God's Plan of the Ages

Volume Five

REDEMPTION PRESS

God's Plan of the Ages

Volume Five ~ Messiah through the End of Time

A historical fiction epic imagining what it may have been like
to accompany the Creator of the universe
from the beginning to the end of time.

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Facebook community: The Feasts of Israel
Maps drawn by Nathaniel Santa Cruz, Graphic Illustrator

Note: This story begins in Volume Two and is continued in Volumes Three and Four, which conclude the Old Testament portion of the story. Volume Five tells the New Testament portion of the story and beyond, to the end of time. About the middle of Volume Five I skip from the book of Acts directly to the book of Revelation.

Be sure to see the back pages for the timeline, diagrams, and index for this volume. Maps of Jerusalem and the Holy Land around the time of Christ are on pages 12 and 13.

"…as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive.
But each in his own order:
Christ, the firstfruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming,
then comes the end, when He delivers up the Kingdom to the God and Father,
when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power.
For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet.
The last enemy that will be abolished is death…
And when all things are subjected to Him, then the Son Himself will be subjected
to the One [the Father] who subjected all things to Him,
that God may be all in all."
(1 Cor 15:22-26, 28)

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Preface

God's Plan of the Ages Volume Five – Messiah through the End of Time

Though this is the final volume of a five volume set, I have written it to stand on its own for those of my dear Readers who don't want to begin with the Old Testament and its confusing Cataclysmic Era. Thus I added a brief Historical Background introduction to set the stage for the Gospels. Those who have read the previous volumes already know the historical background and can skip right to Chapter 1.

The first half of this volume tells the story of the four Gospels. The little superscript numbers indicate Scripture paragraphs, which I've indexed to the Scriptures at the end. These were originally from *A Harmony of the Gospels,* by Robert Thomas and Stanley Gundry, Moody Press, Chicago. I owe them a great debt of gratitude for getting me started on my own "harmony." But I had to change their chronology to fit my perspective on the Feasts, so I developed my own paragraphs.

Please keep in mind, dear Reader, that this entire work is historical fiction. Three places in Scripture (Deut 4:2, Prov 30:5, and Rev 22:18) we are warned against adding to God's Word. Telling the story of the Bible is not adding to God's Word! That would be arrogant and presumptuous of me. God's Word is divinely inspired and infallible. All I have added is a fiction story of how it may have occurred and how it may all fit together.

That said, the first half of this volume sticks pretty closely to Scripture, with little added except some of the dialogs and a few fictional characters, such as Yacov Ben Levi the priest. I tried to at least mention every story in the four Gospels, but integrated into one tale. I built my chronology on the knowledge of the Feasts of Israel from Volume One. I expand on those stories that seem to need it, and skim quickly past those stories that are well-detailed in the Gospels. Much of the keeping of the Feasts comes from ancient Hebrew traditions, handed down mouth-to-mouth from long before the time of Christ. Some of my story comes from secular historical records, and some I calculated by knowing lunar cycles and the movements of the planets. I use ancient Hebrew dates, not from their current dates but based on estimations made at the time of Ezra and from calculations done the traditional way – using sightings of the new moon over Jerusalem. I did not subtract any years for the exiles as Jews now like to do. Due to uncertainties introduced by the Catastrophic Era, these Hebrew dates are almost certainly wrong (they are 1104 years lower than my own dates). However, I chose to use them anyway, because they are probably the actual dates used by the Jews living at this time period.

I look at the Gospels from the perspective of the people who lived them. These are Hebrews from the Middle East. Their thinking is quite different from ours who have been raised with a western mindset. To aid in shifting our perspective I have changed a few of the names to their Hebrew equivalents. John is Yochanan the Baptizer; Zechariah and Elizabeth are Zacharias and Elisheva; Mary and Joseph become Mariam and Yoseph; Jesus is Yashua; the angel Gabriel is Gavriel; and so on. But most names I don't change: for example Herod, Pilate, and the apostles stay the same. I'm not trying to confuse you! Also I use Hebrew names for the months and the Feasts of Israel: Shabbat (Sabbath), Pesach (Passover), Shavuot (Pentecost), Sukkot (Tabernacles), Yom Teruach (Feast of Trumpets), Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), Simchat Bet haSho'ayva (Water Drawing Ceremony), Tisha B'Av (the fast of the 9th of Av), and so on. [See Volume One, page 85, for a chart of Jewish time vs our own, showing where these Feasts fit in the timeline.]

Though I do tell the story of that great Day of Pentecost (Acts 1 – 2), I have skipped the rest of the book of Acts and the entire Church Age. Many volumes have already been written to tell the story of the Church Age. They tell it accurately and well. They agree with each other and with history, and I have little to add to their work.

Instead, I skip directly to the book of Revelation. Though many volumes have also been written of this mysterious and wildly prophetic and symbolic book, there is a huge difference. Those volumes do not agree with each other, and they have little history (yet) to pin down the story. Some authors make the story so symbolic that it loses its practical application for us who live in these end times. I object! Of what value is the Bible if it is so esoteric that it has no application to our lives? I believe we are now living in those very end times addressed in the book of Revelation. To be forewarned is to be forearmed. This is an important story which (to my knowledge) has never been adequately told. The angel told Daniel, "Go your way, Daniel, for these words are concealed and sealed up until the time of the end." (Dan 12:8) The same can be said of the book of Revelation. They have been sealed books – until now! Now it is time. These books are being opened up to those who must live through these perilous days. As the angel told Daniel, "None of the wicked will understand, but those who have insight will understand."

In the last half of this volume, I tell the story of the book of Revelation, and beyond. I pull no punches. This story is very unlike the story of the Gospels, which are laid out clearly in Scripture. My story is as wild and wooly as my source and makes no attempt to cover it paragraph by paragraph as in the first half of this volume. All my characters are fictitious. All my settings are hypothetical. I let my imagination run wild – what might it be like to live through the earth's final judgments and the wrath of God? I must admit, this story is not for the faint of heart. As Jesus said, "From the days of John the Baptist until now the Kingdom of Heaven suffers violence, and violent men take it by force." (Matt 11:12) This story is for those violent men (and women), who are not content to sit around and wait for the rapture, but rather are filled with a violence in their spirits to take everything God has to offer and not settle for a penny less. Theirs is a 'Hebrews 11 faith' that aggressively reaches up to claim the promises of God (Heb 11:33) even in the midst of the worst catastrophes in history. You thought the Catastrophic Era was bad? You thought I went overboard in my narration of the worldwide cataclysms surrounding the Flood of Noah? Ha. You 'aint seen nothin' yet. Wait 'til you get to the seven seals and the seven trumpets of Revelation 6 through 11! And the ages to come, and into eternity!

If you believe in a pre-tribulation rapture of the church, please, do NOT read my story on the Revelation until you go back and read my discourse on it in Volume One (starting on page 185). You will not understand this volume if your mind is still clouded by the pre-trib rapture heresy, as you will be thinking, "It doesn't matter. I won't be there. I'll be snatched up to heaven before any of this stuff happens." Remember, the one who comes like a thief to try to snatch away the saints is not the Lord, it is the devil! He comes to snatch them away because they're sleeping! "But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day should overtake you like a thief." (1 Thess 5:4) Overtake you it will, but you, dear Reader, will not be snatched away by the devil because you will be forewarned.

All who are not prepared will be terrified, dysfunctional with fear. But you, dear Reader, will remember Jesus' words, "There will be signs in the sun and moon and stars, and upon the earth dismay among nations, in perplexity at the roaring of the sea and the waves, men fainting from fear and the expectation of the things which are coming upon the world; for the powers of the heavens will be shaken [i.e., planets will fall from their orbits]. And then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. But when these things begin to take place, [you, dear Reader, will] straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near." (Luke 21:25 ff)

Hallelujah! Our eyes may see the cataclysms, but our hearts will see only the glory of the triumphant risen Savior, come to judge the earth in righteousness and to redeem His own back to Himself. We saints will rejoice to see God's judgments fall on the earth! (Ps 96:11-13; Isa 26:8-9) That has been just a cute theological theory for far too long. Now it is time for it to become reality. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!

God's Plan of the Ages – A Historical Fiction Epic

Volume Five – Messiah to the End of Time

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A Harmony of the Gospels, with Explanations and Essays, Using the Text of the New American Standard Bible, by Robert Thomas and Stanley Gundry, © 1978 by The Moody Bible Institute, Moody Press, Chicago

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The Sign, © 1992 by Robert Van Kampen, Crossway Books, Wheaton, Illinois

The Millennium Bible, Complete Commentary on all Scripture Passages Related to the Second Coming, © 1924 by William E. Biederwolf, published in 1999 by Global Christian Publishers, including Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

To help understand this story of the four Gospels from a Jewish perspective, we need to review a little of the historical and cultural background surrounding the advent of Yashua haMashiach, Hebrew for Jesus the Christ.

In 336 BC, Darius III came to power over the mighty Medo-Persian Empire, which ruled much of the world. However, at about the same time, Alexander (the twenty-year-old alleged son of Philip II, who was king of the Greek province of Macedonia) began a campaign of conquest. His military genius enabled him to defeat Darius III at Issus in 333 BC and at Gaugamela in 331 BC. He continued on to conquer the known world from Europe to Egypt, and all the way to the borders of India by the time he was thirty. True to Aristotle his teacher, Alexander the Great unified his empire by spreading Greek knowledge, culture, and religion everywhere he went. Though brief, Hellenism and the Golden Age of Greece had a big impact on little Israel. It become fashionable to take Greek names, adopt Greek dress and customs, enjoy Greek literature, attend Greek games, use Greek inventions, and tolerate Greek gods.

Many from the upper classes, wealthy and influential members of society, began to forsake their ancestral faith and traditions. This obvious paganizing of Jewish culture was a monstrous threat to all who cared about the God of their fathers. They remembered their tragic history – the Diaspora and God's miraculous restoration. They knew why they had been exiled, and didn't want to have to go through it again! To combat the peril, God-fearing leaders organized into the 'Chasidim', bodies of Protestants and pietists who were willing to pledge their allegiance and even their lives to the 'new covenant' with YHWH, as prophesied by Jeremiah the prophet. (31:31-34)

However, the situation was to get far worse. With the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BC, his empire split up between his generals. So much for unity. They fought each other for power and control. When the dust settled, four remained: Seleucus ruled Syria and eastern Asia Minor; Ptolemy controlled Egypt; Lysimachus ruled Thrace and western Asia Minor (Turkey); and Cassander got Greece and Macedonia. Unfortunately, Israel was strategically located at the land bridge between the continents of Africa, Asia, and Europe, between Syria and Egypt. These four generals saw that control of Israel was a key to dominance in the region. For almost two centuries Israel was tossed between the Seleucid (Syrian) and Ptolemaic (Egyptian) dynasties that sought to dominate the Middle East.

In 171 BC, the cruel tyrant Antiochus IV came to the Seleucid throne. Incredibly arrogant, he believed himself to be deity in the flesh. He called himself Antiochus Theos Epiphanes ('God Manifest'). His detractors called him Epimanes ('Madman'). He unified his widespread empire by enforced Hellenization: imposing Greek language, culture, philosophy, and religion upon his subjects.

The Jewish Covenanters, '**Chasidim**', had a major problem with this. Their goal was to preserve the faith of their fathers. To oppose the Seleucids, many of them formed into a conservative political force known as the **Orthodox Party**, which sought help from the Ptolemys (who were willing to rule Israel without imposing their culture and religion). However, a large group of the more wealthy in Israel, known as the liberal and progressive **Hellenist Party**, loved Greek ways, and had little concern for real faith. They focused on the economic and social advantages of appearing 'enlightened' and 'civilized'.

In Jerusalem, the high priest Yohanan (Onias III) was vehemently opposed to the Hellenistic forces in Israel. But his brother Joshua joined the Hellenist Party and changed his name to its Greek form, Jason. Supported by many wealthy leaders in Israel, he managed to gain an alliance with the Seleucids. Jason offered Antiochus a huge bribe to obtain the office of high priest, promising to build a temple to the Greek god Phallus and a gymnasium (where men performed naked) in Jerusalem, and to enroll the people in Jerusalem as citizens of Antioch (capital of Syria). Jason arranged for his brother's assassination and took his place, throwing Israel into a cauldron of internal strife.

Three years later (168 BC) Menelaus, another rabid Hellenist not even from a high priestly family, bought the high priest's office with an even larger bribe. But he found that the temple treasury (the people's offerings) could not support payment of his bribe, so he stole golden vessels from the temple (a great abomination to the Chasidim) to pay off Antiochus.

About this time Antiochus, desirous of unifying the Grecian empire as in the days of Alexander, led a huge Seleucid army against the Ptolemys of Egypt. Victory seemed certain, except the Roman Senate heard of it and sent Popillius Laenas to stop it. By then the Roman Armies were feared the world over for their ruthlessness. Laenas asked Antiochus if he wanted peace or war with Rome. Then Laenas drew a circle in the sand around Antiochus, and stated that he must decide which he wanted before leaving the circle. Antiochus didn't dare face the Roman legions. He withdrew from Egypt in humiliation and rage.

On his return to Syria, Antiochus stopped in Jerusalem. There he discovered that Jason had believed a false rumor of his death in Egypt, and had rebelled against Menelaus.

Still in great rage, Antiochus ordered the destruction of Jerusalem and the desecration of the temple on Mount Moriah. The walls of the city were broken down, houses were burned, tens of thousands were sold into slavery, the temple was stripped of its treasures, its porches and gates were hacked and smashed, an idol to Zeus (bearing the face of Antiochus) was erected above the holy altar in the temple courtyard, and finally on December 25, Antiochus sacrificed a pig on the altar in celebration of the birthday of the Greek god Zeus (Jupiter).

That pig was the ultimate abomination to the Jewish mind. Antiochus sprinkled its blood on the Holy of Holies and poured its broth over the holy scrolls before cutting them up with a sword and burning them. The unthinkable had happened. The tiny, defenseless nation of Israel reeled with shock and horror.

The temple was converted to a shrine to Zeus. Only swine were permitted for sacrifice. A fortress (called the Acra) was erected next to it, so a Syrian garrison could protect the shrine. Antiochus issued an edict forbidding the practice of Judaism, on pain of death, enforced by house searches. If the Sabbath was observed, or Jewish dietary laws kept, or circumcision performed, or scrolls of the Jewish law found, the entire family was put to death.

A time of terrible persecution followed. Faithful Jews fled to the wilderness or the Judean hills to live in caves. They were hunted like animals, and many thousands had to give their lives to remain true to God. Detachments of Syrian soldiers were dispatched throughout the nation to enforce the diabolical edict of Antiochus. They built a pagan altar to Zeus at the tiny village of Modein (about 17 miles NW of Jerusalem). Then they assembled the towns-people and chose an aged priest named Mattathias to offer a sacrificial pig to the Greek gods in honor of Antiochus.

Grey-haired old Mattathias was a well-respected and God-fearing leader. He was a great-grandson of **Hasmon**, a descendant of Jehoiarib of the first division of priests. He had five sons: John, Simon, Judas, Eleazar, and Jonathan, who also were well-respected among the people. Knowing he faced death, Mattathias refused to sacrifice the pig. But at that moment, an apostate priest approached the altar and requested permission to perform the swine offering. Enraged, old Mattathias ripped a sword from the hand of a Syrian soldier, slew him, then turned and ran the sword through the body of the apostate Jew, right there on the pagan altar. In the commotion, his five sons attacked and slew the remaining soldiers. Quickly they pulled down the altar. Then, knowing swift and severe retribution would be taken, the faithful of the town fled to the hills of Judea.

Each day the zealous band grew as word of the rebellion spread. They first engaged in guerrilla warfare, attacking Syrian outposts, destroying pagan altars and statues, and chastising apostate brethren. But within a year, honored old Mattathias grew sick. On his deathbed, he passed the leadership to his son Judas – a wise choice, as Judas turned out to be a military genius. They called him the Maccabee ('the hammer'), speaking of his military might. Thus the Hasmonean revolution took the name of the **Maccabees.**

For two years the revolt raged. Hiding in caves and lying in ambush, the Maccabees gradually wore down the Syrian occupation. Finally the freedom fighters met the enemy in open battle at Beth-horon, and again at Emmaus, winning stunning victories and finally reopening the way to return to Jerusalem in 165 BC.

The triumphant forces of Judas were unprepared for their bittersweet capture of Jerusalem. The gates of the temple had been burned, weeds grew waist-high in the courtyards, and above it all loomed the hideous Zeus-idol with the face of Antiochus. They tore their clothes and threw handfuls of dust on their heads as they wept. But great grief spurred great effort, as they tore down the pagan idol, cleansed the temple, and rebuilt the altar of YHWH. Exactly three years to the day from its defilement, they rededicated the altar to YHWH. This all was in partial fulfillment of the prophecies in Daniel 8. The festival of **Hanukkah** has been observed ever since, in celebration of the restoration and cleansing of the temple.

Hanukkah is celebrated for eight days, patterned closely after the Feast of Tabernacles. It even has similar names: The Season of our Joy, the Festival of Lights, and the Feast of the Dedication of the Temple. The Judeans had not been able to celebrate the Feasts for many years. In their joy at recovering control of Jerusalem and cleansing the temple in the month of Kislev, they could not wait ten months for Tishri to celebrate the greatest Feast of all.

On the eve of Hanukkah, marathon runners are sent from the village of Modein, starting site of the revolt led by the Maccabees, up to Jerusalem, with flaming freedom torches to light the special nine-branched Hanukkah menorah there. This is a reminder of the cost of freedom, and the spirit of martyrdom which made it possible. Hanukkah is a time of joyous feasting, of gifts, of games, of singing, and of remembrances. Traditions abound, such as the legend of the single cruse of sacred oil found when the Maccabees cleansed the temple. Though only enough for one day's supply for the golden lampstand, it is said to have burned continuously for eight days, until a new supply could be consecrated. The nine-branched Menorah stems from the tradition of the eight Syrian spears found in the temple, upon which the Maccabees put eight candles and kept them burning throughout the celebration. The taller ninth 'servant' candle was Judas Maccabee himself, who lit the other eight. As a savior, Judas is symbolic of Messiah. He was esteemed as a hero of the Judean people, and every mother wanted to name her next son Judas, after him!

Judas was killed in 160 BC. The Hasmonean dynasty continued through the line of Mattathias' third son, Simon. The Chasidim, though appreciative of their new freedom, could not really support this dynasty because it combined the office of priest with the office of king, which according to Torah must be separate, from the tribes of Levi and of Judah respectively. In addition, some of the Maccabees became corrupt, as warrior kings are apt to be. Many Chasidim separated themselves from Jewish society and became known as **Essenes.** They lived in tight, closed communities, tried to keep themselves pure, and worked to preserve Torah and all the traditions of Judaism. They are responsible for much of the intertestamental writings, the Pseudepigraphic and Apocalyptic literature.

Two other groups of pietists remained within society. They gained influence during the reign of John Hyrcanus (135 – 103 BC), son of Simon. These became the religious rulers of the Jews.

The **Sadducees** were chief priests (ruling priests) who supported the Maccabees. Though sticklers for the letter of the law, they rejected the moral or spiritual traditions behind it, zealous to maintain the status quo. They became known as the political party of the Jewish aristocracy. Many of these were from the liberal Hellenist Party. They had actually supported the efforts of Antiochus Epiphanes to paganize their culture. With the ruling Maccabees, they continued their corrupting influence, caring not for the faith of their fathers. They nurtured no desire for a coming Messiah, did not believe in the resurrection, and denied the existence of angels and spirits. They taught that God did not interfere in the affairs of men, and that man is entirely the master of his own destiny, thus good and evil are left to man's free choice. Focused on 'whatever works', they got theological only when challenged by Pharisees.

The **Pharisees** (ruling elders) were bitter enemies of both the Maccabees and the Sadducees. These were the ones still faithful to God's covenant with their fathers, and zealous for the purity of the faith. They too were sticklers for the law, but out of their zeal for the moral and spiritual traditions behind it. They worked to cleanse Jewish life through laws designed to keep the people pure as required by the Mosaic Code. They hated the Maccabees for their corruption, and the Sadducees for their compromises with paganism. In time, they became known as arrogant haters of anyone who disagreed with their interpretations of the law. They were the writers of the Talmud. A very large and influential group, they came to be known as the party of the common people. They wore a distinctive robe so they could be recognized, and they loved to have people come to them with questions on Jewish law and traditions. Their **scribes** were the lawyers, the 'guardians of the law', who worked for them and supported them.

The Hasmonean dynasty lasted a little more than a century. It was brought to an end by an unhappy hostility between two sons of Alexander Jannaeus (102 – 75 BC, son of John Hyrcanus): the weak John Hyrcanus II and the ambitious Aristobulus. Rome had gotten very powerful. Through the Punic Wars (264 – 146 BC), Rome had defeated Macedonia (215 – 197 BC) and the Seleucid king Antiochus III of Syria (192 – 189 BC). By 146 BC Greece (called Achaea) and Macedonia had become provinces of the Roman Empire. Egypt, Syria, and Israel were not yet officially part of the Roman Empire, but they knew that they had best not do anything to upset Rome! However, that's exactly what happened in that all-too-public quarrel between John Hyrcanus II and his brother Aristobulus. The **Roman Republic** sent Pompey and his general Marcus Scaurus to Jerusalem to squelch the conflict, which they did by ruthlessly subjugating Judea to Rome in 63 BC.

The first thing Pompey did as the conquering king was to anger the pious by entering the most holy place in the temple. So right off the bat Jews hated Rome. However, politics is politics. Antipater the Idumean, close friend of John Hyrcanus II, managed to get on the good side of Julius Caesar (who had taken control of the Roman Republic in 49 BC) and was made the procurator of Judea in 47 BC.

Julius Caesar spent much of his time chasing down and exterminating the armies of ambitious Pompey. In the process he destroyed the Republican Senate (by filling it with his own cronies) and effectively installed himself as a dictator. Thus the Roman Republic became the **Roman Empire.** Some members of the Senate conspired against him and murdered him, hoping to reestablish the old Republic, but then had to flee for their lives.

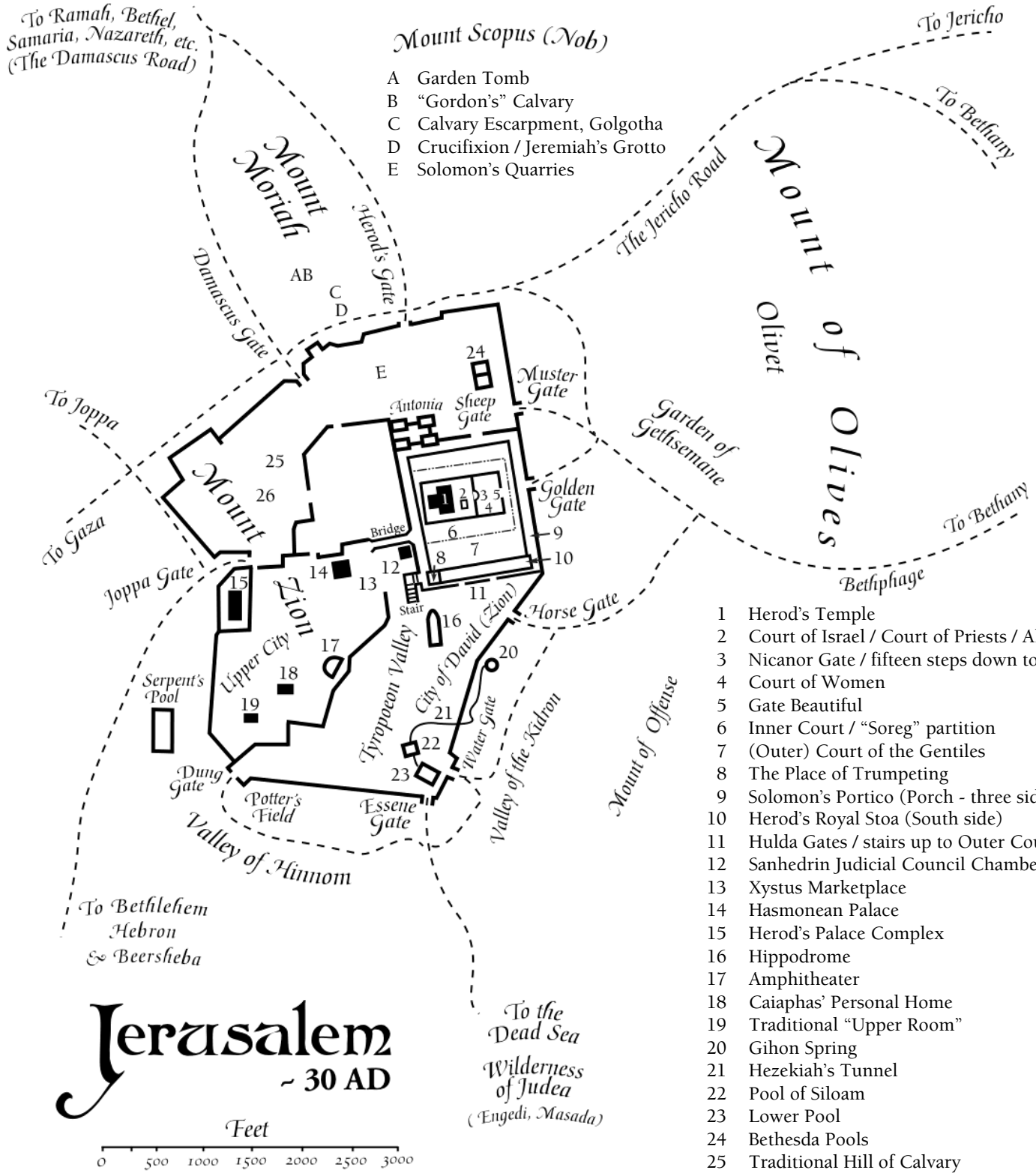
Antipater made his son Herod the governor of Galilee. Within the next ten years Herod had won the favor of both Octavian and Marc Antony, two rivals fighting to be the next Caesar after Julius Caesar's murder in the Senate. **Octavian** made himself the emperor by defeating Marc Antony in 31 BC (taking advantage of his sordid affair with Cleopatra). Herod quickly gave Octavian full allegiance, and was confirmed as the king of Judea.

The next year, Octavian captured Egypt, ending the Ptolemaic dynasty and incorporating Egypt as a province in the Roman Empire. He returned to Rome as a hero, absolute ruler of a vast and undisputed empire.

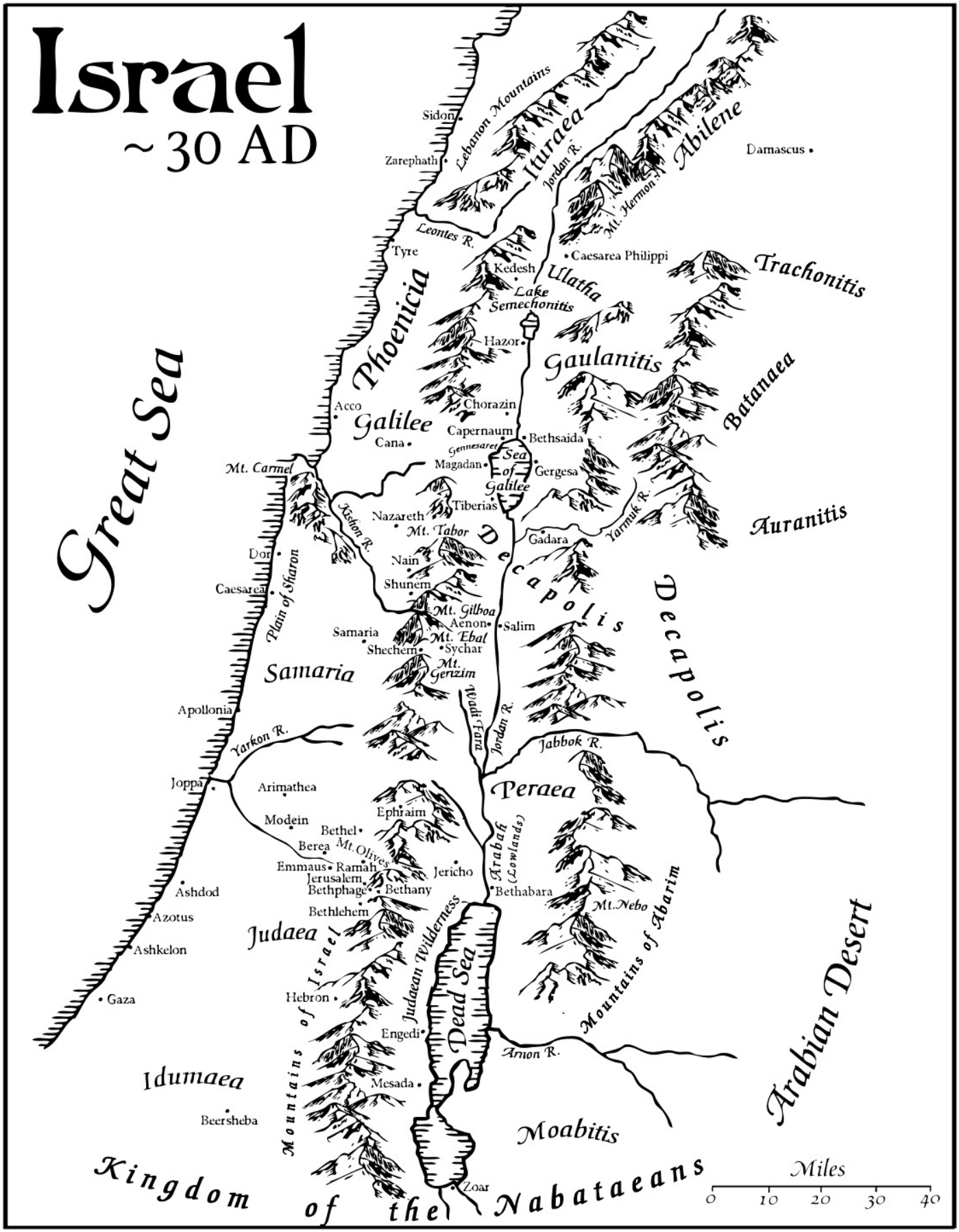
The legendary 200-year **Pax Romana** had finally begun. As Octavian expanded and strengthened the empire, he established a professional bureaucracy, built well-paved roads throughout the empire and ridded them of robbers, reorganized his army more as a police force to keep peace in all his far-flung provinces, and established a fair system of taxation through a periodic census. Business flourished. Prosperity as well as peace filled the empire. Octavian, now known as **Caesar Augustus**, became accepted by many as the 'savior of the world', and even revered as a god.

But Herod's reign in Judea was not one of peace. He had to suppress the uprisings of those who favored Antigonus, the last of the Hasmonean line. He was also hated by the Galileans for attacking their bands of zealots, whose love of freedom and longing for Messiah quickly turned to hate of the oppressive yoke of Rome. Herod went even further to alienate his people by paganizing and Romanizing Judea. Everywhere he honored Caesar by plaques, statues, and idols. New towns adorned with heathen statuary rose at his command, each testifying to his Roman loyalty. Sebaste (Greek for 'Augustus') replaced ancient Samaria. Strato's Tower became the port of Caesarea. Herod built Roman style theaters and staged costly games. His lavish building schemes were halted only by several prolonged droughts, which forced him to purchase grain for his starving people. Even fruitful Galilee became barren and dry, and thousands perished in famine and pestilence.

Jerusalem is a city of many hills, which can be grouped into three major "fingers" or ridges. The tallest is the Mount of Olives, which curves around the city to the east. It starts with Mount Scopus (Nob) to the north, dips down to the Jericho Road, up to its peak at Olivet, down to Bethphage, and up again to the Mount of Offense, where Solomon built altars to his foreign wives. Next tallest is Mount Zion, which starts low in the northwest and rises to its peak in the upper city in the southwest. The middle ridge is Mount Moriah. It is divided from Mount Zion on the west by the Tyropoeon Valley, and from the Mount of Olives on the east by the Kidron Valley. It starts high in the north, dips a bit and rises again to the Temple Mount, and finally drops off to the City of David (also called Zion) in the south.



