Romans, but I’ve never been around the Greeks.”

“I know you are an accountant, but have you led any home groups?”

“Oh, yes! I was leading two men’s groups when I left. But there were men who could easily step into my role and continue the groups.”

I was leading one group of fishermen and another group of servants. Both groups were doing well.”

“That’s great. I could certainly put you to work. We are desperate for leaders.”

“My dad used a unique program that was developed by a friend of his to reach Gentiles, but we’ve adapted it to reach Jews as well.”

“I’ll be interested in hearing about it. Is that the same plan that Basha was using?”

“I don’t know, but probably.”

Yanis knocked and then entered Jonathan’s office. He was grinning from ear to ear. “Okay, Jehovah be praised, I’ve been in town for only a few hours, and I already have a paying job. Shall we look for a house?”

“You guys are welcome at our place in the meantime. We have plenty of room and I think it’s too late to begin looking tonight. Tonight, for Sabbath dinner, we don’t know whether you would prefer to rest at our home, or tag along with us to our home group. You would be more than welcome. Kostakis always has room for more.”

“It’s a family group?” asked Yanis.

“Yes, it’s the first group I started here. That means most of us have been together for eighteen years. Argh! When did I get so old?”

“Hey, I’m older than you are!” declared Yanis. “And I just need to check and make sure Jenay is not too tired. But I’ve never seen her turn down a chance to make new friends.”

Chapter 19

On Sunday, Headmaster Absalom welcomed the rabbis and teachers back for their second week of training. He introduced Yanis and indicated some changes to the previous schedules. Everyone welcomed Yanis and he was thrilled to be teaching part-time. Rabbi Absalom said that he could use him full time anytime he wanted to increase his hours, but Yanis wanted to leave plenty of time for ministry and preparation. He sat beside Manasseh and Nathan and got acquainted.

Manasseh would be teaching reading and writing of Greek and Aramaic and Nathan was teaching numbers and logic. They told Yanis on the break that they were both new at the Christian School.

“Where did you teach before?” asked Yanis.

“We were teaching in a private Hebrew School that we started together. But we sold that building to the Christian Worship Center. Rabbi Absalom said he wanted to use it as a separate location for the oldest students because they were so crowded here,” explained Nathan.



Someone at the Sabbath night group had suggested that Mordecai's house had still not been sold. It was smaller than most of the homes in that area of town. It only had two sleeping rooms, but it was the perfect size for Yanis and Jenay, Enoch and Ephram. They quickly got settled in on Sunday and then Yanis asked to meet with Jonathan about putting him to work with the ministry. Jonathan told Yanis about Manasseh's group and the situation with the synagogue. He told him that Basha had supervised their first few classes and then left town with Josie. He had not found time to check on Manasseh and would appreciate any help he could give him.

“Would that be the Manasseh I met at the school?” asked Yanis.

“Yes. Yes, it would. They are trying to lead an entire synagogue just using Basha's basic training and her manuscript. I don't want them to get tangled up in Pharisaical questions. He's only been a follower for a few months.”

“When do they meet? I guess I can ask Manasseh tomorrow. Also, Enoch has been leading two different men's groups and is doing a great job. You can put him to work, too.”

“I intend to. But I rely heavily on my Leadership Team. They'll know where he's needed the most.”

“Do you have any time at all with your family?” asked Yanis compassionately.

“I try to take afternoons off, but they usually get filled up. I've really made an effort to keep Wednesdays free after school is out. Other than that, I'm booked solid. I love this ministry and shepherding

the flock, but like I said, I was begging Jehovah for help. I hope you'll attend the Leadership Team meeting with me and let me introduce you."

"Sure. And I'll talk with Manasseh tomorrow and see how I can come alongside him."

"That would be great. Now if you could just multiply yourself by ten or so, we'd be almost caught up!" laughed Jonathan.

"I don't want to push my own way of doing things, but I'd really like to talk with you about the system we were using in Capernaum to train leaders. It takes a while to get started, but everywhere it's been used, they've ended up with more leaders than they could find followers. It's been incredible. I'd like to talk with you, but I know you are busy."

"Yes, I've got to meet one of the group leaders who is having trouble with some questions," said Jonathan.

"I think I'll see if Jenay needs my help getting settled in. Shalom."

On Tuesday, Yanis had a chance to visit with Manasseh after their training at the Christian School with Rabbi Absalom. "Jonathan suggested that my wife and I meet with you and your wife to see if we could be of any help with your synagogue groups."

"Oh, Yanis, that would be so good if you have been a follower of Jesus. I just don't know how to answer all their questions and there's still people who are undecided. Could you and your wife come for dinner tomorrow night? We could tell you what we've been doing and about the group."

"That would be great." Yanis walked away with a satisfied grin on his face. *I came here out of obedience to Your leading. It felt totally crazy, but You have already shown me great need and great possible harvests. I haven't felt this needed in a long time. Thank You for bringing us here.*

When Dinah shared what had happened with her abba at the baptism, Yanis and Jenay expressed their sympathy. But when she shared that her abba was Simon the Pharisee of Jerusalem, they were amazed that either one of them was still alive. "I can't believe that you lived over that. I mean, I remember Simon the Pharisee, and he would kill his own mother to stay in power! I don't mean any disrespect, but everyone in Jerusalem was afraid of him."

"I believe that Jehovah is certainly protecting us, but I also know that it helps that the Seleucid government that rules Antioch does not allow such atrocities as occurred in Jerusalem. Paul got some rocks thrown at him, but nothing like Jerusalem. Here the leaders would be held for murder," explained Manasseh. "We were not afraid of being publically stoned. But you know that the Priests and Pharisees in Jerusalem often stirred up riots and incited the people to kill for them unofficially. We were fairly certain that that was what Priest Othniel and Dinah's dad would do. And even if it didn't happen, it was still hard to face being declared dead and losing all our children and friends."

"Yes, I was declared dead by my abba and lost all contact with my family and synagogue. It was hard," agreed Yanis.

They sat and visited long after Judah was sent to his mat to sleep, and it was agreed that they would attend the synagogue group on Sabbath afternoon. Goodnights were said and both couples whispered to each other that they felt they had found friendships that would benefit both.



Jonathan introduced Yanis to the Leadership Team. Yanis felt right at home and expressed his appreciation for all that the Team had done to reach Antioch. He said that he would like to share with them at some point a plan that he had used to build leaders. They voted to receive him as a temporary member since they had not filled Mordecai's position. They wanted to get to know him better before making it official, but they welcomed him and promised to pray for him as he worked with Manasseh's group. The evening was spent mostly in prayer and worship time, and Yanis felt amazingly refreshed afterward.



On Sabbath afternoon, Yanis and Jenay joined the group that was gathering at Manasseh's to read through the manuscript of the Apostle Matthew. Yanis was invited to speak, and he simply shared that he was there to help in any way he could. He shared that he had been raised as a priest and then declared dead when he turned thirteen and decided to follow Jesus. He had traveled with Jesus and His apostles and disciples for almost three years and Jonathan was one of his good friends. He thanked the group for letting him and his wife Jenay attend their group.

Everyone welcomed them and they sat in the grass and listened as Manasseh read a portion from Matthew's manuscript in chapter four.

As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." At once they left their nets and followed him.

Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.

Jenay couldn't keep still. "Yanis and I have not heard this manuscript and it's so exciting. Is it okay if I speak? I don't want to offend anyone."

"Please speak if you can help us to understand any of these passages. We don't understand most of what we read," said Manasseh.

"I just wanted to say that Zebedee was my Grandpa, James was my Abba, John is my uncle, and Simon Peter and Andrew are my cousins. Jonathan and I are twins, and we traveled with Jesus starting on that day."

"You are Jonathan's twin sister?" asked Dinah.

"Yes. We were just little children, but that was the day we started traveling with Jesus. We heard Jesus teach and saw Him heal and do many miracles. That's where I met Yanis. I am so glad that Matthew has written this down. It brings back great memories," said Jenay.

"Would you two mind just letting the group ask you some questions?" asked Manasseh.

"Not at all. We love sharing about Jesus," said Yanis.

"What was it like traveling with Him? I mean you were traveling with God," asked Abner.

Yanis answered that one. "Jesus said that part of His job was to come to earth to show us what Jehovah was like. I can tell you that I have never met a more peace-filled, joyful man. He was an amazing man, but so much more."

"He gave the greatest hugs!" added Jenay. "He loved to laugh and instead of pushing us aside because we were just children, He was always available for a hug. And His eyes were so special. They seemed to penetrate your very inmost core, but not like when you are in trouble with your parents. When He would look at me like that, all I felt was pure love."

Soon they were bombarded with questions, and they very calmly and quietly tried to answer each one. As sunset came, Dinah and her servants set out cheese rolls and fruit on the courtyard table and the questions continued. Finally, Manasseh said that they needed to stop for today and asked if they would be able to come again next Sabbath. Yanis and Jenay agreed and thanked them for welcoming them to Antioch.

It had been a very productive first week. Enoch had enjoyed his Sabbath with Ephram and was ready to start his position as an accountant at Demetrius' Mercantile Store first thing in the morning. "Dad, I'd like to continue to supervise Ephram on Sabbath afternoons. It will help you and Mother be free to minister and I really enjoyed answering his questions. He's growing up so fast. He'll be a man soon and won't have time for me! I've also agreed to lead a men's group after work on Mondays. I want to get that one started, then I'll probably add a second one."

"That sounds great. I'm glad you are taking time for your younger brother. And you are right. There's only a short window to impact their lives before they are men with families of their own. I would appreciate

your help. And if you have any questions concerning your men's groups, I'll be available."

"Thanks, Dad. Goodnight," said Enoch.



Soon Jenay and Susanna were meeting weekly to minister to hurting women in Antioch. They took Ephram and Zephaniah along with them to help carry supplies and included them in the ministry. Jenay invited Dinah to join them, and soon six-year-old Judah was part of the trio of young boys serving in ministry. The three boys quickly became best of friends. Soon the women and their children from the Christian Worship Center were meeting often to make baby shawls and swaddling cloths, and cook and care for the needy. As they worked, Jenay taught and answered questions and the women grew into a very tightly knit group.



It was a cool, blustery Tuesday when Dinah and Judah walked to her parents' house to visit. They had been laughing and singing together as they walked, and Dinah felt like her life was overflowing with joy. But the minute she knocked at the front door she knew that something was wrong. The servant greeted her and invited her into the living area where her mother was pacing the floor. "What's wrong, Mother?" Dinah demanded.

"Your father has gone insane. I can't reason with him, and I can't understand half of what he's saying. He won't lie down, he's just pacing and pacing, and he won't eat," she said as she continued to pace.

"How long has he been like this?" asked Dinah.

"Since the Sabbath. We came home from the synagogue, and he's been like this ever since. I don't know what's wrong. He hasn't been to work all week."

"Well, it's Tuesday, so that's four days. Why didn't you send for me? Has Joab or Jethro been over to check on him?"

"No, they are taking care of things at the bank, but haven't visited."

"If you will entertain Judah, I'll visit with Abba and see what's bothering him," said Dinah, wondering what she would encounter.

"You two always had a special bond."

"Yes, Mother, abbas and daughters generally do," she said, not wanting to upset her mother further. "Will you come sit down and entertain Judah? He found a rock on our walk that he wants to show you." Dinah got them settled on a cushion and then went upstairs to

her parents' private room and knocked. Her Abba's manservant opened the door and invited her in. He looked exhausted.

Her Dad was kneeling on his mat in obvious distress. "Abba, can you tell me what hurts?"

"Oh, Dinah, you've come. I need you," he cried.

"I know. How can I help you?"

"No one can help me. I'm doomed. I'm a dead man. I can't be helped."

"Abba, is it about the bank? Have you made a mistake?"

"No, that would be fixable. But this can't be fixed," cried her Abba, sobbing even harder.

"What can't be fixed?"

"Dinah, I knew. I knew, but I didn't want to die like my friends. I knew."

"You knew what, Abba? I can't imagine what you are talking about," coaxed Dinah.

"I knew. I knew. But I chose to not see. I chose to follow along. I knew," repeated Simon.

Dinah stood and asked the manservant if he had any idea what her abba was talking about. The manservant denied any knowledge, but Dinah wondered if he had been sworn to secrecy. She wondered if Joab or Jethro could get farther with him. Then she heard the Holy Spirit very clearly instruct her to sit and sing Psalm 23 to him. So she sat beside his mat and sang gently, calmly, and quietly to him like she would to a scared child. He quieted and came and sat on his mat beside her. She didn't ask questions. She just sat still and held his hand.

After what seemed like forever, he began to speak softly, almost in a whisper. "I knew he was the Messiah. We all did. But Caiphas and Annas, the High Priests insisted that he could not be. But it was obvious. We all knew he was. The research we had done on him was clear: He fulfilled the prophecies, was the descendant of David, and proved himself in every way. Yet, we were told if we believed he was the Messiah, we would be tortured and killed just like he was. And I wasn't man enough to do it. I had always prided myself on being the best Pharisee of the Pharisees. I loved my title, my power, my position, and I killed to protect my place. Now, I cannot be forgiven. I cannot forget the look on the faces of the children. I can't forget the incredible numbers of people that I authorized to be stoned. I can't be helped. I can't be helped. I want to die, but I'm scared to face Jehovah. I am doomed. I watched them kill my best friend, Joseph of Arimathea. I don't know what they did to Nicodemus. I never saw him again. Dinah, I was there the night we arrested Jesus. I went with the temple guards and watched with approval. Oh, Dinah, the weight of my sin is too much. Now I can't stop the pain inside my head and my heart. I can't bring them back. I am doomed."

"Abba, will you listen to me for just a minute? I know you are upset, but I need to explain something. You raised me to think. Will

you listen to me even though I am a woman, or shall I go and get a man to help you?"

"I will listen," said Simon, still sobbing quietly.

"Abba, after Adam and Eve sinned, Jehovah promised a Messiah. After the world rejected Jehovah and turned to idols and went their own way, God called to Abraham and promised to send a Messiah. Abba, we all need a Messiah. We cannot bear the guilt of our sins. It doesn't matter whether it's a great huge sin, or a tiny sin, you know the Law. Anything less than God's holiness is sin and requires a blood sacrifice to pay for it. You say that you know that Jesus was sent by God to be that Messiah. I'm here to tell you that your sins, no matter how great or small, can all be washed clean because Jesus has already paid for them. Jesus said that He was the sacrificial lamb, and His blood would cover everyone's sin — past, present, and future."

"No! No! You don't understand how bad my sin is!" cried Simon.

"No, I do not, but Jehovah knows every detail. All I'm asking you to do is to ask Him if He would allow Jesus to be your Messiah. It's that simple. Just ask."

"He will say no. My sin is too great," insisted Simon.

"Jesus poured out every drop of his blood to cover your sins and mine. Why would you not ask? The worst He could say is no." For the first time, Dinah saw a glimmer of hope in her abba's eyes.

"Abba, I heard about a man named Saul of Tarsus that killed a lot of Jesus' followers — men, women, and children. When Saul asked Jehovah to let Jesus be His Messiah, He said yes. Now, he spends his life telling people the Truth about Jesus. He regrets his old life, but he's living every day for Jesus now. Right now, he's traveling all over Asia Minor preaching. Abba, I would suggest you ask. Jesus loves you so much and He's already paid for your sins."

"How would I ask?" whispered Simon like a little child.

"You simply pray to Jehovah and ask Him to let Jesus pay for your sins. Then you wait and see what He says and what happens."

"What if He says no?" asked her Abba.

"Well, I don't think He will, but if He does, then you are in no worse shape than you are right now. Don't you think?"

"I guess so. So, I just pray?"

"Yes."

Her abba, Simon, knelt on his mat and just sat staring at the floor. "Do I have to tell Him everything I've done? Because I don't want you to hear."

"He already knows everything you've done, but the major sin you've committed is not these heinous crimes, but one simple thing. You've rejected His Messiah. That's what you need to talk to Him about today," Dinah reminded him.

"Yes. Yes. Jehovah, please forgive me. I knew the truth and I rejected Your Son. Please forgive me. I did horrible things to others and I'm a sinner. I need a Messiah. Would you please let Jesus be my Messiah?"

“Please, Jehovah, hear my abba’s prayer. In Jesus’ name,” added Dinah. Simon sat on his mat staring at the floor. He didn’t move for so long that Dinah was beginning to be worried. She didn’t want to disturb whatever God was doing, so she waited and just sat still.

After what seemed like an eternity, Simon turned to his manservant and asked for a plate of food. He felt hungry. Dinah noticed that the fidgeting and agitation had stopped. He was still very pale, but he was quiet and beginning to relax. The servant brought him a plate of food and he apologized but said that he felt he could sleep. Dinah assured him that that was fine. “I need to be getting home. I’ll see you next week or you can send for me if you need help. Shalom, Abba.”

“Shalom, Dinah, and thank you.”

Dinah quietly slipped out of the room. She went downstairs to find that Judah had been entertaining his grandmother with stories about his goats. They had had a snack, and she was sure Judah would not need dinner.

“How’s your abba?” her mother asked.

“I think he’s better. He ate some food and he’s sleeping now. Please call me if you need help. I love you and will come as soon as I can. But we need to be going now or we will be late for dinner.”

She and Judah walked home, and she heard all about Judah’s time with Grandmother. But Dinah’s mind was far away, and she wondered how her abba’s life would change. She kept replaying what had been said. She knew that she had seen something incredible happen today and she could hardly wait to share it with Manasseh and their group tonight.



Manasseh was late getting home from teaching at the Christian School and was preoccupied. Judah kept trying to tell him that they had walked to visit Grandfather and Grandmother, but Manasseh asked him to play outside and let him concentrate. It was hard to work at the living room table when he was used to the peace and quiet of the old schoolhouse. As the sun got closer to the horizon, he finally stood and put away his schoolwork and told Dinah that he was ready to leave for group. She told Junos they were leaving and the three of them headed to Dan’s house.

“Manasseh?”

“Yes?”

“I wanted to talk with you this afternoon. I hurried home so that we could talk before group.”

“I’m sorry. I needed to get my lessons prepared for school tomorrow. You know that I am struggling to keep up with so many students. It’s a lot of work. I really miss having a quiet place to work in the afternoons.”

“Manasseh, I need to know whether to share my news with the group, or wait and tell you first,” said Dinah.

“You are certainly free to share with the group anything that is on your heart,” said Manasseh. But Dinah could tell that his mind was still on school, and he was not paying attention. She quickly prayed for wisdom to know whether and when to share. She felt sad that they couldn’t have shared it privately first. But it was more than that. She missed Basha. Basha would have been so thrilled. She would have been jumping up and down with praise for what God had accomplished. And she missed Mordecai. He would understand what a big deal this was. He had known her dad back in Jerusalem when everyone called him Simon the Pharisee, a title he bore proudly.

She wasn’t sure she would even share with the group. She just felt exhausted and deflated. As they joined the group at the tables, Eve asked if everything was okay. Dinah’s eyes filled with tears, and she explained that she had won a major spiritual victory today, and now she was just feeling sad and down and she didn’t know why. Eve squeezed her hand and assured her that it was pretty common. Dinah thanked her, and the group began to sing some songs of praise and a Psalm, then settled in the living area. Manasseh shared that he was feeling overwhelmed with school and asked for prayers. Others were struggling at work. There were no questions about the messages over the weekend and still Dinah didn’t feel ready to share. Eve spoke up. “Dan, would you remind us of the depression that can come after a great spiritual victory. I’m thinking of Elijah, I think. I get him confused with Elisha.”

“No, you are right. It was Elijah. Elijah was a great prophet in Israel. He arranged a showdown with the prophets of Baal — a pagan god. On this one day, God showed Himself to be the One True God and Elijah killed 450 prophets of Baal. It was a tremendous victory for Elijah and for God. Then in the very next chapter of I Kings, we read in the manuscript these words:

He himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness. He came to a broom bush, sat down under it and prayed that he might die. “I have had enough, LORD,” he said. “Take my life...”

“Now, God did not fuss at him or criticize him. He told him to get a good night’s rest and then he sent angels to feed him and told him to rest some more. In other words, sometimes our deepest valleys come because we become exhausted from fighting for God. God loves you. Don’t get down on yourself. Sometimes the fight is exhausting, and you just need to rest and heal. Let’s divide into groups of twos or threes and pray for each other.”

Eve took Dinah as her partner, and they walked to the back of the house so they wouldn’t be overheard. All Dinah felt like sharing was just that she had gotten to share with her abba today and she felt he had really listened. “Oh, Dinah. That’s great news. But I imagine that you are exhausted. That would be incredibly hard to witness to your own abba.”

“Yes, it was. I need time to process it. I thought I wanted to share it with everyone, but then I just got so depressed realizing that I’ll never be able to tell Basha. She was such a help to us.”

“Remember, we will all be in Heaven together someday and she’ll do her happy dance there. I know she would be thrilled to know about your getting to share with your abba.”

“Thank you, Eve. God has been so good to me even though I refused to acknowledge that I knew Him for all those years.”

“He loves you, Dinah. And now He’s using you to impact others! I’m so proud of you.”

“Thank you, sister. I just wish my daughter, Martha, would decide to accept Him as her Messiah. But she’s shutting me out and won’t talk about it. The only thing she says is that she won’t make any decision without Enos. I think I’m tired. I just want to crawl in my mat and sleep for a long, long time.”

“Let me pray for the Holy Spirit to strengthen you.”

Dinah didn’t tell Manasseh until Friday afternoon. She wanted his full attention and didn’t want to rush. As she told him, he began to weep with her. He apologized for being too distracted to hear her good news. He asked if they should go to the Sabbath night dinner. “I don’t think so. I would like for him to apologize to you for his publicly humiliating you at the baptism. I mean, spitting in a man’s face is pretty low.”

“Hey, at least he didn’t kill me! I feel very grateful,” assured Manasseh.

“You handled it so well, and I know that I need to let you lead us. If you want to go, I guess I’m willing, but I feel that we’ll know better if this is for real if he invites us back,” said Dinah. “I will plan to visit with him and Mother on Tuesday if the weather holds.”

Chapter 20

As Priest Mahlon and Priest Elkanah entered the synagogue it was disheartening to see that there were only five other men on the main floor. Priest Mahlon asked Isaac to lead them in the singing of some Psalms. They sang, but the large, almost-empty room seemed to just absorb their voices and it echoed with sadness. Before Priest Mahlon could begin his message, Simon rose to indicate that he wanted to speak. Priest Mahlon felt fear rip through his entire being. He knew when Simon spoke, there would be hurtful words, and they were often directed at him. He acknowledged Simon and took a place on the floor.

Simon slowly walked to the front and took the priest's seat. He carefully chose his words. "I am of all men most blessed," he said quietly. "After all the horrible things that I have done, Jehovah has forgiven me and set me free from my sins. Last week Priest Mahlon taught us from the Psalms, and it brought back memories of things that happened in Jerusalem. Enos and Isaac, you are too young to remember, but your dads know what I'm talking about. We knew Jesus. We saw the miracles that He did. We knew that He was the Messiah. But our leaders insisted that we would lose our power and prestige and authority if we allowed Him to live, so we crucified Him." Everyone sat amazed at what they were hearing. It was totally quiet as if no one dared to breathe. "We crucified the Messiah sent by Jehovah for the payment of our sins. Every drop of His blood was shed because it took every drop to cover mine. I knew He was the Messiah, but I denied Him. I rejected Him. And I killed and ordered to be killed anyone who did otherwise. I even authorized the killing of my two best friends without any feelings of remorse. The only thing that was important to me was my power and authority. But this past week, I asked Jehovah to forgive me. Now the only way He could do that was if I accepted His Messiah, Jesus. So, I did." Then Simon stood and made his way back to his place and sat on the floor with the other men.

Priest Mahlon realized that he needed to respond. Suddenly, he knew what his response should be. "My beloved synagogue, I have placed you above Jehovah. I have placed honor to my dad, Priest Othniel, above Jehovah. And today I repent." He knelt before the other men and prayed aloud, "Jehovah God, my Creator and Almighty God, You have decreed that no man can stand righteous in Your eyes and that we must have a Messiah to rescue us from our sins. In Your great love, You sent Jesus to be that Messiah, but I refused to listen or to see because I valued other things above You. That is idolatry. My desire is to repent and be in a right relationship with You. I acknowledge that I have known for a long time that Jesus was the Messiah You sent to pay for my sins and the sins of my people. Please let Jesus be my Messiah. I come to You and beg You to

forgive me. I want the Holy Spirit to direct my life and I want to be in a right relationship with You.” He stayed on his knees and let the sensation of peace sweep through his entire body. He didn’t know that his face was glowing and the men in the room were staring in awe. Priest Elkanah knelt beside his brother and prayed a similar prayer. Then one by one the other men began to kneel and pray.

As the room became quiet and there was a tangible feeling of peace and love and joy permeating the room, Japheth stood and Priest Mahlon acknowledged him. “This is heresy. You should all be stoned or crucified. You have indeed dishonored not only your father, but your ordination as a priest. I knew if we came to a foreign land, you would be the first to fall for pagan beliefs. You’ve always been weak! If I could, I would throw you all out, but since it seems that I am outnumbered, I will leave. Let me know when you have come to your senses.” He looked toward the balcony and yelled, “Zipporah, come!” And with that he marched out of the synagogue.

Enos also stood and walked out. All he could feel was absolute chaos. Everything that he had believed, everything he thought he knew was turned upside-down. He considered himself an intelligent man, but now he was faced with irrational behavior that didn’t fit his understanding. He left the synagogue and paced around the courtyard. He suddenly realized that Martha was still inside and knew that that would be a problem. He entered the synagogue and walked up the stairs to the women’s area. He looked around and took in the women hugging and crying together. He quietly called for Martha and she quickly brought baby Nehemiah with her. He was grateful that he detected no hesitancy in her obedience. Maybe she hadn’t been mesmerized by this heresy. As they left the synagogue together, they could hear them singing Psalms.



That afternoon, Manasseh was reviewing the portion of Matthew’s manuscript that he would be reading, when Dinah’s parents arrived. As Simon walked toward Manasseh, he began to weep and beg Manasseh to forgive him for disgracing him at his baptism. Manasseh surrounded him with a hug and assured him that he understood and that all was forgiven. It was a beautiful moment that Dinah would never forget. It was a moment that she never expected to see, and she marveled at what Jehovah had done for her and her family. *Now, if You will just bring Martha and Enos to Yourself, my family will be complete.* Tears filled her eyes as she prayed for her daughter and son-in-law to recognize Jesus as Messiah. Jacob carried cushions out to the yard for his grandparents and welcomed them to the group. Judah was so excited to have his grandparents there. He sat at their feet and answered their questions when he could. Others began arriving. Manasseh and Dinah were hearing bits and pieces of the news that was being shared throughout the group. Yanis and Jenay

were introduced to Simon and Esther and welcomed them. They exchanged glances and wondered if they were headed into trouble.

When Manasseh got everyone's attention, he asked if Priest Mahlon would mind coming and explaining what had happened at the synagogue this morning. Priest Mahlon asked Simon if he wanted to share it himself, but Simon indicated that he was fine with the priest telling the news.

"I am rejoicing that many in our synagogue have accepted Jesus as our Messiah. We are still missing two families. Japheth and Enos chose to leave. The rest of us have all asked Jesus to be our Messiah." A great shout went up from the group and Dinah and Manasseh fell to their knees in prayer. Someone began to lead them in singing a Psalm of thanksgiving to God, and everyone was hugging and encouraging each other. Yanis and Jenay felt so privileged to be present and allowed to see this healing of the synagogue. Dinah's heart felt that it would break in two. *O Great Jehovah, how can I rejoice when my daughter has rejected you? Oh, God, lead them to You. Lead them to You. I cannot bear being separated from her for all eternity. I cannot bear it. Thank You for my parents and the rest of our friends. I don't want to be ungrateful, but my daughter and her husband — oh, Father, bring them to You.* Hannah came and put her arms around Dinah and together they wept for their children and little Nehemiah. The men were surrounding Simon with questions and sharing his joy. Bilbah and Esther were being surrounded by Esther's grandchildren and the joy was heaped up, pressed down, and running over, as Jesus would say it. But Dinah and Hannah felt such a deep sadness.

Manasseh finally stood and wiped his face with his sleeve. "I don't know if I can top that announcement or whether we should just stop here. Please continue to pray for the other two families." Dinah noted that he spoke with confidence, and she resolved to believe with him that soon Enos and Martha would realize the Truth and come to know Jesus as their Messiah. Manasseh continued, "Welcome to everyone. We have been reading through the life of Jesus as written by the Apostle Matthew. Yanis, would you mind introducing yourself and reading this passage from Matthew chapter 4 and explaining it to us? I don't think I can talk," he said as he choked up again and went to put his arms around Joel and Joab.

Yanis took the scroll from Manasseh and quickly scanned the passage. Because he had never read the manuscript, he was unfamiliar with it. As the group got settled, he looked up and said, "I am Yanis. My wife and I traveled with Jesus while He was on earth and personally witnessed His healings and miracles, as well as His resurrection. For those of you who have just asked Jesus to be your Messiah, you should be listening for the Holy Spirit to speak to you. Sometimes, it is a little hard to hear, but soon you'll recognize His voice and learn to be obedient. King David said, 'I delight to do Thy will, O my God,' and that should be our desire. Following in obedience brings incredible joy and peace and helps us to become more and

more like Jesus. The reason the Apostle Matthew wrote this manuscript was so you could learn more about Jesus — Who He was, what He taught, what He did, and how you can be in a right relationship with God. Mr. Simon, you may remember Matthew as Levi the tax gatherer. He was quite well-known to many in Jerusalem before he became a follower of Jesus.” Simon nodded and acknowledged that he knew him well. “Let’s read this last section of Chapter 4:

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people. News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those suffering severe pain, the demon-possessed, those having seizures, and the paralyzed; and he healed them. Large crowds from Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and the region across the Jordan followed him.

“I can’t think of any disease or condition that I didn’t see Jesus heal during our time together. One thing I can tell you that you might not know. I know you’ve seen what leprosy does to the body and how it eats off the skin and just leaves bare bones. When it says that Jesus healed the leper, what He actually did is totally restore them to new. Because He is our Creator, He would touch the places the leprosy had destroyed and make it completely whole. I was always fascinated by that — especially when He restored their faces. It was amazing to watch.”

Several began to ask questions. “So, He healed Gentiles, too?” “Where is Decapolis?” “Did He actually touch Gentiles?”

“Okay,” said Yanis, “let me see if I heard all those. Yes, Jesus loves Gentiles as much as He loves Jews. Remember that the Israelites were chosen by Jehovah to produce the Messiah and He was born into the tribe of Judah, a descendant of King David. Both Joseph, his adopted abba, and Mary, his mother, were of the ruling tribe of Judah. Now, even though the Jews were chosen to produce the Messiah, Jesus probably spent more time with the Gentiles than He did with the Jews because so many of the Jews followed the High Priest and Sanhedrin that opposed Him. So, yes, He associated with the Gentiles. He healed them. He cared for them and loved them just as He does today. As you know, most of Galilee is made up of Gentiles. Someone asked where Decapolis is. Galilee is on the west side of the Sea of Galilee and Decapolis is on the east side. It is almost entirely made up of Gentiles. We traveled with Jesus into this area and many, many believed that He was the Messiah sent by Jehovah. You are now located in an area that is predominately Gentile and it will be important that you learn to love Gentiles the way Jesus did. For some of you that will be a new experience. I know I had problems accepting it as I traveled with Jesus and again when Jenay

and I began to fellowship with them in Capernaum. Remember I was raised to be a priest in the Pharisaical tradition, but Jehovah made it clear to me that He loves every single person that He created — and that's everyone. Do you have any other questions or any that I missed?"

"So, you associate with Gentiles?" asked Priest Mahlon. When Yanis said yes, he asked, "Do you eat with them?"

"Oh, yes. Jesus, the Messiah, fulfilled the Law and we no longer are under its restrictions. Now, we follow the direct instructions from the Holy Spirit and He will teach you to love and fellowship with Gentiles. I do not eat anything containing blood or offered to idols, but there is nothing that can make you unclean except rejecting Jesus." Yanis took a few more questions and then turned it back over to Manasseh.

"We look forward to meeting with you again next week. We'll continue learning more about Jesus and get into some of His teachings. That is my favorite part of the manuscript. Stay as long as you wish to visit, but that concludes our meeting for today. Jehovah God, my heart is running over with praise to You for bringing us all together. Please especially speak to the hearts of the two families that have chosen not to follow You. Please restore them to us. Please bless us this coming week and help us learn to love as You loved. In Jesus' name."

Everyone began talking and hugging again. Several of the men surrounded Yanis and brought him their questions. The women were bombarding Yanis with questions and Dinah was hugging her two daughters-in-law. Deep inside, all she could hear was her heart crying for Martha. Quickly, she shut out her pain and focused on her surroundings. Dinah reminded them to welcome Grandmother Esther and Bilbah.



At the Leadership Team meeting, Yanis reported what he had seen and heard at Manasseh's group on Sabbath afternoon. The men were praising Jehovah. But they were also thinking about their future. "So, will they all be coming into the Christian Worship Center? We will need to add even more groups and we are short of space and leadership. Once the rains begin, we'll have to shut down the Amphitheater group and we need to get serious about building another building."

"What size synagogue is it? Could it be renovated to accommodate some of our people?" asked Yanis. There was a lot of discussion as to whether they would be comfortable with the Gentiles and whether it would work. Lamech reminded them that it had worked before since their current meeting space was once a synagogue.

"It looks quite large from the outside. I've never been inside. It looks like a traditional synagogue, so I assume it has a balcony. If it

were opened up so that everyone could see and hear, it could probably be used by both men and women,” reported Jonathan.

“How many do you think it would hold?” asked Yanis.

“I’m guessing, maybe 200. How many are there of them?” asked Jonathan.

“There were approximately fifty at Manasseh’s on the Sabbath and they said that was the entire group, but probably half of them are already attending here,” responded Yanis. “I would be glad to talk with Manasseh and the priest about it this week if you would like.”

“Yes, let’s do that. You talk with them and find out what their plans are, and let’s discuss it again next week. Wow! Simon the Pharisee and the whole synagogue — God is accomplishing great things. We just need leadership, but I must trust Him to provide,” stated Jonathan.

“Isn’t your baby due soon? It seems we always have a growth spurt right around that time.” All the men laughed and questioned whether it was connected.

“Yes, I guess so. But the baby is not due for another month. Hopefully, we’ll be a little more settled by then.”

“Jonathan, when can we meet to talk about a leadership plan that I have used in the past?” asked Yanis.

“Why don’t you give us a summary if you can do that briefly and we’ll begin to pray about it tonight unless someone else has something we need to discuss.” Everyone agreed that they would like to hear Yanis’ strategy.

“Okay, the best way I know to describe it is to give you a hypothetical situation. Let’s say, for instance, that Jenay and I invite twelve of these new believers from Manasseh’s group and spend five weeks teaching them the absolute basics of what it means to follow Jesus. At the end of five weeks, we baptize those that are ready and on the seventh week we divide into six teams and encourage them to each invite six couples to their homes for the class. We continue to meet with the original twelve and teach them the same material again for them to pass on to their groups. So, at that point you have me and Jenay and twelve people, plus their six groups, which would be approximately seventy-two people — each one trained for leadership of the basics. After several rotations and all are comfortable with teaching the basic class, we begin teaching them from Matthew’s manuscript so that they can learn more about Jesus, and every eight weeks you are growing more and more leaders. That’s a program designed by a Jewish man in Cana to reach Gentiles and then I used it in Capernaum to reach both Jews and Gentiles. It is now being used all over the known world including Jerusalem.”

Suddenly Yanis was bombarded with questions and Jonathan just sat back and thought about how good Jehovah was. *This is exactly what we need. But it still doesn’t solve the building problem. We are still going to be forced to build more places to worship even if the synagogue will tide us over for a little bit. If Antioch is going to be reached for Jesus, we need places to gather. Is that a good use of*

funds? We can't stretch much farther, and people are uncomfortable. Some are even being turned away for worship and fellowship times. Yes, I must address it soon. He sighed heavily and the other men noticed. "Jonathan, are you having some questions or misgivings about this plan?"

"Oh, no! I trust Yanis completely. If he says it will work, then I'm completely supportive. No. My mind is on where we will put all these people to worship. I think we need to begin looking for land immediately and start building. Even if we get to use the synagogue, I'm seeing a gigantic harvest that will need a place to worship during the rainy season."

"Or maybe we only worship together on sunshiny Sabbaths!" said Lucius. "If everyone is meeting in groups then we may not be able to provide places other than the homes. Maybe the individual groups could meet for worship on the Sabbaths when we can't meet outdoors."

More discussion followed. Jonathan asked Dan to lead them in prayer and they were dismissed. It had been another late night and Jonathan was exhausted.



Immediately, after school, Yanis and Manasseh walked to the synagogue to see if they could find Priest Mahlon and Priest Elkanah. They sat down and spent some time rejoicing over what God was doing in the synagogue. "I needed to meet with you to talk about some of the things that were discussed in the Christian Worship Center Leadership meeting last night. This can stay confidential between just the four of us, but they asked if you would pray about it. I'll be available to discuss it with you and answer any questions." Yanis then explained the dilemma the Christian Worship Center was facing as they tried to provide a place for all the New Way followers to worship and fellowship. He saw the excitement on the faces of the priests and Manasseh. They asked if they could discuss it on Sabbath morning with the synagogue and let Yanis answer any questions on Sabbath afternoon, but they gave their approval for the discussion to take place. The synagogue belonged to the people, and Priest Mahlon felt strongly that it should be their decision.

"I was actually wondering if we should take down our synagogue sign and change it to the New Way or something. But we could become The Christian Worship Center West or something like that."

"I hadn't thought about it, but where are we going to meet for our group when the rains start?" asked Manasseh.

"Well, we can certainly meet at the synagogue," said Priest Mahlon. "I don't see a problem with that at all. The only problem I see is letting the men and women sit together in family groups and allowing Gentiles to worship with us. Those will be the major questions. I don't know whether everyone is ready for that just yet. But

let's see what God arranges. More surprising things than that have happened this past week!" Yanis left the meeting feeling good about the future.

Yanis and Jenay visited the synagogue for worship on Sabbath morning. It felt good to be back in the old familiar design of their childhoods. Yanis sat on the main floor with the men, and Jenay went upstairs with the women and children. Jenay was shocked at what a small group was present. Ephram and Judah were the only children except for the two babies. Most of the young people attended the Christian Worship Center. Japheth and Enos and their wives did not attend. Simon and Manasseh sat together with Joab, Jethro, and Isaac. Dinah sat with her mother, Nancy, Abigail, and the two babies. Bilbah sat with Isaac's wife and newborn. Jenay learned that Priest Elkanah's wife had died in childbirth with their first child, and he had never remarried.

After Isaac had led the synagogue in a Psalm, Priest Mahlon shared the proposal with them. There were several questions and some of them were referred to Yanis. Everyone realized that this would be a major change and the synagogue would never be the same small intimate group again. But they all agreed that God was moving them to embrace the new and let the Holy Spirit guide them. Priest Mahlon dismissed them with prayer and asked that they discuss it together as families and there would be another time for questions at Manasseh's group this afternoon at the eighth hour.

Manasseh and Dinah invited Yanis and Jenay to walk home with them and visit until time for group. Dinah had never met a woman who was so included in her marriage. It fascinated her that Yanis and Jenay were fully partners in life. Yanis treated his wife as if her questions and suggestions were valid and even vital. Dinah wanted to spend more time with them because their marriage was so attractive.

Soon the others began to arrive, long before the eighth hour. Once everyone was present, Priest Mahlon was invited to present the proposal again. There were more questions and occasionally Yanis would need to answer. Priest Mahlon asked Simon if they could vote on synagogue matters when they were not at the synagogue. "Of course, we decide things at my house all the time."

So Priest Mahlon asked for everyone to stand who was in favor of renovating the synagogue into the West Christian Worship Center and making it open to all – Jews and Gentiles. "By standing you are agreeing to fellowship equally with all of God's people." Everyone stood.



Yanis and Jenay couldn't wait to tell Jonathan the news. They explained their need to leave before the post-Sabbath meal and rushed to Jonathan's home to let them know. They discussed some details and Jonathan promised to talk with Elam and Dan about checking on needed renovations and reporting to the Leadership

Team. They discussed leadership for the worship time at the new West Center. Jonathan asked if Yanis would consider being the shepherd or overseer for this Center. It would have to be approved by the Leadership Team but would be a real asset since they would obviously grow, and Jonathan couldn't adequately pastor so many people. "Jesus only pastored about a hundred and twenty of us and focused on the twelve. How can I pastor nearly 500 people?"

"Jesus said that with the indwelling Holy Spirit we would do greater things than He did," Yanis reminded him.

"I guess, but I'm stretched to the limit now. I don't feel I'm giving adequate spiritual care to anyone."

"I think if we get the groups trained to not just be followers, but to be leaders, you will see a great decrease in their dependence on you. They will always come to you for big things, but you won't be having to deal with as much," said Yanis compassionately. "And maybe we'll have time to go fishing!"

"Oh no!" cried Susanna. Then she quickly explained. "Jonathan always decided to go fishing with Josie just when my babies were due. I guess we can't break tradition!" Everyone laughed. "I think Jehovah is sending this one in the winter so that he can't go!"



Gideon, Nahum, Dan, and Jacob, along with other volunteers, quickly renovated the existing synagogue and turned it into the West Christian Worship Center. Within two weeks, the synagogue had been completely transformed and was filled with life.

Manasseh's group had begun to meet immediately after the worship service. When they finished reading through the Apostle Matthew's manuscript, Yanis invited them to a class that would train them to share the New Way with others. He offered the class to the first twelve people who signed up, and the class had filled immediately. He apologized for being able to accept only twelve but explained that the next group would start in two months. Everyone seemed eager to be included.