1 Herod's Temple
2 Court of Israel / Court of Priests / Altar
3 Nicanor Gate / fifteen steps down to the
4 Court of Women
5 Gate Beautiful
6 Inner Court / "Soreg" partition
7 (Outer) Court of the Gentiles
8 The Place of Trumpeting
9 Solomon's Portico (Porch - three sides)
10 Herod's Royal Stoa (South side)
11 Hulda Gates / stairs up to Outer Court
12 Sanhedrin Judicial Council Chambers
13 Xystus Marketplace
14 Hasmonean Palace
15 Herod's Palace Complex
16 Hippodrome
17 Amphitheater
18 Caiaphas' Personal Home
19 Traditional "Upper Room"
20 Gihon Spring
21 Hezekiah's Tunnel
22 Pool of Siloam
23 Lower Pool
24 Bethesda Pools
25 Traditional Hill of Calvary
26 Traditional Sepulcher Site


Israel
~ 30 AD
Great Sea
Phoenicia
Sidon
Zarephath
Lebanon Mountains
Ituraea
Jordan R.
Abilene
Damascus
Mt. Hermon
Leontes R.
Tyre
Kedesh
Caesarea Philippi
Ulatha
Trachonitis
Lake Semechonitis
Hazor
Gaulanitis
Batanaea
Acco
Galilee
Chorazin
Capernaum
Bethsaida
Cana
Gennesaret
Sea of Galilee
Magadan
Gergesa
Mt. Carmel
Tiberias
Nazareth
Kishon R.
Mt. Tabor
Yarmuk R.
Auranitis
Gadara
Dor
Nain
Decapolis
Caesarea
Plain of Sharon
Shunem
Mt. Gilboa
Aenon
Salim
Samaria
Mt. Ebal
Shechem
Sychar
Mt. Gerizim
Samaria
Wadi Fara
Jordan R.
Apollonia
Yarkon R.
Jabbok R.
Joppa
Arimathea
Peraea
Ephraim
Modein
Bethel
Berea
Mt. Olives
Arabah (Lowlands)
Emmaus
Ramah
Jericho
Jerusalem
Bethphage
Bethany
Bethabara
Ashdod
Mt. Nebo
Azotus
Bethlehem
Judaea
Mountains of Israel
Judaean Wilderness
Dead Sea
Mountains of Abarim
Ashkelon
Arabian Desert
Gaza
Hebron
Engedi
Arnon R.
Idumaea
Mesada
Beersheba
Moabitis
Kingdom of the Nabataeans
Zoar
Miles
0 10 20 30 40

So Herod was hated by nearly everyone. He often feared plots or conspiracies, even by members of his own family. He became a gloomy tyrant. His officers had orders to see that the people were constantly at work. He prohibited public meetings and instituted an elaborate spy system. Even his grandiose plan to rebuild the second temple at Jerusalem as one of the wonders of the world, could not endear him to his ill-used and oft-offended subjects. This is the historical setting for the greatest story ever told.

CHAPTER 1 – THE WAY PREPARER

1 The Feast of Shavuot had fallen on Sivan 8, the day after the Sabbath, in the Hebrew year 3997. The day had been full of joyous festivities. The Firstfruits wave offering and subsequent feasting were now past. Now at the sunset, a new day began. The people were full, satisfied, and ready to depart for their homes. They stood respectfully at the time of the evening sacrifice and incense offering, as the high priest quoted the obligatory prayers: "With great love hast Thou loved us, O YHWH our God, and with much overflowing pity hast Thou pitied us. Our Father and our King, for the sake of our fathers who trusted in Thee – and Thou taught them the statutes of life – have mercy upon us. Enlighten our eyes in Thy Law; cause our hearts to cleave to Thy commandments; unite our hearts to love and to fear Thy name, and thus we shall never be put to shame, world without end. For Thou art the God who prepares salvation. Us hast Thou chosen from among all nations and tongues, and hast, in truth, brought us near to Thy great name, YHWH, in order that we in love may praise Thee and Thy unity. Blessed be YHWH, who in greatest love has chosen His people Israel."

He then recited the Ten Commandments, followed by the great Shema, "Hear, O Israel, YHWH is our Elohim, YHWH is one! And you shall love YHWH your Elohim with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might…" (from Deut 6:4-9; 11:13-21; Num 15:37-41)

With special solemnity, he then cast the final (fifth) lot, for the priest who would enter the holy place to offer the evening incense offering and give the closing benediction.

Praise YHWH! It was old Zacharias. The one whose wife was barren all these years. What a great honor! Surely the blessing of YHWH had finally returned to his house. He had not been chosen before and could never be chosen again. The people all applauded out of respect for the esteemed old man, in delight that YHWH had chosen him.

Zacharias took the golden censer with the incense, and a golden bowl filled with coals from the altar. He and his assistants slowly ascended the steps to the holy place, while the congregation repeated the traditional prayers: "True it is that Thou art YHWH our God, and the God of our fathers; our King and the King of our fathers; our Savior and the Savior of our fathers; our Maker and the Rock of our salvation; our Help and Deliverer. Thy name is from everlasting, and there is no God beside Thee… YHWH shall reign who saves Israel."

The prayers were finished. The attendants withdrew, walking backwards in worship, leaving old Zacharias standing alone. He stepped slowly into the holy place. The whole multitude then fell to their faces before YHWH, spreading their hands in silent prayer, as the high priest gave the terse command, "The time of incense has come." Zacharias laid the incense onto the hot coals on the altar of incense. Clouds of 'sweet odors' rose up before YHWH.

So… why was Zacharias taking so long? Was he impure, and had YHWH slain him before the altar of incense? No, they could still hear the bells on his robe, as they waited in silent prayer. (Lk 1:10; Rev 8:1-5) They began to grow restless.

Inside the temple, Zacharias was startled by the sudden glorious appearance of the angel Gavriel, standing to the right of the altar of incense. Zacharias almost collapsed in fear, but Gavriel encouraged him, saying, "Don't be afraid. I have good news! God has heard the prayers you no longer have faith to pray. Your wife will bear a son, and many will rejoice! Name him Yochanan. He will be great in the sight of God and men. He will be filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb, and will turn back many in Israel to YHWH their God. Malachi prophesied of him, that he shall come in the power and spirit of Elijah to turn the father's hearts to the children and the disobedient to the righteous, to prepare Messiah's people for His coming."

Zacharias objected in disbelief, considering his age and the deadness of Elisheva's womb. He requested a sign, as the law requires for prophecies of good. "I am Gavriel, who stands in the presence and power of YHWH!" the angel responded. "Yes, I will grant you a sign as the law requires – because you did not believe me, you shall be unable to speak until my words are fulfilled." With that, he abruptly vanished from sight, leaving Zacharias stunned and shaken. He bowed his head before the altar, trying to recover his composure. Then, hearing the restlessness of the people outside, he remembered his duties.

Historical Note: Zacharias Cohen (priest) and his wife Elisheva were of the tribe of Aaron. Zacharias served in the temple after the order of Abijah, the 8th course of service. (Lk 1:5-8; 1 Ch 24:7-18) The order of the temple service started on the first Sabbath after Nisan 1, beginning the sacred year. Each of the 24 courses served for one week, twice a year. In addition, all of the priests served together for a full week at the three required Feasts of Pesach (Passover), Shavuot (Pentecost) and Sukkot (Tabernacles). So the first service in the order of Abijah came the 10th week after Nisan 1, since the 2nd week was Pesach and the 9th was Shavuot. Zacharias thus served for two consecutive weeks, during Shavuot and the week after.

Walking slowly out, Zacharias realized that the sun had already set. The day was done. Shavuot was finished, and the people were still awaiting the benediction. He faced the expectant crowd looking eagerly up at him. He smiled and raised his hands, and they responded with outstretched arms, as if to catch the blessing with their hands. Lifting his eyes to heaven, Zacharias spoke in a loud voice, so every ear could hear the blessing – except something went wrong. Not a sound came from his lips. He tried again, louder – but again, not a peep.

A ripple of dismay went through the crowd. Something was very wrong. Zacharias was up there making signs to the other priests. He seemed wildly animated. He was trying to tell a story with his hands. The crowd realized that he must have seen a vision in the temple, and that YHWH had taken away his voice until it came to pass.

So Zacharias chose another priest, his longtime friend (from their Yeshiva School days) Yacov ben Levi, to voice the Aaronic benediction. "YHWH bless you and keep you. YHWH make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. YHWH lift up His countenance on you and give you His peace." (Num 6:24-26) All the people responded, "Blessed be YHWH Adonai God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting." They wondered as they turned to begin their trip home what was the meaning of Zacharias' vision.

Zacharias finished his duties at the temple in silence. After the Sabbath of Sivan 14 he journeyed home. Elisheva his wife rejoiced greatly with him at the angel's news. As her husband wrote for her the angel's words, a deep thrill flowed through her soul. She had always been reverent and full of faith. Now it stood her in good stead as she reached past the greatness of the promise clear up to the throne of God, and simply believed. She would have a son who would prepare for Messiah's coming! Elisheva determined that she would pray daily for Messiah.

With that, Zacharias' faith began to grow as well. On Tammuz 1, 3997 (our June 25, 4 BC), they conceived. Now the urgency of Elisheva's prayers redoubled. Rather than release the cat of gossip, she decided to keep it secret. After she started to show, she stayed home and filled her days with worship and prayer.

2 In Elisheva's sixth month the most amazing miracle in the history of the universe occurred in a little town called Nazareth, in Galilee. God became man in the womb of a virgin named Mariam (whom we in America know as Mary). I know, you've heard the story a thousand times. But this, the greatest story ever told, never gets old! Can you imagine the excitement of Gavriel, the archangel who stands in the presence of the King of the Universe, when he received his orders from God Almighty? This story begins on the last day of Hanukkah, the season of gift giving. It was the evening of Tevet 2, Hebrew year 3998 (December 19, 4 BC) when the greatest Gift ever – Emmanuel, God with us – was given by Father YHWH to mankind.

CHAPTER 2 – GAVRIEL'S ANNOUNCEMENT

"Gavriel, it is time!" The flames over the throne in highest heaven blazed brightly, then coalesced into the glorious form Gavriel knew as the eternal Word of YHWH, Logos – Creator and King of the Universe.

"Yes, Logos? Before the Way-Preparer's birth?"

"I shall wait no longer. My love for My precious ones on earth compels Me. Go to a girl in Nazareth called Mariam, daughter of Heli, son of David My beloved, son of Judah, who is betrothed to Yoseph son of Jacob son of David My beloved, son of Judah. Give Mariam this message: I wish to come into her womb to be born of her, if she is willing. Tell her that I am Israel's Messiah, and the Savior of the world. Tell her I am Yashua, YHWH Saves, for I shall save My people from their sins. Also Gavriel, let her rejoice in the good news of her cousin Elisheva's baby." [See endnote 1.]

"Yes, Logos… But Logos? Why are You getting so small? What happened to Your awesome glory?" Gavriel remembered with horror that Logos had talked of being willing to give up His own life for His Bride. "You've dimmed so much… are You… dying?"

"Not yet, dear Gavriel, but yes, that will come, too. Right now I must lay aside My glory for a time. How else could I be born of a woman? You rule the heavens and be Master of the Dance in My absence. I won't be able to lead you, so until I return, Father YHWH will lead you directly, by His Holy Spirit as I've taught you. But hurry, Spirit is ready to carry Me into Mariam!"

"Yes, Logos my Lord!" Gavriel hurried off, shaken at seeing the King of the Universe become such a tiny, almost invisible pinpoint of light. *What if Mariam resisted? What if Yoseph rejected her and refused to care for Yashua? What if the people turned against them because of the strangeness of the birth? The plan seemed so dangerous! How could the mighty King of the Universe ever place Himself at the mercy of these merciless humans? Why, Logos had made Himself so weak that they really could kill Him! The very thought was unthinkable, yet He had said it.* Gavriel determined to just trust and obey, clinging to His promise, "…until I return." Logos always keeps His word. Yes, Gavriel will rule the heavens for Him as ordered, for Logos had taught him to know Father YHWH's voice. He might even lead the Dance – *or can there even be a Dance with Logos missing?* But as to His death, there was just no way.

There is the house of Heli, and there is Mariam, ready to retire. Logos seemed so strangely eager. That's the first time He has ever told me to hurry. Funny how humans consider their houses so strong and secure, unaware of the heavenly realm continually invading them. And Mariam herself… how young and fragile she looks. And clueless. My message is sure going to shake her up! But wait. She is kneeling before going to bed. At least she is reverent and devout. I'll appear slowly and speak softly to try not to scare her too much.

"Hello, highly graced one! YHWH is mightily with you – you who are so blessed among women."

He instantly realized his mistake. Of course she was terrified! A huge blazing warrior angel greeting this tiny young peasant girl like she was royalty?!

"Please, Mariam! Don't be afraid of me. I am the angel Gavriel, who stands before the throne of the Almighty. I have a wonderful message for you from YHWH Himself. You have found favor with Him and He has chosen you of all the women in Israel to bear His Son Logos, the Messiah! Name Him Yashua – YHWH Saves. He shall inherit the throne of your Father David and shall reign over the house of Jacob forever. Yes, His Kingdom shall never end!"

"But sir, how can this be? I have no husband, and I've vowed to remain a virgin until I do!"

"Honestly, Mariam, I don't know myself. Nothing like this ever happened before, nor will it ever again. It's the greatest miracle in history, greater even than the creation of the universe! Logos will become Baby Yashua within your womb. He will be called Adonai Yashua haMashiach, the Son of God! The Spirit of Logos is on His way to plant the Holy Seed within your womb. Will you receive Him?"

"Oh! Yes, gladly! I receive Him with all my heart!"

"Don't take this request lightly. This may put an end to your own hopes and dreams. It may become a burden and shame to you. You think of bearing Messiah as an honor, and honor it is, but many will hate and despise you for it. Some may even try to kill you – and Him. Logos is kind. He won't force Himself on you. Do you wish to reconsider?"

"I am only YHWH's bondslave. May He do to me all His pleasure according to your word."

I'm really beginning to like this girl. I see Logos' wisdom in entrusting Himself to her. How quickly she recovered her initial shock, and how graciously she responded. She is no self-centered powder puff!

"Mariam, one last thing. Your relative Elisheva, who was barren, has also conceived. She is now in her sixth month. She tries to keep it a secret, but YHWH is the Revealer of Secrets. Rejoice with her in her joy. Her son will be used of YHWH to prepare the way for Messiah."

"Oh! Elisheva! Zacharias! Praise God! Hallelujah! I am so happy for them! YHWH my King, thank You! You are so faithful and kind to Your servants! I bow to worship You. My heart overflows in gratitude…"

Wow! What selfless worship springs so readily from her heart! I join her worship, Logos, praising Your wisdom in choosing her, and Your grace… Oh! The breath of Your Spirit… Yes! The pinpoint of light, blown along by Your Spirit into her womb as she worships. Thank You, Father, for choosing me to witness this miracle. I become invisible now to her, but I will remain to guard her, and her new Baby…

Mariam's hours of worship passed quickly. Even as the last remaining celebrants of Hanukkah, the Festival of Lights, found their ways home to retire for the night, Logos, the eternal Word of God, the Light of the World, had found His earthly home and began growing in the womb of the virgin daughter of Judah. Mariam finally went to bed, but lay there, eyes still glistening with tears of joy, planning her trip to Ramah to visit her cousin Elisheva.

She rose early next morning. Her parents had gotten in late from the celebrations last night and were still asleep. But for some reason Mariam was full of energy and wide awake, even though she had gotten much less sleep than they. After considering it, she decided to tell them just about Elisheva and save the rest for later. She was all ready to go and finished with breakfast when they arose.

"Mom! Dad! Guess what! Elisheva is going to have a baby! She's in her sixth month. I just heard the news last night when you were out. May I go help her? Please? I'm all packed and ready."

"Help her?" Rachael exclaimed. "Of course you must go help her! But Elisheva is in her sixth month already and just now we hear the news?! Whatever is wrong with our relatives in Ramah? Even little gossip usually gets here faster than that, and this is big news!"

"Elisheva was keeping it a secret, Mom. Remember when the angel came to Zacharias at the end of Shavuot? That was over six months ago. The angel probably told him about the baby. He was so shocked he couldn't talk."

"Big news… this is incredible! Miraculous!" Heli spoke up. "Elisheva has been barren for so long. I wonder if her baby could be Messiah? or Elijah the Prophet, for he must come before Messiah…" He smiled. "Mariam, of course you may go to help your cousin. And you may stay as long as needed to help with her delivery and to care for her new baby until she regains her strength. But, ahem… uh… I must talk to you about something important first."

"Sure, Father. And thank you for letting me go." She turned and picked up her two bundles. She was in a hurry to leave. After all, what could possibly be more important than getting to her cousin's house?

"Rachael and I have kept this a secret since you were a baby. You didn't need to know before now. You've never been away from home on your own before. But you're not a little girl any more. You are a lovely – and desirable – young woman. And now that you will be away from us, you really need to know, for your own protection. You are betrothed to a young man who cares very much for you, and who has been working very hard for fifteen years to prepare for you. His father and I covenanted together for you when you were only one year old. His father and mother have done a good job preparing him for you. I am very pleased at their commitment and honoring of our covenant. Old Jacob told me last night that…"

"Old Jacob? You mean it's Yoseph?" Mariam's heart leapt within her. Somehow she had known it always, yet now that it was confirmed it took her breath away. She weakly put her two bundles down.

"Yes, it's Yoseph. Old Jacob told me last night that he finally felt Yoseph was ready, and that he's going to give his permission for Yoseph to start courting you. But don't tell me you're surprised. We've visited Jacob and Ruth often enough, and surely you've noticed how Yoseph looks at you and how gracious and kind he always is to you. He is a wonderful man. He will be good to you."

"Yes, yes, Daddy." Mariam ran to her father and threw her arms around him, burying her face in his beard. "Thank you, thank you! No, I'm not surprised, but I am pleased! Very, very pleased!" She started to cry softly, whispering repeatedly, "Thank You, Father. You are so good! Thank You, thank You Father. You are so good."

Embarrassed by the show of emotion, and not sure whether he or the heavenly Father was being thanked, Heli pushed Mariam back to look into her tear-stained face. "Does this mean you won't want to go help Elisheva after all? There's no hurry, I'm sure. We can find someone else to go."

"Eeee…" Mariam squealed strangely, grabbing for her bundles again. "No, no. I am going. We've got to get to the market right away, Father. All the other travelers might already be gone, and I couldn't walk alone. Yoseph will have to wait 'til I get back."

"Okay. I'll go with you to make sure you have someone trustworthy to travel with." Heli reached for his coat, then after considering how warm the morning sun was already, he put it back on the peg. His little girl seemed to have grown up overnight, and he was going to miss her.

3 Mariam's trip to Elisheva's home in Ramah was filled with joy, because of her eagerness to see her cousin. Ramah is a long way from Nazareth – 65 miles – a two-day trip unless you wanted to arrive very late, tired, and sore. Fortunately she had found friends to travel with, for it is dangerous for a young woman to travel alone. Gavriel stayed on guard, invisible, but ready to aid her if the enemy should try anything. The long trip became a delight for everyone in the caravan, as they all shared Mariam's joy.

As Ramah came into sight, Mariam began to wonder. *How in the world did Elisheva keep this a secret, anyway? It's just not possible. Even with the loose-fitting robes they always wore, people would surely notice before her sixth month! And after being barren for so long, the gossip should have flooded the land by now. Unless… Oh, no!* Mariam suddenly knew why she had been so impressed to hurry. Her cousin must be staying at home, not even going out to the market or synagogue, ever since she began to show. *No doubt she has run out of groceries by now and YHWH is providing someone to go out and shop for her.*

CHAPTER 3 – THE BIRTH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

Finally her cousin's familiar house came into view. Leaving the caravan, Mariam broke into a run. She burst through the door crying, "Elisheva! Elisheva! I've come in haste to share in your joy!"

"Owch! That hurt! Oh, Mariam! Blessed of YHWH and most blessed among women! I am blessed and honored by your visit to me – you who are to be the mother of my Lord the Messiah, even in accord with your faith in what YHWH has spoken! Oh… Wow! Did I just say that? How did I know? That must have been the Holy Spirit. For my baby leapt in my womb with the thrill of sheer joy as your greeting reached my ears, and it was indeed prophesied that my son would be filled with the Holy Spirit from my womb. But Mariam, how did you find out about my baby? I have secluded myself and kept it a secret."

"Elisheva, an angel came to me, and told me that I am chosen to bear Messiah! That was just three nights ago. The only way you could have known that was by the Holy Spirit! The angel told me that you were already in your sixth month, so I came to share in your joy. May I stay with you and help you until after your baby is born? I can clean and cook and go to market for you. I also want to help you with the birth and with caring for your baby. The angel said your baby would prepare the way for Messiah."

"Yes, of course. I am honored that you should ask. Give me another hug. It's so good to have you here…" Elisheva was staggered by the implications of what she had just heard, and leaned on Mariam for stability. "Is it really true that you bear Messiah? Has God really fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy that the… the virgin shall be with Child?"

4 Mariam really did believe the angel's message. She opened her mouth to reassure Elisheva that she was indeed still a virgin, and explain that it was the Holy Spirit who had planted the seed within her womb. Instead, out of her mouth flowed deep prophecies. "My soul exalts YHWH, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior! For He has regard for the humble state of His bondslave. Now all generations will count me blessed because of the great things the Mighty One of Israel has done for me! Holy is His name, and great His mercy unto many generations of those who fear Him. He has done mighty deeds, and filled the hungry with good things…" It just went on and on.

Again mighty Gavriel, looking on in awe and wonder, lifted his hands in worship, joining himself in this torrent of pure praises flowing from the lips of this frail little girl up to almighty Father YHWH in the highest heaven.

Mariam was a big help to Elisheva. Especially as the Pascal season approached, she attended to the details of the preparation with joy and dedication, knowing that the time of her cousin's delivery was very near. She paused, deep in thought, as she set the traditional place for Elijah at the Pascal table.

This was the evening beginning Nisan 15, Hebrew year 3998. For a thousand years her people had set this extra place in the faith that Elijah would return to prepare the way for Messiah. Is this the time? Would Elijah return? Every year, the fervent hope of every good Jew was renewed for the prophecies to be fulfilled, for Elijah to come at Passover and announce Messiah's coming!

During the Pascal Seder, Mariam kept looking over at Zacharias. By rights he should have been leading. She had always loved the grace, reverence, authority, and love with which he had led in the past. But this year he was strangely mute – ever since he had seen that vision in the temple last Shavuot – so he had deferred to his younger brother to lead. Just the same, when the third cup of wine (the Cup of Redemption, also called the Cup of Blessing) was blessed and passed around, his eyes seemed to burn with a fire she had never noticed before.

5 "Mariam, as the youngest here tonight, you have the honor of going to the door to see if Elijah has come to take his proper place at our table." Mariam was startled out of her reverie, but having done this several times before, she recovered quickly, bowed her acceptance, and went to the front door. Even as she opened it, a thrill went through her. Elijah has come! Mariam squealed with delight, "Oh, come in, sir! Come in! Welcome to our humble table!" Then she blinked and rubbed her eyes. She was so sure she had seen him, but no one was there.

Still standing in the doorway, Mariam heard a cry. It was her cousin! "Oh Elisheva! What is it?" She whirled and ran to her side, leaving the door wide open behind her.

"My baby! He's coming! Help me!" And with that, the rest of the seder was forgotten in the whirlwind of activity as the long awaited miracle child came to the birth. Two hours later, when everything finally settled back down, Zacharias' brother called out, "Let's gather together again now to finish the Pascal Seder. We were right in the middle of it when we got interrupted by Elisheva. Does anyone remember where we were?" Then he saw the door, still open to the warm spring night, and a strange look came over his face. "Oh, I remember…"

By the last day of Passover, everyone had heard the fantastic news of the miracle baby. Friends and relatives crowded around rejoicing as they made their way toward the temple to have Elisheva's baby circumcised according to the law. So many people! Such an inconvenient time, right during the last high holy day of Unleavened Bread, when crowds were here from all over the land for the Feast. But the law is the law. The circumcision ceremony must be done on the eighth day. Zacharias found his old friend Yacov ben Levi to perform the circumcision. Then the arguments began about the baby's name. Elisheva wanted to call him Yochanan. But everyone else insisted he should be called Zacharias, after his father. Old Zacharias was indignant. He signaled with hand motions for a tablet.

"His name is Yochanan!" ('Joannes' in Greek, or 'John' in English) Zacharias held the tablet high. 6 Suddenly the Holy Spirit opened Zacharias' mouth and filled him with the high praises of God. He prophesied loudly to the stunned crowd: "Blessed be YHWH the God of Israel, who has visited His people with redemption and salvation in great power and glory. For from the house of David His servant He has this day sent to us Messiah, with the power of salvation for us all! Yes, salvation from our enemies and those who hate us, salvation that we might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days… You, little Yochanan, will be called the prophet of the Most High. You will go on ahead to prepare the way for Messiah, to give His people the knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of sins, because of the tender mercies and longsuffering love of our God. Even now Messiah comes like the sunrise from on high to visit us who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to shine upon us and guide our feet into the divine pathways of peace."

The stunned silence gave way to whispering, as the people looked at one another in awe, asking each other, "Who is this child? Could he be Messiah? No, Zacharias prophesied that he would prepare the way for Messiah. Could he be Elijah? YHWH's hand is certainly on him." The news of his miraculous conception and birth spread like wildfire throughout all Judea and beyond.

When they got home, Mariam and Elisheva had a good laugh together at the prank they had played. By keeping her pregnancy secret before the birth, Elisheva had done more than prevent the normal gossip. The suddenness of the announcement from one who had been barren, along with her husband's amazing prophecies, had the impact of a volcanic explosion! Now everyone in Israel knew that Messiah was coming – and that her baby had something to do with it! Thus a Messianic fervor swept the land.

No one alive could remember the synagogues and the temple services being so well attended, especially during the Feasts. Ever since Herod had become king, the Jews had cried out to YHWH for salvation from Rome. But now their longing had a focus. *Messiah was coming! He would set all things right!* From that day, hardly a conversation could be heard in all the land that did not eventually conclude, "Come, Messiah! Come!"

7 Mariam continued helping Elisheva and her baby through the end of Nisan. Now very aware of the Child growing within her own womb, she studied the beautiful baby. She felt a peace and holiness – a sharing in the divine plan. Mariam never wanted to leave. Helping to care for Elisheva's baby seemed so right, so natural. She sensed the link between baby Yochanan and her own Baby.

But she was beginning to show – now in her fourth month. With the big announcement, others had now come to help Elisheva. So to avoid any embarrassment to her cousin she reluctantly returned to Nazareth.

CHAPTER 4 – MESSIAH'S BIRTH

Oh no! The worst! Yoseph is visiting my parents. He sees me! I should have told him about my Baby before I left! Blushing furiously, Mariam stopped and unthinkingly put both hands over her womb.

"Mariam, my gentle little dove! Welcome home! We're betrothed, you know. Your father said he already told you. My dad gave me permission to court you! I've waited for so long! These last months while you were at your cousin's – I thought I'd die! Well – come let's go in. We've so much to talk about…" Yoseph hesitated while looking up and down at his betrothed. The joy on his face faded. "Mariam? Aren't you glad to see me? Why is that horrified look on your face? And why do you hold your stomach like that? Uhh… It kinda makes you look pregnant!"

"I am pregnant, Yoseph. But I have not been unfaithful! I can explain it all. I am still a virgin. You see, my Baby is a miracle of God, the Messiah, the One who is to come! The angel Gavriel came to me, and… Honest! You've got to believe me! Oh, Mother, Father, I'm so glad you're here, because I don't think Yoseph believes me. I'm pregnant but I'm still a virgin. YHWH Himself came down to me and planted the seed in my womb… Mom? Daddy? Why are you looking at me that way? I've never lied to you. You've got to believe me…" Then, realizing with horror the impossibility of her position, poor little Mariam fled to her room and buried her face in tears in her pillow.

Mariam's parents and Yoseph looked at each other sadly. Then, not knowing what to say, Yoseph shook his head and turned toward his own home.

He tossed sleeplessly on his bed that night, in the agony of indecision. *Should he follow the law and publicly expose her? Why, she could be stoned! No, no! He couldn't risk that. But even the public shame of breaking the betrothal would just crush her sensitive, sweet spirit. How could he protect her from that? Yet he had to break the betrothal, didn't he? In a sense, she had already broken it. The law would not allow him to marry her now!*

Gavriel, listening from the realm of spirit, could take no more. He fled to Logos' throne room, though he knew it was dark and empty. (Its glory hidden in Mariam's womb.) But visible or not, Father YHWH was there by His Spirit, for He is everywhere. So he bowed there in tears and pleaded for permission from Father YHWH to intervene.

The Shekina Glory representing Father YHWH's Holy Spirit blazed up above the throne. "Yes, dear Gavriel, you may visit Yoseph. Tell him to not fear to take Mariam as his wife, for the Child within her is My Son. Telling Yoseph the Baby's name, Yashua, as you told Mariam, will confirm the vision to them both. Remind him of My prophecy through Isaiah: 'The virgin shall be with Child, and shall bear a Son, and they shall call His name Emmanuel, God with us.' [Isa 7:14] And give him My love and blessing."

Gavriel went to the cot where Yoseph now wrestled in his sweat in fitful sleep. After entering his dreams, Gavriel passed along YHWH's message. Yoseph relaxed and slowly settled into a deep and peaceful sleep.

The next morning Yoseph explained the situation and made arrangements with his parents, Jacob and Ruth. Surprisingly, they believed him completely and agreed to support him. They quickly made plans. Then Yoseph took the presents he'd been preparing for years and hurried back toward the house of Heli, picking wildflowers along the way. But they had not even started breakfast. Gloom was settled firmly over Heli's household. Yoseph asked, "Where is Mariam? Still in her room? Please call her out for me. I have good news!"

Hearing Yoseph's voice, Mariam peeked a disheveled and tear-stained face from her doorway. She looked like she hadn't slept a wink all night. Perhaps she hadn't. Yoseph's face lit up at the sight of his fearful bride-to-be. He stretched out his arms in welcome. "Mariam! My beloved! The angel you talked about appeared to me in a dream last night. He confirmed all you said, and reminded me of the Scripture in Isaiah about, 'The virgin shall be with Child, and she shall bear a Son who will be called Emmanuel, God with us.' The angel assured me that your Baby is God's Son. The Child you bear is Messiah! He told me that God loves me, and had chosen me to help you care for this Holy One. So I believe you now, Mariam. I am eager to do all I can to help you. Here. These flowers are for you. I picked them for you this morning." He thrust the cheery bouquet into her hand as her teary eyes opened wide with surprise. Then he asked, "Did the angel tell you what YHWH wants you to name your Baby?"

"Why, yes. Didn't he tell you?" She wiped her eyes on her sleeve, her fears giving way to hope.

"He told me, but I want to confirm my own vision, by hearing the name first from your own lips."

"He is to be named Yashua, YHWH saves, for…"

"…for He shall save His people from their sins! Yes! That's exactly what the angel told me! Praise YHWH! That confirms it – it was the same angel with the same message. Mother Rachael! Father Heli! Can you believe her now? It really is true. She bears Messiah! This is the greatest thing to ever come to Israel! We must celebrate! Mariam, I'll help fix breakfast out here while you get dressed."

With Yoseph's help, Rachael and Heli had a lovely breakfast prepared when Mariam came out of her room. Just in time, old Jacob and Ruth showed up at the door. There were smiles and hugs all around as they prepared to celebrate together. Mariam ate with her dad to her left and Yoseph close on her right. No stranger to this family circle, Yoseph led the group in an animated monologue about the incredible significance of Mariam's virgin conception. Everyone could see he knew his Torah!

Mariam remained silent, eyes wide with wonder and delight at being believed and accepted by this man who just yesterday had turned away from her. She leaned against her dad and stared into Yoseph's handsome face. She had looked up to him and loved him all her life, but now that their betrothal was confirmed, he almost looked like a stranger to her. *Everything had changed. He was no longer just the family friend, the big brother that she never had, the playmate, the helper, the encourager, companion… suddenly, he is… her… husband!* She tried out the word in her mind. *Hhh… hhh… husband!* It sounded so strange. Her eyes misted over with tears of joy.

"Mariam?" She was startled out of her reverie. "Don't you want me to court you? We've been friends for so long and I thought you really liked me. Aren't you happy with my preparations? I've worked hard! I'm a master carpenter now. I have a home for us. I have saved up enough money for us to live on for six months. You know I love Torah. What is it about me that you aren't happy with?"

Mariam licked her lips, dried her eyes on her napkin, and took a deep breath. Finally she got it out. "Yoseph, my… husband! There is nothing on earth I want more than you! I'm just so happy that I… I'm… overcome with joy!" She put her face in her hands and began to bawl.

Yoseph moved closer and put his arm around her shoulder, drawing her head to his chest. It was the first time he had dared to do that, and it felt so good. This was truly where she belonged – in his arms! He signaled Father Heli to bring his presents.