"Priest Elkanah, Bilbah, what a nice surprise, please come in. What brings you out on such a windy day?" Jenay sent Ephram to his room since it was too cold to play outside.

"We are glad to catch you at home. Is this a good time to talk?" asked Priest Elkanah.

"Certainly. We always have time for a good visit!" said Yanis.

Bilbah, Priest Othniel's widow, spoke. "When I heard of the need for property for more followers of Jesus, the Holy Spirit began to place

a desire in my heart for a much smaller house. I live in a very large mansion that could be renovated. It is almost as large as the synagogue and is two full stories.”

“Oh, Bilbah, are you sure you would want to give it up?” asked Jenay.

“It is such a waste of space. We have many, many servants, and I really only need one couple — one man to do the outside and heavy work and one woman to cook and clean and care for my needs. I already know the couple I want to keep. The others can be set free. But that’s not all. Elkanah can tell you the rest.”

“When Mother talked with me, I admitted to her that the Holy Spirit was also encouraging me to sell my house and move in with her to help out. My wife passed a long time ago and I have no children. When she told me her idea, I suggested we pray about purchasing a house for the two of us and maybe three servants, and then we could donate our land and two houses to the Worship Center. We could sell off the furnishings and have enough to purchase a small home if we can find one. You see, our houses are located side by side and are identical. If they were combined, it would provide even more space for the Christian Worship Center. We were just wondering if you would make our offer to the Leadership Team.”

“Oh my. What a generous offer. And you have prayed about this and are certain that this is where you are being led?”

“Yes. But we need to locate a small house in the area, and I don’t know if that is possible.”

“While you start looking, I’ll present this proposal to the Leadership Team. They have been unable to find vacant property that is close to the city center. Where are your homes located?”

“They are right behind the bank on the Main Street and not far from the synagogue. Oops! I mean the West Christian Worship Center. Yanis, we are so enjoying the worship times there. It is good to see so many people attending and worshipping Jehovah together,” said Bilbah.

“Yes, it is good. I am blown away by your offer and will keep an eye out for housing. I think you would need something a little larger than this because this only has two sleeping areas. You would need at least four. Do you want a guest room?”

“No. We don’t entertain that much, and Mahlon and Isaac have extra room. Thank you for helping us look, and shalom. We need to get back before sunset and it turns colder.”

“Shalom.” Yanis and Jenay sat in shock. This would be an incredible blessing to the Worship Center.

Chapter 21

The winter brought many changes in Antioch. Jonathan and Susanna welcomed a fourth son into their growing family. And Jonathan was busier than ever.

Yanis had just started the leadership training classes with twelve of Manasseh's group. The Leadership Team had agreed that it would be just what they needed. But when Yanis offered to teach the Team, he was told that they had no time to spare for it. After much discussion, they agreed that if Yanis would cover the teaching material during their regular Leadership meeting time, they would try it for the seven weeks. Yanis would teach it and then they would pass it on to their existing groups. He assured them that as their people became trained, they could cut back on the number of groups they needed to lead. Yanis was amazed that some of the men were leading five different groups each week. He could not imagine the stress they must be feeling. After much discussion and prayer, it was decided that they would learn the material during their regular meeting time and share it with all their existing groups over the next week. This would not be starting with a group of twelve, this would be jumpstarting thirty-three groups all at once.



When Yanis shared Priest Elkanah's and Bilbah's offer, the Team was amazed at the way God was at work in the hearts of the people. Within weeks, Elam was supervising volunteers to help with the building project of the Antioch Christian Worship Center. He, or one of his sons, was there to supervise the volunteers each morning. Dan supervised in the afternoons, and Jacob supervised for a couple of hours in the evening. The work was progressing quickly, but the weather was hampering the joining of the two houses. That would have to wait until the rains stopped.

Priest Elkanah and his mother, Bilbah, had found a lovely home not too far from their old homes and were happily enjoying time together. They were both signed up for the classes that Yanis was teaching.

Yanis and Jenay led Manasseh and Dinah and ten others of their friends through the five classes. They taught them about baptism, but everyone agreed to wait until spring, when it would be warmer, to plan a baptism service. They spent the seventh week discussing who would be invited for the second class and realized that they would be able to invite more people than they currently knew. Their first priority was making sure everyone from the original synagogue was invited, then they would need to invite their neighbors and co-workers. Yanis and Jenay watched in delight as the new leaders eagerly took on this assignment and opened their doors to everyone — Jew and Gentile.



Jonathan was setting aside time each week for Yanis to teach the Leadership Team after they had completed any pressing business. They were passing on the class material to their already existing groups. Everyone was amazed at how simple and concise the teaching about Jesus was. At the end of the first eight weeks, they formed fifteen new groups.

In the meantime, Yanis had realized that if all of these new groups were going to study the Apostle Matthew's manuscript, they would need a lot of copies. He secured the Leadership Team's permission to hire Priest Mahlon, Priest Elkanah, Priest-in-Training Isaac, and himself to make copies of the manuscript. Manasseh and Nathan helped them after school for a couple of hours most days and the work progressed quickly.

In only a few months, Jonathan discovered that he could turn over most of his groups to other leaders and focus primarily on teaching the large gatherings. Since the Leadership Team helped with those, Jonathan was finally able to minister in his own home and help Susanna with raising their family. By the start of the new year, Jonathan was happier than he had been in years. He felt he could fulfill what God had called him to do, without constantly running.



"Dad, I need your help with something. Could we talk?" asked Jacob. It had been two years since Manasseh's life-changing baptism service that had cascaded into major changes for their family and synagogue. Now, there were three Christian Worship Centers and Jacob was helping to build a fourth on the north side of Antioch. Manasseh assumed Jacob was needing help with a project related to the new construction.

"Certainly," replied Manasseh absently.

"Could we talk on the rooftop?" asked Jacob.

"Oh, you mean talk ... alone. Sure. Always." For the past two years, Manasseh and Dinah's marriage had grown so that she was fully included and it surprised Manasseh that Jacob wanted a man-to-man talk without Mother. He led Jacob to the rooftop and asked the servant to bring them some juice. "So how can I help you?"

"Dad, I've prayed a lot about this, and I am sure of it, but I don't know where to start."

"Okay. Why don't you start at the beginning and clue me in as to what we're talking about."

“We’re talking about Rachel,” said Jacob.

“Ooooooh,” said Manasseh. “Elam’s daughter?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And what about Rachel?”

“Dad, you know. I want to marry her. I’m a full partner at the Carpenter’s Shop and I have saved enough to purchase a house. Do you talk with Elam first, or do I?”

“I’m not sure how Christians do it, but traditionally, I would approach him first. Have you spoken to Rachel?”

“No, sir. I thought I wasn’t supposed to,” said Jacob.

“No, you are not. I will speak to Elam and then if he is interested, they will invite you over to dinner. And if everyone is satisfied that you two would make a good couple, you will become espoused, and we’ll start planning a wedding. How does that sound?” asked Manasseh.

“Good, but how long do we have to wait for the wedding?”

“That depends on how fast you can secure the house and be able to support her. But it also depends on when they feel the bride is ready. I was espoused to your mother for a full year. But times are changing. You’ll just have to work it out with Elam. I’ll talk with him after school tomorrow. And son, I think you’ve made a wise choice. I’ll be praying that Elam and Angela agree.”

“Thanks, Dad.”

“You are all grown up and ready for marriage. Where has the time gone?! Parenting a middle child has been interesting. You are so independent, I never know what’s on your mind.”

“Sorry for the surprise. But I am seventeen, run my own business, and soon will have a home. I need to hire a couple of servants.”

“You’ll also need espousal gifts for Rachel and her parents.”

“Yeah, I’ve already started on those. I know I probably shouldn’t have, but I feel pretty certain that the Holy Spirit is leading me.”

“Let’s go join the rest of the family unless there is something else.”

“Sure, but please don’t tell them until it’s settled,” begged Jacob. He didn’t want his older brothers teasing him.



Grandfather Simon and Grandmother Esther were thoroughly enjoying hosting the wedding. The food was kosher and Eliphaz’ musicians were playing the traditional Jewish music, but the crowd was a mixture of Jews and Gentiles from the three Christian Worship Centers. Elam had agreed that Rachel was ready for marriage and that Jacob was able to support her, so he had not made them wait for a long espousal. Yanis was leading the wedding ceremony and Jonathan was just a guest although he and Susanna were often seated at the main table because of their long-time friendship with Elam and Angela.

Jonathan let his mind wander back to the first time he had met Simon the Pharisee in Jerusalem. He never imagined sitting in his courtyard enjoying sweet fellowship with him. *Jesus, did You know then that this day would happen?* His mind began to wonder when Zebedee would begin to consider marriage and starting a family. He wondered what woman he would choose but was interrupted by another guest who wanted to talk.

“Oh, hello Kostakis. Come and sit. I’m just taking a break from all this dancing. I think I’m getting old.”

“I know my feet are! This is quite a wedding!”

“Yes, I’ve always heard that Simon threw a good party. He’s very generous with his friends and family. He reminds me of you. You have been such a good friend to me and Susanna.”

“And you two have been such a blessing to us. I wanted to let you know that Paul and Silas have returned from their trip. I invited them to join us for the Leadership Meeting. I hope that was okay. We are still meeting, even with the wedding, right?”

“Yes, that was what everyone decided. The Leadership Team should all be there except for Elam. When did they return?”

“Just last night and they had walked from Jerusalem, so will need a few days to rest,” said Kostakis. He had hosted Paul and Silas and others of their friends on previous visits.

“Is Peter with them?”

“No, they haven’t mentioned Peter, but they brought two other men that are apparently traveling with them.”

“Are you comfortable hosting everyone?”

“Oh, that’s no problem. You know that Irini and I have plenty of room and love to host guests.”

“That’s good. My house is getting rather tight.”

“Yes, Jehovah has blessed you!”

“Kostakis, should I be encouraging Zebedee to leave the nest?” asked Jonathan.

“I don’t think so. Jehovah has a way of doing that at the right time,” replied Kostakis, whose sons were all grown.

“Good, because I don’t want any of them to ever leave!” confessed Jonathan.

“They grow up fast, don’t they?” The two men sat in silent companionship watching the festivities around them.



On Thursday, Jonathan, Susanna, and the children again attended the wedding for Jacob and Rachel at Simon’s house. Right after dinner, Jonathan and the other nine men left to attend the Leadership Team meeting. As they walked to Jonathan’s office, they were joined by Paul and Silas and their two friends, Luke and Timothy. They received an enthusiastic welcome and everyone was eager to hear the report of their most recent ministry trip. And everyone wanted

to catch them up with all the happenings at the Christian Worship Centers. Paul and Silas expressed great pleasure in their continued growth.

Once everyone had assembled and they had sung a Psalm and a song of praise, Jonathan welcomed the travelers and asked Paul to introduce his friends and to give his report. Paul asked about Mordecai and was told of his passing. He also asked about Barnabas and John Mark and heard that they had left soon after them heading to Cyprus. "We haven't heard anything from them yet," reported Manaen.

Paul stated, "Our friends have joined us in the ministry. Barnabas led Luke to accept Jesus as his Messiah on our first ministry trip. When I returned, I found him to be leading several small groups in Philippi of Macedonia and he was eager to join our ministry team to continue to share the New Way."

"And it was nice to have a doctor traveling with us, since we were often the target of scourgings and stonings," added Silas.

"Our present sufferings are nothing in comparison to the glory that is set before us, Silas. You know that," reprimanded Paul.

"Yes, but it's important for this group to know the truth and understand how best to pray for us," stated Silas.

"Yes, I suppose you are right. Ministry trips are often quite strenuous, to say the least. We were very pleased to find many of the new followers still being faithful, but found that some had been martyred and were already enjoying being with Jesus. We have been traveling for over three years and have seen many, many new followers as a result of this trip. Thank you for your prayers."

"Paul, you forgot to introduce Timothy," reminded Silas.

"Oh, my apologies, Son. Timothy and his mother and grandmother helped us quite a bit on our first ministry trip. Barnabas and I stayed at their home to recover from injuries, and I got to know him then. Timothy was leading several small groups in the Galatian region. He has chosen to join us and has been most valuable since he is a scribe by trade. He was eager to begin a full-time ministry with us. But please, let's focus on what Jehovah is accomplishing here and I don't believe I know this young man."

"And my apologies," said Jonathan. "Yanis is such a vital part of our ministry and I forgot that you did not know him. Yanis is my brother-in-law. Jehovah led him and his family to serve here and specifically to get our leadership training finally sufficient to meet the demands of our growth. He also pastors the two Worship Centers that meet on the west side of Antioch. Which brings us to the primary business at hand.

"Tonight, we were supposed to all be praying about who would pastor the new Worship Center in north Antioch. I would like to hear what the Holy Spirit is saying to you." The men mentioned Manasseh and his son, Jacob, as possibly working together as a team since Jacob was only sixteen and was adjusting to marriage. Everyone agreed that both were ready to lead, but felt that Manasseh was a vital

part of helping Yanis with the western ministries and did quite a bit of teaching there.

“I keep feeling that Giorgio, Demetrius’ son, would make a good pastor. He has taught both a men’s group and a family group and Jehovah has blessed him in both.”

“He is a mature follower and well-educated.”

“Aaron, Lamech’s son, is the man that the Holy Spirit keeps placing on my mind as being the right one for the position.”

“Has Aaron led any groups?”

“Yes, he’s started five or six and then trained other couples to lead them. I believe he is only leading three right now.”

“He also teaches at the market near their home and is very bold in his faith.”

“He has also led the Sunday morning worship service for me a couple of times and it was well received,” stated Jonathan. After no one else mentioned any other names, Jonathan asked if they could just spend the remainder of the time praying for these four men and seeing if the Holy Spirit would clarify who should lead the north Antioch ministry. Jonathan reminded them that there was no rush since the building was not complete. They spent the next hour in prayer and worship. At the end of their time together, they all agreed that Manasseh and Jacob were not the ones, but the men could not determine whether it should be Giorgio or Aaron. They agreed to keep praying and would discuss it again next week.

The following week, the men once again met to discuss the needs of the Christian Worship Centers. Lucius asked, “Would it be possible for the shepherd position for the North Antioch Christian Center to be shared by both of these men? That’s what I’m hearing. I keep asking for God to show me one or the other, and I keep hearing that they both should serve side-by-side.” Several men agreed and all indicated that it was most unusual for there not to be clarity when they were genuinely seeking God’s direction and it was such an important decision. Every man reported that they, too, were feeling that both men were equally qualified but gifted in different ways. After spending more time in prayer, they determined that the Holy Spirit was indeed leading them to ask the men to share the position equally. Jonathan asked if they wanted him to talk with the men initially, or if they wanted to meet with them as a group. They agreed for Jonathan to meet with them personally and ascertain if they were interested in such an assignment. Jonathan felt that they would be, even though he had never broached the subject with them.

On Sabbath afternoon, Jonathan walked to Demetrius’ house and asked to speak with Giorgio. They greeted each other and Jonathan told Giorgio he would like to speak with him about taking on a new group. Giorgio welcomed him in and invited him to the roof. “First of all, I would like to know how you are doing working at Kostakis’ marble quarry. I believe the last I heard was that you and Costas were rooming together, and you were focusing more on supervising the men

and Costas was focusing on the accounting. Is that correct and how is that going?"

"Yes, that's correct. I find it easy to supervise the men even though many of them have worked there a lot longer than I have. But I enjoy getting to know them and learning how to serve them. It gives me an opportunity to really show them that I care. Sometimes, I even get to tell them about Jesus, but most of the time it's just work-focused," said Giorgio, wondering what Jonathan was seeking.

"Giorgio, have you given any thought to spending more time sharing Jesus?"

Giorgio hung his head and said, "Jonathan, you know me well. I am very dissatisfied working for Kostakis. I have no interest in mining marble to make beautiful homes. I have thought about asking the Apostle Paul if I could travel with him on his next trip. I know that Jehovah has blessed me with this good job, but my heart is just not in it. Did Kostakis ask you to talk with me?"

"No, he didn't. He assures me that you are doing excellent work, and this is the first I've heard about you being unhappy."

"Not unhappy, just wondering if this is all that God has planned for me or if I'm missing something," said Giorgio.

"Giorgio, I'm here on behalf of the Leadership Team to ask you to pray about a proposal we have."

"Okay," he said tentatively.

"You know that we are building a new Worship Center on the north side of Antioch." Giorgio nodded. "We need to find the man that God is calling to pastor that Worship Center. The Leadership Team has narrowed it down to two men. We don't know whether that means that one of you will say yes and the other say no, or whether God is calling the two of you to co-pastor and work together to lead the gathering. I'm here to ask you to pray about it and let me know God's answer."

"Jonathan, are you asking me about pastoring that Center?"

"Yes. But we want you to pray about it and know for certain if this is what God is calling you to do."

"I'll tell you right now. If God opens that door, I would gladly run through it. That would be the sweetest job I could possibly imagine. But I want to be absolutely sure that that is His call and not just my own wishes. How do I do that?" asked Giorgio.

"Spend time in prayer until you know for sure. That's all I know to tell you. I'm on my way to talk with the other man, then I'll let you both know whether you'll be a team or not."

"I see that as being a real advantage. I hope, whoever it is, that he is feeling the same call that I am. How do you think Dad and Kostakis will handle this? Do you think they will be disappointed in me?"

"Your dad was thrilled when your name was suggested at the Leadership Meeting. And I had already talked with Kostakis about you. I know he will be excited and proud of you. Don't worry about that!" assured Jonathan. "Shalom."

“Shalom.” Giorgio paced around the rooftop and thought about the possibility of serving as a pastor. *Nothing in the whole world would make me happier. Thank You, Great Jehovah. You are so good to me. Please work this out. But You would have to lead me. I wouldn’t know how to shepherd the people. Help me to trust You with all the details.*

Jonathan knocked on Lamech’s door and greeted his father-in-law. “I’ve come to inquire about Susanna,” Jonathan said seriously. It brought back good memories and never ceased to make them both laugh.

“Come in, come in. And how is my Susanna?” said Lamech. “Is she not with you?”

“No, Lamech, I wanted to talk with Aaron if I could, then I’ll hurry home to her. She’s got her hands full with little Zadok. He’s always into something.”

Lamech looked puzzled. “I hope Aaron is not into something! Are you calling as a big brother or as his pastor?”

“I assure you, it’s all good, and I’m calling as his pastor to see if I can get some more work out of him,” assured Jonathan.

“Let me call him. Why don’t you go up to the rooftop?” Jonathan waited there and soon Aaron joined him. He looked as if he had been sleeping and wasn’t fully awake. Lamech brought them both juice and left them to talk in private.

“I’m sorry I disturbed your Sabbath rest,” began Jonathan. Aaron grinned and admitted that it started out as a good prayer time but ended up in sleep. “Is everything okay, or is there anything I can help you with?” asked Jonathan. He had loved Susanna’s little brothers ever since they had married six years ago.

“Jonathan, how did you know that God was calling you to pastor?” asked Aaron. Jonathan wanted to cry but tried to keep his composure. *God is so good.*

“Actually, my becoming a pastor just happened. Long before I became a man, I knew that I wanted to be like my dad and tell people about Jesus. I had traveled since I was five years old following Jesus, and I realized that so many people had never even heard about Him. My heart yearned to tell them about Him and how He could be their Messiah, too. A week after my thirteenth birthday, Asher and I started walking from Jerusalem to Antioch because we knew for certain that God was calling us here. We didn’t even know where Antioch was. We just kept asking directions until we finally got here. We both found work and started inviting people to come to our house and learn about Jesus. The ministry grew rapidly, and God blessed our crazy efforts. The Holy Spirit led us step by step. It was amazing. Those groups multiplied and the Leadership Team was formed and now we’ve got four different Worship Centers. It certainly wasn’t something that I planned. I just wanted to tell people about Jesus. That still brings me the greatest joy.”

“My dad is going to be heartbroken when I tell him that I don’t want to work full-time with him anymore. I just want to preach in the marketplaces and grow groups.”

“Aaron, let me tell you what I wanted to talk with you about.”

“Okay. Sorry I distracted you,” said Aaron.

“No, it wasn’t a distraction. I think it was a confirmation. The Leadership Team asked me to talk with you and see if you would pray about pastoring the North Worship Center,” said Jonathan trying to suppress a grin.

“No way! Jonathan, are you serious? I mean, yes! Tell them yes! I have no idea what it all means, but yes!” Aaron was practically jumping up and down.

“Would you be willing to share the position with another man?” asked Jonathan.

“That depends,” said Aaron quietly.

“It depends on what?”

“It’s not a pride thing, I promise. I just want to make sure that it’s a man that is truly seeking the Holy Spirit’s way of doing things. If he’s seeking obedience, then I’ll take all the help I can get. Are you talking about equal partners?”

“Yes, depending on what God tells him. But that’s the way the Team is feeling led.”

“Can you give me time to pray?” asked Aaron.

“Certainly, and at this point, that’s all we’re asking. Whenever you and he are ready, we’ll meet and talk more about details. Okay?”

“Thanks, Jonathan. I’ll let you know what I hear. I don’t want to run ahead of God! But this sounds like what He’s placed in my heart.”

“Good. I’ll look forward to hearing from you.”



On Sunday at noon, as Jonathan was preparing to head home to spend the afternoon with Susanna and the children, he greeted Aaron at the door. “Jonathan, I want you to know that I talked with Dad last night and I have his blessings to move into full-time ministry. I want you to know that I am totally convinced that this is where God is leading me.” While they were still talking there was another knock at the door. Jonathan got up and greeted Giorgio.

“I wanted to speak with you alone, but I can come back later,” said Giorgio.

Jonathan stepped outside the door and shut it behind him.

“You have obviously taken off work to come and talk. Does that mean you are already sure of God’s leading one way or another?” asked Jonathan.

“Yes, sir. I am certain that God is calling me to full-time ministry. So certain, I quit my position this morning and told Kostakis that I would be doing full-time ministry somewhere. I don’t know where. If God opens the door on the north side, I would be honored, but there is so much work to be done, I can no longer just sit at the marble quarry and pretend that I don’t see the need,” said Giorgio passionately.

“Come in, please,” invited Jonathan. “Gentlemen, I have talked with both of you, and you have both come to the same conclusion as the Leadership Team. We feel that you two would make an excellent team to lead the north ministry.” Giorgio and Aaron embraced and began to weep as they realized that their lives would be forever changed by this endeavor.

“Partners! A Jew and a Gentile! I can’t imagine a better combination to minister to all,” said Aaron. “I’ve got so many ideas and questions, and my head just won’t quit thinking about all the possibilities.”

“Me, too! I can’t wait to get started. I was thinking we could probably just throw our mats in the office at the construction site and get started tomorrow,” said Giorgio.

“Whoa, guys. I like your enthusiasm. But I’m going to have to ask you to wait until the Leadership Team meets with you. They will want to ask you some questions and you will want to know the details of what they expect before you give a final answer,” said Jonathan.

“No, Jonathan. God has already given me the final answer. Aaron, can you come and stay at my house so that we can start making plans immediately?” asked Giorgio. “We will either work with the Leadership Team, or we will relocate to a different area, but I have no doubts of this, even if we are totally on our own.”

Jonathan was grinning from ear to ear and couldn’t help remembering the enthusiasm that he and Asher felt as they left Jerusalem at age thirteen to follow where they knew God was leading them. “Okay. I expect to see you here immediately after dinner on Thursday.”

The two young men left talking animatedly about what God had already shown them. Jonathan walked home with a spring in his step. It was so good to be reminded that God was at work in all the details.

“You look happy!” commented Susanna as he entered the house and picked up three-year-old Rinnah.

“And why shouldn’t I be?” asked Jonathan as he greeted her and asked about her day. He didn’t feel that he should tell her about Aaron’s new position, since that was her little brother, but she could tell that something exciting had happened and knew that he would eventually tell her. She had learned that as a pastor he couldn’t share everything. She was just glad that whatever had happened had reminded him of how good God was.

Chapter 22

Luke and Yanis quickly became inseparable. Luke moved from Kostakis' house to throw his mat in the office at the Antioch Christian Worship Center, what had once been the priests' homes. He and Yanis were making copies of the manuscript that the Apostle Matthew had written. Jonathan had encouraged them to also consider whether they might want to make some copies of John Mark's manuscript since it was more focused on Gentiles. They began to solicit money to hire more scribes in order to copy additional manuscripts. They had worked together for several months when one afternoon, Luke stood and said that he needed to take a break. "Are you okay?" asked Yanis.

"Yes," said Luke with a puzzled look on his face. "I just need to have some prayer time alone." As he left the room, he walked outdoors to the courtyard and fell on his knees. "Great Jehovah, Your servant is listening."

Before Yanis left at sunset, he checked on Luke and found him still in prayer. He invited him to dinner, but Luke said he needed time alone to pray. He assured Yanis that he would be fine and would see him tomorrow morning.

The next morning, Luke was already working with the other scribes when Yanis arrived. Luke and Yanis took a walk together and Luke shared what he had heard from God. "My friend, things are changing again."

"You have heard from God?"

"Yes, I can't explain it, but I feel that I, too, need to write an account of the life of Jesus while He was on this earth," said Luke.

"But, Luke, you never saw Jesus!" exclaimed Yanis. "How could you write what you did not experience?"

"The message I got from God is that I am to use my scientific background, and interview as many eyewitnesses as I can. Then I am to write a chronological and precise account of His life. I mean, Matthew and John Mark did a great job writing down what they remembered. But the manuscript I would write would be supported by many, many eyewitnesses and make sure that everyone knows that Jesus included all people — Jews and Gentiles, men and women, slave and free. I feel led to record how anyone can invite Him to be their Messiah, and how easy it is. I can't explain it, but I just can't do anything else."

"How can I help you, my friend?" asked Yanis. "You are certainly free to stop copying the manuscripts. I think the scribes that we have hired are making sufficient copies if everyone shares, and we are almost out of money. How will you survive without pay?"

"I received a large sum of money from a friend of mine at home. He asked me to use it to find out more details about Jesus. I wasn't sure what that meant at the time, so I set that bag of silver aside. Now,

I think I see that God has provided everything I need to pursue this assignment,” said Luke.

“That sounds like a good use of the funds. Where would you begin?”

“I have no idea!” said Luke.

“I’ve found that that’s usually where God wants to start!” Both men agreed.

“Luke, did you know that when I first started teaching school, I wrote down as close to a chronological account of Jesus’ life as I could remember? I still have all those notes if you want to read them. They might help you to get started. A lot of them are from my wife’s grandmother who traveled with Jesus and was Mary’s sister. She gave me a lot of background that no one else knew. I don’t want to press this on you, but you are welcome to my notes if it would help.”

“Could we go get them now? I know it’s crazy, but I’ve got to get started,” said Luke. Yanis and Luke walked to Yanis’ home and got the notes. They shared with Jenay what God had called Luke to accomplish and she promised to pray for him. She also invited him to ask her any questions and assured him that she would help in any way that she could.



Giorgio and Aaron had formed an excellent partnership as co-pastors, and the North Christian Worship Center was growing by leaps and bounds. They had purchased two small houses near the Center, and both were praying about God’s timing for marriage. Giorgio had his eye on Teacher Marcos’ daughter who had grown up under Jonathan’s teaching and would make a strong partner for him. And Aaron was hoping that Elam would allow him to take his daughter, Naomi. Both planned to have weddings when the rains stopped near spring.



“Dad, you wanted to see me?”

“Yes, Zerah, we need to talk. Do you have time now, or do I need to schedule an appointment with you?” asked Jonathan grinning.

“Dad, I’ve always got time for you. Shall I meet you on the roof in half an hour? I need to finish my homework.”

“Sure.” These days Zerah was always busy. He went to the Christian School every day, then hurried to Elam’s Carpenter’s Shop to work until sunset. Most of the time he was home for dinner, but usually was helping someone with a project or remodel in the evenings. He fit homework in and from what his rabbis reported, was doing well. The only time Jonathan saw him was on Sabbath afternoons and it seemed he spent more time with his brother Zebedee or with friends.

“Zerah, I want to start by saying how proud I am of you. You have certainly taken on a lot of responsibilities this past year and I know you must have plans concerning your future. I would like to hear what those plans are and see if I could help you in any way, since your birthday is only a month away.”

“Well, I have my scripture memorized already.”

“That’s good. But what are your plans? Have you talked with Elam?”

“No, sir. I haven’t. Dad, I’m not sure where God is calling me, and I don’t want to upset you, but Neri and Adam and I are praying about a ministry trip to the west. We feel that we can support ourselves and we keep hearing about the need for people to teach the New Way. I haven’t ever led a group, but I’ve heard you teach all my life and I feel pretty sure that that’s where God is calling me.”

“And you don’t feel that you can be satisfied working and teaching here in Antioch?”

“I’ve prayed about it, and there’s Christian Worship Centers springing up all over the place. But there’s other places where no one has even heard about Jesus.”

“I know, Son. That’s the way it was when I came to Antioch. As far as I know, Asher and I were the only followers of Jesus in this whole city. Now, look what God has accomplished. If you are sure that God is calling you, I want you to be obedient. I do. But I also know it’s hard to leave everything you have and love and say goodbye to family. I want to encourage you and be there for you. I just remember how very, very hard it was for me.”

“I know it won’t be easy. That’s one reason I’ve tried to stay busy this year. I wanted to get myself ready to leave and accustomed to being alone.”

“Your mother and I have missed you. When does Adam turn thirteen?”

“Next week. Then I’m the last one. We plan to leave the morning after my birthday celebration.”

“I see. I’ll let your mother know. She’ll want to hear all your plans, too. We were thinking about just inviting your class to the party. Since you are leaving, would you like to have more of your friends there? We can do that.”

“No, I think just my class will be plenty. Neri and Adam are included in that group and we’d like to celebrate together, if that’s all right.”

“I think that would be fine. May I pray for you, Son?”

“Certainly.” The two knelt together as Jonathan realized that while his son hadn’t yet turned thirteen, he was already a man and God was speaking and moving in his heart. It was hard to pray without becoming emotional, but this was God’s work, and he didn’t intend to stand in Jehovah’s way. He remembered his own dad’s support and would always be grateful that he encouraged and blessed his ministry even though he was so young.

Long after Zerah had gone to bed, Jonathan stayed on the rooftop to pray. *I thought the hardest part of parenting was when they were babies; now I see that's the easiest part. Letting them follow God on their own has got to be the hardest thing yet. Father, I surrender him totally to you. Please guide him with Your eye upon him. I know that I will see him again in Heaven, but Father, help me to release him to You until then. And help Susanna. She's losing both her son and her little brother, Neri. Father, give her strength. Give me the right words, but You'll have to prepare her heart.*



One month later, Jonathan and Susanna hosted Zerah's thirteenth birthday party. It was larger than they had originally intended, because they had decided to invite the entire Leadership Team to come and pray over the three young men before they left, and one invitation led to another.

After the traditional manhood ceremony, Yanis called Neri and Adam to come and stand with Zerah. With tears streaming down his face, he announced the boys' plans to leave tomorrow morning. The crowd gasped and realized that this was not just a transition-to-manhood party; it was a farewell. The Leadership Team, the parents and their rabbis were all asked to surround the three young men as they prayed for their success in spreading the New Way to those who had never heard.

Early the next morning, Lamech and Jochebed, Asher and Sharon, and their families gathered again at Jonathan's home. They helped the boys hoist their travel bags onto their backs, said a last goodbye, and watched as they walked north into the unknown future. Once they were out of sight, Jonathan and Susanna invited the other two families to sit in the courtyard and visit. The men insisted they needed to get to work, and the ladies lingered only for a little while. Jonathan and Susanna sat alone with their little ones and then began cleaning up the remnants of the party. There were no words left to say, just overwhelming grief, mixed with the absolute assurance that God was at work. Jonathan had always imagined serving side by side with Zerah and dreamed that someday he would turn the leadership over to him. He had always known that Zerah would be in the ministry, but he had not seen this departure coming and it hit hard.



"May I invite myself to dinner so that I can talk with you and Jenay sometime this week?" asked Luke, who knew that he was always welcome.

"Of course. Would tomorrow night work for you?"

On Tuesday at sunset, Luke and Yanis joined Jenay at the table with Enoch and Ephram. “Thank you so much for loaning me your teaching notes. They were exactly what I needed to make a rough outline of the work that needs to be accomplished. I have made a copy of your notes so I can return them to you. I was wondering how many of these eyewitnesses are still alive,” said Luke.

Jenay answered, “My abba and my mother are both in Heaven with Jesus. My grandparents, Zebedee and Salome, and Mary, Jesus’ mother, are with Him. As far as I know some of His half-siblings are still alive in Cana of Galilee. Josie, one of His half-brothers, is probably in Galilee, but another half-brother, James the Just, was in Jerusalem the last we heard. My uncle John, the apostle, and his wife were headed to Ephesus. That’s probably about it.”

“There may still be some apostles in Jerusalem, but most of them have scattered to teach the New Way. And there are others, like us, that traveled with Jesus. There’s Jordan who is in Cana of Galilee and Joel who is in Cyprus. The others have scattered all over the world to tell the good news,” added Yanis.

“What about my cousin David?” asked Jenay. “I haven’t seen him in years, and he’s probably already passed, but he or maybe his children could tell you more about John the Baptizer. They live southwest of Jerusalem.”

“There might be people in Bethlehem who knew them when Jesus was born, but they would have been pretty young if they are still alive.”

“If you think of others, please let me know. I really want to verify each aspect of Jesus’ life and not just get rumors, but actual facts,” said Luke.

“I agree that that would be helpful. And it would verify the details so that it’s not just coming from one person. So, are you planning a trip?” asked Yanis.

“I’ll talk with you two later, if that’s all right,” said Luke, trying to sound casual.

After dinner, Enoch left to teach a men’s group and Ephram was sent to his room. “What’s up, Luke?”

“Yes, I very strongly feel that God is calling me to take this trip. I would like to go to Jerusalem and all the other places that might produce eyewitnesses. As I pray, I keep feeling that you two should accompany me. I will rent an ox and cart so it won’t take forever, but it will still be a major undertaking. And I know you have responsibilities here. Please pray about it and let me know. I would like to leave just as soon as the rains stop and we can travel safely. We’ll need to plan out our route to include everyone that you’ve mentioned and anyone else you can think of.”

“Oh, I just realized that Orly is in Joppa, and he saw Jesus’ first miracle when he turned water into wine for a wedding feast,” said Jenay.

“Isn’t that where the Apostle Peter is?” asked Luke.

“Actually, there’s no telling. He goes wherever God leads. I have no idea if he’s still there or not,” said Yanis. “Now, most of what John Mark wrote is based on what he learned from Peter, so you may not get any new material from him.”

“Okay, that’s good to know. So, pray about it and let me know. I expect a trip like this would take at least three months and I need to clear it with Paul before I just take off.”

“I’ll see you in the morning, but we’ll need to pray about this. Shalom.”

Jenay and Yanis just stared at each other. Finally, Yanis said, “I thought we came to Antioch to work here.”

“We did. We were obedient and He has blessed us abundantly. This wouldn’t be permanently leaving, would it? I mean, Luke intends to come back here, doesn’t he?” asked Jenay.

“That was my impression.”

“We would have to take Ephram out of school.”

“Yes, but he would learn a lot from our travels,” assured Yanis. “And he would get to see Jerusalem.”

“Do you think it’s safe?”

“Is anywhere safe? The only place I know that is safe is right in the center of God’s will. So, I think we need to be praying and not depending on our own understanding.”

“You are right. You always are!” said Jenay smiling. Yanis and Jenay prayed together and apart. They talked with Jonathan and Susanna and finally they talked with the Leadership Team. Everyone agreed that it seemed God was leading them on this undertaking and felt that Yanis had enough leaders trained to sufficiently cover while he was away. Enoch, his oldest son, would take the position of pastor for the West Worship Center and Zebedee and Elias would help him with some of the teaching. Silas agreed to be available if they needed assistance. Early morning on the first day of Nisan, Luke arrived with the oxcart, and they began their journey south toward Jerusalem.



Demetrius insisted that his son’s request to do a double wedding was really what he wanted to do. Aaron and Giorgio had been inseparable since the day Jonathan had shared with them the Leadership Team’s desire for them to co-pastor the North Antioch Christian Worship Center. Lamech admitted to Demetrius that there wasn’t room to do a large wedding at his place, so agreed to help out with some of the expenses. Demetrius said that his greatest help would be to secure a Jewish musical group like the one that had played for Jonathan and Susanna’s wedding. “That’s easy. I think that the entire ensemble attends the West Worship Center.” Sophia and Jochebed met often to plan out the menu and enjoyed decorating the huge courtyard to make it special for their sons’ weddings. It was unusual to have double weddings if the boys were not brothers, but it

made it even more special to have the two cultures combined and rather than clashing, it seemed to emphasize how truly similar everyone is.

Jonathan led the ceremony and tried to hold his emotions in check as he asked Elam and Angela and Lamech and Jochebed the traditional questions to complete the espousal period for Aaron and Naomi and authorize their marriage to take place. The four parents stood beside the young couple and Jonathan prayed for their marriage as well as their ministry together at the North Christian Worship Center. Then Jonathan turned to Teacher Marcos and his wife and Demetrius and Sophia, and asked the same questions. When they replied affirmatively, Jonathan announced that Giorgio and Felice could commence with the wedding. After Jonathan had prayed for them and their ministry together, the music started, and everyone began to dance and sing the traditional Jewish wedding music.

Jonathan found a bench along the edge and remembered his own marriage in this same courtyard. He also remembered the day that both of these young men were born. Now, he was leading their weddings. And they were both pastors. Yes, his time in Antioch had been good. He said a quick prayer for Zerah, who was always on his mind. *I wonder if I will ever meet his wife or my grandchildren?* Then he quickly resolved to enjoy this celebration. He stood up and strode over to Susanna and kissed her on the cheek. "I love you more with each passing day," he said and then returned to dance and sing with the men.

Manasseh was also in a reminiscing mood. As he played the wedding music, he remembered playing for Jonathan's wedding. *This wedding brings back memories of the first time we played here. We are sitting in the exact same place, but everything is different. How much I've grown and learned in these past four years. God has orchestrated changes that at that time, I could not have imagined. I remember how terrified I was of being at a Gentile house, how much we all wanted to leave, and yet how attracted each one of us was to the love that we saw that night. Thank You, Jehovah.*



Naboth and his wife, Leah, walked quietly to the back side of their property at the village farm and sat down in the grass facing each other. Theirs was a traditional Jewish marriage and Naboth was concerned that Leah had insisted that they talk. "Naboth, you are the head of this family, and I will respect that and follow you wherever you feel God is leading us. But I want you to know what I feel God has placed on my heart. May I speak with you?"

"Yes, Leah. You are my wife and I want to hear what is bothering you. I know that you are unhappy."

"First, we were enslaved by Eli and now by Barak. We have no freedom. We work as slaves and have nothing to show for it. Our

daughter is already a woman. Who will she marry? You heard what Hezekiah shared and you agreed with it, but now we have slipped right back into following a man instead of God. I'm scared." Naboth sat quietly and made no response.

"Naboth, I will submit to whatever you think is best. I'm sorry that I have upset you," said Leah quietly.

"No. You are right. I have abdicated my responsibility to determine God's will to Barak. You are right. I'm just shocked that I've let it happen again. It's time I do something, but I don't know what. Leave me alone and let me pray." He sat in silence as Leah returned to the group.

"Where's Naboth?" asked Barak.

"He said he wanted to take a walk and pray." She tried to keep her smile steady, but it angered her that Barak was determined to keep him from having time alone. Thankfully, Naboth had taken a walk and was far enough away that Barak didn't locate him. He walked and prayed alone and finally stopped by a well to rest. Once away from the others, it seemed that his thoughts were clearer. He began to remember the things that Hezekiah had said before he took his family and left. Naboth remembered why he had agreed to move to Antioch in the first place. He remembered his commitment to share the New Way and to walk in obedience to the Holy Spirit. He began to remember things that Peter, John Mark, Jonathan, and Paul had said. And for the first time, it all made sense and he began to weep.

"Jehovah, forgive me. Show me how to get my family out." He knelt in the grass and prayed all night. He knew that he had missed the Seder meal and would be missed, but he also knew that this was something he had to do. He begged God to give him clear direction. *Maybe I should stay and help the others come to the Truth. But the truth is: If I stay even one more day, I will be disobeying what I clearly hear Jehovah saying to me.* But he still didn't know where he was going, or how he would care for his family. "Jehovah, I put my trust totally in You. I can't do this without Your leading."

As dawn began to lighten the sky, Naboth returned to the hut he had called home for the past eleven years. All of his children had been born here. But as he packed, he realized that there was nothing more than an extra robe, a blanket, and a mat for each one of them. Leah was already up and working with the other women to prepare breakfast even though the sun had not risen. He gathered all of their bags and stuffed them with their extra robes. He put his and Leah's blankets in their bags, and then he woke the children starting with the oldest. "Put your blanket in your travel bag; we are going on a trip. Leave your mat but take anything that is valuable to you."

"Abba, I have nothing valuable," said his oldest daughter, and Naboth knew that God was continuing to break his heart. He had not provided for his family and getting out was the direction he had to go. *Why am I so afraid of having nothing, when I have nothing now?* He debated letting the children eat breakfast, but knew, deep down, that

he mustn't hesitate. *I have to be obedient quickly, as Peter used to say.*

He and the four children walked out of the house with his oldest daughter carrying the baby. He called to Leah. "Come." The other ladies looked at them quizzically. But Naboth didn't explain, and he didn't look back. He just led his family out.

"Where are we going, Abba?" asked his son.