The crying finally stopped, and Mariam wiped her eyes once more, this time on Yoseph's shirt. Again she gazed up into his loving eyes. "I'm sorry, Yoseph. Thank you for accepting me. And thank you for accepting my Baby, Yashua. And thank you, Mom and Dad, for arranging such a wonderful man for me. You are all so good!"

Suddenly Yoseph was holding out to her a slender gold ring. Real gold! Mariam couldn't believe it. It shone and sparkled like the sun. She'd never seen real gold in her home before. She held her breath as she reached out her hand and slipped her finger into it. But before she could even say thank you, there were more presents, clothes, food, lovely kitchenware, presents for her parents… "Yoseph! How could you afford all this?!"

"I told you, I've worked hard! I've finished all my father asked of me. And in view of your Baby, my parents have allowed me to make it a very short courtship. Will you drink the cup of sweet wine with me here, now?"

"Yes! Yes! My beloved! I accept you with all my heart!" Somehow the cup was already there, waiting for this moment – a fragile glass goblet filled to the brim with sweet 'new wine' (fresh grape juice). They drained it together, then Yoseph put the goblet under his heel and deliberately smashed it.

"Our covenant is sealed. Forever! My dad agreed with me this morning to move up the wedding date. How soon can we be married? Some people will talk regardless, but I want to minimize the gossip against you. If we have a quiet, private ceremony, before you are showing too much, maybe we can protect you from the gossip and slander of the ignorant. Ahh… when is your Baby due, Mariam?"

"Sukkot, if He is Messiah," Heli answered.

"Yes," Mariam nodded her agreement, delighted to see her father really beginning to believe. Then after a thoughtful pause, "And Elisheva's baby came on Passover at the seder, just as I opened the door for Elijah…"

"I knew it! I knew it! According to the prophet Malachi, Elijah must come before Messiah!" Old Father Heli was ecstatic at seeing the Scriptures being fulfilled before his eyes. "And did baby Elijah sit down at the seder and drink that cup of sweet wine with you?" He roared in laughter.

Mariam's ears turned red. Everyone was looking at her, eager now to hear the news from Ramah. "Well, actually, they named the baby Yochanan…"

"What? Who named him that? There's nobody in our family by that name. Was Zacharias unable to say anything to prevent it? I'll bet he was furious!" Heli was indignant.

"Well, Dad, Zacharias was the one who named him." Mariam giggled. "And at the circumcision, when he wrote out the name for everyone to see, the angel of YHWH loosed his tongue and gave him great words of prophecy over the baby. He said the angel had given him the name, and that Yochanan will be called the prophet of the Most High, and will go on ahead to prepare the way for Messiah. It was wonderful! You should have heard all the people!"

Finally warming up to the task, Mariam was able to share the whole story of her time with her cousin. Yoseph, with an arm around her shoulders, listened intently, delighted to find that his meditative and quiet new wife could tell a good story as well. She made it come alive with personal details, feelings, emotions, revealing a depth to her character that Yoseph had not realized. He looked up to his dad, grateful for the training, the preparation, and oh, so thankful that he had been willing to submit to his parents' choice in his bride. *Truly there was not a fairer flower in all the land – a treasure, the greatest treasure a man could ever have – yet she was so much more… Thoughtful, kind, graceful, reverent, intelligent… He had known all that before. But now he was beginning to catch a glimpse of the depth and breadth of her feelings, her vision, her hopes and dreams, and her deepest emotions. This was going to be fun, sharing his life with her!* "…I think they named him Yochanan because he was only sent in the spirit of Elijah to prepare the beginning of Messiah's ministry – I believe there will be a much greater fulfillment to the prophecy later on, when Messiah is ready to rule the world." Yoseph applauded ardently as she finished her story.

Thus they married, in a quiet ceremony at home, about the first of Iyar (our May), Mariam's fourth month. Yoseph left his job to spend his time enjoying and taking care of his wife, living off his savings, as was the custom in those days. However, in reverence for the holy Child within her, he treated it as a courtship, respecting her virginity.

8 But in her ninth month the edict came down from Caesar Augustus to take a tax-census during the Feast of Sukkot (Tabernacles). He had planned a lavish celebration to recognize the 25th year of his reign, which he calculated to fall on the 750th anniversary of the founding of Rome. This census began back when Quirinius was governor of Syria the first time. Caesar demanded that his subjects all show their allegiance to him by going to the city of their ancestors to be registered and pay their taxes.

At sunset a new year began with the report of the two witnesses sighting the first sliver of the new moon over Jerusalem on the first of Tishri, 3999 (our Sept 11, 3 BC). At that moment, a rare sign appeared in the heavens. The constellation Bethulla the Virgin was lying on her back, clothed with the setting sun and crowned with twelve bright stars. The new moon rose directly under her feet! (Rev 12:1,2) The two witnesses, observing only the moon and untrained in celestial signs, missed that completely.

But in far-off Chaldea the Magi (astrologers) also saw that rare sign in the heavens, and they knew what it meant! In Judah a mighty King would be born of a virgin – the King above all kings, who would grow up to rule the world with a rod of iron. Daniel, the wisest of the ancient Magi back during the rule of Nebuchadnezzar, had told them to watch for this sign. He had left them gifts to present to the King when He came. However, Babylon is far from Israel.

The high priest ordered the Cohen to ascend the Royal Stoa to the Place of Trumpeting, and to give three long, solemn blasts of the shofar, proclaiming the high Shabbat of Yom Teruach (Feast of Trumpets), also known as Rosh haShanah (head of the year) and Yom haDin (the Day of Judgment). This is Israel's dark day, beginning the ten Days of Awe before Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. It is the call for Jewish males to prepare to go up to Jerusalem for the Feast of Sukkot ('booths'), one of the three times each year when Jewish law requires they go to the temple to worship and celebrate before YHWH. (Ex 23:14-17)

As the shofar was sounding, in an insignificant town in Galilee called Nazareth, a very pregnant girl cried out in pain to be delivered. Yoseph began to make ready, but alas, it turned out to just be false labor. The pains subsided.

"You are too early, Mariam my love. It is only the end of your ninth month. There are yet 15 days * before your Baby is due. We must continue with our plans and travel to Jerusalem for Sukkot. It would never do for Messiah to be born in Nazareth of Galilee!"

So as planned, they set out toward Bethlehem, the city of David, for both were of the line of David. They traveled slowly and stopped often. Mariam kept having periodic contractions. The rocky hills were hard, so Yoseph walked beside her carrying the pack, and let her ride their donkey. During the trip, they repented and cleansed their hearts, observing the ten Days of Awe to be ready for Yom Kippur.

The weary travelers reached Jerusalem by the high Shabbat of Yom Kippur. There they rested according to the commandment. Mariam was still having false labor pains, and was exhausted. Yoseph sensed an unseen battle going on in the spirit realm, so he remained in constant prayer.

Crowded as it was there, Yoseph wanted to stay. It just seemed right to him that Messiah should be born in busy Jerusalem, the ancient Holy City. But in prayer the Holy Spirit bade him keep the law and continue on to register in Bethlehem, assuring him that his obedience to the law was his protection. So, after Shabbat, they moved on.

But alas, when they reached Bethlehem, it was literally overflowing with celebrating travelers. The city is built on a ridge of the Judean highlands. The temple is within sight, an easy five mile walk to the north. Many of the line of David were building their sukkim ('booths') there so they could participate as much as possible in the celebrations at Jerusalem, while still keeping the edict of Caesar in the city of David's birth. Their Messianic fervor had only increased since Passover. Mariam, being with Child, was exempt from having to live in a frail sukkah during the Feast, so Yoseph decided to find her a comfortable room.

"Mariam, my love, it is too crowded, and you are tired. Wait for me here at the gate, beside the city elders. I'll find a good room and come back for you."

"Thank you, Yoseph. It would sure be nice if you could find a room for me. But, Yoseph? I've got to lie down. I'm exhausted. That false labor started again, and it really hurts! Look – see the old sheepfold next to Migdol Eder? [watchtower of the temple flocks] It looks empty. Nobody would want to build their sukkah next to a smelly old sheepfold. I'm sure it will have some old straw I could use to put under my bedroll… May I go there?"

"Good idea, my love. I'll leave our baggage with you until I find a place. I can travel faster if I don't have to carry anything. Er… you sure you'll be okay until I get back?"

"I think so, Yoseph. I've never had a baby before. I don't know how soon to expect Him. All I know is, this false labor is a royal pain. It hurts! I've got to lie down."

So they went over to the sheepfold. It was empty. Yoseph gathered the straw left over from the last lambing and rolled out Mariam's bedroll on it near the manger. "Just lie here and rest. I'll hurry back. Don't let our oil lamp tip over on the straw!"

* Normal human gestation is 280 days, which is 15 days more than nine lunar months.

The sun was just setting. He heard the shofar sound from the Place of Trumpeting signaling the beginning of the high Shabbat that was the Feast of Sukkot, the evening of Tishri 15, Hebrew year 3999 (our September 25, 3 BC). Tens of thousands of leafy sukkim lined the walls of the Holy City and dotted the fields south of Jerusalem. Migdol Eder offered a commanding view of the Plain of Rephaim, which spread out below like a broad valley between the two ancient hilltop cities. It was a warm night. Many flocks of sheep were already bedded down in little groups in the valley and the surrounding hills.

Yoseph tore his gaze away from Jerusalem, ran back in Bethlehem's north gate, and began jogging through the busy city. He tried every likely looking place, bargaining, pleading. But alas, every inn was overflowing and every home full of relatives. In two hours he had reached the far wall of the city. He stared out the south gate in panic. He was too late! There was no room, even for a young mother about to give birth! He ran through the remaining streets to the western gate. Nothing! *He had failed!*

In desperation, Yoseph walked outside the gate, turned to face Jerusalem, and fell to his knees. "O YHWH, King of the Universe! Help us! I have no place for Your precious holy Child and her mother. She is about to give birth. Show me what to do." He looked up across the valley toward the magnificent city, for the first time sensing the peace of God. So he headed back to Migdol Eder outside the wall. There was no other place. They would have to stay in that sheepfold. As he rounded the corner and the watchtower came in sight, doubts assailed him. *He wasn't expecting a palace, but a smelly old stable, for Messiah to be born?* It just didn't seem right. "YHWH? Is this Your answer?" he repeated, looking up toward the dark, looming tower. Gavriel hovered close, covering him with divine peace, until Yoseph knew that God would protect them there.

"Mariam? It's me. I'm sorry to keep you waiting so long. I really tried to find a room, but there isn't one available in the whole city. I'm afraid we're going to have to stay here. It isn't much, but it is private, and it faces Jerusalem. I'll fix it up for you. We'll be comfortable here until after the Feast."

The single oil lamp clothed the sheepfold with a soft, golden glow, bravely defending against the growing darkness. Yoseph came in and knelt down in front of the manger where he had placed Mariam's bedroll.

Mariam took Yoseph's hand, placing it over her womb. "Your timing is perfect!" She giggled. Yoseph was startled to find that her abdomen was no longer swollen and taut. Then he heard a soft sound from the manger beside him. "Yashua came right after you left. I had time to clean Him, wrap Him with those strips of cloth you left me, and nurse Him already. But I had to lay Him down in that manger. I'm utterly spent. I don't have the strength left to hold Him. If He cries during the night, you have to nurse Him, okay?" She laughed again, a silvery, sparkling laugh.

Yoseph lifted the oil lamp and stared into the manger. And there He was! Mariam's little lamb! He looked so tiny and so frail. Yoseph was speechless. In awe he picked Him up and cuddled Him tenderly, wondering how many little lambs had been born on that straw in times past. For a thousand years the lambs for the Pascal ceremonies had been born and raised in Bethlehem. But they were born in early spring. Now in the fall, the sheep were all out in the fields and the sheepfold was empty, all except…

Yoseph laid Yashua back in the manger, sound asleep. Untying his own bedroll, he laid it out on the straw beside his wife's. Looking up, he could see the branches making up the roof were so few that they could lie there and watch the stars, as well as the lights of the beautiful city. It was fully dark by now and a thousand tiny campfires sparkled across the valley like tiny jewels. His heart thrilled with the sight. As many times as he had seen it, he never tired of sharing in the beauty, the glory, of YHWH's people all gathered to meet with Him. Glad the nights were still warm, he scurried around strengthening the sukkah to improve their privacy. He shook his head in awe at the humbleness of Messiah's birth.

A feeble cry startled him. His first instinct was to look around for a lamb, perhaps a weak runt that had been left behind by the shepherds that spring. Then he shook his head. *How silly to think that such an animal could survive without any care for five months!* He listened intently for some movement. There was none. The sheepfold was empty. But now Mariam stirred. "Yoseph, dear? I fed Him two hours ago, but He might need changing. Do you mind? I'm still pretty weak." As she spoke, Yoseph heard the cry again. It was the Baby.

Yoseph picked Him up and frowned. *Messiah? Needing changing? What's with this, anyway?* Now Yashua's feeble cry became a full-blown squall. "Sure, my love. Uh… how do you do this?" Yoseph looked around for some more of those strips of cloth they had brought. At that point wet, rude noises erupted from the Baby's behind. The squall changed to a sigh. Yoseph put his nose next to Yashua and sniffed. "I think He's got a poo," he observed dourly.

"Oh, good! So young and already His digestion seems to be working fine. Just wait a minute or two to be sure He's finished. The rags are over there." Mariam paused to laugh at Yoseph's horrified look. "Why are you so surprised? Don't you see? It means He's well-developed. He'll be strong and healthy. He got plenty of nutrition from me when He nursed, and now it's coming through."

Their donkey poked his head through the doorway, sniffed, wrinkled his nose and backed out. Yoseph was on his own. Thus he got his first diaper-changing lesson. But more significantly, Yoseph learned about the weakness and utter dependence of a human child. Somehow he had figured that this caring-for-Messiah thing would be a bit more glamorous.

CHAPTER 5 – THE SHEPHERDS

9 Gavriel and a multitude of the heavenly host were all around, dancing and shouting Hosannas and Hallelujahs and doing cartwheels through the sky. When the newborn Baby took His first breath and let out His first cry, a mighty cheer resounded to the highest heavens. And when He expelled His first poo, the angels (who are used to seeing such things) laughed and clapped. Gavriel hovered near, doing his best to reassure Yoseph that it was all good – the Baby wouldn't break as he fumbled around changing Him.

The evening was getting late. The campfires in the wide valley were beginning to die out, and darkness had settled over the land. Gavriel, feeling protective and jealous for Logos' glory, sought Father YHWH again. "O YHWH, why must Logos Your Son be born in such humility and dark obscurity? It is so dark here beyond the veil! These humans are so frail! There is so much danger! The devil and his demons are seeking any opportunity to bring harm to Logos and to His earthly parents. We angels would all do better in protecting them if we understood why."

"Gavriel, remember His human name, and use it from now on. That will help you to understand."

"Yashua? YHWH brings salvation? I know that Logos is sent to earth to bring mankind salvation from sin. But could He not do that better if He came as an adult? a King? a mighty Warrior? a Prophet or a Priest? a wise Teacher? But a helpless Baby born in poverty and darkness?"

"Ah, Gavriel, you forget. The sin from which mankind must first be saved is self-centered pride. If I were to start by displaying My power and glory, they would justify their pride. But when I start with My humble servant-nature, their pride is disarmed so they can receive Me. Thus they will see that true power and glory is always based upon meekness and humility. They too, if they would find and enter My Kingdom, must come as a child. How could I do any different in sending Yashua as their Messiah? Soon enough they will recognize in Him My glory."

"I see. You've given them someone to whom even the smallest of them can relate, for they all start as a baby. Then in His growth and ascendency back to glory You will show them the path which they also must travel back to You and Your eternal Kingdom."

"Yes, Gavriel. Very good. But there is more. By My Law every sinner must die, unless he accepts the atonement of an innocent blood sacrifice. Yashua volunteered to offer His own blood as that atoning sacrifice, once for all time. That would not satisfy My Law if He were never to know temptation, for His innocence would be only ignorance and immaturity. But if He starts as a helpless baby, lives a life of human weakness facing every kind of temptation, and yet still stays true to the leading of our Spirit, then His innocent blood will satisfy My Law to atone for all the sins of the world."

Gavriel just stared in horror, awestruck at the now repeated suggestion of the death of Logos.

"Fear not, My faithful, beloved servant. With your own eyes you will see the fulfillment of the greatest principle of My Kingdom. By My Spirit, in meekness and humility, even human flesh which to you seems so very weak and helpless is mightier than all the power of the adversary! Yashua shall win the victory!"

"Yes, YHWH my God. I believe. Thank you for helping me to understand. But still, it is so dark down here! You have no idea how dark it is beyond the veil. And this the greatest day in history! I've got to tell someone… to shine a little light! Please?"

"I understand the darkness more than you know. I too want to shed some light. Those shepherds you see camped beneath that knoll? You may tell them."

"Thank You, Father YHWH!" Gavriel then called to his captains, "Follow me!" and flew to the Plain of Rephaim. A group of rough shepherds had built their sukkim beside the aqueduct, which at that point circled around a low knoll. The knoll gave them a little privacy from others in the broad valley. Their sheep had bedded down for the night. The shepherds were lounging around their campfire swapping yarns of the glory of past Sukkot festivals.

"I'll go first. Keep your light hidden. We don't want to scare them to death!" Gavriel said. But in his exuberance he unveiled himself too suddenly, nearly blinding the poor shepherds with the fire of heaven's glory beaming from his joyous presence. Frozen with fear, the shepherds thought the end of the world had come. Gavriel reassured them. "Don't be afraid! I bring you good news of great joy for all people! This night in the City of David is born for you a Savior. He is your Messiah, the high King! Go now, you will find the newborn Baby wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in a manger…" Then the rest of the heavenly host could wait no longer. They all burst out through the veil, in a glory brighter than the sunlight, praising God together in mighty chorus: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace be among all those of good will!"

Outside the wall of Bethlehem, in the shadow of Migdol Eder, Yoseph surveyed his improvements in the sukkah. He was satisfied. Mariam was rested and feeling stronger, and Yashua was freshly changed, so he picked Him up and handed Him to His mother. They sat together with their backs to the wall, gazing joyfully out over the sparkling valley and hugging each other while she nursed the Child.

They looked together toward the temple, which was now dark and empty. The priests had all gone to their own sukkim to be with their families. Yoseph mused, "I really thought Messiah would wait and be born tomorrow night, during Simchat Bet haSho'ayva [Rejoicing of the House of Water Drawing]. Its lighting ceremony represents the Shekina Glory of YHWH come to His temple."

"Perhaps the Shekina Glory will be here, rather than over at the temple tonight," suggested Mariam sleepily, lifting Yashua to her shoulder to burp Him.

Suddenly a brilliant light shone up at them from far off in the valley. "Wow! Look at that! Someone must be trying to have his own Simchat Bet haSho'ayva a bit early," Yoseph exclaimed.

"It is beautiful!" responded Mariam. "Maybe it is the Shekina Glory, the real one, YHWH Himself, returned to Israel! But it shouldn't be hidden down there in the valley. It should be up at the temple. Oh! Look how bright it got! It reminds me of the glory that shone around the angel Gavriel when he first gave me the message. I think it is, Yoseph! It must be an angel! Maybe it's Gavriel again!"

"I'm thankful he's down there and not up here." Yoseph grinned lovingly at his wife, who had returned to nursing. "Thank God for a little privacy."

"Oh yeah? I think we had better prepare for company!" Mariam retorted, pointing to torchlights moving slowly toward them from the place where the brilliant light had disappeared. She could have been bitter at the invasion of their privacy. Instead, she was warmed by the realization that this event was too significant to be kept to themselves.

Yoseph looked at the approaching shepherds. Then he looked up at Migdol Eder, the Watchtower of the Flocks, where all the baby lambs destined for the temple Pascal ceremonies had been guarded for a thousand years. It was dark, but Yoseph suddenly sensed that the watchtower was not empty. Those heavenly guards were on duty, watching over God's precious baby lamb – Yashua! Yoseph bowed his head, stunned at the realization that this Child, this miracle Baby, was the true Pascal Lamb, and all the others born and raised here just pointed to Him.

The shepherds were kind, and surprisingly reverent considering their rough reputation. They simply believed the angel's message and worshiped the newborn King as their Messiah. Oh, they had heard all the gossip about the coming Messiah from the prophecy of old Zacharias last Passover. But it had been just gossip until this moment. Now they saw, and believed. They were poor, but they still left gifts of what they had. Some had pets, lambs, or faithful dogs who helped them guard their flocks. They offered them to Yoseph to protect his family. But Yoseph refused. The dogs knew their masters. YHWH was his protector. Still, it seemed like the animals and even their own donkey now bowed in worship before Mariam and the Baby.

"And the Word became flesh, and sukkah [dwelt] among us…" (Jn 1:14) Thus the true meaning of the Feast of Sukkot, God living with men, came to pass. Unnoticed by religious leaders, welcomed only by a small band of shepherds, God took upon Himself the weakness of human flesh to be born a helpless Baby in utter poverty, darkness, and obscurity.

CHAPTER 6 – THE CIRCUMCISION

10 A few others also were to notice, and believe. This story begins the evening of Shmeni Atzeret (the eighth day of the Feast, the day they celebrated the seventh and final Simchat Bet haSho'ayva lighting ceremony). Yoseph and Mariam left their sukkah in search of a priest to perform the B'rit Milah (ritual circumcision) as required by law, but they quickly discovered that no priests remained in Bethlehem. They'd all gone over to Jerusalem for the Feast.

Yoseph felt a little conspicuous as he left Mariam and trudged up the long valley toward the temple, carrying the Baby. This was the highest of high Shabbats (Tishri 22), and he was traveling farther than the prescribed Shabbat-day's journey. But the law of B'rit Milah overruled every other law, and it was the eighth day since Yashua's birth, so he had no choice. He wished Mariam could come too, but he was going to have to enter the temple courts to find a priest. Mariam, due to the uncleanness of her childbirth, was not permitted past the 'soreg' – the low wall dividing all the inner courts from the outer Court of the Gentiles.

In the Court of Israel, he found a venerable old priest who was off-duty and willing to perform the circumcision. His fingers were quick, right in full view of the celebrants. He had done this a zillion times before, I'm sure.

But the old priest's eyes were on the Simchat Bet haSho'ayva ceremony, and they glistened with tears as the elders of the Sanhedrin finished their torch dances and the music began for the Songs of Ascent. The four towering menorahs lit up the temple. The Levite singers had moved from the Court of Israel out through the Nicanor Gate, and were standing at the top of the fifteen steps leading down to the Court of Women. The music of the temple flutes, trumpets, harps, and stringed instruments swelled. The Levites began their songs with Psalm 120, continuing one more song with each step down, through Psalm 134.

The priest wiped away a tear and finished up his work, eager to be done with it. Then, not wanting to interrupt the glorious ceremony, he shoved the vigorously crying Baby back in Yoseph's arms and said, "Now you have to speak His name so your witnesses can hear. That seals it."

"What?" Yoseph asked. "I couldn't quite catch that."

"Just say His name out loud so your witnesses can hear." He spoke a bit too sharply, peeved at the distraction.

"I wait for YHWH, my soul does wait, and in His Word do I hope. My soul waits for YHWH more than watchmen for the morning; indeed, more than watchmen wait for the morning. O Israel, hope in YHWH; for with YHWH is lovingkindness, and with Him is abundant redemption. And He will redeem [save] Israel from all his iniquities…"

"His name is Yashua! [YHWH saves]," Yoseph shouted out, a little too loudly, holding the squalling Infant up high so all the men around could see Him.

The Levites glared angrily at him for interrupting their ceremony, but continued their song as they proceeded down the next stair. *"O YHWH, my heart is not proud, or my eyes haughty; nor do I involve myself in great matters, or in things too difficult for me. Surely I have composed and quieted my soul; like a weaned child rests against his mother, my soul is like a weaned child within me. O Israel, hope in YHWH from this time forth and forever…"*

The old priest was startled with the discrepancy between the words of the Psalm and the attitudes of the proud Levites. All the words of the Hoshanna Rabbah ('Great Hosanna') ceremony that morning flooded back into his mind: *"This is the day which YHWH has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it! YHWH save [Yashua] now we beseech Thee! YHWH, we beseech Thee, do send prosperity! Blessed is He who comes in the name of YHWH. We have blessed You from the house of YHWH. YHWH is light, and He has given us the Light."*

Embarrassed, Yoseph held the Baby close and rushed out of the court. But with tears streaming down his face the old priest followed, calling, "Wait!" The familiar words of the Hoshanna Rabbah, which he had sung all his life, had taken on a new meaning. He caught up on the bridge over the Tyropoeon Valley. "Why did you name Him Yashua?"

"Well, because that's what the angel told us to call Him," Yoseph answered softly.

The priest suddenly reached out, grabbed the Baby out of Yoseph's arms, and stared into His face a long time. "Where was He born?" he demanded.

"Bethlehem. At the wall beside Migdol Eder. On the first day of the Feast. His mother is waiting there for me. She couldn't come because she…"

A knowing nod from the priest, and tears again began to flow. Dozens of verses from the Torah, the Psalms, the Prophets, flooded his mind.

"And you. You are Yashua's father?"

"Well, it's a long story…" The priest's full attention was on him and he saw no way to wiggle out of it. "I recently married His mother, but she is still a virgin. Yashua was given her by the Holy Spirit before we married." Yoseph hung his head, knowing that the priest could not possibly understand, and fully expecting a lashing rebuke.

Instead, he gently handed Yashua back to Yoseph. "I believe," he said simply.

"Huh? Believe? Believe what?" Yoseph answered, his mouth dropping open.

"Don't you know the Scriptures?" The priest shook his head. "Take good care of this Baby, my son. He is Messiah! I am Yacov ben Levi. I will pray for Him. And," pointing, "if you ever need aid for Him, I live with my son Heber and his wife Mary in a big house in the upper city, over there."

CHAPTER 7 – SIMEON AND ANNA AT THE TEMPLE

11 Yoseph and Mariam returned to the sheepfold, where they lived for 33 more days. (Lev 12:4 ff) Mariam delighted in being a mother – cuddling, nursing, guarding her Child. Yashua's face plumped out as He started gaining weight.

Yoseph soon ran out of money. (Caesar's tax collector had taken half their savings!) So he took odd jobs in the city to support them. He told Mariam to call out "unclean" if anyone came too close to the sukkah which had become their home. And he restored the roof with thatch from the fields, as the rains had now begun in earnest.

Yoseph considered renting a room in the inn, now that the festival travelers were gone. But he couldn't afford it, and anyway, the sheepfold that had been their sanctuary seemed safer than anywhere inside the city walls.

The 34th day dawned fair and cool. Yoseph knew it was YHWH telling them it was time to leave. Winter was coming. The old sheepfold could not keep them from the cold. They packed their few belongings and headed north, toward the beautiful city and the temple.

Yoseph had planned to buy a lamb for the purification sacrifice. But that was too expensive. When he counted the money he had saved working in Bethlehem, he realized he barely had enough to return to Nazareth. He would have to settle for the minimum (two turtledoves or two young pigeons) for Mariam's purification according to the law.

This was Mariam's first time in the temple since Yom Kippur. Yoseph pointed out the places where Yashua had been circumcised and where old Yacov ben Levi had later confronted him and promised to pray for Yashua.

"I'm glad I wasn't there," Mariam laughed. "I would have yanked that old priest's beard when he grabbed Yashua away from you!" She held Him out in front of her, staring lovingly into His bright eyes. Just then an old man stepped from the shadows, and striding up quickly from behind Mariam, took the Baby out of her arms. Her squeal of surprise went unnoticed as the old man held Yashua up high and began to prophesy by the Holy Spirit.

"Blessed be YHWH, King of the Universe! Now let Thy servant depart in peace according to Thy Word, for my own eyes have seen Thy Salvation prepared before all the peoples; a Light for revelation to the nations, the glory of Thy people Israel!" The prophecy continued on and on.

Mariam just stood with her mouth open, astonished at what he was saying. He smiled down at her, the fire still burning fiercely in his eyes. "My name is Simeon. I've waited all my life for this moment. You and your husband are blessed of YHWH! For behold, this Holy One is set for the fall and the rise of many in Israel, and for a sign which will be opposed by our religious leaders. The sword will pierce even your own soul, but in the end the secret thoughts of many hearts will be revealed."

He handed the Child back to Mariam. "Take good care of Him," he whispered. "He is much bigger…" and here he swept his arm in full circle around the temple and all its magnificent furnishings, outbuildings, courts, and gates. "…than everything else you see here."

"Would've yanked his beard, eh?" Yoseph chuckled as old Simeon walked off, arms lifted in praise.

Mariam didn't answer. She was blushing furiously, and trying to remember every word that Simeon had said. His lengthy prophecy had penetrated into her heart. She knew it was YHWH's call over her Son's life.

Now again they heard the sounds of praising and giving joyful thanks to YHWH, this time from an old woman kneeling in the shadows. "Who are you, old mother?" Mariam asked. ('Old' is a most respectful title in the East, you know, as is 'mother' for an older woman.)

"I am Anna, widowed daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. For sixty years [ever since Pompey subjugated Judea to Rome in 63 BC] I have not left the temple, looking for the redemption of Jerusalem the Holy City. Now I have found Him, and my heart overflows with thanksgiving! YHWH, bless His holy name, assures me that your Baby is Yashua, YHWH's salvation! I must go quickly and tell all my friends that Messiah has come to His people!"

They thanked her, and Anna scurried off. "And we too, must hurry, Mariam my love." Yoseph prodded. "We have to do this sacrifice and hit the road, before the winter cold keeps us from returning to Galilee. Let's find a priest…"

At that moment, Yoseph caught his breath, his mouth still open. Mariam followed his gaze to the shadows over by the temple wall. There she saw an old priest with a long flowing white beard. But he was unlike any priest she had ever seen. Priests always stood tall and held their heads high, nose in the air, looking up or off in the distance, as if disdaining to soil themselves with riffraff the likes of her. This priest was on his knees in the dirt, mussing up his spotless robes. His head was almost on his chest. His face was covered with his hands. His shoulders were shaking. Was he praying? Or was he weeping? Mariam couldn't tell. "Who is it, Yoseph?" she whispered.

"It's Yacov ben Levi, the kind priest I told you about, the one who performed Yashua's circumcision. But why is he kneeling in the dirt? Let's go see… old Yacov?" he called as they came near.

Yacov's face came out from behind his hands, both wet with tears. They saw that he had indeed been weeping, but from joy, not sorrow. "I've been waiting, watching for you, today. I knew you would come. I'm glad you have come!" he called, rising to his feet and walking toward them. "May I have the honor of preparing your sacrifice?"

"Thank you, old Yacov. You are too kind," Yoseph responded. "But why were you crying?"

"In my heart there burns a fire that I have not felt, not in these 66 years. I first tasted it when you brought Yashua for circumcision, but then I began to doubt. So I asked YHWH for a sign, bless His ineffable name forever and ever." And he raised his face and hands toward the heavens in praise. Tears again streamed down his face. For a few moments his emotions rendered him speechless. Finally, wiping his eyes on the back of his hand, he faced Mariam, who held the Child. His eyes seemed to burn right into her soul.

"I am a Pharisee. I live by Torah. And in Torah a thing is not established until it is confirmed at the mouth of two or three witnesses." Yacov faltered again, struggling.

Yoseph nodded, realization dawning on his face.

"Simeon and Anna are well known and deeply respected in this temple." Yacov finally got it out. "Purer hearts and more faithful lives have never darkened these gates. I have my two witnesses, and I can never again doubt that Yashua is the Messiah of Israel." He stopped to stare lovingly, worshipfully down at Yashua, who was snuggled in Mariam's arms. Mariam surprised herself by holding out the Baby for Yacov to take, but he shook his head.

"No. I am unworthy to hold the body of my Lord." He bowed his face to the ground, once more kneeling in the dirt. "I am your servant…" he began, and Mariam started to object. It just seemed wrong for this Pharisee, this exalted leader of the Jews, in his fine white robes, to be bowing in the dirt before a peasant such as her. But then she realized it was not her, but the Babe she held, to whom he bowed. "I will pray for You every day of my life. May God grant me the honor of seeing You again when You claim Your Kingdom in power and great glory."

12 Yacov sacrificed the two turtledoves for them. When everything was completed according to the law, Yoseph and Mariam headed north. The date was Heshvan 27, 3999 (November 6, 3 BC). The road to Nazareth was over 75 miles, but Mariam was much stronger now, and they treated the trip like their honeymoon. Mariam was radiant with joy and in the flower of her youthful beauty. Yoseph was glad that Mariam's days of purification were finally past, so he could come to know her intimately as his wife.