"Wherever God leads us. Right now, I'm looking for a man named Jonathan. But let's just enjoy this walk and see what happens. We are on an adventure!" he said, amazed that he actually felt a surge of excitement and wonder. *How will I find Jonathan in this city of thousands?* But then he knew that his job was to be obedient, and God would take care of the rest. Up ahead he saw a large building with a sign out front "North Christian Worship Center." He knew it would be empty because of Passover. But as they approached the door, they heard voices chattering inside. Naboth knocked and was greeted by a smiling young lady. She explained that they had celebrated Passover yesterday, and they were just cleaning up after the crowd.

"I am looking for a man named Jonathan that I think is the leader of this gathering."

"Just a minute, I'm new here. Let me get Hilda and she'll know."

In a few minutes an older lady came and explained that this was a newer Worship Center, and that Jonathan was in charge of the one close to the amphitheater near downtown. She gave him directions to Jonathan's house and told him to wait and let her get something for the children. In a few minutes, she returned with two bags filled with fruit and another filled with unleavened bread.

"May God bless you, shalom," said Naboth as he accepted the bags of food. "See, children, I told you God would provide!" They walked back to the well they had just passed and sat in the grass and ate until they were all satiated. After drinking from the well, they were ready to travel. Then Naboth led them to Jonathan's house.

Chapter 23

Jonathan and Susanna lingered over breakfast in the courtyard for the second day of Passover. The three little ones played in the yard, while they enjoyed the rare privilege of visiting with Zebedee. He was off work for three days to celebrate Passover. Even though he still lived at home, he was seldom there. His days were filled with work at the Mercantile Store and his evenings with ministry or visits with friends. Jonathan could see the restlessness in his eyes and wondered if he, too, would be thinking of marriage soon. *Should I be encouraging him to buy a house and get ready?* As they visited, Zebedee talked with them about his growing friendship with Timothy, the young man that was traveling with Paul. Zebedee intended to take his group of friends for an overnight fishing trip since he was off work. He invited his dad to come along but Jonathan assured him that he was content to stay home with Susanna and help with the little ones. As Zebedee began to collect his supplies for the overnight trip, there was a knock at the front door. Zebedee investigated and led the little family around to the back courtyard.

"Naboth, how are you, my friend? Welcome! Did you meet my son, Zebedee? This is Susanna, my wife, and Susanna, this is Naboth's wife, Leah. We were friends in Jerusalem — so I'm talking about a long time ago."

"Don't remind me! Actually, I would like to speak with you privately if that is possible. I hate to take you away from your family."

"I don't think Susanna and the children will mind having some fresh conversation." Jonathan called his three children and encouraged them to play with their new friends. Susanna began to get acquainted with Leah, and they helped the children learn names and get settled into playing together.

"Naboth, I am glad to see you!" said Jonathan again as they settled onto benches on the rooftop.

"I just walked out. Yesterday, Leah asked me when I was going to start listening to God, and I just walked out. We literally have a robe and a blanket and that's all. We have no place to live, no place to work, no land. We have nothing except the absolute assurance that God is guiding us to start all over."

"I want you to know that that's an incredibly good place to be. I came to Antioch with little more than that. I at least had my parent's blessings and prayers, and a bag of Mother's Sabbath bread." The men laughed.

"The Worship Center on the north side provided us with fruit and unleavened bread this morning for breakfast. We were very grateful."

"So what are your plans at this point?" asked Jonathan gently.

"I was obedient to get out. Other than that, I have no direction. Before I was a farmer for Eli, I worked as a scribe. I would have to

brush up on that before I could land a job, though. Is there a place where my family and I could camp?”

“I think we can do better than that. Naboth, I need to know if you are ready to embrace all of Jesus’ teachings, or whether you are still following the Pharisaical Law?”

“I know what Peter was trying to tell us. I agree that Jesus is the Messiah for all people, but Jonathan, I’m new at this. I still cringe at the thought of touching a Gentile. I have to be honest.”

“Let’s walk over to the west side of town. My nephew, Enoch, is the pastor of the Antioch Christian Worship Center and may know of a Jewish family that would have room to house you. And the West Worship Center may still be hiring scribes. I’ll talk with my Leadership Team and let you know if they know anyone needing help. They can usually find work for just about anyone. Let’s see if Susanna wants to walk with us. It’s a beautiful morning!” said Jonathan.

Together the two families walked to Enoch’s home. The children continued to play together, while Susanna and Leah visited in the courtyard. The men went up to the rooftop and Jonathan explained the situation to Enoch.

“I’m glad to meet you, Naboth. We have a room that is still set up with tables for scribes to help us make copies of manuscripts. But we’ve run out of funds and can no longer hire full-time scribes. I wish we could. I would like to see that work continue because then we could distribute the manuscripts to more followers. But right now, it is just volunteers and I think we are even out of papyrus. So, that’s not a good option for you. I’ll be meeting with my leaders of the West Worship Center tomorrow night, and they will probably know of someone who needs a scribe. But unless you want to raise funds for the manuscript work, it’s not going to be a good place for you. What about the schools? Are any of them looking for teachers?” asked Enoch.

“No,” replied Jonathan. “They are fully staffed this year. Looks like we’ll have to wait on employment. How about a place to stay? Naboth is ready to worship with Gentiles, but is still uncomfortable with the idea of living with them. You have a higher Jewish population over here on the west side. Do you know of anyone who could house them until they can get back on their feet?”

“Actually, I might. I have two families in mind. They are both fairly close. I could talk with them and return shortly. There’s no need of you walking back to your place. I’m pretty sure one or the other will house them. Do you two want to come with me, or wait here?”

“We’ll wait here.” Jonathan was pleased that Enoch seemed so comfortable in his role as pastor while his dad, Yanis, was out of town.



Enoch knocked on the door and was greeted by a servant. “Master Simon is in the back courtyard with his family. Would you prefer to join him there, or would you like to meet privately with him?”

“Ask him if he could give me a few minutes of his time privately.”

Enoch was invited to wait in the living area. He stood to greet Simon as he entered. “Enoch! What a pleasant surprise. You are welcome to join us for the holiday.”

“Shalom, Simon. I appreciate your offer, but I need to get a family settled and God brought you and Esther to mind. I was wondering if this would be a ministry that you two would enjoy, or whether you would prefer that I ask someone else. I have a few other people that I could ask, but I wanted to give you the first opportunity.”

“Okay. You know that I’m very new at doing ministry. What would that look like? I’ve never done anything like that.”

“Well, actually, I think this would be a perfect opportunity for you to do something that you love doing. We have a family that has been uprooted, essentially kicked out of their home, job, and family because they have decided to follow Jesus’ teachings. They are completely penniless, so they can’t afford food or housing and they won’t be able to pay you anything. You would provide their food and housing until they can accumulate enough funds to be on their own again. They have four children under the age of eleven, so they will need at least two sleeping areas, and preferably three. They will help out with chores or anything they can, but he primarily needs to be free to search for a job once Passover has ended. So, you need to think of this as a gift to Jehovah that they cannot repay. It simply would mean hosting them as your guests until they can get settled.”

“I understand. Esther and I love entertaining and certainly have the space for them. How long would they stay?”

“They would need to stay until they could afford to rent a place and purchase food. But, of course, if it’s not working for you or Esther, you can let me know and I’ll place them somewhere else.”

“And this is something that you’ve done before?” asked Simon.

“Oh, yes. It’s just Christians helping their fellow Christians.”

“So, they are followers of Jesus?”

“Yes, in fact, Naboth was a good friend of Jonathan’s when they were boys back in Jerusalem,” said Enoch. “He and his wife, Leah, have been followers of Jesus for a long time.”

“What kind of work is he looking for?”

“He trained and worked as a scribe until he moved here eight years ago. He got mixed up with a group that taught him to farm and raise vegetables and herbs for the market. He could work on a farm, but of course, the pay wouldn’t support his family. Jonathan brought him to me because he thought I was still hiring scribes to copy manuscripts.”

“You’ve got plenty of scribes?” asked Simon.

“No, we have no funds to pay them,” replied Enoch.

“But don’t you need to be making more copies of the manuscripts for new groups?” probed Simon.

“Yes. But it’s not exactly a money-making business. It’s very expensive to make even one copy, and then we give it away. So, right now, we’re waiting for Jehovah to provide the papyrus and ink so that we can at least finish the copies we’ve started.”

“I was not aware of this need. That sounds like another ministry that I would enjoy. I would like to meet your friend. What did you say his name was?”

“Naboth. His wife is Leah, and they have one girl and three boys.”

Simon turned to his manservant and asked him to get Esther and Joab. Enoch asked if he had any further questions. “I don’t think so. I just want to make sure this is acceptable to Esther.” He smiled, “God is reminding me to consult my wife occasionally.”

“Dad, what’s wrong?” asked Joab as he anxiously entered the living area.

“Everything is fine. I just wanted to make sure that you two are in agreement with me. Enoch has asked if we could host a young couple with four children who need a job and a place to stay. I’m not sure about the job, but we can certainly provide them a place to live until they can get back on their feet — if it’s okay with your mother.”

“You know that I love having children around,” said Esther.

“Would you be able to relocate him, if it turns out to be too much trouble for Dad and Mother?” Joab asked Enoch.

“Certainly. They would just let me know, and I would find the family another place to stay,” assured Enoch.

“Then it sounds like an ideal ministry opportunity for you, Dad. You’ve always loved people and the more the merrier.”

Simon and Esther agreed, and Enoch promised to let both Leadership Teams know of Naboth’s need for employment. He assured them that he would be available if they had any questions or problems and left to get Naboth and his family.

Simon and Esther loved hosting the young family. Over the next week, Leah felt that she had moved into Heaven with the servants taking care of their every need. They were amazed at how quickly they felt comfortable with Simon and Esther and spent hours talking about their very different journeys to Jesus.



On Tuesday morning, after the eight days of Passover had been celebrated, Simon met Joab and Jethro at the bank. “Please meet me in my office as soon as possible.” Joab and Jethro knew that look on their grandfather’s face and both quickly dropped everything and joined him immediately.

“Grandfather, is everything all right? Is there a problem?”

“No. I just need to make sure that you are comfortable with a decision I have made.”

“Of course, Grandfather,” said Joab. Simon smiled. It made him somewhat sad that his grandsons were still so afraid of him. Maybe this announcement would help.

“I have decided to retire from the bank. I have found a ministry opportunity that I would like to pursue, and it’s high time that I allow you two to run things here. I am appointing both of you as partners to run this bank. As of today, if it is agreeable to you, Joab will become the legal steward of the bank, and Jethro, you will be assistant steward. I will be available if you have any questions or want to discuss things with me, but from now on, we will simply split the profit three ways and I will leave it in your capable hands.”

“Grandfather, what can I say, except thank you. Thank you! I guess I’m in shock; I was not expecting this,” said Joab.

“Yes, Grandfather, thank you so much. I am certainly in agreement, but we will miss working with you each day. What is this new ministry that you will be doing?” asked Jethro.

“I’m just exploring some possibilities and want the time to do so. I’m not ready to announce anything. But if you are both in agreement, this change will be effective today. I will come back later to pack up my office, but right now, I’ve got other things on my mind. Shalom.” And before the men realized what had happened, he was out the door and heading to Enoch’s house.

Simon sat in Enoch’s courtyard and shared with him a plan that he felt the Holy Spirit had placed on his heart. They walked over to the Antioch Christian Worship Center and Simon looked at the room that had been set up for the scribes to work. By the end of the day, Simon had purchased a small storefront not far from the bank. He arranged for his servants to begin clearing out the building and getting it set up to his specifications.

On Wednesday morning, Simon met with Enoch and Naboth at the storefront. He arrived early and arranged some benches for the men to sit on. Simon announced, “As of yesterday, I retired from the bank and turned its entire operation over to Joab and Jethro. Naboth, I am starting a new business and wanted your input. I talked with Enoch the other day and we both feel that it would work.”

“I’m certain it will work, if indeed this is what the Holy Spirit outlined for you,” assured Enoch.

“Here’s the plan. I haven’t come up with a name for it yet, but this will be a place for people or stores to hire scribes. Businesses or individuals will pay to have their documents prepared, checked, or read to them. That will provide income to support the scribes who are working in the back preparing the manuscripts about Jesus. It will take us a while to get established, but I feel certain that it will make enough profit to at least produce a few manuscripts each year. That’s about all I’ve got figured out so far. But I want to know what you guys think and Naboth, I’d like to offer you the steward position. You would be responsible for getting it up and running. How does that sound to you guys?”

“Wow! It sounds perfect!” agreed Naboth. “But, I do want to pray about it. Can you give me some time?”

“Of course,” said Simon.

“So, do you want me to still announce your need for employment to my leaders tonight and to the whole Leadership Team tomorrow night?”

“No. Let’s wait and see if Jehovah will clarify this for me. I already feel peace about this new assignment. I think this is a business that will support my family as well as give both of us a place to serve Jehovah,” replied Naboth. “But leaning on my own understanding has gotten me in a lot of problems before!”

“Simon, do you need any carpenters to build things? We seem to have plenty of them who are willing to help. And we could just move the tables and benches over here from the Antioch Center. We won’t be using them there,” volunteered Enoch.

Naboth’s mind began to think about all that would be involved in getting the new business started.

Chapter 24

In late spring, Peter stopped at Jonathan's office and said he felt led to spend some time in Antioch. He spent some time with Naboth and Leah and their children and enjoyed their fellowship. He often preached at one of the Christian Worship Centers and spent his days preaching in the market. He stayed with Kostakis and visited with Paul, Silas, and Timothy. Peter reported to the Leadership Team that he had encountered Josie and Basha in Cana and that they were enjoying some time with her son, Jordan, and his wife and children. They planned to take the Apostle Matthew's manuscript to Jerusalem before the winter so they could avoid the festivals which were the most volatile times in Jerusalem. Everyone caught him up on the news of the new Worship Centers, the many people coming to accept Jesus as Messiah, and the many followers who were being launched into Asia Minor to share the New Way. Peter brought them the sad news that in Capernaum just about all the Jewish followers of Jesus had relocated to Syria, but that the Roman followers were thriving. He was surprised to learn that Yanis and Jenay were traveling with Luke but was excited about their purpose. "I hope I'm still in Antioch when they return because I've thought of several things I should have included in John Mark's manuscript." Naboth volunteered to write down and record the things he wanted to share with Luke and hopefully get into his manuscript.



It was late fall and definitely in the rainy season when Luke, Yanis, Jenay, and Ephram returned to Antioch. They were pleased with the interviews that they had done, and Luke felt certain that he could write a report of Jesus' life that would be more accurate and supported than John Mark's or Matthew's manuscript. Yanis and Jenay settled back into their home with Enoch. Jenay got busy making him a couple of new robes because he had certainly grown while they were away — physically as well as spiritually.

Luke had only been back a week when Paul and Silas announced that they were planning a third missionary trip into Asia Minor. They began to discuss all the details and decided that they would walk north of Antioch before turning west, since this was not a good time of year for sailing. "Would it be okay if I rent a donkey to carry the manuscript box? I would like to continue to work on it, or I could stay here if you prefer. I definitely feel God's call to finish what He's assigned me to do."

Everyone agreed that Luke should plan to accompany them, but they would try to allow him some time to work on the manuscript. They decided it would probably be wise to buy a couple of donkeys and load them with food since it would be winter and might be hard to find food

along the route. The area they would travel was sparsely populated for long stretches before they got into the cities they were more accustomed to visiting. They decided on donkeys instead of oxen because they weren't sure that there would be roads for oxen and an oxcart.

They began to assemble their supplies and purchase food that would keep for the journey. It was agreed that they would leave at sunrise next Sunday morning.



Zebedee wasn't exactly sure how to tell his folks his decision but felt that waiting until the last minute would make it too hard for them. He wanted to let them know in plenty of time to make the adjustment, but not so early that it would be a prolonged goodbye. He knew that the men would announce his decision to the Leadership Team since Paul had asked him to be present for the meeting. *I wonder if it would be better if we just did it all together with all three sets of parents. But that's not fair to them. I should be the one to tell them. Please give me the right words to say and lead me to know when to tell them.*

Jonathan had always tried to take Wednesday afternoons off to spend with his family and Zebedee hoped that it would not be interrupted. Wednesday had finally arrived, and Zebedee hurried home from the Mercantile Store. His dad was nowhere to be seen. "Where's Dad?" he tried to ask casually.

"I'm not sure. He's usually home by now," said Susanna. Zebedee could feel his stomach begin to tighten. This wasn't going to be easy, and he didn't want to have to rush it. *Maybe I'll just wait and talk with Dad later tonight and not include Susanna and Zephaniah.* But while he waited, he heard his dad rushing in the door and scooping up the two little ones in his arms. They sat around the table with five-year-old Rinnah and three-year-old Zadok getting all the attention. Zebedee felt that even though he had prayed and prayed for clarity about God's direction for him, he only now realized the cost. He would miss seeing his little brothers and sister grow up. And his love for his stepmother and all her care for him brought tears to his eyes. *Yes, a thousand times yes, I want to be obedient to whatever the Holy Spirit wants of me. But I never realized how hard it would be. I'm grateful that Zerah was brave enough to take that first step. Now, it's my turn. And I will be obedient. But right now, I'd just like to grab Rinnah and run. Guess I can't take her with me. Wouldn't Paul like that!* He shook his head at the thought.

"So, what's on your mind tonight, Zebedee," asked Jonathan. "You seem quieter than usual."

"I've got a lot on my mind, and I'd like to talk with you guys after you put the babies to bed."

"I'm not a baby!" declared Rinnah.

"I'm not a baby!" echoed Zadok.

“No, you are not. What happened to my babies?” asked Zebedee. “Did you hide them somewhere?”

Jonathan and Susanna exchanged looks and privately indicated that they didn’t know what this was all about. They lingered a few minutes over dinner and then Susanna took the little ones up to their rooms and rejoined them at the table.

“Dad, Mother, I wanted to include Zephaniah if that’s all right with you, because what I’ve decided is going to affect him, too. I’ll be leaving on Sunday morning to travel with Paul into Asia Minor. I’ve been praying about this even before Zerah left and this time I have total clarity about God’s direction for me. I’m still troubled by leaving you and Mother and Zephaniah and the babies, but I know that God will comfort me just as he comforted you when you left home. The Holy Spirit has made clear that this is what I need to do, and what I want to do, and I feel certain that this is when I need to do it.”

Jonathan felt that he had been hit in the stomach and was afraid he would be ill. This was his firstborn. He wanted to cry and scream and throw a fit. He had been certain that Zebedee and Zerah would help him with the ministry in Antioch, but it was not to be. Suddenly, he heard God calling to Abraham and saying, “Offer your son, Isaac, your only son, Isaac....” And Jonathan bowed his head in surrender.

“Son, you know we will support you in whatever God is calling you to do. No, it won’t be easy to leave home, and it may be harder on us than it is on you, but we would never discourage you from following God’s will for your life. Go with our blessings.”

“Zebedee, what can I do to help you get ready?” asked Susanna.

“I think I can handle everything, but I’d be glad to take some of your Sabbath bread if you want to pack a bag. We are taking donkeys to carry our provisions because we are walking into Asia Minor,” said Zebedee. “Paul believes that the groups need prepared teachers to lead them, and his intent is to drop one of us to shepherd each group along the way.”

“So, what other boys are going?”

“Enoch, Elias, and me. And of course, Timothy and Luke, and Paul and Silas. We’re walking this time because it’s too late in the year for good sailing, and we’re leaving Sunday at sunrise.”

“I want you three boys to be at the Leadership Team meeting tomorrow night.”

“Yes, Paul has already told us that. That’s why I couldn’t put off telling you any longer. I didn’t want it to surprise you — although I hated to tell you,” confessed Zebedee.

“I’m proud of you, Zebedee. Follow God with all your heart and He will never leave you or forsake you. Make Him your focus and He will fill you with more joy and peace and love than you ever thought possible,” said Jonathan.

It was late when they called it a night. They had spent time praying with Zebedee for the other two young men as well as Paul’s entire team. They also prayed for the two sets of parents who were also hearing this news tonight. Later, as Jonathan and Susanna cried

together, both felt that they had held it together well. They agreed that they were glad that Zebedee had included Zephaniah in the discussion since even though he was only eight years old, he seemed to be also leaning toward a serious pursuit of obedience and he needed to hear how joyful and yet how hard that pursuit could be.

After dinner, Jonathan and Zebedee headed to the Worship Center. Paul introduced the three young men to the Leadership Team and outlined their plans for hiking into Asia Minor and ministering to already established groups from the two previous trips. The men prayed together and promised to continue to pray for the upcoming endeavor. Jonathan was thankful that Zebedee was determined to be obedient, and had absolute confidence that God would be his provision. But then his feelings would swing to total terror. He knew first-hand the dangers, the hardships, and the pain of obedience, and he would have to surrender those feelings to the God of all comfort. He prayed constantly for all those taking this step of faith and he prayed for Zerah, Neri, and Adam wherever they were.



On Sunday at sunrise, Paul, Silas, Luke, and Timothy were up and packing the final bags on the donkeys as the three young men and their dads joined them. Several men from the Leadership Team arrived and they all prayed together one last time before the team started their journey. Jonathan, Asher, and Yanis walked alongside the men as they headed north out of Antioch, but the time soon came when they had to turn back. They watched until the men were out of sight and then returned in silence to their own responsibilities. All three had sacrificed their firstborn sons and it left a hole that would not easily be filled. But all three dads had tasted that obedience, and knew that God's plan was always best, even when it was hard.