Many times a day as they looked into the eyes of their Baby, as they caressed His tiny body and held Him close, as they changed His diapers or bathed Him, as Mariam nursed Him, snuggled Him, or rocked Him to sleep, they marveled in awe and wonder. For this frail human Baby, whose life they literally held in their hands, was the King of the Universe, Emmanuel, God with us.

Gavriel and the heavenly host remained very close by, guarding and protecting them, sometimes even pushing aside the rain clouds to let the sun shine through, unseen but sharing their joy in everything they did. Leading in the Dance or ruling from the heavenlies was fun, but caring for his Master was his passion!

13 Let's return to far-off Chaldea at the tip of the Persian Gulf. The Magi had excitedly been watching a progression of rare celestial events. The first of Elul, 3998 (August 12, 3 BC on our Gregorian calendar), they had seen Jupiter ('Sedeq' in Hebrew, meaning 'righteousness', pointing to Messiah), the planet representing kingship, coronations, and the birth of kings, come into intimate conjunction with Venus, the mother planet, within Leo, the sign of the Lion of Judah and the constellation of kings.

Jupiter with Venus, the two brightest 'stars', in Leo! That sure got their attention! But it was just the beginning. They had seen a mad dance of all visible planets, involving conjunctions never seen before and little understood. Venus even joined Mercury, and they walked together the rest of the month. Some saw revolution, war, pestilence, and darkness, while others saw bright light, revelation, and peace. By the end of Elul, the last night of Hebrew year 3998, Jupiter was coming into conjunction with Regulus, the star of kingship, the brightest star in the constellation Leo. The royal planet had touched the mother planet, and now was advancing toward the royal star, all within the royal constellation representing Judah.

The next evening, the first of Tishri and the first day of the Hebrew year 3999 (our Sept 11, 3 BC), the Magi had gathered as the climax approached. Will the Conductor of the heavenly orchestra make it clear this last year of the Fourth Millennium? The glorious sunset covered the western sky with royal colors – reds, purples, and golds. As the first stars became visible in the darkening eastern sky, every eye strained to see.

The sun was in the constellation Bethulla (Virgo the Virgin). Twelve bright stars formed her crown (Venus and Mercury had joined the usual ten stars). The setting sun clothed her with majesty and modesty. Only the sharpest eyes could identify her as she set below the horizon. The virgin lay supine, as if in labor to give birth. Now the first sliver of the new moon just became visible directly under her feet, an obvious symbol that the virgin will give birth. (Rev 12:1 ff) This was the magnificent sign in the heavens that they had been told by Daniel to expect.

The Magi eagerly awaited the rising of Leo. Yes! Jupiter was beginning to touch Regulus within Leo. That settled it! A high King will be born of a virgin of the tribe of Judah in the land of Judea. He will bring light and peace, but also cause darkness and division on the earth. They eagerly debated what to do. The Magi were the 'kingmakers' of the civilized world. Certainly they must pay Him a visit and honor Him with their gifts (and Daniel's). But Judea was over a thousand miles away. The roads were fraught with perils, especially for the rich. And the winter rains were already upon them, turning the roads into quagmires and making travel nearly impossible. They watched for more signs and waited for spring.

Sure enough, near the end of Kislev, Jupiter stopped to head back. On Adar 12 (Feb 17, 2 BC) near when the Jews celebrate their Feast of Purim, the conjunction between Jupiter and Regulus in Leo was repeated. Then on Iyar 4 (our May 8, 2 BC) the conjunction between Jupiter and Regulus in Leo repeated a third time. This time, Jupiter circled to draw a big crown right over the head of Regulus!

That did it. A triple confirmation! By the 15th of Sivan (our June 17, 2 BC) under a full moon, the caravan set off. Twelve Magi with 70 Arabian horses, 50 servants, 40 pack camels, and vast quantities of weapons, food, and riches, moved northwest up the Euphrates river and around the fertile crescent. The first night of their travels they got another big sign: Jupiter touched Venus again, this time closer than they'd ever seen. They merged as one, shining like a beacon to point their way. This lengthy sequence of events had never happened before and never would again.

Back in Nazareth, Yoseph and Mariam sold their home shortly after Tisha B'Av (the 9th of Av, a dread time during which Jews fear great catastrophes), and moved south to Ramah of Benjamin, five miles north of Jerusalem. That way they wouldn't have to travel so far for the Feasts, which had gained great significance to them. Besides, Ramah was where Elisheva lived with baby Yochanan. They arrived on Av 25, in plenty of time to celebrate the triple Feasts of Yom Teruach, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot with Zacharias and Elisheva, in fond remembrance of the births of their babies the previous year.

And on Av 25 (our August 25, 2 BC) our traveling Magi were again amazed and encouraged to see the spectacular conjunction of Mercury, Venus, Mars, and Jupiter. Four of the five visible planets had joined together to herald and worship the new King!

The Magi caravan arrived in Jerusalem about the first of Heshvan (the end of October). Needless to say they caused quite a stir with their queries about the birth of a new high King, the Messiah! Roman king Herod, being a jealous and self-serving old fox, tried to get them to be his spies. He secretly grilled them on just when the Baby was born based on when the astrological signs first appeared. He then sent them to Bethlehem with orders to report back to him after they found the Child, so he too could 'worship Him'.

Being only five miles down the road, they needed no stellar guidance. The Magi cheerfully traveled the short distance to Bethlehem to begin their search. But after a fruitless week, they concluded that the new King was no longer there. The news of the shepherds had been passed around the town. (You know how it is with juicy gossip.) People kept telling them that the young couple and their Baby had left town six weeks after the birth and had gone north. One old grandmother even said she was quite sure the family was planning to move back home to Nazareth. So the Magi caravan left Bethlehem to head north. They searched and questioned people as they went.

They no doubt stopped to tell Herod that they hadn't found Him, but had been told that He may have moved north, possibly as far as Nazareth. They had no reason not to confide in him, yet.

But they had only gotten as far as Ramah, about five miles north of Jerusalem, when they received another celestial sign. To understand this one, you need to know something all Magi know. The outer planets normally seem to move eastward through the constellations. But as they approach the opposite point in the sky from the sun, due to the earth's faster speed around the sun, they appear to slow, stop or do a U-turn, and then head back west awhile, after which they slow, stop, and start again in the normal direction. This illusion is called a retrograde loop. It is not uncommon (occurring about once each year), but it is significant to those who make their living in astrology.

We know that Jupiter began its annual retrograde loop on 25 Kislev of Hebrew year 4000 (December 22, 2 BC). This is the first day of the seven-day Feast of Hanukkah, a season for giving gifts. The Magi rejoiced when they saw the 'star' slow and stop just as they approached Ramah, knowing that their trip was not in vain. (Matt 2:9-10)

They set up camp just outside the town. The next morning the Magi left their caravan to go a King-hunting. It was pretty easy to locate the house. Ramah was not a very large town. The common people there all knew about the miracle births of Yashua and His cousin Yochanan!

The kingmakers found Elisheva first. *No, her two-year-old was not the one, but she knew who was!* She directed them to Yoseph's home. They left her a generous gift of gold coins for her information.

Now fourteen months old, Yashua lived with Yoseph the carpenter and Mariam in a home Yoseph had built. How surprised they were when twelve magnificent Magi crowded into their tiny house and bowed to worship the Baby! And the gifts! Yoseph's eyes glistened. He wouldn't have to worry about finances for years! The Magi stayed all day, sharing with Yoseph and Mariam stories of Daniel, his signs and prophecies, and his desire to honor Messiah.

But that night in a dream Gavriel came to the leading Magus and warned him of the danger. They rose before dawn and resumed their journey, agreed to make it look as much as possible like they had never found Him. Riding down the steep trail past Jericho, they crossed the Jordan and headed east into Ammon, hoping that Herod's men would not catch them for questions. They turned north only after they reached the King's Highway at Heshbon.

14 Gavriel returned to Yoseph and spoke sternly to him, warning him to awake and flee to Egypt, for Herod would try to kill the Baby. Awaking, Yoseph immediately obeyed. His family was on the road an hour before first light. They stopped to pound on old Zacharias' door. He was serving in the temple that week, but Elisheva sleepily answered.

"Gavriel just told us that Herod wants to kill Yashua!" Mariam wailed. "And he might try to kill Yochanan, too! I think you'd better hide him. We're on our way to Egypt. YHWH be with you and guide you!"

Herod's spies awoke with the dawn, in time to see the tail end of the Magi caravan heading down to the Jordan. "Haven't they found Him yet?" they wondered, following grumpily. But when the caravan crossed the river and headed into the wilderness of Ammon, they realized the truth. The Magi had indeed found the Child, probably back at Ramah or before. They were on their way home!

The spies hurried back up to Jerusalem, arriving that afternoon with word that the Magi had left Israel, never stopping long enough to indicate if they had found the new King. By now, no doubt, they had reached the King's Highway and were half-way to Damascus. Herod realized that he had been tricked. They must have found Him somewhere along the way, and had deliberately hidden the fact. He was furious!

He was also too late, for Yoseph and Mariam had passed through Jerusalem that very morning, and were on their way to Egypt, well financed by the lavish gifts of the Magi.

15 And Elisheva and baby Yochanan (who was twenty months old) were at that moment crossing the Jordan and heading out into the wilderness, where they would live until his ministry began. Their provisions, at least to begin with, were again financed by the generosity of the Magi.

King Herod immediately ordered the execution of all boy babies under the age of two, throughout the territory of both Bethlehem and Ramah. His soldiers were sent out in great haste, lest the baby's parents hear about the plan and escape. Thus was fulfilled the tragic prophecy about Rachel, the mother of Benjamin, weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted because they were gone. (Matt 2:18; Jer 31:15) Benjamin's inheritance centered around Ramah. But Rachel's tomb is somewhere on the road south to Bethlehem (Gen 35:16) and many of her descendants had settled there also.

Too bad for Herod. He killed a lot of babies, redoubling the people's hatred of him. But he missed the one Baby, Yashua, who will stand before him as his judge one day. He also missed baby Yochanan, Yashua's way-preparer. Oh, everybody knew about Yochanan – from the widespread gossip over his miraculous birth two years ago. Perhaps he was the one! But nobody could find him.

Trying to pacify Herod's wrath, the religious leaders tried to get old Zacharias to tell them where his wife and son were hiding, but he didn't have a clue. He hadn't been home when they had fled. Wanting to retain King Herod's political patronage, they tortured old Zacharias. They later murdered him between the temple porch and the altar as he faithfully performed his service. (Matt 23:35) May YHWH reward him and vindicate his integrity.

And Herod? Yes he received his reward. This was Herod the Great, who in the eighteenth year of his reign had begun the temple in Jerusalem (which was forty-three years under construction at the time of Yashua's ministry – Jn 2:20). Herod became increasingly sick in mind and body, prone to delusions of persecution and outbursts of violent anger, with hypertension, arteriosclerosis, and fits of insanity. He also had a venereal disease or two, due to his immoral lifestyle. Realizing that he would soon die, he devised a diabolical plan to ensure that all of Israel would mourn for him in spite of their nearly universal hatred. He commanded that Jewish leaders from around the country be rounded up and imprisoned at the Hippodrome in Jerusalem. His army was ordered to execute them all at the very moment of his death.

History records that two Jewish rabbis were slain by Herod on the day of a total lunar eclipse, January 10, 1 BC. Herod then murdered several members of his own family, including his rebellious son Herod Antipater. He died five days later in utter ignominy. His soldiers obeyed his orders for the funeral ceremony, but refused to kill the Jewish leaders, instead setting them free to add to the widespread rejoicing at his final demise on Shevat 2 (our Jan 24, 1 BC). The date became a Jewish feast day.

It gets complicated here. Herod's will divided up his kingdom among his remaining sons. Archelaus (son of Malthace, a Samaritan) got half of Samaria, all Judea, and most of Idumaea, by far the choicest share. Unfortunately, he was a royal jerk, inheriting all of his father's vices but none of his abilities. His stupidity resulted in widespread riots in Jerusalem, which he quelled by slaughtering 3000 Pharisees just before Passover. Very bad timing. It earned him the undying hatred of every Jew in the Middle East. [16] It was no wonder that Yoseph, after hearing the good news of Herod's death and returning from Egypt, was afraid to settle anywhere near the beloved Holy City, especially after he heard that old Zacharias had been slain and Elisheva and baby Yochanan were missing. He bypassed Judea entirely and headed north to his old stomping grounds, Nazareth. Thus he unwittingly fulfilled an unwritten prophecy that Messiah would be a Nazarene. King Archelaus maintained his inept and tyrannical rule for ten years before he thankfully got banished to Gaul.

Herod's second son by Malthace, Herod Antipas (a nickname for Antipater, but not the Antipater that Herod killed, who was the son of Doris, Herod's first consort), got Galilee, the other half of Samaria, and Perea. This was the Antipas who was called "that fox" by Yashua (Luke 13:32) and who put Yochanan to death after the tiff over his illicit relationship with his half-brother Philip's wife, Herodias (Mk 6:14-29; Lk 3:1-20). Herod Philip (son of Cleopatra, a Jewess) got Trachonitis, Gaulanitis, Batanaea, Auranitis, Ulatha, and Ituraea. The fourth tetrarch, Lysanias, got Abilene in Lebanon. [See map, page 13.] The Decapolis was an area of Greco-Roman cities not under Herodian rule.

CHAPTER 9 – YASHUA GROWS UP

[17] Down in sleepy Nazareth, those political upheavals pretty much passed them by. Yoseph and Mariam's folks, Jacob and Ruth and Heli and Rachael, held a big party to celebrate their safe return. The two mothers had worried when they'd heard the tragic news from Ramah, but Jacob and Heli knew that YHWH would keep His Messiah safe! Just the same, it was with heartfelt thanks that they heard the story of their miraculous deliverance.

"But what about Elisheva and Yochanan? Nobody has found them! Poor old Zacharias was tortured and slain by our leaders for not telling where they went." Ruth had been fretting about that ever since.

"Mom," Mariam put a hand on each shoulder and looked directly into her mother-in-law's eyes, speaking like the adult she now was. "I don't know where Elisheva and Yochanan are, but I know they are safe. If they had been harmed, my Baby would have known, for their spirits are somehow linked. Yashua is happy and contented – therefore Yochanan is safe. I know it."

"So that's why you went to live in Ramah?"

"Yes. We had to live near them. And near the beautiful city to celebrate the Feasts!" Mariam had a sudden idea. "Maybe YHWH led us to Ramah to save Yochanan and Elisheva, and others, too. We were the ones who woke up Elisheva and warned her to flee after the angel warned us. But imagine if we had been living down here in Nazareth. We couldn't have warned them. Herod might have killed them and all the babies between here and Jerusalem!"

Heli nodded. "YHWH is good. Bless His holy name forever and ever. Already He is saving us through His Messiah, who is not yet three!"

So Yoseph and Mariam returned to the house he had built in preparation for his wedding. They got back into the carpentry business. They were good citizens. They worked hard, paid their taxes, went up to Jerusalem three times a year to keep the Feasts with the rest of their fellow Judeans, and in general, kept their noses clean. Oh, they sure thought bad things about evil Herod Antipas and even-more-evil Archelaus, but they never said them!

But life had its trouble even in their old hometown. It was not the Romans who persecuted them. It was their own people, their own religious leaders. You know how it is with gossip. Yes, they could count back in those days, too. They seemed to find it great sport to ask Yashua's age, then count back to Yoseph and Mariam's wedding date and come up short. So few believed that absurd story of Yashua's miraculous virgin birth, especially when they saw Him behave pretty much like the Child that He was.

It's not that He was mean or rebellious or anything – He wasn't. In fact, He was unusually kind and obedient. He never had to be disciplined twice for something.

It's just that as they watched Him play kick-the-can or tag with the neighbor boys, they would think, *Him? Our Messiah? I don't think so!* So they would condemn Mariam and Yoseph for jumping the gun. Thus Yashua grew up with a stigma over His head that He could not understand.

It came to a head one fine spring day. Yashua ran in from play. "Mom! They did it again!"

Mariam could see that this was really distressing Him. She sat down with Him on the couch. "Tell me about it, Son. What did they do again? Did someone hurt You?"

"Well, no. It's just that… well… they're all happy and smiling and talking with each other, then they see Me. Suddenly I get this frown. The laughter is gone. They glance at each other, shake their heads, then studiously look aside when they pass Me."

"Who? Your friends? The neighbor kids?"

"No. Not usually anyway. This time it was wives of the synagogue priests. Sometimes it is the priests themselves. Or other elders or leading people in the town. But I've got to find out what it is! If I'm doing something to offend them, I need to fix it!"

Mariam put her head in her hands. She had hoped He would be at least ten before she had to deal with this. He was only six! Why should He have to bear this load at such a young age? She looked up again and reached out her arms. He gladly bounced up into her lap – He always was a cuddler. She held Him tightly and rocked Him for a bit.

But she knew this subject would not go away. "Yashua? You are growing up so fast! Already You have a perception way beyond Your years. But this problem is too heavy for You. You can't bear it. You will be strong enough to bear it when You're grown, but not now. I swear to You that it is not something You have done, nor I, nor Your dad. It is something that was done to us before You were even born. Now, will You let me carry it for You until You are grown? Then I promise I will tell You all about it."

Yashua climbed down from her lap, but continued to hold on to her. "When will I be grown?"

"Well, normally You become a man at twelve…"

"May I split the difference? I promise to not let it bother Me, if you promise to tell Me about it when I'm nine."

Mariam counted it up on her fingers. It came out right. For the zillionth time in the short life of this Child she was amazed. "Where did You learn math? You sure didn't learn it from me!"

"Then it's a deal?" He didn't even know what 'math' means. That part went right over His head.

"It's a deal." He ran off happily to play. Mariam hoped He would forget. Three years is a long time. She never had been very good with numbers.

But on Yashua's ninth birthday, after James, Joseph, Simon, and Anna had left the dinner table to play and baby Judas was nursing, Yashua reminded her. "Mom. I'm nine. You promised to tell Me why people seem to hate Me."

"Oh, they don't hate You. They never hated You!"

"Well, they do a pretty good imitation of it! At least I need to know why they get offended and look away, and won't smile at Me when I greet them."

Mariam looked pleadingly across the room at Yoseph, but he was sacked out in the easy chair with a newspaper on his face. Yashua saw the look, and ran to get him. As they returned, He filled His dad in. "Mom promised to tell Me why people look at Me strangely, like I'm offensive to them. She wants you to hear, too. Do they do that to you?"

Yoseph rubbed his eyes. "Yes, Son, they do. I don't worry about it. Great people behave in a good and kind manner. Small people behave crassly."

"Small people? The town leaders and their wives?!"

But Mariam was giving Yoseph that look which insisted this problem couldn't be handled by trite clichés. He remembered what they'd talked about. "Siddown, Son. We need to talk. Man to man. Your mom did tell me about her promise, and I am going to help her keep it, since it affects us all so much. You see, I am not your real father. YHWH Himself is Your real Father. Your mom conceived You by His Holy Spirit before we even married…" Thus Yoseph proceeded to explain it all to Yashua much more explicitly than Mariam would have ever dared.

Yashua listened intently without interrupting. Yoseph was not sure how much He understood. When he finished, Yashua only had one question. "Didn't you tell them? The leaders, I mean?"

"Yes, some of them. The whole story. A few believed us. Your grandparents did. But most of them, particularly the religious leaders, just thought we'd been playing hanky-panky before we married, and then lied to cover it up."

Mariam was afraid He would ask what hanky-panky is, but Yashua doesn't say another word. He just bowed His head in thought. So they left Him alone. However, His seriousness went on for days. Finally she had to ask, "Yashua, what is it? You seem sad."

18 "Oh! No, Mom. I'm fine. I'm just trying to hear My real Father. If My real Father is YHWH, I have to get to know Him." From that day on, Yashua spent hours every day listening for His real Father.

Never was a young boy more intent on hearing the preaching and the Torah readings at the synagogue. So it should not have been a surprise when at the age of twelve, Yashua got 'lost' in the synagogue at Jerusalem following the Passover Festival. It took them three days to return and find Him, and holy cow, were they ever mad!

As I said, Yashua rarely needed to be disciplined, and never more than once for the same crime. But this time, boy-oh-boy was He going to get a strapping! Yoseph hauled Him out of the synagogue by His ear.

He had barely gotten Yashua beyond the gate before he yanked off his belt and jerked his Son down over his knee. In a rush of anger, without pausing for explanation, Yoseph waled on the poor Boy's behind. Whap! Whap! Whap! Whap! The leather belt made satisfyingly loud claps echoing off the walls of the synagogue.

"Wait! Sir! Please!" An old priest came running out of the synagogue, white robes flapping in a very undignified manner. Yoseph paused, belt still lifted high, as he turned to look. Their eyes met.

"Yacov ben Levi?" Yoseph's face turned red. His leather belt fell to the ground with a thwack.

"Yashua?" Yacov questioned the Boy, still over his dad's lap. Yashua smiled up at him and nodded. The priest immediately fell to his knees on the ground before them, his spotless robe right in the mud. Mariam squealed in shock. Yoseph pulled Yashua off his lap and stood Him up.

"I am so sorry!" Yacov cried. "I didn't recognize You. Please, forgive me! I have not seen You since You were circumcised. All the time You were questioning us, and then correcting us from the Scriptures, my heart burned within me. Everyone was amazed at Your perception! But I surely should have known. I've been praying for You every day for twelve years. I should have recognized You."

Smiling, Yashua reached out to touch him softly on the shoulder. "How could you have known? Your eyes were blinded by the doctrines of the Pharisees. But now you see. I'm grateful. Thank you for your prayers." Then He pulled on his arm. "Please stand up. And tell no one about Me. They mustn't see you bowing to Me. It could cost you."

Mariam saw kneeholes in the mud, but when Yacov stood up, there was not a smudge on his priestly robes. She looked sharply at Yashua, but He seemed unaware.

They said their good-byes, and turned to go home. Yacov returned to the synagogue in joyous worship.

Yoseph just tromped along fuming, embarrassed that Yacov had caught him so angry. So Mariam took over. "Son, why did You treat us this way? Your father and I have been frantically searching for You!" She was angry, too.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to trouble you. Didn't you know I had to be about My Father's business?"

But they remained angry, as they didn't understand. At first that saddened Him. Then He realized, they had not spent all the time listening to His Father that He had been spending these last three years. Suddenly He was startled with the thought that maybe He was unique in this close relationship with His Father!

19 *Maybe His folks couldn't understand! Maybe they couldn't hear His Father at all! Maybe they too were blinded by cares of the world.* Half the way home Yashua was weeping inside. *Were all people like that? Could no one else hear the Father?* Now that He had learned to hear His Father's voice, He wanted that for everyone. Yacov seemed quick enough to receive it, and if he could, anybody could! Yashua's weeping turned to joy. Could that be His mission in life. *Yes! That is what He will do, all His life. Help people hear the voice of His Father. He'll start with His parents when they get home.* Thus Yacov became a big encouragement.

But even though He worked at it the rest of the year, His dad couldn't seem to hear Him. Sometimes Yoseph even doubted it was really the heavenly Father that Yashua heard. Mariam took Yashua aside one day, "Son. You're thirteen now. You're a man. But your dad is still head of the house, and he has a lot of responsibilities. You, James, Joseph, and Simon are pulling your own weight around the home, but your dad's got to also provide for Anna, Judas, and baby Sharon until they grow up, too. He doesn't have time to just sit around listening to the heavenly Father like You do. You don't understand how difficult it is to raise a large family like ours!"

"But Mom! If Dad would only listen to Father, it would be a lot easier. You just said, I'm pulling My weight. Yet I spend hours every day listening to My Father. Dad doesn't have to provide for us all by himself. I know My Father will provide, if only we'll listen to Him and do it His way. Father YHWH always provides when we obey Him."

That didn't make sense to Mariam. Nor to Yoseph when she told him. Yashua didn't try to push it. As long as He was staying in His parent's home, He remained in submission to them. But it saddened Him that His parents had to work so hard providing for the family when His heavenly Father had already provided an easier way.

Father YHWH spoke to Gavriel by His Holy Spirit. "Remove your covering from Yoseph son of Jacob son of David My beloved, son of Judah." He sounded grieved.

"Oh, YHWH! That surely will mean his death! Your adversary is searching for any possible way to slay him! Has he failed You?"

"Let's just say that he is blocking the success of others. I'll talk to My Son. Maybe We can yet turn it around for Yoseph. But you know I'll not force him."

Sabbath morning arrived, and Yoseph's family awoke early. As always, Yashua was eager to get to the synagogue for the Shabbat teaching. But this time, Yoseph said he would not be going with them. He had to go down to Tiberias, on the Sea of Galilee, a twenty mile journey. A wealthy Roman had asked him to come to his house by the sea to finalize a major furniture commission. The Sabbath was the only time he had free for such a trip. He would be there all day, and return to Nazareth the next morning.

Yashua was appalled. "Dad, don't go! Father YHWH will not bless your trip."

"Now Son, You know I always keep Shabbat with You. But this is the biggest opportunity of my entire career! The Romans don't care about our Sabbaths. They don't usually buy anything from us, either. But this fellow is willing to pay me a year's wages for the furnishings for his new home. And once his friends see how good our furniture is, they all will want me, too! Don't You see? This one job may well provide all our family's needs for years to come!"

"Father YHWH provides for our needs. It is His blessing that has always brought us enough work."

"Yes, I know. And it is His blessing that has brought me this opportunity! We could get wealthy! Your mom and I wouldn't ever have to worry again about providing for you kids! YHWH won't provide if we reject His opportunities. God only helps those who help themselves, you know."

Yashua was silent for a few moments. Yoseph turned to leave. Then, "Dad? Father says that this opportunity is not from Him. It is a temptation from Satan. Please don't go."

Yoseph whirled around, a bit exasperated. "Son, how can You possibly know that?"

"I listen to Father. I know His voice. I want to help you to know His voice, too. He wants to lead us, to bless us, if we'll only listen to Him."

"Yashua! You are only thirteen and already You are teaching me!" Now Yoseph was getting angry.

Mariam saw. "Oh Yoseph, at least stop and pray about it. Maybe He sees something you haven't considered. Maybe there will be bandits on the road…"

"I'll be careful. I'll go with others from town." He was determined not to pass up this opportunity.

Mariam was too respectful to argue. "Okay. I'll go with you to the edge of town, to make sure you find reliable men to travel with." So that was that. The kids hugged their dad good-bye. Mariam left Yashua in charge of getting them ready for Shabbat school, while she walked to the edge of town with their dad. They never saw him again alive.

When Mariam returned, she was hysterical with grief. It took a long time for the kids to get the story straight. It seemed that Yoseph had found some 'reliable' men, already started down the road to Tiberias. He had given his wife a quick hug and kiss, and had run to catch up with them. But these men were not intending to go to Tiberias! They were Judean zealots. Mariam watched in horror as they attacked the Roman outpost guarding the road! In the brief battle that followed, the Roman guards were all slain. Yoseph was caught in the middle of the fight unprepared. He had no defense. He fell. Mariam ran to him and cradled his head in her arms as he died. His last words were. "I… wish I had listened… to Yashua… to Father YHWH."

Mariam was left with seven kids and an eighth in the oven. They were all pretty young. The older four were able to carry on their dad's business but Anna and Judas were still toddlers, and Sharon was not even weaned yet.

Though some in town helped out, others were saying that it served them right for their indiscretion before they married. It was pretty tough. When Mariam's baby was born, she named her Tamara, meaning 'sorrow'.

But their carpentry business still prospered. The older boys, Yashua, James, Joseph, and Simon, knew that the family now depended on their labor. They worked well together. Mariam was surprised to find that they never lacked for anything. In fact, by that time next year, they were more prosperous than ever. She remembered what Yashua had said.

Yashua, now fourteen, had taken over as head of the home as well as head of their business. He had earned a grudging respect in town, and now even His brothers and sisters obeyed and looked up to Him. One Sabbath evening after dinner, and after He had led in the regular family prayers, Mariam asked Him, "Yashua? If only Your dad had learned to listen to YHWH, he would still be alive. Will You teach us to listen to YHWH, like You do?"

"I will gladly teach anyone who wants to learn." Yashua looked around at all His younger brothers and sisters. They weren't interested. Soon it was only Yashua and Mariam. So in a glorious revelation to her soul, Mariam learned the secret of constant, persistent, prevailing prayer. "I never do anything without listening to Father," Yashua assured her. "He is speaking to Me all the time, for He knows that I'm attentive and that I trust His ways are best. I love His wisdom. I'm always willing to do whatever He leads Me to do. It is such a fun and satisfying life! Why would anyone want to live any other way?"

So for the next fifteen years, Yashua and His mother enjoyed a special closeness, while Mariam learned to listen to YHWH and obey His promptings. But as they got older, James, Joseph, and Simon got their fun and satisfaction in other ways. As they reached the teenage years, they behaved pretty much like teenagers do today, especially without a dad to restrain them. So after work when Yashua went out to spend time alone in prayer, his brothers would spend their evenings carousing and painting the town red.

Satan complained to Gavriel. "Lookit! Every one of His brothers has chosen me and my ways! I've got occasion! You can't keep covering them like that!"

Gavriel granted him a bemused smile for his effort. "Nice try, Satan. But your memory of the Law is rather selective. You certainly would have occasion if they were on their own, head of their own house. But Yashua is the Head of their house. As long as they live and work under Him, in proper submission, they are totally covered by His prayers. You have no idea how powerful that is!"

CHAPTER 10 – JOHN'S STORY, Spring AD 28

My name is John. I am old – ready to go Home – but Spirit reminded me of scenes from my years with Yashua and suggested that I rewrite His story to make it more personal. I had forgotten so much – I was almost senile – but He refreshed my memory, making it as vivid as if it were yesterday, so I could give it to you before I die.

Yashua was born on the first day of Sukkot, Tishri 15, 3999 (Sept 25, 3 BC). So He was 29½ years old when I first met Him after Passover, Nisan 15, 4029 (Mar 31, 28 AD).

Though we were just fishermen, my brother James and I still sometimes followed the crowds to Jerusalem to keep the Feast. Of course during the week of celebrations there was also a lot of jesting and gossip that floated around. This year we were amused to hear the latest yarns about Yochanan, the only son of Zacharias and Elisheva Cohen.

Everyone knew the story of his miraculous birth. Like the rest, we had wondered if Yochanan might be Messiah. But after King Herod had killed all the babies, he and his mother had vanished. Zacharias didn't know where they were, or if he did, he wouldn't tell. So they killed him, too.

20 Now the city was abuzz with the news that Yochanan had been hiding out in the Arabian Desert with his mother these 28 years. His elderly mother had died, and Yochanan was now down at the Jordan baptizing, and teaching of One who was to come who would baptize with fire!

We rested on the high Shabbat of the first day of Unleavened Bread, but next morning we followed the crowds down to the Jordan. Yochanan sure looked like he'd been out in the desert for 28 years, with his long, wild locks and homespun camel-hair clothes! People asked him if he was Messiah, but he insisted that Someone was coming after him who was greater yet. He never claimed to be Elijah, but he reminded us of Malachi's prophecy of Elijah coming before the great and terrible day of YHWH.

Then when I heard Yochanan preaching against our sins, I was convicted! I knew I was pretty bad. Life among fishermen is sometimes rough and tumble. So my older brother James and I crowded in amongst the rest and had Yochanan baptize us, too. We figured it couldn't hurt and might even help smooth our quarrelsome relationship.

21 I was close to Yochanan, watching his face, when a young man stepped up beside me and asked to be baptized. Yochanan's face turned white, and he dropped to his knees right there in the water. He looked so silly! The water came up to his neck. He was pleading with the stranger, saying, "No, I can't baptize You! I need to be baptized by You!"

I glanced at the new fellow, and though I have grown to know Him well since then, at that first glance I certainly saw nothing special. He was tall and a bit skinny, with a thin, straggly beard – kinda homely. But His eyes – well, they penetrated and burned with a fire I hadn't seen before.

Anyway, the Stranger convinced Yochanan to baptize Him, and as He was walking up from the water a pure white brilliance fluttered down upon His head like a dove. I looked up. The heavens had opened! The glory of YHWH blazed down, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased!" My heart was thrilled. I didn't talk about it much, but really, that was the moment I believed in Him, whom I know now as Yashua, Messiah, the Son of God.

22 I watched as, all alone, He started back up the road toward Jerusalem. Everyone else was watching Yochanan but I had eyes only for Him. It was weird – He reached a steep part of the road, then, almost as if pushed along by an invisible hand, He turned south into the desolate Judean wilderness just east of the Dead Sea. I was surprised. Nobody with any sense wants to go there! It's a barren, dangerous wasteland. I almost ran to help Him get back to the road. I was sure He would get lost in those rugged hills, or fall and get injured in the steep rocky ravines or hidden caves. Though I wanted desperately to help Him, my feet remained rooted to the ground and I could not.