Susanna and Sharon tried to put it into words for the other women at their group. "There's a quietness about the house that is not realistic. Zebedee slept at home, but we very seldom saw him. He was always busy. Yet somehow my heart knew that he was there and now he's gone," said Susanna.

Sharon agreed but reminded them all, "And yet in some ways, he seems to be there in even greater measure — like I think of him more often and pray for him more. I know I will adjust, but it was just so sudden."

"I don't think I could have handled it, if I had seen it coming!" said Susanna. "I don't know that I'll ever adjust to both boys being gone. I guess it's just part of being a mother." And the ladies agreed that God was good, and prayed that He would bless their sacrifice.

Jenay remembered how she and Yanis had walked away from her family and was so grateful that they had supported her decision to be obedient.



How quickly the time passed. Antioch continued to grow, and the Christian Worship Centers multiplied. Yanis and Jenay's implementation of their leadership plan had revolutionized Jonathan's ministry so that he was free to counsel and teach without feeling overwhelmed with it all. He loved his work, and he loved being home in the afternoons to watch his three younger children growing up. Many afternoons he could include eleven-year-old Zephaniah in the ministry.

Zephaniah felt that God was calling him to pastor a Christian Worship Center someday. It was just a vague impression at this point, but he loved doing ministry with his abba as they visited with the sick or elderly or answered questions for a new follower of Jesus. His oldest brother, Zebedee, had left on a ministry trip with Paul over four years ago and had never been heard from again. His next oldest brother, Zerah, had felt called to minister in Asia Minor and had left with two friends over seven years ago. He only vaguely remembered him. Zephaniah often imagined going to search for them, but he knew that that was not God's plan for his life. He could spend the rest of his days searching for them, but the area was too great, and it would be a waste. Right now, he needed to finish his homework. Maybe tonight would be a good time to talk with his parents about a plan that was forming in his head.

"Dad, could I talk with you after dinner?"

"Certainly. Have you got a question about school that I can still help you with?" asked Jonathan teasingly.

"Not really. Can we talk later?" said Zephaniah quietly. He knew his mother hated to be left out of conversations, but he didn't want to talk in front of Rinnah and Zadok.

"Sure. We can talk while Mother and Rinnah clear the table. Would that work?" Jonathan's head was trying to sort through what might be troubling Zephaniah, but he had no clue. He was fairly certain that he was too young to be announcing an upcoming ministry trip. But, of course, with two older brothers, he might have questions. He would just have to wait to see what he needed and prayed that he would have wisdom to lead him well.

"Dad, I really enjoy working with you after school every day and I'm learning a lot," began Zephaniah.

"Thank you. I appreciate that," said Jonathan bracing himself for what he was about to hear.

"But Dad, I don't think it's fair to Zadok and Rinnah. You used to spend afternoons with all of us and now I'm taking up all your time," stated Zephaniah as Jonathan breathed a sigh of relief.

"Yes, but it's important. Normally, you would be working and earning money for your future by now. The least I can do is prepare you to work when you turn thirteen."

“Dad, I was wondering if I could maybe work with some of the other Worship Center pastors. I would like to study under Yanis and learn to be a scribe so that I could teach school like you do. And I would like to work with Giorgio and Aaron. They have created some really interesting programs that are appealing to the young people of Antioch. If I worked with other pastors, at least a few days a week, that would free you up to spend time in the afternoons with Mother and the little ones,” stated Zephaniah.

“Zephaniah, I think that’s an excellent idea. Would you want to focus on working at one Worship Center for a while, and then change to a different one, or would you like to work different days at different ones? You really only have a few hours after school each day. What are you thinking?” asked Jonathan.

“I think the apprenticeship with Yanis would need to be full-time to do advanced studies as a scribe. Could you see if he could teach me during the summer?”

“I will certainly talk with Yanis about it. I will see him tomorrow night. Will that be soon enough?” asked Jonathan, grinning.

“Sure. I just want to make sure you are not offended. I just felt that God was leading me that way,” said Zephaniah.

“I’m glad you brought it up. I hadn’t thought about it, but it could be very helpful to you. How many hours would you like to devote to ministry each week?”

“Well, right now, I am working with you about two hours each afternoon, so I think I could handle working with Yanis for two hours as long as he doesn’t need me to do additional homework. Then, I could work full-time during the summers.”

“So you primarily want to focus on working with Yanis right now?”

“I think so. If he can’t teach me, then I’m okay with working with any of the other pastors who might have time,” said Zephaniah.

“I’ll talk with Yanis tomorrow night and see what he thinks,” agreed Jonathan.

“Thanks, Dad.”



“Manasseh, our baby is all grown up,” stated Dinah at dinner. Judah was visiting with friends, and it was just the two of them.

“Yes, next week he will be a man. You have made me very happy — four sons and two daughters!”

“And my questions have not totally driven you insane?” Dinah asked teasingly.

“No, my love, but they have kept my life interesting. I will be forever grateful for your questions and prodding me to get answers.”

“Then, will you allow me to ask you to pray about another question of mine?” asked Dinah.

“Certainly. What is troubling you?” asked Manasseh.

“I’ve been praying about this for a long time, and now that Judah is grown, I feel that God is saying it is time for me to take action.”

“You have a new ministry in mind besides being a grandmother?” he asked.

“Yes, Manasseh. Haggith is getting too old to continue to midwife and she knows so much that I don’t. I would like to spend the next few years apprenticing with her to become a midwife and learning about all the plants and teas that she uses to save lives. Remember how she helped Bethany and Nancy? I want to learn about those things. Would that be displeasing to you? I feel that God is calling me to be a grandmother and I want to be the best grandmother ever. But I also feel that God wants to use me as a midwife. It’s such a special time for a woman and it would give me the opportunity to love and care for other women — not just my family. And I feel that I could use that special time to share with them what I’ve learned about Jesus.”

“We have seen Haggith’s ministry. It is a lot of hard work and not what I wanted for you. I wanted you to finally have a chance to take it easier and enjoy your old age and your grandchildren.”

“But I want to be obedient, and I am still strong and eager to serve.”

“Yes, I want you to be obedient. Have you talked with Haggith about this?” asked Manasseh.

“No. I would not before I talked with you. I have simply prayed about it.”

“Go tomorrow morning and talk with Haggith. God will guide you.”

“Thank you, Manasseh. I don’t know where this will lead us, but I know that I want to be obedient.”

“And Jehovah will bless the work of your hands,” said Manasseh, kissing her fingers. Dinah could hardly sleep. She was so excited.

The next morning, Haggith was thrilled with her interest in learning more about being a midwife. Samuel and Haggith had wondered what would happen when there was no one who knew the things that Jehovah had taught her about birthing. Haggith wanted to begin immediately, and they set a schedule to meet each day to learn about the plants and leaves that needed to be gathered so that a supply was always available. Dinah was thrilled to be learning something totally new to her. Sometimes, Samuel would go with them, but most of the time it was just the two ladies foraging in the woods. Little by little, Dinah was learning to recognize the plants and their effect on the body. Dinah also began to assist Haggith with births. Haggith was constantly teaching Dinah as they waited and watched and worked side by side. Even though Dinah had delivered most of her grandchildren and assisted with many others, she had much to learn about the complications that could arise. Dinah loved to learn and it was a very happy time for her.

She was not only learning about the birthing process, but she was also learning how to trust God and how to depend on Him to guide her. She learned that Haggith’s confidence came from being in constant prayer for the Holy Spirit to guide her through each delivery. As they spent more and more time together, Dinah felt comfortable sharing with Haggith her deep pain regarding Martha’s decision to not

accept Jesus as Messiah. Haggith was able to understand because her daughter and both of her sons had rejected Jesus. Dinah looked to Haggith for wisdom and comfort regarding Martha and Enos. Haggith shared, "For a long time, I begged God to give me an opportunity to talk with my children and convince them of the Truth. Then a wise lady reminded me that I needed to release that to Jehovah. He is the only One who can speak to the heart. I committed to praying every day, and often, all day long. My prayer is that Jehovah will pursue them in every way possible. I pray that He will speak to them when they sit at home and when they walk along the road, when they lie down and when they rise up."

"That's the Shema," said Dinah.

"Yes, and God is now their parent. My hands are tied. But I can pray. And while they can cover their ears to me, they can't keep God from speaking to them even in their sleep!" said Haggith confidently. They often spent time praying together for their children to listen and heed Jehovah and come to know the peace and love and joy that they were missing. Dinah felt her grief lifting and instead focused on anticipating what God could accomplish for her. But it was hard to accept that Martha would make her own choice and her family would be impacted by that decision.



Jonathan was busy preparing a message for the upcoming Sabbath. He had plenty of leadership and usually only prepared one of the six messages that were presented each week. It left him with plenty of time to personally minister and counsel. The knock at the door startled him and he quickly rose and greeted the stranger. "Dad!" Jonathan suddenly realized that standing before him was his first-born son, four years older, much thinner, and definitely aged.

"Zebedee! My son! My son! Come in," he said as he pulled him into his arms. "When did you get here?"

"We have been walking from Jerusalem and just arrived. The other men are headed to Kostakis', but I told them I wanted to stay with you and Mother."

"Of course. Let's go tell her now. You are so grown up. I almost didn't recognize you."

"It's been a while."

"Is everyone well?"

"Yes, we're just tired and felt led to return and rest up. I'm sure we won't be able to stay long. There is so much work to do. And Dad, I found Zerah. He's in Philadelphia. He's pastoring a gathering there. And you have a grandson," said Zebedee as they started out the door toward home.

"A grandson," whispered Jonathan. "A grandson. So, Zerah is married and has a son. Oh, Zebedee, I love both of you so much. It is hard to be away from you, but I'm so proud that you both are serving

our Messiah. I didn't realize what a sacrifice my own parents made to allow me to be obedient. Now, I see and feel it in a whole new way. It just makes me look forward to Heaven more and more. I hate being away from you two."

"I know, Dad," said Zebedee. "But look at what God has accomplished here in Antioch because of you. I don't think your dad is sorry for his sacrifice, and I don't think you are. But we're all human and it's hard to keep our eyes on the goal. I cannot begin to judge the impact that my obedience has had — all I know is that I am being obedient and people who have never heard of Jesus are now going to be in Heaven because of it. And even better, I'm helping to train them so that they can teach the New Way to more and more people. You used to say that Jesus would set off a wildfire. Dad, I'm seeing it in a very real way. I don't see a lot of Jews coming to know Jesus as Messiah, but I am seeing hundreds of Gentiles from all nations turn their hearts to Jehovah and His Messiah. Mother!" Zebedee called. Soon, he was surrounded by Susanna, Rinnah, and Zadok. "Where's Zephaniah?"

"He works with Yanis in the afternoons. He won't be home until sunset."

"Dad, Enoch didn't come home. He's pastoring a gathering in Laodicea and didn't feel led to leave them. It will be hard on his parents and Enoch asked me to deliver a message to his dad."

"Do you need to do that now, or can it wait?" asked Jonathan, reluctant to share Zebedee with anyone.

"Why don't we visit for a while and then we can walk to meet Zephaniah. I want to see Yanis before he discovers that Paul and Silas and the others are back," said Zebedee.

"Of course," agreed Jonathan, realizing that he would expect Zebedee to do no less.

Zebedee could hardly believe how much Rinnah and Zadok had grown and changed. They weren't babies anymore and Zadok would be starting school in the fall. Susanna prepared a midday snack, and they sat in the courtyard and listened as Zebedee shared about his journey and the people he had met. Susanna cried over Zerah but was so glad to hear that he was settled and happy and had a family surrounding him. "Someday, when the little ones are grown, we'll go to visit," she said to no one in particular.

Mid-afternoon, Jonathan and Zebedee walked out to Yanis' office at the Antioch Christian Worship Center. Zebedee wanted to spend a few minutes alone with Yanis and share Enoch's message with him. While they waited, Zephaniah showed his dad some of the writing that he had been working on with Yanis. Soon, the three men said their goodbyes and Yanis ran home to let Jenay know the news that Enoch was safe and settled in Laodicea.

"We brought the New Way from Jerusalem to Capernaum and then to Antioch. Now Enoch has taken it from Antioch to Asia Minor. Jesus said it would spread throughout the world. I wonder where Ephram will take it?" said Jenay.

Chapter 25

At the Leadership Team meeting, everyone was excited to see Paul and Silas and their team. Paul explained that he had left Enoch in Laodicea pastoring a gathering, and gave a brief report of their travels all over the Roman-occupied lands. It had been a very productive trip, and many had accepted Jesus as their Messiah. Paul reported that the majority of the new growth was among the Gentiles rather than the Jews. "In fact, I no longer look for the Jewish synagogues first. I just focus on gathering crowds wherever I can, and we spread out and tell as many people as possible about the New Way. So many have come to know Jesus as Messiah and I need more and more leaders to stay and pastor those groups. Soon, there will be more Christians there than in Antioch!"

It was a special time of praising God and worshiping, and other business was forgotten for the evening. When asked how long they would stay, Paul indicated that he was ready to leave tomorrow, but had felt the Holy Spirit telling them to stay and rest a while. He had no idea how long that would be and thanked Kostakis for his hospitality.



The rains had finally stopped, and Paul's team felt led by the Holy Spirit to spend time in Syria and Galilee before returning to Jerusalem. For the past year the team had taught in worship services and groups in all the Christian Worship Centers all over Antioch. They spent most of their days preaching in the many marketplaces. Luke, Yanis, and Zephaniah worked on Luke's manuscript about the life of Jesus. He had collected more notes from eyewitnesses, and it was a mess again since he had had little time to work on it. He carried the manuscript in a wooden box covered with goat skin but wondered if it would ever become the chronological and thorough account that God had placed on his heart when he and Yanis first began the work. They made major progress, but it was still unfinished. Once again, Paul purchased a couple of donkeys to carry the manuscript and necessary supplies for the team. Several young men had joined the group during their time in Antioch, and Zebedee knew that Paul was mentoring them to become pastors for the new groups in Asia. Everyone on the team believed that they would simply complete this circle and then head north and west again. Many gathered in front of the original Worship Center to see them off. They stopped briefly at the North Worship Center and again were surrounded by fellow followers who were promising to pray for those who would hear the New Way for the first time. Jonathan and Asher had walked with the men until they were well on their way, then they had to turn back. It was hard to say goodbye again, as they had all settled into a routine. But Jonathan

admitted that this time was a little easier and he had grown in his confidence that God would take care of his sons and that His plans were best.

Jonathan and Asher walked back alone. “My friend, I had no idea how hard this was on our parents when we left.”

“Yes, only it was probably harder because we were so very young, and we weren’t surrounded by older and wiser followers.”

“Yes, we were young and foolish enough to believe that God would guide us each and every step of the way!”

“And He has, and He is,” said Asher.



Two years later, Jonathan came home from his office looking troubled. “Susanna, how does everyone in the city of Antioch know that our daughter is available for marriage? Have you announced it to everyone?”

“No. But it is a special day when a girl becomes a woman, and it quickly becomes common knowledge. I’m sure she told her friends, who informed their brothers that they had better get their requests in. Who is it this time?”

“Nathan’s son, Noah. That’s five men who all feel that God has led them to marry Rinnah. And I don’t feel right about any of them!”

“Oh, Jonathan. I know this must be hard for you. I’m always available to listen if you want to talk. I know. But there’s something deep inside of me that says to wait and listen carefully.”

“She is too precious to marry just anyone. Some of these are too old, some too young, some too harsh, some too soft.”

“And no one that’s just right,” added Susanna.

“Do you agree?” asked Jonathan hopefully.

“Yes, husband, I agree. We need to wait and pray. I believe that one of these will emerge as God’s clear choice, or maybe there is someone else. It’s not something we have to decide tonight.”

“Do we have to invite Noah over to visit?” asked Jonathan.

“I believe that’s the proper thing to do.”

“But then I have to disappoint him and tell him no. It looks like it would just be simpler to say no in the first place rather than letting him get his hopes up.”

“But we need to be careful to not rule someone out that God has chosen. Let’s pray about it and you can invite him over to have dinner with us after work on Sunday,” said Susanna.



Manasseh and Dinah were walking to Joab’s house for Passover Preparation Day. After her parents had passed, Joab had bought his

grandparent's home and he and Nancy loved entertaining as much as Simon and Esther had. Today, as always, they had invited all their brothers and sisters and their families. They were surprised that Enos and Martha had joined them for a short visit in the afternoon. It was the first time they had joined the family for the Passover celebration in almost nine years. Everyone welcomed them and showered them with love. While they seemed nervous to be surrounded by Jesus followers, they seemed to relax and enjoy being with family. It had been a long time and Nehemiah and his brothers didn't know his cousins or grandparents. How Dinah cherished this special time and she got to hold her newest grandson. But just as soon as they left, she retreated to her mat and cried until she could cry no more. "Jehovah God, how can I enjoy my children when two are missing and lost for all eternity? I want to trust that You are bringing them to Yourself, but it's hard. Help me. Please help me. Help me to exhibit my trust in You. You have a plan for them that I cannot see. Please don't ever stop pursuing them and surrounding them with Your love and blessing. Jehovah, You know my heart's desire is to please You. Help me to please You with confident trust. Help me to keep my eyes on You. Bring them to Yourself and let them know the peace and love and joy that You have planned for them." Dinah lay on her mat for a few minutes and then got up, washed her face, and rejoined the rest of her family. How they enjoyed being together. The house and courtyards were filled with laughter and fun.

Late in the afternoon, a servant gave Dinah a message. She grabbed her bag and hurriedly left. In the past year, she had assumed all of Haggith's patients and only contacted her if there was a problem. She had become a trusted midwife for many of the families from the Christian Worship Centers. And in the past year, she had been able to hire and train both her daughter, Bethany, and her friend, Hannah. She whispered to Bethany to stay with her family, and she would send for her when she needed her. Like Haggith, Dinah loved ministering to families who were welcoming a new little one, and it often gave her an opportunity to share with them about Jesus. Dinah spent the night with the nervous family who were expecting their firstborn. At sunrise she sent two servants to get Hannah and Bethany. By midafternoon, everyone was relieved when Dinah placed a healthy son in the arms of the new abba. Since the servants were comfortable with the new mother's care, Dinah's team was free to leave. Dinah and Bethany went back to join their husbands at Joab's house and continued their celebration.

As Dinah sat on the cushion after dinner and tried to keep her eyes open, her heart was filled with praise for her happy family. Manasseh had been a wonderful husband. Their two oldest sons, Joab and Jethro, had produced a total of eleven grandchildren. Their older daughter, Bethany, had two children. Bethany's oldest, Deborah, was already espoused to be married. *I probably should train another midwife and let Bethany spend more time with Deborah this year as they prepare for her upcoming wedding. I need to ask Bethany about*

that tomorrow. Her mind continued to step through her children, and she just shook her head with awe. Their younger daughter, Martha, had five sons. She was determined to keep her head focused on the positive, but her heart cried out again for Martha. They used to be so close. Now, today was the first time she had seen her in over two years and her grandchildren didn't even know her. *Oh, Jehovah, hold me. It's more than I can bear. The Scripture says something about the sons taking their fathers' places, but I see Manasseh and me passing through time at an incredible rate of speed. Soon, we will be gone, and Joab and Nancy will be the elders. Life is so short, yet each generation comes and goes. My goodness, such thoughts. I wonder if Judah is happy working with Jacob. I should remind Manasseh to talk with him. They've been working together for two years, yet it seems like only yesterday since my baby became a man. Jehovah has blessed us so much.*

"Dinah, you need to go on to your mat. You are exhausted. I'll be there in a little bit. Judah wants to talk about something. We are going to the rooftop."

Dinah hadn't realized that she had fallen asleep and slowly rose to go to the guest room that Joab's servants had prepared for them. *How I used to hate coming here to this room because of the secret that separated me from my parents. Oh, God is so good. Thank You that my parents are safely with You now. Father, I never saw that happening. Please work in Enos and Martha's hearts. Please, Father.* It was her constant prayer day and night.

"What's on your mind, Judah?" asked Manasseh.

"Two things. Thank you for allowing me to work with Jacob since I couldn't figure out what I wanted to do. Jacob has offered me a partnership in the Carpentry Shop and I'm leaning toward taking it. But Jonathan has asked if I would consider doing more teaching and possibly pastor a new Christian Worship Center. I'm trying to figure out if I can do both, or if I have to choose. I really love doing both. But then there's a third complication."

"A third? What is that?"

"Her name is Zilpah, and you may not know her dad. He is Asaph. They moved here from Jerusalem two years ago and are active in the North Christian Worship Center."

"What does her dad do?" asked Manasseh, his head reeling, and trying to process this sudden news. He hadn't even realized that Judah was old enough to be thinking of taking a wife.

"He's a farmer and they are not financially prosperous. The move was, of course, not planned and they have recently purchased some property near Enos."

"And how did you meet Zilpah?" asked Manasseh.

"I was teaching at the Worship Center there about six months ago, and I talked with her dad quite a while after the service. Later, he asked Jacob and me to do some remodeling of some buildings on his property. I have not spoken directly to her, but I've seen her working with her mother and caring for her younger siblings. Lately, I can't get

her out of my mind, and I feel that the Holy Spirit is prompting me to talk with her dad. I mean, how will I know if she's the right one when I can't talk with her?"

"You can't. You see, that's a good thing. The Scripture says we are not to base decisions on our own understanding. But if we rely fully on the Holy Spirit to guide us — then Zilpah will not only be the right wife for you when you are young, but she will still be the right wife in your old age. People change, situations change, life changes. It's vitally important that you have Someone guiding you that can see the future and know your needs and hers."

"Jacob and I are taking the whole week of Passover off. We were able to rearrange some jobs and he wanted time with Rachel and the baby. I think I will take some days to just pray this through and make sure that it's the Holy Spirit and not just my eyes that are attracted to her," said Judah.

"That would be a very wise decision. I also suggest that you ask God about whether he is calling you to pastor a Worship Center full time, or whether you would be satisfied with a part-time position. He already knows what is best. Often, He is just waiting for us to ask," counseled Manasseh.

"Thanks, Dad. Sometimes, I just get so wrapped up in the pros and cons that I forget to pray," admitted Judah. "I mean, I'm praying, and I have prayed, but I haven't really taken the time to ask and really listen. That takes time and I just get so busy."

"I know. We all do. But this is the perfect time. I'll be praying for you. These are big decisions and ones that are best guided by Jehovah, not me!" assured Manasseh. "Any more complications?"

Judah grinned and shook his head. "No, Dad. Thanks for helping me with these. I'll let you know what I hear. You'd better get some sleep. I think I will leave before dawn tomorrow. I want to walk to the Great Sea and hike along the beach. I often hear God speaking as I listen to the waves."

"I'll let Mother know why you aren't here. Goodnight, Son."



On the last day of Passover, Judah returned and informed his dad that he was going to continue to volunteer in ministry, but not accept a position as pastor. He really didn't feel called to do that, and he did feel that the Holy Spirit had spoken clearly that working with wood and helping people with their homes was his calling. Then he asked his dad if he would inquire about Zilpah and he assured him that he would. Judah gave him directions to the property and Manasseh tried to figure out the best time to talk with Asaph about his daughter. It was a little awkward since he knew nothing about this man, but he had been praying and felt good about it.

On Friday, Manasseh walked to Asaph's farm. He knocked on the door of the farmhouse and was greeted by a young lady who he

assumed might be Zilpah. She stated that her dad was working in the orchard today, but she would send for him if he would wait in the courtyard. Two young children were dispatched to get their dad and the girl served Manasseh some freshly squeezed plum juice. She returned to the house and left him to wait alone. He would have loved to speak with her but knew that was improper. It took a while for Asaph to arrive, and it gave Manasseh time to catch his breath. He began to pray for Asaph to show Judah favor, but he primarily prayed that God's will would be accomplished whether Asaph said yes or no.

"Shalom, my friend," called out a friendly voice.

"Shalom. I am sorry to take you from your work. Today was my only day to talk with you since I am a rabbi at the Christian Worship Center School and will start classes again on Sunday."

"It is no problem. The trees will still be there. I'm learning that farming is a never-ending task. So, I'm glad to take some time off when I can." The girl brought juice for her dad and then left them to talk.

"My name is Manasseh, and my son Judah has asked that I inquire about your daughter, Zilpah." Manasseh heard a gasp from inside the kitchen and realized that everything they said could be heard. He decided that it was now too late and anything else he said would be okay.

"Is that the Judah who worked with Jacob to rebuild the houses for the farm hands?"

"Yes. He has also taught at your Worship Center and apparently talked with you. He has promised me that he has not approached your daughter in any way. He has spent quite a bit of time praying and feels that the Holy Spirit is leading him in this direction."

They sat and discussed Judah and how he would provide for Zilpah. When Manasseh learned that Zilpah was his firstborn, he realized he might need to coach him on what was expected. "Judah has three older brothers and two older sisters. I've sat in your position twice and I want to encourage you to pray and speak with your wife and if you are in agreement, to speak with Zilpah. You may want to do some investigating and make sure of Judah's ability to provide well for your daughter. Then it is customary to invite him over to dinner to get to know him better. You can do that as many times as you wish until you are ready to give him an answer. I want to encourage you to not feel rushed. If this is indeed the Holy Spirit's leading, He will lead you to the same answer as He has led Judah. If not, you can say no and prevent them a lot of heartache down the road."

"Yes. I will certainly need time to pray and talk with my wife. This will be hard for her. Oh, and do you have any questions for me?"

"Nope. I did my praying and investigating earlier. I'll be praying for you — especially since she is your firstborn. Shalom."

"Shalom."

As Manasseh walked back into the city, he remembered the night Eliphaz had inquired about Bethany and how hard it was to think about the future when all his thoughts were on the past.



Jonathan and Susanna were sitting in the courtyard enjoying the lovely Sabbath afternoon. They were discussing a new ministry that Susanna wanted to start with the women slaves in her neighborhood. She had met several at the well and she felt that they were ready to form a group. She was trying to decide how to approach their masters, and whether she could do that, or whether she would need Jonathan's help. They also discussed the growing list of possible husbands for Rinnah. And Susanna asked if Zephaniah had shown any interest in leaving the nest. He didn't seem in any hurry to do so. He was finishing up his studies with Yanis to be a rabbi and a scribe and was working the rest of the time to assist him at the West Antioch Worship Center. Zadok would become a man in two years and Jonathan was not as sure where God was leading him. *We'll see where this new year takes us.* Susanna had just started dinner when their friend, Dan, arrived. "I have come to inquire about Rinnah," he said. "I thought I could catch you at home this afternoon."

"Well, I certainly hope you are inquiring for Reuben and not for yourself, because if not, the answer is no!" Both men laughed.

"Of course, I'm inquiring about Rinnah for my son, Reuben," he stated formally.

The two men went up to the rooftop to talk privately and discuss Reuben's intentions. He was another one of those young men that had two distinct possibilities and Jonathan had not heard his most recent plans. Reuben had worked for his dad for four years, but he also spent a lot of time leading groups and doing ministry projects. Jonathan wanted to make sure that he had decided on one or the other. And secretly, he hoped that he had heard God's very clear leading to stay in Antioch. *Jehovah, forgive me, but You know how hard it would be to release Rinnah to a man headed into a far land. That would be ten times harder than releasing a son. I don't know whether I could do that.* He immediately felt the Holy Spirit's check and he silently thanked God for the opportunity to serve Him by surrendering His children obediently. Dan seemed to read his mind and said, "Jonathan, I wish I could promise you that Reuben is being called to stay in Antioch, but you know as well as I do, we have no guarantees."

"Do you think that God is calling Reuben to relocate?" asked Jonathan.

"I think there is a distinct possibility. He has worked for me for four years and has considerable savings, but the other day we were talking about purchasing a starter home and he said he was unsure where and when that would happen. You'll have to talk with him. I can promise you that he loves Rinnah and will do everything he can to make her happy, but his first loyalty is to Jehovah and obedience. I know that Rinnah is very involved in ministry with Susanna and Eve, and I assume that she is equally committed to obedience. Reuben has

just accepted the lead pastor position at the newest Christian Worship Center and feels very strongly that that is God's will for him for now. I think they will serve together and make a great couple. Eve and I have no doubt about that."

"Let me talk it over with Susanna and with Rinnah. You have probably heard that an awful lot of young men feel that God is leading them to marry her. I don't understand how that can happen. Are we not teaching them how to determine God's will? They can't all be the right one," complained Jonathan.

"You have a very beautiful daughter, both inside and out. I know that God has good plans for her. I don't know why all the confusion. With my daughters, the most I had to determine was between two different men for Leah, and it wasn't a hard choice. I'm sorry to complicate things further, but we wanted to pray it through and be sure. But then, that just puts more pressure on you. I don't mean to. I know that Rinnah is your only daughter, so that will make it harder for you."

"I would appreciate your prayers, Dan. You know that I respect you and I feel very good about Reuben. Would you ask him to join us after work on Monday?"

"Thank you, Jonathan. Now, I need to return to my family. I will see you at the Leadership Meeting, if not before. Shalom."

"Shalom." Jonathan walked Dan to the door and then returned to the rooftop where he knelt and worshipped. Of all the young men that he had considered, he couldn't think of a better fit for Rinnah. She would be happy with Reuben, and she would be cared for. She would make a great pastor's wife. *But Father, You know my heart's desire is to keep all my children around me. I know You understand and know my every thought. But I just want to remind You that I will obey. So, please guide me. Is this from You? Is this the plan that You have for my baby girl? Please guide me and help me to know when to tell Susanna.*

As Jonathan walked back to the yard to join the family, he discovered that Rinnah and Susanna were hugging and crying. "Zadok!"

"Yes, sir," said Zadok as he ran to his dad.

"Did you listen to my conversation with Dan?"

"Yes, sir."

"You know we have talked about this. That was very wrong of you. You are almost a man and I know you know better. And now you have told Rinnah and made her upset. Go to your room. You will not have dinner with us. You need to consider other people's privacy and feelings."

"She says she's not upset. She said they were happy tears," defended Zadok.

"I don't care, it was not your place to talk about secrets between Dan and me," said Jonathan sternly. "Zadok, go!"

Jonathan affirmed for Susanna and Rinnah that Dan had inquired for Reuben. He promised to pray about it and would talk with them

after dinner. Jonathan noticed a look of deep contentment on Rinnah's face. It was the first time that he had seen her happy about the inquiries.

As Jonathan and Susanna prayed, the choice became very clear, and Rinnah affirmed that she was pleased with their decision. The espousal was set for one month away. It was held at Kostakis' house during their regular group time on Sabbath night. Kostakis and Irini also invited Dan's family group. Yanis led the espousal, and then Kostakis and Irini hosted the dinner that followed. Since it was a Sabbath night, everyone stayed late and celebrated. The wedding was set for after the rains stopped in the spring, but hopefully before Passover.

Now, Jonathan had to visit each home and let the other young men know that they had been rejected. He wondered if he should talk with them about letting their own wishes and desires get in the way of determining God's will. But when he realized that he was prone to do the same thing, he decided that he would let the Holy Spirit do His work and stay out of it. He did begin to work on a series of messages to help his people determine God's will. And he intended to bring it up in the Leadership Team meeting.

Chapter 26

It was a beautiful, sunshiny day during the first week of the new year, when Jonathan answered the knock at the door and heard those special words: "I have come for my bride, Rinnah." He and Susanna had known the date, but had kept it a secret from Rinnah so that she could experience the anticipation and not knowing. That was a part of Jewish tradition. Jonathan had watched her longing for Reuben grow all through the winter. They had allowed them to visit and together they were preparing a home. Reuben often ate dinners with them, or spent Sabbath afternoons, and they were making plans for her ministry beside him as a pastor's wife.

The wedding was a weeklong celebration and it seemed that Dan and Eve had invited everyone to attend. There was much music and traditional Jewish dancing. But the guests were both Jews and Gentiles, and all were welcomed. Yanis presided and everyone enjoyed the celebration. On Sabbath night, only the two families were invited for Sabbath dinner. Dan and Eve and their grown children and grandchildren were all present and Jonathan and Susanna were there with Zephaniah and Zadok. It was a sweet time for family, but also a time for prayer and commitment of this marriage to God's service. Zephaniah took Zadok home early and left Jonathan and Susanna to visit as late as they wished. It was after the sixth hour when Jonathan and Susanna found themselves walking home alone. They held hands but walked in silence. Both realized that their home would never be the same again. *I need to focus on helping Zadok grow up. I think I have been a little too focused on Rinnah. And I need to figure out what he wants to do in the future. I've really treated him as the baby of the family, and he's almost a man. I should have had him working. Then, Susanna and I will face a new future together. How fast they grow!*

In the coming days, Jonathan began including Zadok in ministry projects after school and in the evenings. He began to really get to know his son and tried to help him figure out his future. Jonathan found that Zadok had a love for people similar to his own and that he had a passion for teaching but was not interested in being in front of crowds like his brothers. He preferred teaching small groups or individuals. Jonathan prayed for him but didn't feel any clear direction for his future. He trusted that God would guide both of them when the time was right.



For the past year, Zephaniah, Jonathan's third son, had co-pastored the Antioch Christian Worship Center with Yanis. Yanis' younger son, Ephram, was the pastor of the old synagogue and was mentoring Priest Mahlon and Priest Elkanah to take over. At the beginning of summer, Jonathan felt led to step down from being in

charge of the original Leadership Team. That group had grown to include the pastors from each of the Worship Centers. Keeping up with all the different groups was becoming too much work and stress. He wanted to focus on just teaching and shepherding his original group and Worship Center. The Leadership Team had voted unanimously for his son, Zephaniah, to lead them and oversee all the Christian Worship Centers in Antioch. Jonathan was so proud of his son and pleased that he was doing such a great job.

Christian Schools had been started in five of the Christian Worship Centers and Rabbi Absalom was always on the lookout for new teachers and rabbis. School had been in session for over a month and there was a distinct hint of fall in the air. Zephaniah was calling for reports from each of the eight pastors, when the door suddenly opened. Three breathless men entered the room and were welcomed by the group. "We were trying to make it in time to report to you," said Silas. "Let us catch our breath. Do you have some juice?" They were quickly served juice and they joined the men on the floor to rest. While the other men sang some songs of praise, everyone was wondering why the three men had come without Paul. Soon they heard a brief outline of the news.

"Paul was opposed by the Sanhedrin and Pharisees in Jerusalem and arrested. There was a plot against his life, but the Romans successfully transferred him to Caesarea in Galilee along the Great Sea. He is in a Roman prison there," reported Silas.

"We waited and waited for his release, but it has been over a year and there doesn't seem to be any end in sight. Paul sent us to ask for your prayers and to request that Yanis come and help him prepare letters for the gatherings that he has established in Asia Minor. The Holy Spirit has filled him with much wisdom that he wants to share with the new followers. Since he's in prison, he felt the Holy Spirit is guiding him to dictate his thoughts," reported Zebedee.

The men listened and prayed for wisdom and clarity and Yanis left early to go to talk with Jenay about traveling to Caesarea to help Paul. Luke and Silas went to Kostakis' house for the night and Zebedee walked home with Jonathan and Zephaniah. "Dad, I'm not sure, but I think that Luke and I will stay in Antioch for a while to work on his manuscript. There is no room for us to work in Caesarea and the manuscript is too precious to have it ruined by the wind and rain of winter if we tried to camp. If we remain in Antioch, we will be looking for a place to stay and work. I'm hoping we'll be able to spend some time together."

"That would be good, but let's just take it one day at a time. I'm glad to have you close by even if it's just for a day. You'll always be welcome. I'm sure we can find room at one of the Centers for you and Luke to finish this manuscript," said Jonathan.

"We should have discussed it tonight," contributed Zephaniah. "But I'll ask around." When they arrived home, Susanna was waiting up for Jonathan and Zephaniah as she always did. Zadok was already sleeping. Jonathan often wanted to talk after the Leadership Team

meeting. She ran into Zebedee's arms and cried when she saw him. She fixed him a plate of food and they listened again to what had happened over the past three years. They talked late into the night and finally got settled enough to sleep. But when they pointed him to Rinnah's old room, the conversation started all over. Jonathan briefly caught him up with the espousal and marriage. "Now, she has a home and husband of her own, and she is with child."

"My baby sister. That's hard to believe. I feel old. Goodnight, Dad. Goodnight, Zephaniah." He kissed his mother's cheek. "We'll have all day to visit tomorrow."

Each of the Christian Worship Centers announced Paul's need for prayer. Most of them held two or three services each day and soon just about every follower in Antioch had heard the news of Paul's arrest. Jonathan asked Silas to share at the original Christian Worship Center, and they spent time in prayer for Paul's release, but also for God's will to be accomplished.

Silas gathered his team together at Jonathan's home on Sabbath afternoon to discuss their plans. Yanis and Jenay had offered Luke and Zebedee the use of their home since Ephram was only there at night. "How long will it take to finish your manuscript?" asked Silas.

"I really haven't had any time to work on it. We keep adding notes of things that need to be done, but we haven't had a place to really work since we left here, and we were only just beginning to get it organized then. We need to start all over and get it put in order. It could take several months," said Luke.

"But here we can work on it full time and not be distracted by other responsibilities," added Zebedee. "It will go much faster, and we can spread it all out at Yanis' house and not have to repack it each night."

"I can't promise you how long you will have to work on it. But I'm okay to leave you here until Paul is released. We have to come back this way to return to Asia Minor anyway and we'll plan to pick you up just as soon as Paul is able to travel," agreed Silas. "I'll go back to Caesarea to help Timothy and the others care for Paul's needs and to minister there. There are a lot of groups that need to be trained and organized before we leave. And I'll be taking Yanis back with me to work as a scribe for Paul."

"And we'll keep the Centers praying for Paul's release," said Jonathan.

"Thanks, Dad."

"Silas, do you need financial support?" asked Zephaniah.

"Yes, we occasionally get gifts from area gatherings, but so few know about our needs, and it would be good if we could rent a small house instead of camping out for the winter."

"I see no problem with helping you with that. The Worship Center has money designated for helping with ministry trips and I will have it for you in the morning."

"Thank you, Zephaniah. That would be a big help," agreed Silas.

“Now, what about you two? Will you need financial support for supplies or food or anything to get this manuscript completed?” asked Jonathan.

“No, a friend of mine from Ephesus has supported the writing of this manuscript and we still have sufficient funds for our needs,” said Luke.

“We’re fine, Dad. But thanks.”

Susanna served the men a post-Sabbath dinner before the sun was set so they could travel to their homes and get a good night’s rest.



Early Sunday morning, Silas, Yanis, and Jenay began their walk to Caesarea. It would take a week, but they looked forward to the walk along the coast of the Great Sea. It reminded Yanis and Jenay of their time in Capernaum and brought back many happy memories. They got to know Silas and a special friendship formed. Silas told them that the Romans were keeping Paul in prison but allowing him visitors. The team was camping nearby, but now they would try to rent a modest home with the gift from the Antioch Christians. The Romans expected them to provide Paul with food and whatever else he might need, so they were living off of whatever they could find at the market. Jenay agreed that since her days would be free, if she had a kitchen, she could cook for the team and Paul.

“Paul will want Yanis to be available by sunrise to write down what God is teaching him. Timothy and I each take two of the men with us and preach in the markets or at the wells and lead classes all around the city. You two will be valuable assets to keep the ministry going. But let me know if it’s too much. Paul has a lot of things he wants to get accomplished, and he wants to push us all to do more. Sometimes I have to intervene and remind him we still have human bodies,” laughed Silas.

When they finally arrived, they located a small house and Jenay felt comfortable with the other six men. Yanis and Jenay purchased a couple of mats to place in the indoor kitchen and the other six spread out in the living area and one tiny sleeping room. Everyone was grateful to be out of the winter rains. Jenay had never had servants, and quickly fell into the routine of cooking for the nine of them. Soon she asked Yanis if he could afford for her to purchase a lap loom and threads so that she could start making robes for everyone. All their robes were tattered and outgrown. She didn’t know how long she would be there but hoped that she could at least get a few made. She loved to weave, and on pretty days she would sit outside and enjoy the sunshine. She could hear the Great Sea’s roar from the back yard. She went with Yanis to visit Paul and check on his size, then she began weaving robes for each of the men. They were very appreciative. It was satisfying to her and gave her time to pray. She had plenty of people to pray for!

Paul had a steady stream of visitors and Yanis used that time to make duplicate copies of the letters that the men would deliver to the gatherings all over their ministry route. He intended to keep the copies in Antioch for safety and felt that they might be beneficial for the followers there. Yanis often stayed late into the night when Paul was able to work without visitors. Yanis loved hearing the things that God was revealing to Paul about how the gatherings should work together. He said the large group of followers, as well as the small groups, were very similar to a human body; each person having a different role, but each interacting and supporting the other, all under one head — Jesus.



Back in Antioch, Luke hired a servant to take care of the cooking and cleaning at Yanis' house. He wanted to spend all his time on the manuscript. Ephram was mostly at the West Worship Center and very seldom at the house. Luke and Zebedee worked from sunup to sundown. Then they worked by lamplight until they fell into their mats exhausted. They only took time off for the Sabbath. Manasseh and Nathan helped them after school each day and sometimes they were able to recruit some of the older students. Finally, the manuscript that Luke had envisioned was taking shape and he felt it was getting closer and closer to what God had called him to accomplish. Sabbaths felt long, even though they knew they needed the rest. They spent most Sabbaths visiting one of the Worship Centers and then visiting with Jonathan and Susanna in the afternoons.