No one saw Him for the remainder of the Pascal week. As we returned to our fishing at the Sea of Galilee, I wept inside, considering the difficulty and suffering that young man might be facing in the Judean wilds. I had not been much of a praying man before, but I tell you, I prayed then. Maybe Yochanan's baptism had done me some good. I can't ever remember caring so much for anyone other than myself before. It felt as if the weight of the world had fallen upon His shoulders, and I, with my prayers, was the only one who could help Him bear it.

Early on the fortieth day from Firstfruits that feeling was stronger than ever. I woke up James, and we both knelt and prayed for Him. We were still praying at dawn when our dad, Zebedee, came in wondering why we weren't out helping him launch the boats. "Dad, I know this is a busy time for us, but I'm worried about Yashua. He is Messiah! I know! I saw His glory when heaven opened! But last I saw Him, He was in the Judean wilderness. May I take time off during Shavuot to go up to Jerusalem to see if He's okay?"

"Of course, John. We're never so busy you can't take time off to celebrate the Feasts if you want to. Frankly, I'm delighted. I didn't think you boys were interested. Guess you got religion last Passover, eh? Well, good. Maybe what I spent on your education won't be wasted after all." He grinned, and I knew he was thinking of our buddies Simon and Andrew, who came from a poor illiterate family and couldn't even read Torah. "Now, would you mind helping me with the boats already? Day has dawned!"

So it was settled. Two days before Shavuot, we cleaned up and headed back toward Jerusalem. When we got there, the city was still talking about Yochanan the Baptizer, as he was now called. The priests had just sent a delegation down to Bethabara ('House of the Ford'), to find out if he was claiming to be Messiah. We hurried after them.

We found Yochanan just as he answered the priests, [23] "No, I am not Messiah, nor even His prophet. I'm just a lonely voice crying in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way of YHWH!' I baptize with water, but among you stands One whom you do not yet know, whose shoelace I am not even worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Spirit of God and with fire."

It was already late, so we camped in Bethabara near the river. We still had one last day before we had to return up the path to Jerusalem to be there at Shavuot. Early next morning we finished breakfast with an eagerness and excitement we had not felt before. I knew we would find Him! When we got back where Yochanan was baptizing, the crowds were thin – most had gone up to Jerusalem for the Feast. Were we in the wrong place? Jerusalem is twenty miles away, a six hour walk up a steep road.

[24] "Hey! There He is!" Everybody's head turned. "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world! This is the One I told you about, the One who has a higher rank than I, whose shoelace I am not fit to untie. I would not have recognized Him, except by the sign I was told to watch for: I saw the Spirit come down like a dove and remain on Him. I only baptize with water, but He is the One who baptizes with the Spirit and with fire. I saw the sign, and I testify that this is Messiah, the Son of God!"

Everybody gasped. Yochanan's disciples rushed over to tell him not to talk like that. He might lose his disciples! That caused a bit of a commotion, and when we looked back Yashua was gone. Nobody knew where, so they had a sense of disappointment. But I was intrigued by what Yochanan had said. "Why did you call Him the Lamb of God?" I demanded. "What did you mean by that?"

"That's what God called Him. I heard it when He went into the wilderness after I baptized Him. I went with Him in spirit, in prayer. I think that's part of His mission as our Messiah, to make atonement for our sin like the blood of the lamb does at Passover."

"Where did He go just now?"

"I don't know. He doesn't go by my whims," Yochanan retorted. "But I can guess. Tomorrow is Shavuot. Every good Jew will be up in Jerusalem. My guess is that you'll find Him there. That's where I'm heading, too. If we start now, we'll make it there before sundown."

Sure enough, the next afternoon as the crowds were leaving the temple after the Shavuot services, we saw Him walking with them. We were standing near Yochanan and his disciples. [25] A big smile brightened Yochanan's face when he saw Yashua. He pointed and shouted, "Look! God's Pascal Lamb!" His encouragement was all I needed. I made a beeline toward Yashua, never taking my eyes off Him for fear I'd lose Him again in the throng. Our friend Andrew, who also had seen the dove and had heard the voice from heaven, came running along in my wake.

We asked Yashua where He was staying that night, and He invited us to join Him. We felt honored to be received so readily. Andrew was so giggly with glee he was almost hopping up and down. When he saw his brother Simon in the crowd, he ran over and dragged him back toward Yashua, saying, "We found Messiah! Come and see!"

Andrew and I were astonished at what happened next. Yashua stared with His penetrating gaze into Simon's eyes, smiled, and said, "You are Simon son of Jonas. But from now on you'll be called Cephas." [Cephas is Aramaic for a small rock or stone. But when translated into Greek, Cephas becomes Petros, which is Peter in English. So I'll use 'Peter' instead of 'Cephas' for the rest of my story.]

At first, Simon was miffed. He started to protest, "But… how do You know me? What right do You have to change my name?" But his protests died on his lips when he looked into Yashua's eyes and saw the full authority of the universe. In that moment he knew this was no ordinary man. Simon glanced at his little brother Andrew, who was beaming with joy. "Peter," he tried it out on his tongue. "I like it. I know a zillion Simons, but no one else is called 'Rock'. Andrew, did He change your name, too?"

Andrew hadn't thought of that before. He looked at Yashua, with a question on his face. Yashua laughed and slapped him on the back jovially. "No, Andrew. I have no need to change your name. You and John saw who I am back at My baptism. Peter didn't. He needed something else to open his eyes to My authority." He looked at me with a twinkle in His eye and I suddenly realized that He had just spoken our names without ever being introduced.

"How did You know my name, and what is Your name, Rabbi?" I asked, wide-eyed.

"My name is Yashua. [YHWH Saves.]" He gave each of us a big-brotherly hug. "The Spirit of YHWH has anointed Me. He told Me your names when He said to choose you."

We'd reached the place where Yashua was spending the night before starting the long hike back to Galilee. As we got ready to sleep, Yashua told us the story of His baptism and filling by the Spirit, the Spirit leading Him into the Judean wilderness to reveal His mission, His terrible time of temptation by Satan, the angels strengthening Him, and finally His coming up to Jerusalem to celebrate Shavuot.

Then just as we were drifting off to sleep He reached out and touched my hand. "Thank you, John, and thank your brother James for Me, too. Your prayers for Me during My temptation in the wilderness meant more to Me than you can know. I might have failed had not you and Yochanan stood with Me." With that, He turned and fell asleep. I remained awake with waves of love, joy, acceptance, and peace washing over my soul like an ocean. *Why did my stupid brother stay with Yochanan the Baptizer?* I thought. *I'll have to catch him when we get home and knock a little sense into his thick skull. Yochanan can't compare with this!*

The next day we were up at dawn. After a quick breakfast of local fruits, we joined other travelers heading down the main road toward Galilee. Yashua started off at a rapid pace. He was obviously in very good shape. Big old Peter dared to ask Him why we needed to go so fast.

"Well," Yashua responded kindly. "We need to get to Cana by the third day." (That is about seventy miles, a two-day walk.) "But the main reason we're hurrying is that we have an appointment with your neighbor Philip and his friend Nathanael today. They're already ahead of us. Do you mind?" He grinned like a kid with a secret.

We looked down the road. Not many people were on it this early. But Yashua pointed into the distance and said, "There's Philip. Let's catch up with him."

How could He ever have recognized him at that distance? I thought, as we finally came up behind him. Old Peter wasn't the only one panting. [I call him 'old Peter' out of habit. Though the eldest in our group, he was pretty young – only four years older than my brother James. But he later became our leader, so we called him 'old Peter' out of respect. Old, as you know, is a term of respect in the East.]

"Philip!" Yashua called. He turned, and Andrew cried out, "Hey! It is Philip, from Bethsaida, our hometown. Philip! We found Messiah!"

Philip's face turned white and his mouth popped open. "I saw You! At the Shavuot celebration. My friend and I were watching You as the Shavuot offerings were being waved before YHWH. We saw the Shekina Glory of YHWH fall down on You like a flame of fire, and You glowed like the sun! Who are You? You are Messiah, aren't You!"

"My name is Yashua from Nazareth. Follow Me," Yashua answered simply.

"I've gotta go get my friend. He's got to meet You! I'll be right back," Philip promised, and took off like a scalded cat down the road. In a few minutes he was back, dragging a skeptical-looking young man. I overheard him mutter, "…no good thing ever came out of Nazareth."

"Behold, Nathanael Bartholomew [son of Talmai]!" Yashua called to him. "An Israelite in whom is no guile!"

"How do You know me?" Nathanael frowned.

"Before Philip told you about Me, when you were kneeling under the young fig tree, I saw you." He grinned.

Nathanael's face paled and he dropped to his knees. Flashes of recognition swept over him as he remembered the One upon whom they had seen the Shekina Glory of YHWH fall. That very morning, he had arisen early before dawn, troubled by what they had seen. He had knelt under a fig tree to pray, and had asked YHWH to reveal to him who was this special person he had been privileged to see. He had agonized in prayer about it, wanting to believe but not knowing what to believe.

He was still kneeling there, desperate for an answer, when Philip had called him to breakfast. Philip pointed out how far they had to travel today if they were going to make it to the wedding at Cana, but Nathanael had gotten angry at Philip and said some unkind words. When they started out, he had stormed angrily on ahead of his friend. Did Yashua somehow know all this? He must have known! "Rabbi! You are indeed Messiah! You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"

Yashua laughed, a big, happy, accepting laugh. He lifted Nathanael up from his knees and gave him a big hug and a kiss on each cheek. "Because I saw you kneeling under the fig tree this morning, do you believe? You've been a skeptic all your life. But now something has come into your life greater than your skepticism. In the next three years you shall see much greater things than these. You shall see the heavens opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon this Son of Adam."

Wave after wave of realization flooded over Nathanael as he became aware of just how much Yashua knew about him. All his life he had closely identified with our father Jacob, who had seen the heavens opened and the angels ascending and descending on a ladder stretched from heaven to earth at Bethel. Jacob had received the promises of YHWH and later he had wrestled with YHWH for the blessing. Yet the one thing about Jacob that Nathanael hated was his duplicity. Nathanael prided himself in his honesty and refused to believe anything until it was proven. Yashua knew all that! Under the fig tree, indeed! Yashua had known him when he was an infant, bouncing on his mother's knee in the security of their home in Cana of Galilee. Nathanael laughed out loud at the pun, for the ancient Hebrew idiom 'under the fig tree' referred to the innocence and security of infancy at home.

"Where are we going, Rabbi?" Nathanael asked, as they walked along the road together. He had the feeling that he already knew the answer.

"I called you five because My ministry has begun. I must go where the people are, for My ministry is to My people Israel. Many are gathering at your hometown, Cana of Galilee, to celebrate the big wedding in three days. Do you think I would miss it?"

"Thank You, Rabbi. I'm honored that You should come to my hometown. But have You…"

"Yes, Nathanael. My family knows the groom's family, and we've all been invited. Besides, Spirit is telling me that the master of the feast will find a special task for Me to do there. Many will see the love and power of YHWH through Me. Watch and see! On Shabbat, we can stay at My parent's home in Nazareth so we'll be rested for the wedding feast."

We walked on together. Nathanael was deep in thought, periodically glancing over at Yashua. He smiled at him, as if inviting him to ask questions.

"Rabbi? What You said about the heavens open, and the angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Adam… did You mean that Jacob's ladder at Bethel portrays You?"

"Yes, Nathanael. Very good. In Jacob's vision I am the ladder that reaches from the earth, where My body is, to Father YHWH in heaven, where My head is. The angels ascending and descending the ladder are ministering to Me and to My body at every place along the ladder. You, My disciples, are My body. I am calling each of you to be a rung in My ladder and a living stone in My temple. Bethel is the house of God, My temple. As you dwell in Me, you also become both My ladder reaching up into the heavens, and My temple Bethel, where the ladder touches earth."

Nathanael's head was spinning. "How can You be in heaven and on earth at the same time? And how can Your disciples be part of Your body?"

Yashua laughed and gave Nathanael a glad hug. "Still a little of that old skepticism, eh? Don't worry, Nathanael. I will teach you. Heaven is not so far away as you might think. But YHWH is Spirit. My ladder reaches up to Him in My prayers. As I teach you to know Him intimately and to reach Him continually in your prayers, you too become a part of My ladder reaching up to heaven. And when you reach out to minister to others in My name and by My love, you also become an extension of My hands and feet, and thus a part of My body on earth – Bethel, My temple."

CHAPTER 11 – THE MINISTRY BEGINS, Summer AD 28

So we six traveled on: myself, Andrew and his brother Simon (now Peter), and Philip and his friend Nathanael, all talking and joking, laughing with and learning from Yashua. We felt so privileged to be among the very few in the land who had recognized Him as Messiah. How quickly that was to change! ***26*** The miracle at Cana, where Yashua changed the water to the finest fresh, sweet wine for the wedding feast, was just the beginning. It seemed like every gathering, every feast or party, every synagogue meeting, there was Yashua, working miracles, signs, and wonders. That first year was wonderful, even euphoric. Multitudes came to hear Him, hanging on His every word. They were ready to crown Him King then and there! No wonder – He knew each one by name. He knew their needs and saw their hearts. He laughed and cried with them, joked with them, and poured out His love on them. He not only healed all their physical diseases, He exposed their emotional and spiritual needs, and met them as well.

27 Oh yes, there were some problems. Yashua's hometown, Nazareth, rejected Him right off. After Sukkot, Yashua's 30th birthday, they even tried to kill Him after He told them who He is. "No prophet is welcome in his own hometown," He reminded them. They responded, "We know who You are. You're not Messiah or His prophet. You're just the illegitimate son of Yoseph the carpenter!"

It seemed strange to us who saw His miracles every day, that even His own brothers couldn't see, but Yashua told us that it was their unbelief that closed their eyes, so He couldn't do many miracles among them. ***28*** After they drove us out, we moved the ministry headquarters to Capernaum, on the northern beach of the Lake (or Sea) of Galilee. ***29*** Our first Shabbat there He healed a demoniac at their synagogue. Boy, that sure got their attention! "What is this?" they cried. "A new teaching with authority and power? Why, even the demons obey His command!"

Then there was the money problem. That first year we hadn't yet learned how He wanted the ministry finances handled. He simply gave away virtually all the money He happened to have with Him, like He had no concern over whether we'd even be able to eat that night. So Peter, Andrew, James, and I agreed to try to solve the problem for Him secretly. ***30*** While He was out ministering around the countryside we ran back to the lake to try to make enough money to support the ministry for the coming week.

It was good to get back to our fishing, something we actually understood. But before we even had the nets mended and ready to cast, along came Yashua, walking down the beach. He didn't criticize us, though He certainly could have for our lack of faith. He just said, "Follow Me and I'll make you fishers of men." In that instant I realized two things, which hit me like a ton of bricks. First, money really did mean nothing to Him, in comparison to the value of the lives to whom He ministered. How foolish was I to fear that He who could heal a leper with a touch would starve for lack of finances!

But more importantly, for the first time I realized that Yashua actually wanted us to participate in His ministry! I could hardly believe it. We weren't only His disciples, His followers – He wanted us to become His co-workers in the ministry! It boggled my mind, and still does, frankly. To think that He could entrust such power and glory into the hands of weak and foolish sinners such as I?

31 Another problem arose next Passover. Yashua drove the animal vendors and money changers out of the temple right in front of our religious rulers. Boy, did they get mad! He told them, "My Father's house is supposed to be a house of prayer. Stop making it a house of merchandise."

"*Your* Father's house?! What authority do You have to question our control over God's temple? Give us a sign! The people say You've been going around the countryside doing miracles. Do one for us right here, so we will know that You are from God."

"Because of your unbelief, I am unable to give you any miracle – except this: Destroy this temple, and in three days and three nights I will raise it up."

"Ha! It has been forty-six years in construction, and You say You can rebuild it in three days? That's no sign. That's just absurd." They laughed Him to scorn.

He didn't try to explain. He just turned and walked away. From then on those who refused to believe in Him used that statement in derision. When He passed by, they would say, "There goes that joker who's going to rebuild our temple in three days!" It wasn't until later that we understood He was talking about the temple of His body.

Anyway, from then on our ruling elders seemed to have a prejudice against Yashua. No matter what He did, how many people He helped, or what words of wisdom He taught, they nitpicked and criticized. It was a royal pain. They became one of our biggest problems. I'll bet they had been in on the take from the merchandisers in the temple.

32 However, right near the beginning we found we had at least one budding believer among those Pharisees. A dark, middle-aged man with a thick, black beard showed up one night after the day's ministry was over. His name was Nicodemus. He was a well-known and influential teacher and ruler in Israel.

He started out by bowing to Yashua, calling Him Rabbi, and trying to butter Him up. But Yashua saw right through that and cut him short with, "Very truly I tell you, unless a man is born again, he cannot see God's Kingdom."

We all were mystified. Nicodemus voiced the question in all our minds. "How can a man be born when he is old? He can't enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born again, can he?"

"Why do you marvel? The first birth is water and flesh; it results in a child of the flesh. The second birth is spiritual life; it results in a child of God. To have a relationship with God, who is Spirit, you must be born again, that is, born from above, the realm of spirit." He laughed lightly. "This spirit realm is rather like the wind. You can't see the wind or tell where it has been or where it is going, yet you hear it and see its effects. So is everyone who is born of Spirit."

"I don't understand." Nicodemus shook his head. "I've never heard anything like this. How in…"

Yashua chuckled and gave him a friendly slap on the back. "You are the famous teacher of Israel, yet you don't understand these fundamental truths?"

"Where did You get these theories?" Nicodemus frowned. "None of the scribes and Pharisees…"

"Hey! Careful!" Yashua suddenly became serious, even stern. "If I teach you simple, basic, earthy things and you have trouble believing, how will you believe when I teach you the grand truths of these spirit realms? I'm not telling you theories, Nicodemus. I am telling you Truth. I bear witness to things I have seen, things I know. I dwell there in the heavenlies. I have traversed many times between that realm of Spirit and this realm you see. I am come to build a ladder, a bridge, joining the two realms. One day soon this will all become clear, when I am lifted up on the cross just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness.

"Moses told the people of Israel, 'When you are bitten, look and live!' Just so I say, 'When you are bitten by sin look at Me and live!' for whoever believes in Me will receive the Life of All Ages: Life from God's Spirit realm."

"So…" Nicodemus was thinking hard. "This birth of Spirit somehow involves believing in You?"

"Yes! Yes! You're getting it!" Yashua was smiling again, and I could tell He was getting excited. "God is Love. He loves mankind so much that He gave Himself, His only Son the promised Messiah, as human flesh to pay the penalty for your sins, so whoever believes in Me shall not perish in his sins, but shall receive My Abundant Life, the Life of Spirit. He didn't send Me into the world to condemn the world, but that the world should be saved through Me. When I am lifted up on the cross I become that bridge, that ladder between the two realms. Believing in Me is walking the bridge, or climbing the ladder. My name is Yashua, YHWH saves. Though I am a Son of Adam, yet I am also the full and only manifestation of Father YHWH into this realm of flesh. You must believe that I am the One who was to come, the promised Messiah. Anyone believing in Me shall not be condemned on Judgment Day, but anyone rejecting Me in unbelief is condemned already, having rejected the one and only Son of God. For I am the Light of the World. Those who love darkness and wickedness hate the light, and will not come to Me. But those who love truth and righteousness love Me, and come to Me."

Poor Nicodemus was wide-eyed and breathless. He had 'ultimate overload' written all over his face. "You admit You are a Son of Adam, yet You claim to be the promised Messiah? And You claim to be the one and only Son of God? Yes, I do love truth and righteousness, and I was ready to acknowledge You as a great prophet sent from God, but now You are just asking too much. I'm going to have to think about this for a bit. I'll go discuss it with the other elders…" Thus he turned away, shaking his head sadly, and mumbling to himself, "None of us Pharisees loves darkness or wickedness. We all love righteousness and truth. Yet no one else among us has come to Him. Just who does He think He is, anyway…?" [See endnote 2.]

As soon as He was out of earshot, I spoke up. "Yashua! You could have had him! And just think; he might have been the key to reaching the other Pharisees. He was ready to believe, but You spoke too sharply to him. You see, You need to be more careful with Your words so as not to cause offense. Don't hit 'em with it all at once. Just give 'em a few key verses from Torah and let them digest…"

"John, John. So quick to judge Me? Do you not realize that in judging Me you are judging Truth? I merely spoke Truth to him. Truth always bears good fruit when it is planted in good soil. I assure you, John, that Nicodemus is a believer. Today, I merely planted the seed. Father will water that seed, and in its proper time it will bear good fruit. You'll see!" And Yashua gave me a smile and a hug.

Two years later during Yashua's trial I did indeed see Nicodemus not only believe, but even stand up for Yashua in the face of the Sanhedrin. But I am ashamed to say that Yashua's accusation of my judging Him went right over my head. He had just pointed out a major flaw in my character. I had missed it completely. I not only didn't repent, I didn't even recognize I had done anything needing repentance. He didn't give up on me, though, as you shall see.

33 As we turned to go to the house, we noticed a young woman waiting in the darkness. I assumed by her braided hair, jewelry, gaudy clothes and unveiled head that she was a 'woman of the night'. *Is our ministry day never done?* I thought resentfully. *Can't she see we need sleep?*

"Rabbi, I heard what You told Nicodemus." She bowed. "I believe in You. Can I be born of Spirit, too? Or is that just for Pharisees?" Her voice held a taint of bitterness.

"Mary of Magadan in Galilee." Yashua said it softly, kindly, yet a look of terror came into her face.

"How did You know…" She paused, her mouth half open. "How… how much else… do You know about me?" She demanded, in an accusing tone.

"Father YHWH knows all about you, Mary. He tells Me all I need to know. He says you have been a proud rebel, against your parents and against this male-dominated culture. In your rebellion you have opened up your soul to demons, who control your life. They have driven you into terrible wickedness that made you hate yourself."

Tears started to flow, but still she looked Yashua in the eye. "I knew it." Her bitterness was turning to anger. "That Spirit birth is only for the rich and righteous people like Nicodemus. I'm too poor and… w-wicked."

"No, Mary. That Spirit birth is open for all who will believe and accept Me. In fact, it is easier for the poor and wicked to accept Me than for the rich and righteous! But you cannot accept Me as your Lord and Master while My adversary controls your life."

"Lord, I want to accept You. What must I do?" Her voice squeaked. She fell to her knees and began to shake.

"Decide that you want Me and My love to rule your heart, instead of My adversary's rebellion and selfish pride. Then believe that I have the power to deliver you from the adversary's demons and give peace to your soul."

"I do believe, Lord! I've heard You teach. I already made that decision. I do submit my heart to the rule of Your love. I repent of my wicked… everything." She bowed and wept.

Yashua laid His hands gently on her head and said softly. "Begone, you seven demons of pride, rebellion, hatred, anger, bitterness, manipulation, and judging. Go directly to Tartarus, awaiting Judgment Day." He paused and looked up, His face glowing with an otherworldly light and an eager smile on His lips. He began to pray.

"Father YHWH, fill her with Our Spirit of love and joy, abundant and overflowing. Give her Our peace and patience. Grant her kindness, goodness, gentleness, and real faithfulness. Supply her with self-control by Our Spirit." At that, all the hardness melted from her face to dissolve in a pool of tears at their feet.

From that moment on, Mary the Magdalene was Yashua's most ardent supporter. She served us all and accompanied us on our travels. I have never seen anyone delivered of demons so easily, or so completely. Her great love for Yashua spilled out on us all. She had such purity of heart. Her peace and compassion were a soothing salve on our squabbles. Her bubbling joy was infectious. It seemed like every demon that Yashua had cast out of her had been replaced by an overabundance of the exact opposite. And I learned that the same truth Yashua spoke to Nicodemus applies to all, rich or poor, righteous or wicked; all must be born of Spirit, as Mary Magdalene was that day.

34 Another minor problem we had was with the zealous disciples of Yochanan the Baptizer. During the Pascal week when everyone came to Judea to keep the Feast, the crowds around Yashua got pretty huge. It was more than one person could handle, so He would minister to them up on the shore, then send them down into the river to us to baptize for Him. It was a lot of fun working in the same area of the Jordan where Yochanan used to baptize. It never even occurred to us that it might cause some offense. Then we heard that Yochanan was still baptizing, but he had moved up river to Aenon, near Salim. Some of his disciples were miffed, thinking we had upstaged Yochanan.

Yochanan didn't seem bothered a bit. "I told you before," he said, "that He is much greater than I. I am not Messiah. I was only sent to prepare the way for Him. Shall I be sad when His own come to Him? No! No more than the best man can be sad when the bridegroom comes for the bride. He must increase! I must decrease!"

35 So all in all, I'd say Yochanan handled it very well. Just the same, I was very sad for him when he got tossed in the clink by Herod Antipas for telling him the truth about stealing his brother's wife. That was a shock to us all, even Yashua. He seemed acutely distraught at the news.

The next morning when we awoke, Yashua was gone. After a lengthy search, we found Him praying alone in the Judean wilderness. He was covered in sweat, as if in great agony of soul. When we urged Him to come back to camp for a hearty breakfast so He would be strong for the day's ministry, Yashua looked up at us through His tears and shook His head. "You really don't understand where My strength comes from, do you? Breakfast does not make Me strong, or the ministry, the crowds, the approval of men, or even your own help, though I value it very much. My strength comes from My Father through prayer. It is only His Spirit in Me that enables Me to do anything at all. Without His guidance in prayer, I have no ministry.

"I was crushed when I heard that Yochanan was taken captive by Herod, because I know that he will die there, and that even now his faith is being sorely tested. Pray! Oh pray that his faith fail not!" Yashua started to weep with His face in the sand. I was awestruck! This incredible man who had overcome the devil's worst temptations in the wilderness nearby, was groveling in the sand at our feet.

"Come on! Come on!" I chided Him. "Let's get it together now! There's nothing you can do for Yochanan, so don't let it get You down. We've got a lot of people to minister to right here today. You've got to be strong now."

He let me pull Him up. He leaned on me as we walked back to camp. I tried to cheer Him as we ate, but still there was a thick sadness over the group. When we finished, He finally spoke again. **36** "Let's pack up and head for Galilee. Our work in Judea is over for now. We'll take the Jericho road up to Jerusalem, then go north through Samaria."

"What? Our work here isn't over! We're at the peak of our ministry! You mustn't let Your discouragement affect Your teaching schedule like that." Then I added, "And if we must leave, we ought to take the Jordan River road here so we avoid Samaria. Those filthy Samaritan half-breeds despise us Jews! They'll never accept Your teaching."

He looked at me quizzically, eyebrows raised. "Filthy Samaritan…? Who despises whom, John? I told you, I have no power except what the Holy Spirit gives Me. He has empowered Me to minister in Galilee now, so I can do nothing more here. As for going through Samaria, would you rather take the easy road and miss whatever blessing YHWH had planned for you on the road of His choosing?"

So we all pondered that as we climbed the steep trail toward Jerusalem, wondering what blessing in Samaria could possibly be worth leaving the easy, level Jordan Valley road for this rugged climb.

37 Later, when it was all over and we were on our way north to Galilee, I asked Yashua, "How did You know that woman would be there by Jacob's Well in Sychar, and that she'd be the key to evangelizing the whole town of Sychar? How did You know she would even talk to You? It seemed awfully risky to be so bold and chummy with a *Samaritan woman!"* I'm ashamed to admit that I spat out those last two words as if the very words themselves were vulgar.

"I didn't know, John. I don't know any more than you about the future. But the Holy Spirit knows. All I did is follow Him step-by-step. You've got to understand this, John. By watching Me, you are learning how to let the Spirit lead you. Until the moment He led Me to ask that woman for a drink from the well, I had no idea what He was planning. But then the Holy Spirit showed Me the worship in her heart. She wanted to worship, but she just didn't know how. It rang bells in her heart when I taught her that God is Spirit and Truth, and true worshipers meet Him in those realms rather than at some physical spot on earth."

Once again, I was awestruck that He expected me to actually participate in His ministry. And amazed that God loves even the Samaritans. And that He treats both women and men as equally precious! I remembered the joy Yashua had shown welcoming Mary of Magadan into our group. I realized for the first time that He didn't consider women to be a lower class like most of our society did.

38 He was certainly right about the Holy Spirit anointing Him for ministry in Galilee. Those next forty days were fantastic. He spoke with power and authority, "Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand!" The miracles He did got increasingly fantastic, too. **39** Like when He healed the official's son who was at Capernaum while we were all in Cana! **40** But the best for us was when we went to Peter and Andrew's house in Bethsaida and found Peter's mother-in-law sick. Just a word and a loving touch, and she was up and well! That miracle really touched us, bringing it down to a gut-wrenchingly personal level.

The news got out. By evening it seemed like the entire city was at our door, sick! Yashua ministered among them 'til long after dark, healing, casting out demons, blessing, encouraging. Even as late as He worked, **41** He still got up before dawn the next day and went into the hills to pray. I felt like an idiot, sleeping in, then facing all these people asking for Yashua when I didn't even know He'd gone!

We ran out of money, again. It seemed everyone was taking but few were giving. Yashua didn't seem to have the slightest concern, so finally old Peter, Andrew, James, and I decided to take the matter into our own hands again. While Yashua was ministering on into the evening, we foolishly snuck off and put out our boats for an all-night fishing expedition. We figured that in one night we could get enough to keep the ministry afloat for several weeks. And by the next morning we'd be back with our own little miracle and no one would know where it came from!

42 I have to shake my head at our arrogance. The one thing that we were really good at – fishing. And we caught absolutely nothing all night! We finally gave up in disgust long after everyone else was already up. Our little secret miracle was a total bust anyway.

We were washing the seaweed off our nets when Yashua came up. Again, He didn't chide us. Instead, He got into Peter's boat and asked him to push off a bit so He could teach the multitudes from the boat. I don't remember the message much – I was too ashamed at my own ineptitude. But when it was over, He told Peter and Andrew where to drop their nets (as if Yashua had ever fished in His life!) and the next thing I knew, Peter was yelling for me to get our boat out there to help! Their nets were full, totally full! It was more fish than I'd ever seen in one catch. Nice big ones, too, the good-eating kinds that only the wealthy can afford at the market. They were breaking the nets, and when we got them aboard, both our boats were filled to overflowing and in danger of sinking.

As we struggled to get everything safely to shore, we became aware that we were with the greatest Fisherman of them all. We fell at Yashua's feet, acknowledging our own arrogance and sinfulness. I was frankly awed and a little terrified to be in the presence of the Master.

Yashua just laughed and responded, "Don't be afraid. From now on instead of fish you will be catching men!" So we left everything right there on the shore for our dads to sort out, and followed Yashua. It was pretty clear after that that He didn't need our help with His ministry finances.

43 The next day Yashua cleansed the leper with just a touch. We argued about that. It was illegal for Yashua to touch the leper. It could have gotten Him in big trouble, because of the strict quarantine laws against lepers, and it was the first time we had ever seen Yashua deliberately break the law. But when He touched him, he was instantly well! So did Yashua touch a leper or did He touch a well person? I have to believe the latter, since I don't think Yashua ever intentionally broke any Mosaic laws.

Until now, our ministry was pretty well received everywhere in Galilee except Nazareth. *28* Ever since Yashua's family had moved to Capernaum, where they had received Him very well, we expected no more negative press. But it was right there at Yashua's house in Capernaum that the long arm of our religious law first reached Galilee. *44* I'll never forget the crowds around His house, and the gall of the guys who dug the hole in the flat roof to let down this paralyzed dude right in front of Yashua's face.

Rather than being miffed at the hole in His roof, Yashua seemed genuinely pleased at their faith. He promptly said to the paralytic, "Joshua, your sins are forgiven!" Everyone in the room was shocked, myself included. We all knew that the Pharisees and scribes had come down from Jerusalem to His house just to try to find some fault in His ministry, and bingo! There it was, right off the bat! You could see criticism written all over their faces. They were thinking, *Blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone!*

Peering right into their eyes, Yashua chuckled at them and said, "Why are you judging Me in your hearts? Which is easier, to say to this paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven' or to say 'Rise and walk'? But to show you that the Son of Adam does have the authority on earth to forgive sins…" He smiled at Joshua and reached out His hand, "I say to you, arise. Pick up your pallet and return home."

Oh, I tell you, our religious rulers were put in their place that day! The whole town saw the man who had been begging every day by the city gates, paralyzed since his youth, now dancing down the street, praising God at the top of his lungs. Glory!

45 That afternoon Yashua gave another of His sermons by the seashore. He always was one to take advantage of learning moments in the crowd. Joshua sat right up front, beaming like the sun, visible proof of Yashua's ministry.

That evening on our way home, we passed by the Roman tax office, where He taught us an important lesson. We never would have guessed that a hated tax collector was worth saving, but Yashua thought so. He not only saved Levi ben Alphaeus, He renamed him Matthew ('God's Gift') and even asked him to join us in the ministry!

46 Matthew gratefully invited us to his home. He threw a big feast for us with his friends – more tax collectors, or worse! The scum of the earth! Their sordid past didn't bother Yashua. When the religious leaders denounced us for eating with such sinners, He responded, "It is not those who are well who need a physician, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

What a much-needed lesson for me! I think Matthew's salvation was one of Yashua's greatest miracles – that such a sinner could become such a wonderful partner and friend! He also had a skill that proved invaluable later on: he knew shorthand, like the scribes. He could record Yashua's talks! Verbatim! He truly was 'God's Gift' to us!

47 From then on we found it increasingly difficult to avoid the scrutiny and criticism of our religious rulers. They (and even Yochanan's disciples) found fault with us for feeding the poor and outcasts during their 'suggested' twice a week fasts between Passover and Shavuot. Can you imagine? They would never help feed the poor, but when we tried to help them, they accused us of partying when we should be fasting. Yashua told them, "The wedding party doesn't fast while the bridegroom is with them, do they? But dark days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away; then they will fast."

48 It got worse at Shavuot. We all went up to Jerusalem for the Feast (our first trip with Matthew). On the morning of the high Shabbat of Shavuot, the first thing Yashua did was to heal a lame fellow by the pool of Bethesda at the Sheep Gate. Our religious rulers caught this guy carrying home his bed roll (as Yashua had told him to) and blamed us for breaking Shabbat! They were furious! They didn't care that this poor man had been lame for 38 years. They were sticklers for the Mosaic law, but had no clue of the higher laws of justice, mercy, and kindness.

Then when Yashua responded, "My Father is doing His work until now and I must do it, too," they really came unglued. Oh, they were hopping mad, claiming that He was calling God His own Father, thus making Himself equal with God. I almost laughed at how close they came to seeing the truth, yet how impossible it was for them to accept it. *49* Yashua even stood there and gave them a whole sermon on the subject, but they could not receive it, though it did shut them up. I'll never forget His final point: "I won't need to accuse you before My Father. Moses, the very one in whom you place your hope, will accuse you. For if you had really believed Moses you would have believed Me, since He wrote of Me." It was great! Got 'em right between the eyes.

But the point in His sermon that meant the most to me personally was His accusation, "You search the Scriptures because in them you think you have eternal life, but they only testify of Me. Yet you are unwilling to come to Me that you may find Life, Life from the eternal Spirit!"

I was shaken with the realization that all my life I, too, had trusted that just because I was a good Israelite and kept Torah (mmm… usually anyway), I automatically had eternal life. I was beginning to recognize that Torah does indeed testify of Yashua as the Messiah, but I didn't know how coming to Him related to eternal life. So after the scribes and Pharisees left, I asked Him, "Yashua, what You told them about being unwilling to come to You to find life – well, we have come to You. So what You told them about finding eternal life… uh… we already have it, right?"

He chuckled at me, pointing out the obvious, "Do you even know what eternal life is, John?" I had no answer, so He explained. "I am Life. In finding Me and learning to know Me, you are finding Life. You've begun your journey to Life, John, but the first taste is not the whole meal. Abide in Me; learn of Me. Like a window to heaven, Torah will then open up My Abundant Life and love to you."

The next Shabbat He gave us two examples, I'm sure as much for my benefit as to challenge our religious rulers. Returning to Galilee after the Feast, we had been gleaning a little each day from the surrounding fields for our daily sustenance, as we had brought no food with us. Nothing unusual about that, except we arrived at the beginning of Shabbat. On our way to the synagogue, ***50*** Yashua told us to glean for our dinner. We had never gleaned on Shabbat before! I knew the scribes and Pharisees in our traveling group would be offended. I knew the Torah Shabbat laws, as well as the Pharisees' many added interpretations. But we were hungry, and had not yet reached our parents' homes, so we did it. Of course the Pharisees immediately accused us of breaking the law.

"Have you forgotten about King David, whom YHWH honored after he took the consecrated bread when he and his men were in need? And even the priests are required to work on Shabbat to be a blessing to the worshipers in the temple. Shabbat was made to be a blessing to all mankind! Man was not made just to be in bondage to Shabbat! If you understood the Torah Shabbat laws, you would realize that they all point to the eternal rest found only in Messiah. Loving and serving Messiah by blessing His precious ones – feeding, loving, healing them – is the essence of Shabbat Rest. For I, the Son of Adam, am Master even of Shabbat."

He spoke it quietly and with a pleasant smile on His face, yet it hit me like a punch in the gut, knocking the wind out of me. I looked around. Many others in the group were also gasping for air. Not one of us had any response, so we continued to the synagogue. ***51*** There, the Pharisees brought a man with a withered hand to Yashua, accusingly asking Him, "So… is it right to heal on Shabbat, or not?"

Yashua looked angrily at them. He knew what they were thinking. Their question was a challenge. They may just as well have said, "So You think You are Master of Shabbat, do You? Then break the Shabbat law right here at the synagogue in front of everyone. We'll make sure it ruins Your reputation!"

"Are you really so hard of heart? Which one of you, if your sheep falls into a pit on Shabbat, would not pull it out? And is not this man of more value than a sheep?" His eyes blazed with a different kind of fire, that I had not seen before. "I ask you. Does your law permit you to do harm on Shabbat? Does it permit you to be hateful, cruel, and uncaring? Or even to destroy a Son of Abraham? Or does your law permit you to do good, to save a life on Shabbat?"

No one answered. The silence in the synagogue was profound. Yashua contemplated the Pharisees angrily, shaking His head at their hardness of heart. Finally He looked back to the man they had brought, and His face softened. "Stretch out your hand," He almost whispered. "I affirm, it is always lawful to do good deeds on Shabbat!" His face broke into a broad smile as the man reached up his hand and it came alive, as flexible as the other. Everyone in the synagogue cheered, except of course the Pharisees, who went out to plot against Him. Thus we learned a bit more about how Torah opens up His Life and love to us.

CHAPTER 12 – SERMON ON THE MOUNT, AD 29

52 That summer and fall were some of our finest times with Yashua. There were a lot more miracles, but more significant that summer was Yashua's incredible teaching ministry. I've just got to tell you about this one sermon near Capernaum. It came from Him so easily and joyfully – you would have thought He was just chatting with us on a stroll in the park. Yet it had such profound implications that I still take it out and study it now and then.

53 In fact, that entire day was the most amazing day I have ever known. After a full day's ministry in Capernaum, we'd gone to sleep, but Yashua had gone up to a rugged peak overlooking the Sea of Galilee and spent the entire night in prayer. Then right at daybreak, He called for His disciples to climb up there with Him. Out of the few who obeyed, He chose twelve to be His apostles (messengers).

54 Later, when we descended the mountain, we found a big crowd waiting for us around the foot of the mountain. The people came all the way from Jerusalem, Judea, and the coastlands of Tyre and Sidon, many with their sick, troubled, and demon-possessed. They came crowding around, trying to touch Yashua, bowing, and telling Him their tales of woe. I've never seen such power displayed! Or such love and compassion! He walked eagerly among them like a kid in a candy shop, listening, touching, encouraging, hugging and loving each one. Every single one was healed, every one! It was incredible!

We thought Yashua would be exhausted. He hadn't yet had any breakfast. But no, after that individual, personal ministry was done and everyone was healed and blessed, Yashua had us all sit down. He left us, and walked over to a knoll facing the mountain. He climbed the knoll and sat on a rock on top. Then He taught us in a voice that filled that natural amphitheater so everyone could clearly hear.

55 Matthew, bless his soul, took down most of Yashua's sermon in shorthand, word for word. We dubbed it the 'Sermon on the Mount'. And though a thousand sermons have been preached from it since then, I believe it still has not been exhausted. It was simple and straightforward, yet so far-reaching and profound that its depth and scope may never be equaled. I have never heard anyone else speak with such wisdom and authority! Everyone in the crowd was utterly awed at Yashua's teaching.

I won't just repeat His sermon. It's all right there in Matthew's gospel for you to read. But I'd like to mention a few things I got from it that have had a powerful impact on my life since then. Yashua started right off contrasting the Kingdom of Heaven with the kingdoms of men. It's really a clash of worldviews. It's sorta like everything we've ever known gets turned on its head. All the laws are inverted. To be rich in the Kingdom of Heaven, I must give up all pride of self-ownership to become poor in spirit. To receive true joy, I must have Yashua's attitude of mourning over the tragedies of sin. To rule with real power, I must be a servant. To preach with true authority, I must be meek, teachable. To receive heaven's righteousness, I must be aware and repent of how far I have fallen short. To be filled with God's love for His precious ones, I must be filled with hatred for the perversions and worldly attitudes that are destroying them. To live the abundant life of peace and joy in the Kingdom of Heaven, I must also be willing to suffer persecution and even death from rulers of the earth. Indeed, I must love my enemies, and pray for those who persecute me. For I am no longer of this realm. I have made peace with God, and I am His child. I must be different. I must shine as a beacon of light in a dark world, or spice things up like salt in a cheerless society. Then when people see my good works, they will know I am enabled by God, and will glorify our heavenly Father YHWH.

Yashua also taught us how to pray, again bringing the heavenly Father down to earth. Yes, He is still in heaven, but now I pray that His name be holy on earth as it is in heaven; that His Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven; that His will be done on earth as it is in heaven. And I bring it even closer, that His Kingdom come within me as it is in heaven; that His power and authority be manifest through me to everyone around me, yes, even that His glory shine through me to all who see me, just as it shines throughout all the heavenlies. In this prayer, Yashua taught me that it is the Father's kingdom – surely His is the power and glory forever. But it is His good pleasure to display His Kingdom to the world, even through my weak and humble service.

In conclusion, Yashua contrasted two ways of living. Either we seek first God's Kingdom and His righteousness, or we will go around judging. It's easy to live by judging. To let that self nature rule our lives is the most natural thing in the world. We simply decide what to do based on our own knowledge of good and evil. God commanded Adam and Eve not to eat the fruit of that tree. That kind of attitude is what cost them the Garden of Eden! It is deadly, for it is not the way we were created to live. The only other way of living, seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, is a lot harder. It means laying aside my own self-righteousness and letting King Yashua rule over, in, and through me by His Holy Spirit. No longer do I need to worry anxiously about my daily needs. He knows what I really need. Just see how He cares for the flowers and the birds! What a glorious sermon! I'm still learning from it.

56 But that day was not over yet. Yashua still had had no breakfast. As we walked back toward Capernaum we were met by some Jewish friends of a hated Roman centurion. They claimed this joker was a good man, that he loved the Jews and had built them a synagogue. They wanted Yashua to come and heal his servant. Can you imagine their nerve! After Yashua had already ministered for two days straight, healing a whole multitude with no sleep and no breakfast! I butted in to protect Him. "Hey! Can't you see this man needs some rest? Give Him a break! Bring the servant tomorrow and stand in line with the rest of the crowds!"

But Yashua gently pushed me aside. "Sure. I'm happy to come with you," He said, starting to follow them toward the centurion's home. I fussed and fumed, wanting to protect Him, but Yashua must have sensed that something great would happen because of His sacrifice of obedience to the Spirit, and He just walked meekly along with a smile of anticipation on His face.

However, before we even got close to the house, the centurion sent more men with a different message. He didn't want Yashua to come to his home. He felt unworthy. I think he was afraid he would tarnish Yashua's reputation. He just wanted Yashua to speak the word, believing that his servant would be healed from a distance by just the Master's word.

Yashua was astonished. I had never seen Him surprised by anything before. But this time He truly seemed amazed. He turned to me and said, "Never, never have I seen such faith! No, not even in all Israel!" Then putting His hands on the shoulders of the centurion's friends He smiled and said, "Go. It is done for him just as he believed."

"What was so surprising to You, Master?" I asked later. He shook His head in wonder. "Do you realize the faith of his confession, as revealed by his words? He could not have said what he said, unless he first knew that Father God is totally in control, able to heal his servant, and in addition knew that Father God's full power and authority is released by just My Word.

"I've been with you about a year now, John." He smiled at me. "You've seen a lot of miracles. But you still don't know that – I mean, really know it, deep down in your heart. He knew it, deep down, without ever even meeting Me. That is a blessed heap of faith that I hope for all of you someday."

I had to stop and think about that one for a bit. *Father God's full power and authority, released by just Yashua's word?* He's right. Maybe I've been too close to Him, seen His human weakness too much. I'm still not sure I have that much faith. But at least I'm learning what faith is!

CHAPTER 13 – MIRACLES. YOCHANAN DOUBTS

57 Yashua went out of His way to strengthen my faith. He led us around Mount Tabor to Nain, where He butted into the middle of a funeral procession and raised back to life the son of a widow there. And those words kept going through my mind, "Father God's full power and authority, released by just My Word." Even the power of life from death! I was beginning to believe it.

58 By this time, Yochanan the Baptizer, who was still in prison, had heard of all the miracles and the big crowds following Yashua. I guess he was miffed that Yashua didn't come down and spring him, so he sent two of his disciples with a challenge. Just as Yashua was about to address a large crowd, Yochanan's disciples stood up and shouted loudly, "Yochanan the Baptizer sent us to You, asking, 'Are You the expected Messiah, the One who is to come? Or must we look for another?'"

You could hear the ripples of dismay running through the crowd. Yochanan? Having doubts? He is the one who pointed us to Yashua, saying, "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world." How could he doubt? Prison must be very hard on him! How will Yashua chastise him for doubting? I remembered Yashua's tearful prayers for Yochanan just before we came back to Galilee: "…even now his faith is being sorely tested and shaken. Pray, Oh pray that his faith fail not!"

But this time, rather than calling us all to pray for Yochanan, Yashua did something very different. (Later I learned that Yashua took secret delight in astounding us.) First He invited the two disciples of Yochanan to stand beside Him, one on His right and the other on His left. Then He said to the puzzled crowd, "My heart is deeply burdened for Yochanan. Will you please be My sermon to encourage him? Those who are sick or needy, please line up on My left if you want to participate." It didn't take long for a big line to form up; lots of people had problems and diseases, and everyone loved Yochanan! Then one by one, Yashua allowed the one on His left to hear each person's problem or sickness, He Himself ministered healing to them, then the one on the right verified that the problems and diseases were all taken care of, just like that.

I think Yashua must have healed a hundred different kinds of afflictions that day: blindness, the lame, broken and incorrectly healed limbs, speech problems, deafness, skin diseases, problems with demonic harassment or demon possession, broken hearts, dead relatives restored from the grave, even feeble old folks made strong again. It was incredible the variety that filed past, and even more incredible their joy when their problems and anxieties were taken care of, their diseases healed, and their dead relatives returned alive – they danced and shouted for joy!

When the line was finally gone, Yashua thanked the people for being His sermon to encourage Yochanan, then said to the two disciples: "Now report back to Yochanan what you have just seen and heard with your own eyes and ears. And quote to him the Scripture: 'They will see the glory of YHWH, the majesty of our God. Encourage the exhausted and strengthen the feeble. Say to those with an anxious heart, "Take courage! Fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance; the recompense of God will come – but He will save you!" Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, and the ears of the deaf will be unstopped. Then the lame will leap like a deer, and the tongue of the dumb will shout for joy.' [Isa 35:2-6] He will recognize that Messianic Scripture as pointing to Me. Blessed is the one who continues believing in Me and does not stumble when tough times come. And…" Yashua's eyes filled with tears and I thought He was going to break down sobbing in front of us all. "And tell Yochanan… Please… tell him… how much I love him!"

Yochanan's disciples left, fairly running, with their mouths still open in wonder and amazement. Yashua wiped His eyes and turned back to the crowd. "So, when you went out to the wilderness to hear Yochanan, what did you think you would see? A wishy-washy reed blowing in the wind? Or a rich king in soft robes? Of course not. You went out to see a prophet, the first true prophet of God to Israel since the prophet Malachi, over 400 years ago. But I tell you, Yochanan is more than just a prophet. He is the one of whom Malachi said, 'Behold, I send My messenger to prepare the way for Messiah.' He came in the spirit of Elijah, to speak words of righteousness, to sound a clarion call to repentance, to restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and children to their fathers, just as Malachi said he would. Though he never saw Me from the time we were babies until My baptism, he knew Me from his mother's womb, and he loved Me and supported Me in prevailing prayer as I was growing up. I know. I felt his covering prayers! But more importantly, he did the job God gave to him – preparing you to receive your Messiah. In My eyes, Yochanan is the greatest man who ever lived!"

There were gasps in the crowd. Though they looked up to Yochanan as an esteemed prophet, yet I heard people whispering, "Greater than Moses? Greater than King David? Greater than Noah? Greater even than our Father Abraham?!!!" The hillside reeked of skepticism.

"And yet," Yashua continued, sweeping His arms over the crowd, "He who is the least in the Kingdom of God, even the youngest or weakest child of the high King of heaven, is greater than he."

I must admit, not a single one of us understood that statement. We didn't dare question Him about it, either. I finally understood it much later, on the day of Shavuot, when old Peter stood up and preached his first sermon by the power of the Holy Spirit. Peter's greatness exceeded that of any human, for, like any true child of the Kingdom of God, the Spirit of Yashua the King shone through him.

59 That evening as the crowds were leaving for home, a Pharisee invited us to dinner. I was glad when Yashua accepted, thinking that here was our big opportunity to get back on the good side of the Pharisees. This one, at least, had been in the crowd and had seen the miracles. Sadly, it didn't turn out that way. We were all reclining at the table, with the Pharisees at one end and us at the other, when in stole a temple prostitute. Everyone grew silent. Our host half rose, I'm sure to shoo her out, but she made a beeline to Yashua, ignoring our dirty looks. She immediately fell at Yashua's feet, broke open this expensive-looking alabaster vial she had, and began anointing His feet with perfume. Our host sat back down, a smug look on his face. I could tell exactly what he was thinking: *Yashua is no prophet! He can't even discern that she is a filthy prostitute!*

The woman was clinging to Yashua, weeping profusely, washing His feet with her tears and wiping them with her long hair. It was most awkward. I was embarrassed for Him. I wondered if I ought to be the one to shoo her out. This crass behavior toward our Master could seriously compromise His reputation and destroy the ministry! But Yashua broke the ice. "Simon, I have a story to tell you."

"Good. Tell it, Teacher," our host responded smugly. I don't think it even occurred to him that Yashua had spoken his name without ever hearing it.

Yashua smiled at him, ignoring the woman for the moment. "A kind money-lender had two debtors. One owed him a year's wages, the other only a month's wages. When they couldn't pay, he forgave them both. Now, which one will love him the most?"

"I suppose the one he forgave the most."

"You are right." Yashua reached one hand down to the woman and the other out toward Simon, to clinch His point. "When I came into your house, you didn't wash My feet. You gave Me no kiss of greeting or anointing for My head. But this woman, since she came in, has not ceased to kiss My feet, wash them with her tears, wipe them with her hair, and anoint them with perfume. I tell you, Simon, your love is small, because you, already being righteous, have been forgiven little. But she, in acknowledging her great sinfulness, has been forgiven much. Just look! You can see it by the greatness of her love!"

Simon was aghast. He stood in indignation and tried to respond to the obvious slap in the face. But Yashua wasn't done yet. He reached to the floor and actually took the prostitute by the hand. "Tamarah, your sins are forgiven. Go in peace and sin no more. Because of your repentance and faith, My blessing has now fallen upon you. Rejoice, for your name is inscribed in My Father's Book of Life!"

So, instead of making friends with the Pharisees, we made some powerful enemies that day. They sent us off muttering, "Who is this joker who calls God His Father and thinks He can forgive sins?"

60 All summer we went from village to village in Galilee. Yashua healed a lot more people (usually with just a word or a touch) and taught every day, mostly in parables. He told stories about common things to illustrate spiritual principles. He also began speaking out against the cities that rejected Him, and against our religious rulers.

61 That fall they even accused Him of casting out demons by Baalzebul, the chief of demons, so Yashua called them "a brood of vipers." And after all the miracles Yashua had done, even that very day, the Pharisees and their scribes had the impudence to ask Yashua to do another miracle just for them, to prove He was from God!

His response to them shocked us all. I remember His exact words: "An evil and adulterous generation asks for a sign. Yet no sign shall be given it but the sign of the prophet Jonah. For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so shall the Son of Adam be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."

Wow! It sounded like He was saying that He would die, be buried for three days and nights, and then come back to life! That seemed quite incredible to us at the time, and none of us could believe it, including our religious rulers.

That afternoon He did another big miracle just for us disciples, to strengthen our faith. Too bad our religious rulers weren't around to see it. He had spent the whole afternoon in Peter's fishing boat teaching parables to a crowd beside the Sea of Galilee. ***62*** At evening, He was exhausted after the full day's teaching and ministry, so He told us to head toward the far shore while He lay down on a life jacket in the stern and fell fast asleep.

Now, you've got to realize, Peter's fishing boat is not very big. It was just made for two and our catch. There were thirteen of us in it. So when a storm blew down the lake from the north, we got scared. We just didn't have much freeboard, and this was a real gale: one of the typical Galilean thunderstorms with high, gusty winds and steep, choppy waves that can spring up suddenly in the fall and winter. We began shipping water over the side, which forced us to abandon our course and just let 'er run before the wind. But the waves grew as big as the boat and bigger! We knew we were in serious trouble. We were already swamped, and we simply couldn't bail fast enough!

I looked to the stern. I couldn't believe it! Though He was drenched like the rest of us, Yashua was still sleeping! "Yashua, wake up! Save us! We are perishing!" I screamed, reaching back to shake Him. I am ashamed now that I was so panicked, having spent a lifetime on the sea, but at the time it really looked like we were all about to die and I got angry that Yashua was sleeping so peacefully.

Ignoring the storm, Yashua sat up and gave us all a bemused, concerned look. He didn't seem to mind being wet. He shook His head sadly and said, "Why are you so timid and fearful, you men of little faith?" Then another wave poured over the stern. I bowed in resignation, certain that the next one would sink us. A thought came to mind, *How ironic, that it ends like this. All our hopes and dreams for Messiah and the salvation of Israel, all dashed just because we 'expert fishermen' stupidly overloaded our boat!*

"Peace. Be still." Yashua spoke it quietly. At first I thought He was still speaking to us. Then I looked up to see Him standing, looking into the teeth of the storm. *Standing? In a storm? Huh! How foolish is that?* Except the storm was gone. Totally gone. I couldn't believe my eyes. The wind died as if it had been chopped off with a knife, and that 'next wave' never came. I tell you, we sure looked silly, huddled there terrified in a boat full of water, in a sea that was as calm as if we'd been sailing across a bathtub.

We looked at one another, our mouths hanging open. *Who is this man, that even the winds and waves obey Him?* we were thinking. But there He was, settled back on His life jacket, fast asleep. We stared in fearful awe of this man who held the power of the universe in just His Word.

63 We bailed out and rowed toward the nearest shore. We had been blown far south, to the land of the Gadarenes. We found ourselves on a desolate rocky beach below a cemetery. We hoped for some peace and quiet while we dried everything out and Yashua caught up on His sleep.

But the second we hit the beach Yashua woke up, eager to minister to someone – we knew not who. As we were beaching the boat, two naked, demon-possessed men ran out of an open tomb intent on driving us back out to sea. Before we could cast off, Yashua calmly stepped out of the boat and walked toward them. He asked their names, and demanded that the demons depart from them.

The men's angry demeanor changed to pleading! They fell to their knees at Yashua's feet. "What do we have to do with You, You Son of the most high God? Have You come to torment us before Judgment Day? Our name is Legion, for we are many. Please don't order us out of the country. If You must cast us out, send us into that herd of swine."

We hadn't even noticed the pigs. They were about a quarter mile away. When Yashua pointed toward them and said, "Begone!" it was only seconds before we heard their loud terrified squeals. They rushed down the steep bank into the sea and perished.

The swine herders had been watching, expecting us to be overcome by the crazed men. But when they saw the demon-possessed men bow down at Yashua's feet, saw Him point to their pigs, and then got run over by the pigs' charge into the sea, they realized what had happened. By the time we had the two men cleaned up and dressed, they had half the city of Gadara on their way down to meet us.

I expected Yashua to save the city of Gadara like He had Sychar of Samaria. But these people were too angry about the loss of their pigs! They didn't care that raising pigs for food is against Jewish law. They wouldn't listen to Yashua. They just screamed at Him to go away. It sounded like the demons had gone from the pigs into their enraged owners.

As we were launching the boat, one of the cleansed demoniacs begged to come with us. Yashua put His hand on his head and said with a big smile, "I have a better idea, Freddy. Go home and report to your own people what great things God has done for you. Will you accept My appointment to be My witness to the city of Gadara?"

"Yes, Lord! I will!" he replied. And he did. I got a lesson on the many ways God can use to save a city.

64 Speaking of saving a city, when we finally got back to our own city of Capernaum, nearly the entire town was waiting for us. The leader of our synagogue was a Pharisee named Jairus. His daughter was sick, and he was desperate for help. Now, the Pharisees had not treated us very well. Jairus was no exception. He had opposed our ministry from the beginning, and just recently been among the group that had accused Yashua of casting out demons by the power of Baalzebul. After all the miracles we had done in Capernaum, he still hadn't believed, but had asked Yashua for another miracle as a sign.

But now that his own daughter was dying, his attitude seemed to have changed. He came humbly, pleading with Yashua and bowing before Him in worship, yes, publicly, in full view of the very crowds he had been warning against Yashua's teachings. I expected Yashua to simply repeat what He had told the Pharisees before: that an evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but none will be given it but that of the prophet Jonah.

I was wrong. Yashua seemed to appreciate his change of attitude, and readily agreed to follow him. I guess being a Pharisee didn't matter to Him as much as having a humble and repentant heart. But even as we struggled through the crowds toward his house, Yashua paused and called out, "Who touched Me?"

I laughed out loud. Peter, more respectful than I, voiced what we all were thinking. "But Master? The crowd is pressing in hard on You. How can You ask, 'Who touched Me?'" As we were enjoying the joke, however, an ashamed and trembling woman stepped forward and fell down at Yashua's feet. She confessed that she had touched Him, hoping to be healed secretly of an embarrassing ailment.

She looked pleadingly up at Him through her tears and blurted out her whole story – twelve years of menstrual bleeding, of pain and weakness, of spending all her living on doctors who couldn't help her, of having to call out "unclean" everywhere she went and of not being allowed to touch anyone, not even her husband or her children.

But then she had heard about Yashua. She had gone to hear Him teach and witness His healing miracles – though she was too embarrassed to go up to Him publicly in front of the crowds. She had believed that Yashua is Messiah, and she had applied to Him her favorite Messianic passage from the Prophets: "For you who fear My name, the Sun of Righteousness will rise with healing clear down to the tassel of His robe…" (Mal 4:2; see note below.)

Ever since, she had been telling herself, "I only have to touch His tassel, and then I shall be well…" But she was afraid to do it openly. Being unclean, she could be stoned for deliberately touching a rabbi! So she had sneaked up behind Him in the crowd, brushed the tassel of His robe, sensed the instant healing in her body, and turned to hurry off. Yashua, not feeling the physical touch but sensing healing power flowing through Him, had caught her.

The woman cried for mercy, and repented of breaking the laws of uncleanness. Yashua just smiled and told her, "My daughter, your faith has saved you. You are forgiven. Go in peace, completely well, body and spirit!"

But while He was still speaking, Jairus' servant came up and informed him, "Don't trouble the Teacher anymore. Your daughter has already died." Yashua immediately turned to Jairus, who had staggered and was about to fall in grief. "No!" came the sharp command as He reached out to steady him. "Don't succumb to fear. Keep on believing!"

We finally reached the house, with Yashua's arm around Jairus to support him. The mourners were already there, weeping and wailing. But the crowds were acting like they were at a circus, wanting another miracle. Yashua seemed disgusted at them. He sent them all away, claiming loudly that the child was not dead after all, only asleep.

They jeered and mocked Him at that. Eventually they all left. He only allowed me, Peter, and James in the house with the dead girl and her parents.

She was indeed very dead. White, still, and cold, her jaw already set hard with rigor mortis. I saw her myself, lying beside her weeping mother. How in the world could Yashua wiggle out of this? I couldn't believe He'd told a lie! He had told everyone she was just asleep. I had never heard Yashua stretch the truth before, even in His joking around. But this was a whopper! It could sink the entire ministry!

I was frantically trying to figure out a way to help Him save His ministry. Yashua just nonchalantly walked over to her, took her hand, and said, "Get up, Talitha." I rolled my eyes. Didn't He even have the perception to see how dead she was? By the time my eyeballs returned to center and focused, the girl was already sitting up and hugging Yashua. I blinked twice and shook my head. She had been stone cold and white just moments before. Now before my eyes she was a warm honey-brown and very much alive! As many miracles as I had seen up to then, I must admit that I was totally astounded.

"Yashua! That was fantastic! Why, no one will ever dare to doubt You anymore! We'll just call all those people back, show them what You did, and…"

"No, no, John!" Yashua smiled at me. "Even you don't know what I did. The body is indeed dead without the spirit to give it life. But her spirit was asleep, awaiting My call. I merely woke her and returned her spirit to her body. We must tell no one, My friends. The multitudes cannot possibly understand it. Please, everyone, don't breathe a word of this outside this home."

I was flabbergasted. His big opportunity to really impress the crowds and He wanted to hush it up! I tried to rebuke Him. "Yashua, that's not right! You don't seem to understand the importance of good press. If we can wow the crowds, demonstrate that You really are Messiah, and prove it beyond doubt with a few spectacular miracles like this, then the Pharisees won't dare bother You again!"

Historical note: the traditional tassel on a Jewish rabbi's robe, called "tsetse" in Yiddish and "kanaph" in Hebrew, is mostly made of white thread symbolizing purity, with one purplish-blue thread doubled so you can see both ends. One end is always longer than the other, reminding them to long for Messiah. The color was supposedly the very color of the throne of YHWH, to remind them that they were always in His presence. The dye for this thread was a very costly extract from the marine mulex trunculus, a mollusk (shellfish) harvested by the Phoenicians. This purple-blue dye was used to stain single threads on the tassels of Jewish robes and prayer shawls from antiquity. Jews consider it the color of Messiah. Such tassels were worn by the devout since well before the time of Christ. In very ancient times, the common people of Sumer were forbidden to wear robes of this purple, as it was a mark of wealth and nobility. King Herod's robe which our Savior wore at His trial was made of this purple, as the Romans considered it the color of royalty. As far as we know, Yashua wore such a robe only once – *when He had been tried and found guilty of claiming to be Messiah!* I wonder if that bothered the scribes and Pharisees? About 450 AD at the beginning of the Dark Ages, they ran out of dye, and no one living knew the formula for extracting it. Since then, Jews have dyed their prayer shawls black, symbolizing mourning. Orthodox Jews knew that before they could return to proper observance of the Mosaic Covenant, they would have to rediscover this dye. Then in 1984, an Orthodox Jewish biochemist in Jerusalem announced that he had determined the correct formula. Now any observant Jew can go out and buy prayer shawls and robes with tassels which have exactly the same colors as were used in Yashua's time.

He seemed to think that was a very good joke. I couldn't believe He was laughing at something so serious. "John, John. I appreciate your trying to be My press manager. But there is something that you don't understand about the Pharisees. They don't want Messiah to come and establish His Kingdom! They are too busy protecting their own kingdoms. I'm a big threat to them! When we wow the crowds and the people all start proclaiming Me Messiah, the Pharisees will kill Me! It is not time for that yet, so I've got to tell those who believe in Me to not spread it around."

65 He kept doing it, too. The next day He healed two blind men, and again told them to keep it quiet. Later we found out why, after Yashua healed a demon-possessed man who had been dumb. The crowd heard him speaking and gave the glory to God. Immediately the Pharisees were right there trying to silence them, swearing that Yashua was casting out demons by the ruler of the demons.

Yashua wept for them, saying they were committing the one sin that cannot be forgiven: blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. They saw Yashua's good deeds and knew it was by God's Holy Spirit, but judged Him as evil, thus bringing condemnation upon themselves. Yashua would rather they not even hear about the miracles, than hear about them and judge the Holy Spirit's power and grace as evil.