Another spring had passed, and summer was hot along the Great Sea when Yanis reported to the team that Paul had been summoned to yet another hearing. This one was before King Agrippa. The men and Jenay spent a considerable amount of time praying that soon Paul would be released. But instead, the news the next morning caused quite an upheaval. Paul had appealed to Caesar and was being shipped to Rome. Silas called the team together. It was decided that they would walk to Antioch and reunite with Luke and Zebedee and then continue to Rome. When Silas and Yanis went to visit with Paul the next morning to go over their plans, they found that he had already been transferred and they had not been allowed to say goodbye. They packed up their few provisions, bought two donkeys to carry all the manuscripts, and were on their way to Antioch by midmorning.

Yanis and Jenay were torn between staying in Antioch and possibly traveling with Paul's team to Rome, or at least to Asia Minor to join Enoch, their oldest son. They tried to hurry, but they could only travel as fast as the donkeys. They predicted that they could cover the

250 miles before the following Sabbath, so they had plenty of time to plan, discuss, and pray. The seven men and Jenay had formed a tightly knit bond and they were committed to helping the couple determine God's will for their future. During their days of walking together, Yanis and Jenay felt that Jehovah was calling them to stay and resume their work with the Christian Worship Centers. Antioch had become a hub of Christian activity and was vital for training leadership that would continue into all of the area north of the Great Sea.

By midafternoon the following Thursday, they arrived in Antioch. They went directly to Yanis' home and were surprised to find only a servant preparing dinner. Yanis talked with the servant and explained to the others that Luke and Zebedee had completed the manuscript and had taken it to the Scribe Shop to have it copied. The servant assured them that Luke and Zebedee would return at sunset and suggested they wait for them there. They discussed spending the night at Kostakis' but agreed that it would be easier to camp in the yard since the weather was good and they needed to be together to make plans. The servant assured Yanis that he could prepare enough food for all the guests for the evening. Yanis thanked him for his help and promised that they would let him know their needs soon.

They unloaded the donkeys and began to sort out their supplies. When Luke and Zebedee arrived at Yanis' home, everyone began talking at once. All the news was shared, and plans began to be made. Timothy and Silas would leave tomorrow morning and see if they could book passage to Rome on a ship. Luke and Zebedee would stay and help Simon's scribes finish the manuscript — hopefully in about two weeks — before beginning to walk toward Rome. And the other four men and Yanis would assist wherever they were needed in the Christian Worship Centers and preaching in the markets until the group was ready to travel.

“Dad! Mother! You're back!” Ephram ran to hug both of them at once. He greeted the other men and the news about Paul's transfer was shared all over again. Everyone caught Ephram up on the plans they had made so far. They explained that Timothy and Silas would try to get to Rome quickly by ship, while the others would be responsible for leaving copies of the letters that Paul had written to the gatherings along the way. They would rendezvous in Rome at some point.

Yanis agreed to spend his time helping Luke and Zebedee and the other volunteers finish the first copy of Luke's manuscript. He also asked if they should plan to make a second copy to leave in Antioch for safety. Luke liked the idea, but Silas was uncomfortable delaying the delivery of the letters.

Ephram intervened. “How about if I announce tonight at the Leadership meeting that we need all-hands-on-deck to make another copy of Luke's manuscript to leave here? Then we'll continue to make copies after you guys leave. We'll also want to get a copy ready to go to Jerusalem whenever anyone is headed that way. I suspect we could get it accomplished in less than a week. Would that work?”

Silas agreed and reminded Zebedee that he would need him to be in charge of purchasing supplies for the journey. Zebedee suggested that Ephram see if the Worship Centers could help them financially for the long journey. After a quick dinner, Ephram, Yanis, Silas, and Timothy left to attend the Leadership Team meeting .



Zephaniah and Jonathan greeted the men and were eager to hear the update on Paul. They were shocked by the change since they had been praying for his release from Caesarea. They had not considered this outcome. Yanis was surprised at how much Jonathan had aged. He was eager to hear what was going on in Antioch. Zephaniah insisted that they take time to worship and praise Jehovah and reminded the leaders that God always had something good in mind. Once they returned to the table, he asked Silas to give them an update about their plans.

Silas began by apologizing for needing to ask for funding yet again. "I see no problem with supporting this ministry since I know it will result in the strengthening of the existing gatherings all over Asia Minor and all of the area between here and Rome. It is our privilege to support the work," said Lucius and all the Team agreed.

When Ephram explained the need for scribes to quickly finish copies of Luke's manuscript about Jesus, the Leadership Team began to discuss ways to recruit them. Jonathan said that he would take care of getting the five schools to dismiss for the coming week so that the rabbis and teachers and older students could work. Everyone who was available would meet at the Scribe Shop, and if there was not room, they could also work at Yanis' house.

The men spent time praying for Paul, and for Silas and Timothy as they sailed. They prayed for the team that would be walking and ministering to many of the existing gatherings along the way when the manuscripts were complete.

On Friday, Ephram let Joab know of the need for scribes on Sunday, but Joab immediately took off from the bank and helped Naboth and Luke set up a system that kept everyone busy and the work checked twice before approving it for the manuscript. They wanted to work fast, but not introduce errors. On Sunday the Scribe Shop was packed with men copying Luke's manuscript, and six additional men were working on making copies of John Mark's manuscript at Yanis' house. Luke was amazed that in a record five days, thirty-six different scribes finished the first copy and made a complete second copy to leave with Jonathan. In future days, the Scribe Shop would make additional copies to be distributed locally and hopefully to Jerusalem.



During that crazy, chaotic week of watching God pull together all the help they needed, Yanis and Jenay felt with certainty that they were being called to travel with Paul's team for a while longer. They saw how Jehovah had blessed Ephram's pastoring of the Antioch Christian Center and felt comfortable leaving him to continue his ministry there. They hoped that God would allow them to settle somewhere near Enoch in Laodicea. They discussed when to tell Ephram their new plans. It would be hard to leave him behind, but they knew that he was surrounded by support here in Antioch. They met with Luke and Zebedee and they were thrilled with their decision. They assured them that they would be welcome to travel with the team and reminded them that they hoped to leave on Friday if everything was completed.

On Wednesday, at breakfast, Ephram asked if he could speak with Luke and Zebedee privately. They met on the rooftop and Ephram asked if he could join their ministry team. "I feel certain that God is calling me to travel and pastor in a new area. I am not sure where God is calling me but feel that I should travel with you until God reveals the location." They welcomed him, but asked what would happen to the Antioch Christian Worship Center. "Dad can pick up there, but I also have complete confidence in Priest Mahlon's and his two brothers' leadership. They are ready to pastor on their own and God has given me total peace. That's really none of my business. I just want to be obedient to what I'm hearing, so I resigned as the pastor there last night. I met with Zephaniah this morning and resigned from the Leadership Team. I'll be ready to leave with you whenever you are ready."

"We hope to leave on Friday. Have you told your parents?" asked Luke, exchanging glances with Zebedee.

"That's always the hardest part," agreed Zebedee, nodding at Luke that they should not reveal what they already knew.

The men prayed together and then left to join the other men downstairs as they finished assembling the scrolls and making sure that everything would be ready to pack tomorrow.

Ephram found his mother sitting in the courtyard weaving. He sat with his mother, Jenay, and asked where his dad was. She explained that he had gone to the Scribe Shop where they hoped to complete the copies today. "Mother, I have some news that I would like to share with both of you. Could you walk to the Shop with me so that we could talk with Dad for a few minutes?"

"Certainly." *What in the world? Is he announcing his espousal? Will that change what God has clearly told us to do? Oh, this leaving is going to be much harder than I expected. But we will be obedient. When God called us to Capernaum, it was hard to leave my parents. When He called us to Antioch, we left Abie, our only daughter, the rest of my family, and all our friends. Now, we are leaving Ephram, my*

baby. Father, give me strength. They walked to the Scribe Shop together and asked Yanis to join them. Ephram asked Naboth if there was a place they could talk in private, and he invited them to use his office.

There Jenay explained that Ephram had asked to speak to the two of them together. She could see Yanis' thoughts and smiled. Their marriage had started out pretty rocky, but now she could read him like a manuscript. He was thinking the same thing she was thinking. She knew it.

"Dad, Mother, I know this will be really hard for you, but I have resigned from pastoring the Antioch Worship Center. I talked with Luke and Zebedee this morning and received permission to join the ministry team until I locate where God is calling me to pastor. As I've worked with Luke these past few years, I've become aware of how great the need is to continue to teach the New Way farther and farther into new territory. I don't know whether I'm needed close to Enoch or whether it will be some place different, but I know that God is calling me to a new area. I hate to leave you two, but feel that God's people will care for you here."

Yanis and Jenay exchanged glances and they could hardly suppress their joy. "Son, we want you to go wherever God is leading you. You have our support and our blessings. Now, we need to share with you what we told Luke yesterday," said Yanis.

"What is that?" *Did Jehovah reveal His plans for me to them?*

"Last night, we became absolutely certain that God was calling us to travel with Paul's team until we can determine a new place to pastor. As you've said, the need is so great. We have learned so much from this team and feel God's call to be a part of this new work. We planned to tell you tonight that we would be leaving you. It was going to be incredibly hard, but we felt you were settled here. Now ..."

"Dad! Mother! I can't think of anything sweeter. We will travel together and then God will reveal where we are most needed. Do you know when the team is leaving?"

"We are trying to finish the manuscripts today and I assume we'll leave tomorrow."

"What will we do with the house if we're all leaving?"

"I wonder if Zephaniah is ready to purchase a home. It would be a much easier walk than having to walk to Jonathan's every day."

"Talk with him and see. I need to be busy on the manuscripts. You and Mother will have to take care of that if you have the time today. Otherwise, we'll just give it to Jonathan and let him deal with it."

Zephaniah was indeed eager to purchase the house especially after the Leadership Team appointed him as pastor over the Antioch Christian Worship Center. It would be a much nicer commute and he asked Luke's servant to continue to take care of the house and cooking. He headed to Jonathan's to tell his parents the news.

On Friday morning there was a touch of fall in the air as Jonathan and Susanna tearfully hugged Zebedee and the rest of the team goodbye. Saying goodbye to Yanis and Jenay was even harder. They

were certain that the next time they met would be in Heaven with the rest of their family. But above the sadness was an incredible joy to be part of the wildfire that was moving across the world. They stood and watched the nine until they couldn't see them. Then Jonathan and Susanna began their own walk back home.

Chapter 27

It was two years later, when Silas, Luke, and Zebedee arrived at Jonathan's office at the Christian Worship Center just as school dismissed. Jonathan was finishing up a message for the Sabbath when he greeted them. "Welcome. I hope this is good news!"

"Yes, it is good news, but not news we wanted," said Silas.

"Don't talk in riddles. My son is back and that is good news. But what is Paul's status?"

"As far as we know he is still being held in Rome," said Silas.

"Dad, we are really tired and hungry. Could we go to the house and get settled before we give a report?" asked Zebedee.

"Certainly. Let's go." He knew that Susanna would be out doing her ministry with the other women, and he was mentally searching the pantry for things to serve them. Susanna always kept everything well stocked for surprise visitors. So, it should be okay.

As the men got the donkey settled, Zebedee asked if the three of them could stay for a short visit before their return to Rome. Jonathan assured them that he now had plenty of room and he and Susanna would be glad to host them. "We could go to Kostakis', but I would rather be here, and Luke and Silas said they didn't care as long as we can rest a few days."

"Where are Yanis and Jenay?" asked Jonathan.

"We left them in Laodicea with Enoch. They wanted to visit and rest a while, then Enoch will help them find a group nearby to get started. You know they will be a real asset there."

"So, where is Ephram?"

"He's in Colossae. But Dad, we're starving."

"Sorry." He hurriedly set out the bread rolls that Susanna had made this morning. He found butter and goat cheese in the cellar along with some fruit and nuts. He poured them each a cup of wine, and they sat and ate in silence. It broke Jonathan's heart to see them so hungry and wondered what all his son had endured to share the New Way with others. When Susanna arrived, she hurried back to the market and quickly prepared dinner for the men. The men again devoured everything and thanked them profusely. Then they headed to guest room mats.

All day on Thursday, the men checked on the various Christians in Antioch. They preached in the marketplace, and Jonathan spent as much time with them as he could. After a wonderful meal prepared by Susanna, they went to the Leadership Team meeting with Jonathan. Now, for the first time, he heard the report. Silas reported, "Paul is under house arrest in Rome, and has rented a small house for himself, his guard, his team, and a servant cook. He sent for John Mark to come and help Timothy. They are busy ministering to the people and teaching them, but they are also transcribing letters that Paul wants sent to the New Way gatherings throughout the area. The team is

helping to form groups and train leadership for as many new followers as they can.”

Zebedee added, “Paul is leading an amazing number of Roman officials to Jesus. Every day his house is filled with people wanting to learn about Jehovah’s love for them and the price that Jesus paid for their sins. It’s a very effective ministry.”

Silas continued, “We stayed with Paul and worked in Rome for almost a year until Paul asked us to check on all the gatherings again. We three were chosen to travel back here and to check on everyone as we traveled. Our goal was to determine what the gatherings along our route needed and how we could help them to grow. We’ll return as quickly as possible and bring back that report to Paul.”

“The main thing that we heard is that they need more leaders, and more manuscripts of the life of Jesus,” said Luke.

“Were you able to distribute the letters that Yanis helped Paul write to the various gatherings?” asked Zephaniah.

“Yes, we delivered them on our initial trip to Rome. Then we delivered more on this trip and I’m sure there will be some ready when we return,” answered Silas. “Even though Paul is still in prison, he uses us to relay his messages to these gatherings and encourage their leaders.”

“I’m sure that the Scribe Shop has some manuscripts ready for you to distribute,” reported Zephaniah.

“What can we do to help, besides pray?” asked Samuel.

“We always need funding just for basic needs, but we primarily need copies of Luke’s and Mark’s manuscripts. It would be so helpful to be able to distribute these to the new followers.”

“You don’t need Matthew’s manuscript?” asked Manaen.

“No, we don’t encounter many Jewish Christians in this area. There are a few, but we mostly need the manuscripts written specifically for Gentiles.”

“I don’t know how many manuscripts Naboth has ready, but if you wish, we could do another week of focusing on making manuscripts.”

“No. We will begin our journey back to Rome on Sunday, so we will just take whatever is available,” said Silas.

“That is such a vital ministry. Thank you for any manuscripts you can give us. We’ll take the ones that are ready and pick up the others next time. So many of the leaders have no idea what Jesus taught and what He did. We, and Paul, feel that the manuscripts will help them to understand the whole picture of the New Way,” said Luke.

“Are you staying with Jonathan? Tomorrow, I will bring you all the manuscripts that are available,” said Zephaniah.

“Yes, we are at Jonathan’s and thank you. We would like to hear all the reports from the Worship Centers tonight if you don’t mind. Paul always wants to know how each gathering is doing, and we don’t have time to visit each one. He spends a lot of time praying for you and your ministries,” said Silas.

“Let’s take a few minutes for worship together and then we’ll begin our reports and combine them with prayer requests. How does that sound?” asked Zephaniah.

The men sang some Psalms and praise songs together and then began their reports. Jonathan noticed that Zebedee moved to the table and recorded the prayer requests on a tiny piece of papyrus. He resolved to take him to the market and replenish his supplies tomorrow.

On Friday morning the men preached at several markets but took the afternoon to purchase needed supplies for the trip. Susanna and several of the ladies were working to prepare bread and collect other supplies for their trip.

Kostakis hosted the Sabbath dinner that included the regular group plus the Leadership Team and their families and the three men from Paul’s team. There was a lot of laughter and sharing.

The three men each gave a report and taught at different Worship Centers across Antioch. Jonathan was pleased that Zebedee had been allowed to speak at his. Zebedee was a good speaker and engaged the crowds. While he reported what Jehovah was accomplishing between Antioch and Rome, he also encouraged and challenged the people of Antioch to not become lethargic in their faith and not get tangled in the weeds of everyday life. He encouraged them to pray about knowing God’s will for each new day and using each day to the fullest. Even Jonathan felt convicted by the Holy Spirit to do more for the kingdom.

The three men rested at Jonathan and Susanna’s house for the Sabbath and then left before sunrise on Sunday morning. Somehow, it seemed easier each time to watch Zebedee leave. The Worship Centers had helped them to restock on supplies and financially supported their work. And they packed five of Luke’s manuscripts of the life of Jesus that they would distribute along the route. Naboth promised to continue to make copies. Jonathan and Susanna waved from their courtyard until they were out of sight.



For the next two years, the Leadership Team heard nothing from Paul’s team. They were committed to praying for Paul’s release from prison, and for the entire ministry team. Zephaniah continued to remind them to encourage volunteers to help with the copying of manuscripts of the life of Jesus. Naboth, with the help of contributions from the Worship Centers, paid the rabbis and teachers from the various Worship Center Schools to work full-time during the summer breaks. Some of the older students were also hired upon recommendations of their rabbis or teachers. Volunteers worked for portions of the day after work, and some of their Christian bosses allowed them to work one day a week. Everyone wanted to do their part in seeing the New Way spread to the entire world.



On Thursday afternoon before the Passover Preparation Day began, Paul and Timothy, Luke, Zebedee and four others on Paul's ministry team arrived at Kostakis' home. The ministry team was exhausted as they had walked from Rome to Antioch. They had made many detours and visited as many gatherings as they could. Now, they needed to take some time to rest. They felt that the Holy Spirit would probably send them back to preach between here and Rome and encourage the new followers in that area north of the Great Sea. They ate and were refreshed and then Zebedee left to check on his parents. Jonathan and Susanna were sitting in the courtyard when Zebedee arrived. "Good news!" he shouted. "Paul has been released and he's free. They are staying with Kostakis, but I'll stay here with you, if it's okay."

"Son, you know you are always welcome. Are you hungry?"

"No, Kostakis fed us well before I came. Thank you."

"How long will you get to stay?"

"I never know. Paul doesn't stay anywhere very long. When we're traveling, he usually stays until a group is formed. Then he appoints one of us to stay and pastor and he moves on. But I think he comes to Antioch primarily to catch his breath and rest a little. And for that I am grateful! I'm hoping we can at least stay through Passover."

"And you've never felt like the Holy Spirit was leading you to settle down?" asked Susanna.

"No. I feel a deep urge to just keep telling the good news in new places. There are so many people who have never heard the New Way. If I don't go, who will? I see you've hired a slave to help with the cooking. I didn't think you ever would," commented Zebedee.

"No, we've invited a Christian couple to share the house and help us out with things that we are getting too old to handle. It also frees us to do more of the ministry that we love. Your mother is teaching more and more and it's nice to come home to a hot meal and rest instead of running to the market and rushing all the time," explained Jonathan.

Zebedee spent the night with his parents and after breakfast, Susanna had to leave to teach a women's group. She knew the men would enjoy being alone, but she hated to miss a minute of time with Zebedee.

"Did you know that Zadok is now pastoring the original Christian Worship Center?" asked Jonathan.

"No. I hadn't heard that. So, you've stepped down?"

"I still teach occasionally, but teaching full-time is too strenuous for me these days."

"I'm glad God has allowed you two sons to help you here. I'm assuming Zephaniah is still at West Antioch?"

"Yes. He's doing good work and is in charge of the Leadership Team, too. And Rinnah and her husband, Reuben, are co-pastoring south of here."

“Yes, I knew that. I feel like Zerah and I have deserted you.”

“No, Son. God has called you both to this ministry. We wouldn’t have it any other way. We are so proud of both of you.”

“You don’t resent our being gone all the time?” queried Zebedee.

Without hesitation, Jonathan stated firmly, “Zebedee, I saw my abba leave everything he had ever known to follow a man named Jesus. He left his career, his family, his home, his plans and dreams, to follow this man that he believed was the Messiah. I got to tag along and got to know Jesus personally. That still amazes me that I’ve hugged Him, eaten with Him, learned from Him. What an awesome way to grow up. I accepted Him as my Messiah right after the crucifixion and resurrection in Jerusalem and the Holy Spirit began to direct my life.

“I saw the New Way begin in Jerusalem. I saw it spread across Samaria and Galilee, from tiny villages to the largest cities. Then God called me to Antioch, a place I had never heard of. I never dreamed I would leave Israel. But God has blessed me here. The New Way has stretched from Jerusalem all the way to Rome. I think you or Luke ought to write down that journey. Everyone is focused on writing about Jesus’ life, but His life continues. He is not dead. His Holy Spirit has led so many individuals to participate in this journey. Jesus has transformed our world and I’ve gotten to be a part of it. I wouldn’t change anything about my journey, or yours. He’s got a good plan. I know He will return soon, or your mother and I will join Him in Heaven, but everything that He said would happen has happened. Zebedee, I’m so proud of you. I hope you know that.” Jonathan sighed and settled deeper into the cushion. There was a contented smile on his face that stretched from ear to ear. Zebedee suddenly startled and realized that he had just witnessed his dad entering Heaven. Zebedee gently shut his dad’s eyes and sat and held his dad’s hand. It was a hand that had guided him, held him, led him to Jesus, then released him and freed him to be all that God intended.

The End (Or Only the Beginning?)

AFTERWORD

I hope you have enjoyed the New Way Series. Please contact me through our website weath.net if you have any questions or comments. I would love to hear from you.

In His service,
Dale Weatherford