CHAPTER 14 – APOSTLES SENT OUT, Fall AD 29

66 Fall was come, and harvest time. The Feast of Sukkot would be upon us soon. I hoped this whole ministry thing would taper off a bit for the winter. Things were getting a bit too hot for us among the Pharisees and religious rulers. We had gotten too popular. The crowds were huge and growing daily. So the Feast seemed like a good time to put Yashua's ministry on ice for awhile and let things cool off. I was unprepared for Yashua's little harvest speech.

"Look at the multitudes. They are beat down, like sheep without a shepherd." I looked. They seemed fine to me; busy, gathering the harvest and preparing for winter, laughing, jostling one another with coarse jokes as always. I shrugged my shoulders and looked back at Yashua. He was weeping! I could not understand such compassion.

"The harvest is plentiful, but the reapers are so few. Pray, oh, pray with Me, that the Master of the harvest will send more workers out into His fields."

I looked out into the busy fields again. Full of workers. "Uh, Yashua? I see lots of workers."

67 Ignoring my ignorance, He called those He'd chosen as apostles by name. "Simon Peter and Andrew ben Jonas, James and John ben Zebedee, Nathanael Bartholomew, Philip, Thomas, Matthew Levi and Jacob ben Alphaeus, Judas Thaddaeus [later called Jude], Simon the Zealot, and Judas ben Iscariot – this day I commission you twelve as reapers of the Master's harvest fields."

"Huh? But we're fishermen!" My brother James responded. We were still a bit proud of our trade.

Yashua nodded. "Remember, I told you that I would make you fishers of men? Now is the time. Soon My cousin Yochanan the Baptizer will be slain. Then our religious rulers will put Me to death also."

"Our religious rulers…? [We understood that to be the Pharisees, their scribes, and the chief priests (Sadducees).] But it was King Herod who imprisoned Yochanan."

"Yes, but he did it to please our religious rulers, and they know it. Herod wants to release him. But by killing him he opens the door for the spirit of the evil one to fill the hearts of our religious rulers with murder. But they cannot touch Me until the time."

"Does that mean we won't go to the Feast?"

"Oh, of course we'll go. But we will go separately and maintain a low profile. My time will come later. For now, this is your chance to learn to minister in My name. I want you to split up and go in pairs to visit as many of the towns of Israel as you can, for you are reapers in My…"

"I want to go with Matthew!" I interrupted.

Yashua laughed. "I'm glad you appreciate Matthew. You sure didn't when I first called him! But no; you will go with your older brother James, and Matthew will take his brother Jacob. You see, each pair must have one who is physically bold to reach out, and one who is spiritually bold to reach up. You will find that James will support you and even lead you much better than you can understand now. He may be quiet, and he may seem like he is not as strong as you, but I assure you, he is a mighty intercessor before the throne of heaven and a powerful warrior in My Kingdom." He smiled warmly at me. "You have a natural boldness to reach out to people, John, but you need his intercession more than you realize. In time you will come to appreciate James as your partner and best friend, rather than competing against him as when you were young."

I looked over at James. He stuck up his snooty nose at me, and I felt the all-too-common urge to go over and knock him flat. *Later.* Yashua was still talking.

"Don't go to the Gentiles or the Samaritans; you won't have time. Go only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Preach the good news that the Kingdom of God is at hand. I grant you authority to heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, cast out the demons, and abundantly aid those in need, just as My Father will abundantly meet your needs. You won't need to take any money, or extra clothes or sandals, for a worker is worthy of his support. In every town that receives you there will be a virtuous family who will take you in. Eat whatever they serve and gratefully receive whatever they give you. Stay with them as long as you're in that town. When you leave, pronounce God's special blessing of peace upon that family.

"But I warn you, there will be much persecution, just as they persecute Me. When they reject you in a town, accept nothing at all from them. Shake even the dust from your feet as a witness against them, and flee to the next. I send you out like sheep in the midst of wolves. So be wise as serpents, yet innocent as doves. Do not fear them. When they deliver you up before the magistrates, don't even worry about what to say, for the Spirit of My Father in heaven will speak His wisdom through you. I will go with you in Spirit, interceding mightily and empowering you, for I will be praying continually for you.

"Now go. Split up to attend the Feast separately. You will not see Me there. I, in partnership with Spirit, will be doing the same as you, to cover as many cities as possible. We have six months. We will gather in Capernaum on the first of Nisan, just before the Passover next year. You will have some good reports to share with Me then, I know!"

I looked again at James and he raised his skinny head up proudly and gave me another smirk. Once again I had this overpowering urge to put him in his proper place: with his face in the dirt. *Someone needed to teach that guy a little humility!* Just then Yashua spoke, and I realized that He'd been watching me.

"All his life all he's ever wanted from you was your love and acceptance, John," He said quietly. "Put him in his proper place – in your heart – by just going to him with a hug and telling him how much you love him."

I was startled. I'd never thought of that! All our lives we'd been rivals, competitors. As the second born, I'd been jealous of his special favor with Mom and Dad. I had fought with him since I first learned to throw a punch. Did I actually love him? I looked in my heart and was surprised at how much love for him I suddenly found there. I walked over to him and stretched out my arms. "I, uh, love you, James. You are my very best friend. Or at least I want you to be. May I work with you and be your partner?"

And suddenly all the icy walls melted down in puddles at our feet, as he fell into my arms with his head on my shoulder and began to softly weep. "Yes, John, I would be honored to have you as my partner, and, well, I've always wanted to be your best friend," he said between sobs.

As I held him there, I wondered why we could not have done this twenty years earlier. I looked back at Yashua. He was beaming at us. I still ask myself, was this outpouring of love for each other just our own natural love, or was it a miracle gift of love from Him? We may never know.

All I know was, the next six months were the highlight of our lives. James and I made an awesome team, like we were made to work together. I'd always been bold to reach out, but I'd never realized how bold he was in reaching up for more of Spirit. He was always right there at my side when I needed him, interceding while I ministered, and ministering to others when I was praying for someone.

Just as Yashua had said, our strengths complimented each other's weaknesses. Our unity of spirit and purpose was nothing short of a miracle. There was no taint of that old competitiveness or sibling rivalry. The only thing sad was the thought that I had wasted so many years refusing to receive God's greatest gift to me, my own brother.

68 When the six months had flown by and we were heading back to Capernaum, I reflected on all the homes and towns that had been blessed, all the people that were healed, cleansed, revived, and encouraged, all the demons that had been cast out and banished, and all the poor whose needs had been abundantly met. I was awed at how much can be accomplished by only a pair of brothers working in harmony in body, soul, and spirit.

Oh, we had our tough times, too. We were chased out of a few towns, thrown into prison for several weeks at one place, and hauled before the chief magistrates twice. But through it all James stood firmly beside me. I discovered the truth of Yashua's assessment that James was a mighty intercessor and a powerful warrior for His Kingdom.

CHAPTER 15 – THE SECOND YEAR OF YASHUA'S MINISTRY, Spring AD 30

69 The first of Nisan rolled around. We returned to Capernaum with some awesome stories to share, as Yashua had predicted. As much as He loves to party, we were expecting a big bash. I must admit, I was imagining us two as the stars of the show. It's pretty heady stuff to feel the incredible power of God flowing through your body.

But the party never happened. Most of the others were already there when we arrived. They all looked glum, and Yashua was weeping quietly. I jumped to the conclusion that what had worked fantastically for James and me had not worked so well for them, and tried to cheer them up.

But old Peter stopped me. ***70*** "Yochanan is dead, John," he said quietly. "He died a terrible, gruesome death, on Herod's birthday shortly after Sukkot. Yashua just came in and heard the news a few hours ago. I'm afraid He's takin' it kinda hard. We're all in mourning with Him."

I was surprised that Yashua, who had already informed us that Yochanan would die, should be so upset over it. Mariam came over and gave me an affectionate hug. "Hi John," she said. "Thank you for being sensitive to Yashua about this. It is kind of you to share in His mourning. He had a special bond with Yochanan from before birth, you know. They knew and recognized each other by the Spirit, even when they were both in the womb. When Yochanan died, something inside Yashua died, too."

What awesome love! Well beyond my comprehension. I shook my head, more than a little miffed. Love had never been one of my strong points. All I could think of was, *Rats. There goes our party.*

How pathetic. I had so little love. I'm ashamed to look back. That lesson Yashua had taught me about loving my brother James was only the beginning of a series of lessons on love I was to learn from Him. I didn't know it then, but Yashua was changing me so my weakness would become strength in His hands, so much so that I later became known as the 'Apostle of Love'. I couldn't call myself that, you know, especially as I began to see my own weaknesses. The term I use is 'the disciple whom Yashua loved'. That's more accurate, since it was really His love for me that flowed over me, filled me, and changed me.

Finally the last of the twelve straggled in. They all had about the same reactions as I had, and I got the impression that each of the twelve had awesome things to share and was disappointed at not being able to celebrate. Maybe later. But the crowds were already gathering and Yashua was in no shape to minister, [71] so we crammed into Peter's boat and cast off for some lonely place across the lake.

As we silently sailed (before a favorable breeze) Yashua talked to us. He first commended us for a job well done. He then explained how news of our mighty exploits had spread throughout the land. The multitudes were ready to try to make Him King, while both religious and political leaders were upset and plotting against us. "So it might be good if we just lay low until things settle down a bit." *At one time that was what I had wanted, but…* He concluded, "If the multitudes get too enthusiastic about crowning Me King, it could result in My death before the time. [72] Herod is terrified of Me. He's been hearing tales of miracles and wonders across the land, and is now convinced that I am Yochanan the Baptizer risen from the dead."

He paused, so I butted in. "Yashua, why would they want to crown You King for the mighty exploits we did?" As the words left my mouth I realized how arrogant it sounded, but I was still miffed at having my 'star of the party' daydreams dashed.

"John, My friend, everything you did, you did in My name. I knew because I felt the power flowing through Me with every miracle, every touch, every word you spoke. Most of the people never even knew your names…" (At this, I saw with horror my own pride in being upset at not getting the recognition that I felt I deserved.) "But My name was spread abroad across the whole land." Here Yashua gently touched my arm, smiling sadly at me. "If you had been ministering in your own name or for your own glory, you could have accomplished nothing at all."

He dropped it, and finally allowed us to share with Him what God had accomplished through us in the last six months. The others all eagerly shared, glad for the release. But I who had imagined myself the star of the party remained silent. The place where He had touched me and His quiet rebuke burned in me for a long time. I was deeply ashamed of my arrogance and self-centeredness, and at how woefully little love I had for others.

The wind carried us to a lonely shore a few miles beyond Bethsaida. We weren't really watching where we were going; we just wanted to lose the crowds. But they had seen our boat leave Capernaum and had evidently followed on foot, over Herod's new stone bridge across the Jordan and around the north shore of the lake. There were ten thousand people waiting for us, with more coming! I prepared to cast off again, but Yashua shook His head. "No, we'll minister to them. They are like sheep without a shepherd. How can I turn them away? You all walk among them touching them and speaking My words of healing, while I minister Words of Abundant Life from Spirit."

So all afternoon we worked while Yashua talked to the multitude about the Kingdom of God. And the entire time His rebuke continued to burn within me. "If you had been ministering in your own name or for your own glory, you could have accomplished nothing at all." With every encouraging touch, every healing, every cleansing from sin, I sensed His Words, His Power, His Spirit, flowing through me. Truly it was in His name and for His glory!

[73] By evening we were exhausted. No lunch or supper didn't help matters much either. And the people just weren't going home! The sun was low on the horizon, and the crowds were even bigger than when we had begun. Finally Philip, James, and I went to Yashua and suggested that He call it a day and send them away, so they could find food and lodging before nightfall. He responded quietly with a smile, "You feed them." *Yeah, right. As if the two or three dollars we had left in our ministry bag was enough to buy bread for each person to get a crumb!*

Andrew, Peter's brother, held out a small picnic basket to Yashua. "This young fellow overheard You. He wants to share his lunch with everyone." He chuckled as he looked in. "Hmmm… There are five biscuits and two small fish here. He sure has a lot of faith!"

"Yes, you do, Yosef My friend," Yashua said to the lad, ruffling his hair. "And your faith shall be rewarded!" Yosef beamed up at Yashua. He told us to ask the crowd to recline on the grass in groups of fifty or so, so we could pass between them. He held up the boy's lunch and blessed it. Then He began breaking the bread and fish into pieces and giving them to us to pass out. It was incredible. As fast as we could give it out and return for more, He had more ready for us. At first the people were anxious, grabbing pieces from us for themselves. But as the food flowed through our hands faster and faster, they relaxed. They began to enjoy the meal and serve one another.

And there was Yosef, watching it all, wide-eyed. After the crowds had eaten their fill, lots of food was scattered around all over the place. Yashua told us to gather up the excess, that it not be wasted. Then He knelt down beside Yosef and held out his picnic basket. "Here are some of the leftovers from your lunch, Yosef. I'm sure your parents will want to see. Thank you for sharing it with everyone."

Yosef took the basket. It was now stuffed full. But he didn't even open it to check what was inside. "Thank You, Master! I knew You could do it!" He scampered off into the crowd, saying, "Wait 'til Mom and Dad hear about this!" He was so excited to share it, I don't think he even ate any.

"We got twelve baskets full! Twelve! I can't believe it!" Andrew kept telling anyone who would listen. [74] But Yashua urged us into the boat with the leftovers. "Head back toward Capernaum without Me. I must be alone with My Father for a while. I'll catch up with you later, after I've sent the multitudes away and prayed." Then calling to the crowd, He blessed them and bade them safe journey home.

We were already a few hundred yards from shore when we heard shouts. "Truly, this is the prophet who was to come into the world! Gather around Him. We must make Him King! He will save us from the tyranny of Rome! He cares for us, and feeds us, and heals our sick! Surely, He is Messiah! He will always provide for us. Hail King Yashua! Long live King Yashua! Long live the King!"

Then in the dwindling twilight we saw Yashua scaling the mountain, while the shouts of the people changed to, "Where did He go? He was right here? Don't let Him get away; we've got to make Him King! He didn't get into the boat, did He? I know He didn't. He was right beside you. It's too dark to see." We chuckled at how easily He had eluded them, but I wondered that He would so casually refuse their honors.

The night was dark and moonless. The stars shone to aid us in navigating toward Capernaum, but the gentle breeze that had blown us across was now dead against us. [75] As the night wore on, it steadily increased, to whistle past our ears. We had to row like crazy to make any headway at all. After nine hours of rowing and being battered by the waves, the dim lights of Capernaum still seemed far away, and we were beginning to despair of ever reaching it.

Then we saw the apparition of someone walking on the water. His face was set toward Capernaum. At the speed he was striding, he would surely beat us there.

I just rubbed my eyes, thinking the day had been far too long. *So now we're seeing ghosts already?* But several of the others screamed out in terror, ready to throw themselves into the boisterous sea. Immediately Yashua (for it was indeed He) cried out, "Take courage. It is I. Fear not."

"Lord, if it is You, please bid me come to You on the water!" Peter called. I couldn't believe my ears. Where in the world did he ever get that stupid idea? We were far from shore. The water was deep and the waves fierce. But Yashua just said, "Come!" and old Peter jumped out and started walking toward Him on the water. We sat there with our mouths open, our oars forgotten and our boat blowing sideways to the wind and waves (something a good sailor never allows). He was doing it! Peter actually was doing it! I swear! Old Peter was walking on the water!

Time slowed down. I have this vivid picture indelibly imprinted in my mind. There was old Peter looking up toward Yashua. He was slightly hunched over, as if fearful that each step might be his last. Yet each step remained solid, as if walking on dry land, though the waves dashed furiously at his feet. Yashua beamed at him, arms outstretched in encouraging welcome. As he closed the gap, Peter straightened up, smiling. I could see the thoughts going through his head: *I can do this. This is cool. It's not difficult at all.* He stood tall and defiantly surveyed the storm. In that moment the violence of the waves hit him. A lifetime of instinctive fears swept over him, and he sank like a stone! Throwing his arms up toward Yashua, he screamed, "Lord! Save me!" just as his head went under.

I don't know how Yashua covered the remaining gap so quickly, but the next thing I knew, He was lifting Peter up from the water with a gentle rebuke. "O you of small faith… Why did you doubt?"

They walked together back toward the boat, with Peter leaning rather heavily on Yashua's shoulder. Now comes the strangest part of this story. We had seen that Yashua is Master over the wind and sea, but we were not ready for this. As they stepped into the boat, time itself bowed the knee to the Master.

I cannot understand it, much less explain it. All I know is that one moment we were sideways to the wind on a dark, stormy night, being blown rapidly back toward the eastern shore where all our exhaustive rowing efforts would be wasted. The next moment [76] we were at our own familiar beach at Gennesaret, just south of Capernaum.

The gale was past, dawn had broken, and people were streaming from the surrounding villages with their sick, hoping to touch the tassel of Yashua's robe and be healed. (That woman Yashua had healed of the twelve years of bleeding had been blabbing His praises all over.)

Where did that six hours go? How did Yashua get the boat to Gennesaret against that strong westerly wind? We twelve have discussed it at length among ourselves, and the only thing we can say is that Yashua is Master over time and space, just as He is Master over the wind and waves.

Another full day of ministry came and went. So many people. Where did they all come from? And most of them sick, too. I didn't know there was that much sickness in all of Galilee. And the next day, the multitudes doubled. It seemed that everyone who had been fed with Yosef's lunch was trying to find Yashua again to make Him King. We passed out those twelve baskets of leftovers, but this time they didn't multiply. The baskets were soon empty.

[77] Yashua reproved them in the synagogue that Shabbat at Capernaum. "You seek Me, not because you recognized My glory, but because you ate of the loaves and fish and were filled," He insisted. "Don't work for the bread that perishes, but for the bread that endures unto eternal life."

When they questioned that, He was really blunt with them. "You seek the wrong bread. I am the living Bread which came down from heaven. I am the Bread of Life. To have eternal life within yourselves, just eat My flesh and drink My blood." Oh, did that start arguments! Even some of His best supporters grumbled against Him on that one.

"Does this cause you to stumble?" He asked. "Only God's Spirit gives true Life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak are Spirit and Life. Those whose hearts are set on Life will believe and receive. But those whose hearts are set on the flesh cannot receive this. They know only physical bread, which gives only physical life. They cannot believe so as to receive the Life of Spirit. My words must offend them and drive them away! So, My friends, where are your hearts set? Will you leave Me also?"

Peter responded for all of us apostles, "Lord, to whom can we go? Only You have the words of eternal Life. We twelve have believed and have come to know that You truly are Messiah, the Holy One of God!"

"Yes, Peter. Well said! Well said!" Yashua smiled at us all, and in the same breath, with the smile still firmly on His face, He added. "I Myself have chosen you twelve, yet even one of you is a devil."

Shocking as that statement was, I am ashamed to say that it went completely over our heads. We didn't have a clue that He was referring to Judas Iscariot, who would later betray Him to our religious rulers to be crucified.

He just continued speaking. ***78*** "The Jews seek to kill Me. You go to the Passover in My place tomorrow. You will not see Me there. We will meet back here after the Feast." Sure enough, we never saw Him at the Feast. I don't know if He was there or not, though I can't imagine Him failing to keep the commandment of Moses. Our religious rulers were seething with hatred against Him, and all the more so when they couldn't find Him at the Feast.

Going back to Galilee when it was over, we noticed a group of them heading north, no doubt still looking for Him. We caught up with them to try and overhear what they were saying: "…but how can we condemn Him when all He ever does is good? All the people love Him. All those healings are real, and we can't deny them. Everyone who touches the tassel of His robe is healed!"

"It's not His miracles – it's what He teaches His foolish followers that's so dangerous! His teaching destroys our authority and wipes out our traditions. We've spent a thousand years translating the law into customs that the people can understand and obey, but Yashua simply refuses to obey. A good example is the laws of ceremonial washing. We have taught the people how to follow them, so they will always be ceremonially clean when they eat. But Yashua won't follow our rituals. He seems to have no concept whatever of being ceremonially clean. And now the crowds are starting to follow His bad example…"

We hurried to Capernaum, but Yashua didn't need our warning. We found Him already debating our religious rulers over the subject. He pinpointed their problem, "Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, saying, 'This people honors Me with their lips, while their heart remains far from Me. In vain do they worship Me, teaching the precepts and traditions of men as their doctrines.'"

Yashua maintained that their laws about ceremonial washings missed the point. "Eating with unwashed hands may make a person sick, but has no effect on his spiritual condition. Those laws are just outward controls. They don't touch the heart. For from out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adultery, fornication, theft, slander, false witness… These are the things which defile the man. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile the man."

That made our religious rulers angry, but they turned away, as they knew He was right. While they discussed among themselves what to do about Him, ***79*** Yashua called us aside and we started off for the district of Tyre and Sidon. "They can't understand, because they will not believe," He said. "It does no good arguing with them. Let's find a place outside Israel where we're unknown so we can rest awhile."

As if the Master could actually get away! Even in Tyre a Canaanite woman recognized Him. She pestered us until He healed her daughter. Yashua was reluctant to minister beyond His commission, which was only to "the lost sheep of Israel." But she insisted that even dogs get scraps from their master's table. When He saw her faith, He responded with compassion, as always. I guess with Yashua, faith is more important than lineage or culture. That is a hard concept for us proud Hebrews to accept!

80 We returned to the south shore of the Sea of Galilee. Freddy of Gadara had spread the news of his deliverance far and wide, so this time everyone in Decapolis was eager to see Yashua, even some of the curious Romans and Greeks who lived in the ten Greek cities there. For three days He taught and worked mighty miracles of healing.

Finally, He fed the multitudes there just like He had at Bethsaida; this time 4,000 men with 7 loaves and a few fish. Again we escaped the over-eager crowds in Peter's boat.

81 We sailed across the lake to Magadan in the district of Dalmanutha. Our religious rulers again grilled Yashua, asking for miraculous proof that His ministry was from God. As if He hadn't already performed enough miracles! As before, He refused to oblige them, reiterating that He would give them no sign except that of Jonah.

82 So we got back in the boat and crossed the lake to Bethsaida. They brought a blind man for Yashua to heal, but He just took his hand and led him out of town, to the place where He had fed the multitudes from Yosef's lunch. Strangely, we seemed to forget all Yashua's miracles when it turned out that we had forgotten to buy bread!

Yashua used it as a good lesson. First He spit on the blind man's eyes and rubbed the spittle around. Then He warned us, "Beware the leavened bread of the Pharisees and Sadducees!" We assumed that He was chastising us for forgetting bread, so He explained, "Words are bread to feed the heart. It's hard to see at first, but keep on feeding on the Word of God, the Bread of Life from above. The truth will finally become clear – as long as you avoid the poisoned bread of traditions and laws leavened with the iniquity and malice of our religious rulers."

"Lord Yashua," Sam (the blind man) said hesitantly. "I can see, but… it's all fuzzy. Men are like trees walking."

Yashua touched Sam's eyes again, but smiled at me! Suddenly I saw what He'd been trying to teach us all along, as He had said in that argument over ceremonial washing. It's what we feed our heart. Physical laws and traditions aren't real food. They point to the higher laws of the spirit realms. That is the real food! Those who keep the physical laws but reject the spiritual laws are hypocrites. They see, but 'it's all fuzzy'. Feeding on the spiritual truth behind the physical law brings it into focus, repairing our attitudes of heart and mind. "Finally, everything is clear!" Sam said.

"Yes, it is." Yashua laughed heartily. "Now go straight home. Don't go back to the village, or they'll feed you the wrong things about Me, to try to destroy your faith!"

CHAPTER 16 – TRANSFIGURATION, Summer AD 30

83 From there we went north to the district of Caesarea Philippi, where Herod Philip was tetrarch. I was surprised to be heading away from Jerusalem, so close to Shavuot, but I didn't chide Him. It seemed wrong, but I'd finally begun to realize that Yashua really was continually led by YHWH's all-knowing Holy Spirit. Yashua was meditative and sad, so I walked close, trying to cheer Him up.

We paused to enjoy a meadow by a waterfall of the Hermon River, one of the sources of the Jordan. ('Hermon' comes from a Hebrew root meaning 'consecrated, sacred', from the majestic Hermon mountains and their pagan 'high places'. This waterfall park is a lovely vacation spot for Jews and Gentiles. It is called Mapal Senir in Hebrew, or Wadi Paneas in Greek.) Reluctantly leaving the meadow, we strolled up the path, following the river to its source in the side of Mount Hermon. It is one of the most beautiful places in all of Israel, and we were enjoying it immensely. Yashua casually commented that the river was dedicated to the pagan god Pan by local Hellenistic Romans. The cave from which the waters emerged was known as the Paneas Gates, meaning gates holy to the god Pan. It was supposedly the portal between earth and the gods. "But I call it the gates of hell," He added pensively. "Myriads of demons have spewed from that cave to inhabit, torment, and destroy those who believe in them. It is their own faith that gives the demons power over them."

"Who do people say that I am?" He turned to us, abruptly changing the subject.

I was startled. *Finally, after all the things He has said to offend people, He is starting to be concerned about His public image?* "Well, some say You are Yochanan the Baptizer returned to life. Others think that You are Elijah, Jeremiah, or some other prophet or great teacher."

"And you? Who do you think I am?"

"You are the Messiah! Son of the living God!" Peter again blurted out what we were all thinking, though we had never had the courage to tell Him directly before.

Yashua was pleased with that answer, and commended Peter (and all of us) very warmly. "How blessed you are, Simon son of John!" He paused to give him a big bear hug, then held him at arm's length smiling into his face.

"Peter. Petros. Small Rock. I named you well. What you just confessed is a rock of revelation. It is a rock of faith from the heavenly Father Himself, for no human source could have convinced you of that. I swear to all of you that this rock of revelation and faith is the foundation bedrock upon which I am building My church, and those gates of hell…" He nodded toward the dark cave with the waters flowing forth, then looked at us with a broad smile on His face, "shall never prevail against it!" He laughed. "By My Spirit you shall obtain power to overcome every demon and reclaim for My Kingdom all that they have usurped."

84 Then He grew pensive again. "Please, tell no one who I am. It has become too dangerous for Me. Soon I must return to Jerusalem. I will suffer many things at the hands of our ruling elders, priests, and scribes, and be crucified, and then be raised again on the third day." I must admit, I did not understand what He was saying. It seemed all wrong, especially since the Feast was only a few days away and we were still an awfully long way from Jerusalem.

Good old Peter, still flush with the warmth of Yashua's commendation, took Him aside and quietly chided Him. "If You're afraid of all that, then we won't go up to the Feast. We'll stay here in Caesarea. Our religious rulers will never come way down here. We'll guard You. We'll keep You safe. God forbid that You should ever have to suffer!"

"Get back under My authority, Satan!" Yashua loudly responded. "You are not putting God's interests first, but man's." It shocked us all, especially poor Peter. It didn't make sense. Did God want Him to suffer at Jerusalem? And was He running away from it?!

We continued heading north. That afternoon a crowd gathered to hear Yashua preach, He talked about taking up a cross to follow Him, and losing one's life in order to save it. I must admit, that all went right over our heads. But we understood the last part! He said that some were standing there with Him who would not taste death until they had seen Him coming with power and glory into His Kingdom!

After He had sent the crowds away, we asked excitedly, "Is it us, Lord? Are we going to see Your Kingdom come in power and glory? Is Shavuot the time You plan to lead all Your disciples up to Jerusalem and take over Israel?"

He looked strangely at us, as if we had asked the wrong question. "We will not go up to Jerusalem for this Feast. We will minister here in Caesarea the rest of the week and then celebrate Shavuot alone on the sacred mountain."

I was beginning to doubt Yashua's sanity. How can you celebrate the Feast alone? By its very nature, celebrating the Feast means assembling together. I worried about Him that week. Especially when on Preparation Day He said, "Peter, James, and John, come and climb Mount Hermon with Me. We will pray and celebrate Shavuot there. The rest of you, remain here. You can celebrate the Feast by ministering to the people as they have need."

85 I tried to figure out what He meant. What was it about Shavuot that I was missing? We celebrate the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai. Maybe that is why He wanted to climb Mount Hermon? But climb on a high Shabbat? It sounds too much like work. It didn't make any sense at all.

Anyway, after spending a cold night on the side of the mountain, Yashua woke very early, joyful and eager to get to the top. I was glad that He seemed to have forgotten His earlier gloomy predictions of His suffering and death. We followed along behind Him on the steep, rugged path, trying to keep up. We were worn out when we reached the first peak, at noon, having had too little sleep and too little breakfast. So when Yashua knelt to pray, we all collapsed on the ground for a little snooze. Please don't criticize us. This was a high Shabbat, and we really felt we should be resting. Besides, Mount Hermon is bigger than it looks (9230 feet high). It's a tough climb, even to the first peak. We were almost to the snow line! You try it some time.

Suddenly we awoke, startled by the brightness of the Shekina Glory of YHWH! It was like what we had seen on Yashua at that first Shavuot, except much bigger. The brightness was intense, yet gentle on the eyes, as if to welcome us closer. Yet it was terrifying, all the same, for its radiance transformed everything into a heavenly splendor – holy and purest white, like fresh snow – and by contrast my own sinfulness was exposed as filthy and ugly.

Peter, James, and I trembled on the ground, watching Yashua as He stood and lifted His hands up to heaven. You must understand, the same light that was exposing our sinfulness bathed Yashua in the glory of perfect holiness. His face shone like the sun, and even His garments became whiter than the snow-covered peaks ahead of us.

Then we saw why Yashua had lifted His hands. He was welcoming two angels, descending from the glory cloud. He addressed the 'angels' by name. "Welcome, Moses! And welcome, Elijah! Thank you for coming to share in the power and glory of My Kingdom."

They bowed and voiced their gladness at being invited, and then the three of them got into a joyful discussion of things that simply didn't make sense to me – something about Yashua's suffering, death, and final departure from Jerusalem. They talked about Yashua descending into hell, His fierce battle over the souls of men, and laying down His life to ransom them. I suppose it might have made sense if they were sad and mourning with Him. But they were happy, eager, laughing with excited anticipation.

Old Peter obviously didn't get it any more than I. He blurted out, "Master, it's so good that we're here with You. We can make three Sukkim, one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah!" It sounded so silly I almost laughed out loud. Making Sukkim at Shavuot instead of Sukkot?!

But even as Peter spoke, an azure blue cloud filled with fire dropped down from heaven. The most terrifyingly awesome, and yet compellingly beautiful voice I had ever heard came rolling out like thunder from inside the cloud, "**This is the Son of My Love. Heed Him**!"

We fell on our faces in the dirt like dead men. There can be no other response to hearing the voice of almighty God! Suddenly I understood how our fathers felt when God had thundered down from the top of Mount Sinai! *Celebrate the Feast indeed… we were reliving the Feast! Except this time instead of giving us the law of sin and death, He gave us the law of love and life in Yashua haMashiach!* It was incredible! Instead of the Ten Commandments, now there was just one: "**Heed Him**!" That's all.

Heed Him. Listen to Yashua, pay attention, and obey. So simple, yet so profound and comprehensive. I caught a glimpse of what Yashua meant when He said that the whole Law is fulfilled in a single word: love. When you love Him with your whole heart you have His love for His creation. Then it becomes easy to listen to Him and just walk in harmony with His commands. This was a major breakthrough in my continuing lessons on love.

We were still lying on our faces. Yashua finally came over and touched us. "Arise. Don't be afraid." We looked around. The radiant glory was gone, except the shining smile on Yashua's face. "Let's go down to the others. And don't tell anyone else about this, at least until after I rise from the dead. My glory must be kept veiled until then."

Once again, we didn't understand. We had just seen the glory of almighty God resting upon Him, so why did He keep speaking of suffering and death? And why did He want to keep His glory hidden? Why – if the scribes and Pharisees could just catch a glimpse of this, they'd eagerly accept Him as our King and Messiah! It didn't make sense.

86 As we started down the sacred mountain, we got to thinking. *That was Elijah.* We'd been taught by our scribes that Malachi had prophesied Elijah would come and restore our relationships just before Messiah was revealed. Was this the time for that restoration?

But when we asked Yashua, He again looked as if we had asked the wrong question. "Yes," He said, shaking His head no. "Elijah must come to begin the restoration before Messiah is revealed in His power and glory. But it is also written that Messiah must suffer many things and be despised, rejected, and abused. The truth is that Elijah already came, and they did to him whatever they wished." We suddenly knew He spoke of Yochanan the Baptizer. His 'restoration' ended in Yochanan's suffering and death! *Does Yashua also have to suffer and die? No! Impossible!*

87 After the Feast was over, we went back to Caesarea. We found the other disciples in the middle of a big crowd, arguing with some scribes. Evidently a scribe had brought a demon-possessed boy to them to test them, and the nine had failed the test. The crowd immediately surrounded Yashua, explaining that His disciples had been unable to cast out the demon. As they spoke, the demon dashed the boy to the ground and threw him into the most horrible convulsions. Yashua looked around at the scribes smiling smugly to themselves, and said, "Oh you unbelieving and perverted generation! How long must I put up with you? Bring the boy to Me." Then He turned to the boy's father. "How long has he been like this?"

"Six years – when he was eleven. The demon has often thrown my boy into the fire or water, trying to destroy him. If You can do anything, please have pity on us!"

"That 'if' lies not with Me, My friend, but with you. All things are possible to him who believes."

"Oh…!" The father hesitated, evaluating his own faith. "Master, I do believe, but… but… help my unbelief!"

"That is one request I love to answer!" Yashua responded, touching the father on top of his head.

By this time four strong men had managed to wrestle the boy over to Yashua. They dumped him at His feet. He was in terrible shape. His body was bent and his muscles were contorted. Everyone but Yashua backed off in fear. Even his father was afraid of him! Then Yashua spoke, quietly, but with intense fervency. "Come out of him, you deaf and dumb spirit, and don't ever enter him again."

The boy coughed, threw back his head, and arched his back so hard I heard his spine crack. A horrible, piercing scream came out of his mouth. Then he fell to the ground dead! His eyes were open but rolled up into their sockets. His face began turning blue. I glanced over at the scribes, who were still smiling smugly. *Was this it? Had they won?*

I looked back to Yashua. He wasn't looking at the dead boy, his father, or the scribes. He was looking right at us disciples, with concern on His face, as if to inquire, *Don't you get it – yet? Where is your faith?*

I remembered Yashua's instruction to the boy's father. "Lord, I also believe… but help my unbelief!" I prayed. His eyes met mine. I knew He had heard.

Meanwhile, after some venomous name-calling (such as 'fraud' and others not so nice) the scribes had given up and were on their way back toward Jerusalem. The rest of the crowd was beginning to disperse as well. But the boy's father remained, his eyes fixed on Yashua and an eager smile on his face. I was ashamed. This father now seemed to have more faith than I, even though the boy lying before us was clearly dead as a doorpeg! Yashua again touched his head, this time in a gesture of love and acceptance. Then He took the dead boy's hand and put it in his father's hand.

That was it. The boy was instantly alive and well, and was laughing delightedly in his father's arms. Many in the crowd heard the laughter and turned to see the miracle. But the scribes were already out of earshot. To this day they believe that Yashua too had failed their little test.

Later, Yashua explained to us, "You couldn't cast out that demon because your faith is still small. Even mustard seed-sized faith can move mountains! But," He chuckled, "I must admit, powerful demons like this may also require some intense prayer and fasting."

CHAPTER 17 – JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM for the Feast of Tabernacles, Fall AD 30

88 "We must go up to Jerusalem," Yashua said softly.

"What? Now that Shavuot is over?" I argued.

"For Passover," He responded. "The Pascal Lamb can only die in Jerusalem, you know."

"Of course. But that is not 'til next spring, over nine months away. And what about Sukkot, in three months?" Thomas was still miffed at missing Shavuot.

"That nine months will seem so short, with all that we have to complete before then. And no, I won't be able to celebrate Sukkot with you."

"But Yashua, why not? We always celebrate Sukkot together." We continued to argue like whiny babies.

"My time is come. My ministry here is nearly done. I am the Pascal Lamb. During the Passover I will be delivered into the hands of wicked men and condemned to die. But just as the refuse from the sacrificed lamb is burned outside the camp, I will be slain outside the city gates, to bear the shame and reproach of the sins of the world. Then after three days I will rise again and return to My Father. When you see it, you will believe in Me." He spoke it so clearly, it is a wonder that we didn't catch it.

We all heard Him. But we were in an arguing mode. Instead of just listening to Him as YHWH had so recently told us on the mountain, we continued to try to talk Him out of it or make contingency plans.

"We can just stay here in Caesarea. They'll never come way down here to take You during the Feasts."

"No, John. I've set My face resolutely toward Jerusalem. Get ready to start back to Galilee." We totally missed it. We missed it so badly that on our way back to Capernaum [89] we were arguing amongst ourselves over who would be greatest in His Kingdom. Yashua didn't actually hear us argue, but somehow He knew, as we would see later.

[90] When we reached Capernaum the local tax collectors accosted Peter. "Is your Teacher not even willing to pay the temple tax?" they sneered.

"Uh, of course He is," Peter replied. "But we were out of town on a ministry tour. Uh… we don't have any money. Yashua gave it all away on our tour."

"You're already three months late!" they accused. Peter fled to the house, but before he could explain the situation, Yashua spoke first. "What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth collect their taxes, their own sons, or strangers?"

Simon? My old name when I was a fisherman? Peter got worried that Yashua was thinking of him as a stranger rather than a son. "Well, when You put it like that, I guess just from strangers – their subjects."

"Correct. Consequently, we who are the sons of the Kingdom should be exempt. [Peter smiled and breathed a sigh of relief.] But so as not to cause offense, go fishing one more time. The first fish you catch will have a shekel in its mouth. Give it to them to pay our taxes."

It happened just as Yashua had said – one more miracle to demonstrate Yashua's Kingship over everything in the universe. [89] After that, Yashua took us aside to ask us what we had been discussing on the way home from Caesarea. We kept silent, ashamed that we had been arguing about who was the greatest. Now Peter realized with horror why Yashua had called him Simon – he had led the argument! He confided in me later that this was a major turning point in his life. He began to realize that he was Peter, the rock, not because he was so great, but only as a humble servant.

A young child was playing nearby. Yashua called her over. She responded cheerfully and sweetly, running up and giving Him a big hug. He stood her beside Him, and taught us, "Truly I say to you, unless you repent and become like this child, you can't enter My Kingdom. Whoever humbles himself and becomes dependent, receptive, and teachable like this child will be great in My Kingdom. And whoever cares for such a child in My name, receives Me and My Father who sent Me." I was oblivious to the struggle going on in Peter, but Yashua wasn't. "You see, Peter, it is the least among you who is great in My Kingdom. The greatest one in My Kingdom is the one who makes himself servant of all. But look at this girl. She has seen but a glimpse of My power and glory, yet she believes. She doesn't try to judge Me or argue with Me. She just loves and trusts Me. She wants to learn from Me. She obeys when I call. She is a precious treasure in My Kingdom.

"Whatever you do, do nothing that would cause her to stumble in her faith, for whoever causes even one of My precious little ones to stumble, it would be better for him that a millstone had been tied around his neck and he had been cast into the sea."

I was stunned. She had done nothing for Him but come running when He called and give Him a hug. And He was calling her great, even greater than us who had done mighty miracles in His name? I was more than a bit miffed. Yashua may have sensed my bad attitude [91] when I responded, "Master, we saw someone here in Capernaum trying to imitate You by casting out demons in Your name. We tried to hinder him, for he doesn't follow us."

"No, John. Please, don't hinder him. He who is not against us is working for us. No one who uses My name to perform a miracle will soon speak evil of Me. Indeed, he may even come to love Me!"

"But Master," I reminded Him, "remember when the Pharisees accused You of casting out demons by the power of the prince of demons? You said whoever is not with us is against us! It seems to me that You're not being consistent here." [61] I still was unaware of my judgmental spirit.

"Yes, John. I was speaking then of their heart attitudes. Anyone whose heart is not inclined toward Me is My enemy, no matter how good his deeds appear outwardly. But in this case, I am speaking of their outward actions, and yours. You can't see their heart – you see them serving in My name. Just be grateful that they are working for us, and allow Me to be the one to judge their hearts at the proper time." He looked straight into my eyes.

"So, what about us, Lord? We have done mighty things in Your name! Why do You call this little girl greater than us? She has done nothing for You."

"Nothing? She believes in Me, and she loves Me. That is all I asked of her. What about you? Yes, you have seen many of My miracles pass through your hands, and you say you are ready to die with Me, yet you do not even believe My Word or support Me when I say I am going to Jerusalem to die as the Pascal Lamb. What did you do instead? You judged and criticized Me. You strove to change My plans. You fought with Me. You argued about your own greatness. Thinking you knew best, you tried to usurp the Father's leadership in My life. Look in your heart, John. You don't really believe. As much as I have done with and through you, you don't really accept that the Father's plan for Me, though difficult, is the only way to bring forth My Kingdom."

I looked around. I could see the others had already caught the point. Old Peter was on the ground sobbing. I realized I was the last holdout. But Yashua smiled at me. "It's okay, John. I love you, and I have prayed for you, that when it is over, your faith will be strengthened and you will be able to help others who are wavering in unbelief."

I humbled myself to accept the rebuke, my face burning with shame. Even as I did I was amazed that I was able to do so. This was by far the sternest reprimand Yashua had spoken to me. Even a year ago I would have gotten angry, argued, fought back, defended myself, or gone off in a huff. Maybe it was Yashua's prayer for me. Or maybe it was just the grace of God. I began to see that Yashua's corrections were having an effect on me. I was pleased with the change. I bowed to Him. "Thank you, Yashua, for praying for me. You're right, I don't really believe. I've been horrible about arguing with You and criticizing Your decisions. Please, Master, forgive me and strengthen my faith. I really do want to believe and to support you as the Messiah."

He smiled at me and nodded, and suddenly, all was right again. I was awestruck at how easily and quickly came His forgiveness and encouragement. My heart overflowed with joy as waves of His infinite love flooded me, washed me, cleansing me and strengthening my faith just as I had asked. I determined in my heart that I would never again be the old angry, competitive, arguing, self-centered fool that I had been. Though I failed sometimes (as you shall see) this day really was a turning point in my life. At the very least I was quicker to recognize and repent of my old self-focused, judgmental attitudes!

So we listened as Yashua taught us many things. He explained stumbling blocks and the importance of letting nothing get in the way of our faith. He told the story of the good shepherd, who leaves ninety-nine sheep in the fold to search for the one lost on the mountains. ***92*** He taught of forgiveness and the proper response to being forgiven. Most of all He filled us with love for people, divine love, and His determination that everyone have the opportunity to believe in Him. It was like He was planning to be gone, and preparing us to take over His ministry!

93 Sure enough, when Sukkot came, He sent us on by ourselves. I am ashamed to say that even His own brothers argued with Him about that, and taunted Him about being too chicken to show His face at the Feast. He responded, "The world hates Me, because I testify that its deeds are evil. They even seek to kill Me, but it's not yet My time. However, the world cannot hate you who are its friends. They love you. So you go on to the Feast yourselves."

94 When we got to Jerusalem, the whole city was abuzz with stories about Yashua's miracles, and arguments as to who He is. People kept asking us why He wasn't at the Feast. We explained that He couldn't come because our religious rulers hated Him and wanted to kill Him. After repeating that about a hundred times, we heard a big stir at the temple and discovered it was Yashua, up front teaching the people. No one was more surprised than we!

But everyone seemed to be arguing, or even fighting, over Him. I've never seen such division. They either dearly loved Him and were eager to see Him become their King, or they violently hated Him and wanted to see Him dead.

We tried to warn Him, but our religious rulers were always right there, questioning Him, trying to find fault with Him. "What authority do You have to teach? You've never even been educated! From whom did You get such teachings? Are You just making this all up on Your own?"

"My teaching is not Mine, but the heavenly Father's, who sent Me. If anyone is actually willing to do the Father's will, then he will recognize My teaching, that it comes from Him and I'm not just making it up. The reason you don't know My teaching is that you don't know Father YHWH. He is the Truth! I know Him because I am come from Him. He sent Me and commissioned Me to teach."

Oh, boy! Did that make them mad! They strode off muttering, and headed for the temple guard. As much as I wanted to talk to Yashua, I knew we had to listen in, so I followed them. ***95*** Sure enough, I overheard them ordering the temple guard to look for an opportunity to seize Him – any disturbance, any interruption of their ceremonies – Yashua was immediately to be taken down and hauled off.

I hurried back to find Yashua, but once again He had eluded us. We didn't see Him again until the next day, the Last Great Day of the Feast, as the lamps were being lit for the sixth celebration of Simchat Bet haSho'ayva. As they started lighting the first massive menorah in the Court of Women, there was Yashua, standing in the background. For a moment, His face seemed to glow all by itself, but then the lamp flared up, lighting all the faces around Him.

The people all gave a mighty shout, waving their lulavs frantically with joyous laughter. But Yashua remained back by the wall, looking sad and alone in the vast happy throng. We hurried over to Him.

"Master! We thought You weren't coming." I cautioned Him, "It's dangerous for You to be here. Our religious rulers have given orders for You to be seized and taken down if You interrupt the ceremonies. So be careful, lay low, and keep quiet. Enjoy the ceremonies unobtrusively, like You're doing now. Or hide out in Your sukkah."

"Thank you for the warnings, My friends," He smiled weakly at us. "It is beautiful, isn't it."

"You're not listening to us! And why are You so sad? This is a happy time of YHWH dwelling with His people! You don't have to be sad if You will just be a bit careful in what You say around here."

"This is My last Sukkot with you until it is renewed in My Kingdom. I'm sad because you still don't understand that I must do the will of My Father, even though it means that I be captured and killed. And I am sad that I must leave you, and that where I must go, you cannot follow."

"No, Master! Far be it from You! There are many here who are eager for You to be our King! And we'll stand with You! You can't just…" but He turned and walked away, and was lost in the crowd. It all left me a bit miffed.

We didn't see Him again until morning, during the seventh and final Water Libation Ceremony of Simchat Bet haSho'ayva. We hurried over to warn Him once more to keep His cool and lay low. This was the most dangerous time of the year for Him. We all gathered around Him, and I whispered in His ear. "Yashua! I'm glad we found You. Don't forget, the temple guard is looking for any excuse to arrest You. We'll do our best to protect You, but You've got to try to remain inconspicuous during the ceremonies. Just don't say anything, or do anything rash."

Yashua smiled cheerfully at me and shook His head. "Obeying My Father is never rash." I wasn't sure what that meant, but at least He looked cheerful and calm enough, so we went back to watching the ceremonies.

The high priest had already gotten the golden pitcher of water from the flowing pool of Siloam. He ascended the ramp of the altar and turned toward the silver basin, as the rest of the priests chanted the familiar words of Isaiah 12:

"Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. For the Lord YHWH is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation [Yashua]. ***Therefore you will joyously draw water from the springs of salvation [Yashua].*** *And in that day you will say, 'Give thanks to YHWH, call on His name. Make known His deeds among the peoples. Make them remember that His name is exalted. Praise YHWH in song, for He has done excellent things. Let this be known throughout the earth. Cry aloud and shout for joy, O inhabitants of Zion,* ***for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.'"***

The anticipatory pause… I glanced at Yashua and His eyes met mine. He was beaming joyfully as if to reassure me. The people began their traditional chant: "Raise your hand! Raise your hand!" The high priest dutifully lifted the pitcher high, and poured the water into the silver basin. The chant dissolved into fervent prayers for rain after the long, dry summer, and for the living waters of the springs of salvation (Messiah) for the nation of Israel.

Now the silver trumpets sounded out their thrice sevenfold blast. The Hoshanna Rabbah (Great Hosanna) began. We watched the priests march seven times around the altar singing the Hallel (Praise Psalms – 113-118), to the enthusiastic and joyous accompaniment of the temple musicians. The people were waving their palm branches overhead and shouting their Hosannas and Hallelujahs. It was nearing the climax of the whole day, when the people joined in singing the final verses of the Hoshanna Rabbah. (Ps 118:25-26)

"This is the day which YHWH has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it!" the priests sang out in strong voices as they completed their seventh circuit of the altar.

The people responded: *"****YHWH, save now [Hosanna], we beseech Thee!*** *YHWH, we beseech Thee, send prosperity!* ***Blessed is the One who comes in the name of YHWH…"***

The sound was deafening, with everyone singing their hearts out and the musicians playing triple fortissimo. I glanced over at Yashua. He was just singing out with the rest of us, so I didn't have a clue what would happen next.

"We have blessed you from the house of YHWH. YHWH is light, and He has given us the Light. Bind the festival sacrifice with cords to the horns of the altar. Thou art my God, and I give thanks to Thee. Thou art my God, and I extol Thee. Oh! Give thanks to YHWH, for He is good; for His lovingkindness is everlasting and His mercy endures forever."

The final clash of cymbals faded. There was a dramatic moment of silence as the chills and thrills played arpeggios up and down everyone's spine. In that moment, Yashua stepped forward, to the front of the crowd. His voice rang out loud and clear: "I am your Living Water. I come in the name of YHWH, and My name is Yashua [YHWH saves, Salvation]. If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scriptures say, from his innermost being shall flow rivers of Living Water."

I was paralyzed. Everyone else was backing away, so we who had been hidden behind the crowd were exposed. Yashua was standing between the crowd and the priests. Every eye was on Him, and on us! There was no escape!

Not one soul in the entire temple could have heard Him incorrectly or misunderstood His clear meaning. This was the moment when every observant Jew expected Messiah to come to His temple. Yashua had just announced, in terms no good Jew could possibly misconstrue, that He was Messiah and that He had come to His temple! Now He stood there motionless, arms outstretched, defenseless.

A buzz of voices began to rise. I looked frantically over at the scribes and Pharisees, and then at the temple guards. It was really strange. They were obviously agitated, arguing amongst themselves, but no one was making any attempt to capture Him. I heard voices from the crowd. "Surely, this is the Messiah! This must be the One who was to come." "No! Messiah will not come from Galilee, will He?" "He is a Galilean, from Nazareth, but Messiah must come from Bethlehem, the city of David."

So the whole assembly broke up with arguments and divisions over Him. He just stood there, arms still held out to them. Some came up to Him and bowed or knelt before Him, reaching out for Him to touch them. Others cried out to our religious rulers to have Him seized and removed from the temple, so they could go on with the ceremony. But the elders and the temple guard seemed rooted to their places, and I began to think that we might escape after all.

The captain of the guard looked to our religious rulers, so I pushed through the crowd to overhear their plans. "Why don't you just do your <expletive deleted> job, and arrest Him?" one of our ruling elders swore, letting loose a string of vile oaths. Shocked at the swearing, the captain bowed his head. "Never a man spoke like He does!"

"Are you also led astray by Him?" the elders retorted. "Look at us. Not one of us rulers has believed in Him, have we? But this ignorant and accursed multitude does not know the law."

But at that, one of our religious rulers spoke up in defense of Yashua. "Does our law judge a man without examining Him first?" I recognized him as Nicodemus – the one who had come to Yashua by night and asked about being born again into the Kingdom of God.

"Nicodemus, you fool! Are you also led astray by Him? Are you from Galilee? Search the Scriptures, and see that no prophet ever arose out of Galilee."

"Wait! What about Isaiah 9? '… in earlier times He treated the lands of Zebulun and Naphtali with contempt, but later on He shall make them glorious, around the sea, on the other side of the Jordan, "Galilee of the Nations." Those people who walk in darkness shall see a great light; those who live in a dark land, the light will shine upon them… for a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us. The government will be upon His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, and Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, even on the throne of David and over His Kingdom, to establish it and uphold it with justice and righteousness from then on, for all time. The zeal of YHWH of Hosts will accomplish this.'"

Nicodemus certainly knew the Scripture! But the rest of our religious rulers angrily turned their backs on him and began discussing among themselves what to do next.

I timidly came up to Nicodemus. "Thank you, sir, for sticking up for Him," I said. "You are very brave. I just wanted you to know – Yashua isn't actually from Galilee, though He has spent much of His life and ministry there. He was born in Bethlehem. He is of the tribe of Judah and the lineage of King David. His family moved to Nazareth because of the persecution of Herod." I stopped. I saw a new fire in Nicodemus' eyes, as he looked around wildly for Yashua in the multitude. "I believe!" he shouted back to me as he strode off through the raucous crowd.

That day Yashua made many strong enemies, but He also won many believers and faithful friends. I wanted to chastise Him for foolishly interrupting the ceremony like that, but I sure had to admire His courage. Perhaps He was finally ready to take over His Kingdom! Maybe He would take charge this very evening, at the final celebration of Simchat Bet haSho'ayva! I determined to stand with Him and try to protect Him when He spoke out.

But the Festival of Lights that evening went by without an interruption. It was one of the most beautiful ever, and I kept expecting Yashua to speak out, but He just enjoyed it with us and kept silent. I felt a bit letdown. He had missed His opportunity! If Yashua had spoken up at that glorious celebration they surely would have crowned Him King.

Instead, we finally got sleepy and decided to go to our lodgings for the night, but [96] Yashua wouldn't go with us. We were a little worried that He might remain with our religious rulers, who traditionally kept themselves awake all night by quoting Torah passages to each other, but no. He just left us and prayed all night on Mount Olivet.

Early next morning, which was the high Shabbat of Shmeni Atzeret (The Eighth Day of Assembly) on which we celebrate Simchat Torah (Rejoicing in the Law), He was again teaching in the temple. He was there for the sunrise ceremony, in which the priests march through the temple courtyard to the Eastern Gate ('Gate Beautiful') at the first rooster's crowing, then turn their backs on the rising sun and declare their allegiance to the temple. He was there while the crowd gathered for the Torah recitations.

We came with the crowd. We found Him just as the scribes and Pharisees brought out an immoral woman and cast her to the ground before Him. We could see right off that it was a trap – they wanted Yashua to excuse her immorality, so they could accuse Him of breaking the Law of Moses, right there at Simchat Torah! That certainly would have finished His ministry, and they could get rid of Him before He interrupted their public Torah recitations.

"We caught her this morning," they claimed, "in the very act of adultery! The Law of Moses says we must stone her. So… what do You say?"

Yashua didn't answer. He wasn't even looking at her, or at them. He was strangely stooped, writing with His finger in the sand of the temple courtyard.

Suddenly it all became clear. This was no prostitute. Look at her elegant robe. I thought of the all-night party, the freely flowing food and wine, our religious rulers keeping each other awake all night, laughing and joking and sometimes even getting drunk. They were standing over her, leering at her while pointing accusing fingers and pestering Yashua. They probably had gotten her drunk and seduced her themselves, just so they could set the trap for Yashua. I wondered how I could warn Him.

Yashua stood, took a step back, and gestured toward her. "Yes, stone her…" I couldn't believe my ears! *Yashua had always granted mercy rather than judgment before. Couldn't He even recognize what had happened?* But He continued, "And let the man who is free from this sin of lust or immorality cast the first stone." He stooped back down to finish His sermon in the sand.

The scene changed abruptly. The woman was still weeping quietly on the ground. But the Pharisees were silent, and no longer pointing at her. Instead, they were looking down at the woman with a mixture of horror and guilt on their faces, and casting furtive glances at one another. One old man with a red face turned and wandered off. Two others quickly followed him, and soon all of the older men had gone.

The younger men glanced over to a middle-aged priest standing, arms akimbo. He looked like their ringleader. He glared coldly down at Yashua. Yashua looked up sadly, into his eyes. Suddenly his face flushed. I could see the guilt written all over it. He must have planned the whole thing – probably seduced her himself. He could not meet Yashua's gaze. He turned and fled, the others close behind.

The woman was still weeping quietly, face in her hands. Yashua touched her shoulder. "Where are your accusers?"

She flinched at the unexpected touch, then looked around and caught her breath. "They've gone? I don't know. They accused me of terrible things, but I… I don't remember! I was partying with them last night. I had too much wine and got drunk. I'm so sorry!" She put her face to the ground at Yashua's feet and burst out weeping again.

"Then does no one condemn you?"

She looked around again. "I guess not, Master."

"Neither do I condemn you. Your fault was in trusting your leaders as if they were righteous, when in fact they were deliberately trying to get you drunk and seduce you. Now go home. From now on, put a guard over your heart. Don't allow yourself to be trapped by sin anymore."

Her look of grief changed to astonishment, then to gladness, and finally to gratefulness. She bowed to Yashua, kissed His foot, got up, and fled into the crowd. I was amazed. Mercy had triumphed over judgment after all. Yashua slid His foot across His sermon in the sand, but not before I saw the words He had drawn there: "Sin is the trap. I am come to set the captives free."

The traditional Scripture recitations for Simchat Torah went smoothly. Everyone respectfully listened as the final chapter of Deuteronomy was read, followed immediately by the first chapter of Genesis. Several of our elders stood, one at a time, and gave lengthy dissertations about the importance of the Law, and the relationship between Torah and various customs of Sukkot. The last one made the observation that the Torah was like the Festival of Lights they had celebrated that night. Just as the great menorahs gave light to all of Jerusalem, so the Torah gave light to all of Israel. Those who walked by its light would not stumble; those who didn't were walking in darkness. Then he held the scroll of the Torah high and everyone bowed and worshiped. It was all very inspiring.

At noon, as the priests were about to dismiss the crowds for lunch, Yashua stood to speak. The crowd grew silent, and a priest nodded to Him. It was His right to speak. He had waited until the proper time, without interrupting or causing any commotion. The priests only hoped that He might say something they could use to discredit Him.

97 His eyes closed momentarily, then: "**I Am** – the Light of the World. Everyone who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the Light of Life."

You could have heard a pin drop on the stone pavement of the temple. Once again, there was not a person present who could have heard wrongly or misunderstood His meaning. Indignant muttering reached my ears: "What incredible arrogance! He's claiming to be the great 'I Am'! That's blasphemy!" A bold Pharisee shouted. "We cannot accept Your testimony, as You alone testify of Yourself."

"You judge Me only by what you see. But your tradition requires you to believe the testimony of two. I bear witness of Myself, and My Father bears witness of Me as well."

"Your father? Where is Your father? He died…"

"My Father is YHWH. You don't know Him, because you don't know Me. You are from below, of this world. My Father and I are from the heavenly realm and not of this world. I only speak and do as My Father has taught Me. Therefore, just as I said unto you, *you shall die in your sins – unless you believe that* ***I Am Messiah."*** He turned and spoke to the crowd. "You are truly disciples of Mine only if you abide in My Word. Merely reading Torah will never bring you to Truth and Freedom unless you come to Me, for it all points to Me. If you will come to Me, then you shall know the Truth, and the Truth shall set you free."

That bold Pharisee responded. "We are the children of Abraham. We've never been enslaved to any one. How can You say, 'The Truth shall set us free'? Free from what?!"

"Truly I say to you, sin is a trap. Whoever sins is the slave of sin. The slave is cast out of the master's house, while only the son remains. If therefore the Son shall set you free, you shall be free indeed."

"Abraham is our father. We are freeborn!"

"Then do what Abraham did. You are trying to kill Me. Abraham never did that. Name one time when he tried to kill any whom My Father sent. But no, you are doing the deeds of your real father…"

"At least we were not born of fornication, as You were. Our real father is God Himself." He spat it out expecting the accusation to shame Him to silence.

"Which of you can convict Me of sin? …any sin? If God were your Father, you would love Me, for He sent Me. You are of your father the devil, and you do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and a liar, for he is the father of lies. Therefore you cannot believe Me, for I speak Truth."

"You're a filthy Samaritan!" "You have a demon!" The Pharisees were beginning to angrily shout out bad names, like spoiled children. I think they realized that they had no proof of His 'illegitimate' birth.

Rather than respond to their infantile name-calling, Yashua turned away from the Pharisees. Reaching out His arms, He spoke to the crowd, "If anyone keeps My Word, he shall never see death."

"Now we know You have a demon. Abraham and the prophets all died, yet You claim that keeping Your words will keep someone alive? That's utterly preposterous! Are You claiming to be greater than our father Abraham?"

"I claim nothing for Myself. It is My Father who makes the claim for Me – My Father, the one whom you say is your God, but whom you don't even know. Abraham eagerly rejoiced to see My day, and now that he has seen it, his faith is rewarded and his longing is satisfied."

"What balderdash! You're not yet fifty years old, and You claim to have seen Abraham?"

"Truly I tell you – before Abraham existed, **I Am.**"

There was dead silence for a few moments, while the immensity of His claim sank in. Then the angry shouts began anew. "What blasphemy! He's making Himself out to be God! We have no further need of testimony. He must be stoned! According to the law, He must be stoned! Stone Him! Stone Him!" They grabbed Him and dragged Him out of the courtyard and over to the edge of the platform on which the temple is built, gathering stones along the way.

He followed meekly. There was really nothing we could do to help Him; there were just too many of them. But as we watched, praying desperately for a miracle, He lifted His eyes up to the heavens, then turned and walked through their midst back to us. It was incredible! Their eyes could no longer see Him, like He was invisible. When they were ready to throw their stones, no one was there.

We laughed and gave Him a big hug, relieved that He had eluded them one last time. "Now, let's scramble, before You get into more trouble," I said, [98] trying to hurry Him past the temple gates.

"What's your hurry? Afraid for Me?" Yashua laughed with us, enjoying the little joke He had just pulled on the Pharisees. "Let's stop to help that poor blind man by the gate. Do you know him? He has been blind from birth."

"From birth? Whose sin was it then that caused his blindness? His, or his parents'?"

"Actually, it wasn't anybody's sin. You jump to the wrong conclusion. He was born blind just so the glory of God's perfect works could be displayed in him this day. The night is soon to come, in which no one is able to work. But as long as I'm in the world, I am the Light of the World, as I told the Pharisees."

He spat on the ground and made clay. As He applied it to the blind man's eyes, He said, "I am Yashua. Go wash your eyes in the pool of Siloam. You will become My little object lesson to those blind Pharisees who just tried to stone Me. Maybe they'll open their eyes to see you."

We glanced back at the Pharisees. They were still 'blind' and milling around, totally confused at how He got away. They were unable to see Yashua not fifty yards distant.

We returned to our lodgings, still chuckling at Yashua's little joke. But the next day when we started to pack up to go home, Yashua stopped us. "We will stay in Judea awhile longer. Don't you want to know the rest of the story?"

So the next Shabbat we returned to the temple. There beside the Gate Beautiful we saw the one who had been born blind. He was praising God and trying to tell his story to everyone coming through the gate.

Yashua walked straight up to him and said, "Do you believe in Yashua, the Son of Adam?"

"Yes I do, Sir. He healed my eyes, though I was born blind. Isaiah says only Messiah can open the eyes of one born blind. But Sir, I don't know who He is."

"Look at Me." Yashua placed His hands on the man's shoulders, looking him in the eyes. "It is I."

"I believe! I believe!" And he fell down at His feet and worshiped Him, kissing His hands and feet and drenching them with his tears. Yashua raised him up, gave him a hug, and then urged him, "Please, tell My disciples your story since we last saw you."

"Okay. I had no trouble finding the Pool of Siloam. I'd been there many times. When I washed off the clay from my eyes, I instantly had perfect sight. I ran right back to the temple to find You, but didn't really know who to look for. So I just stayed at the temple the rest of the day, praising God. The Pharisees found me there and started asking questions. Remembering what You had said about my being an object lesson to them, I cheerfully explained how it had happened. They seemed indignant that You had healed me on the high Shabbat of Shmeni Atzeret. They tried to get me to call You a sinner, but I refused. I told them that You must be from God, or You wouldn't be able to do such miracles. So they threw me out of the temple. But it is all worth it just to know You!"

By this time a small crowd had gathered, among them some of the Pharisees who had tried to stone Yashua on Shmeni Atzeret. Yashua spoke loudly, so they could hear. "For judgment I came into the world, so those who are blind may see – and those who see may become blind."

Those Pharisees caught His meaning instantly. Their faces turned red, and they angrily retorted, "We're not blind. We see exactly what's going on around here."

Yashua responded quietly, "No. You perceive nothing. If you would admit your blindness, I could heal you and free you from your sin. But in your stubborn insistence that you can see, the blindness of your sin remains."

If I had said that, I would have used a sarcastic tone, to stab 'em to the heart. But that is not how Yashua said it. His tone was gentle, as if entreating the Pharisees to repent.

The crowd around us had gotten quite large. Yashua turned to them, smiled, and began to teach.

Again, I was amazed at His teaching. He repeated His previous claims about being the living Word, the wisdom of Torah, the Water of Life, the Light of the World, and the fulfillment of Sukkot. Then He also added several new analogies. [99] He said, "I am the door of the sheepfold. Only by entering through Me can you be saved to go in and out and find good pasture. The one who tries to enter the sheepfold without going through the door is a thief. He comes to kill, steal, and destroy. But I am come that you might have Life, and have it more abundantly!

"I am the good Shepherd. I know My own, and they know Me. I call My sheep by name. They hear My voice and follow Me. They won't follow a stranger but will flee from him. I have other sheep as well, who are not of this flock. I will bring them also, so they shall all be one flock with one shepherd. As any good shepherd, I lay down My life for My sheep. I have authority to lay it down and take it up again. This is the commandment I have from **My Father.**" He emphasized it in such a way that everyone knew just exactly who He was claiming His Father to be!

And once again, as Shabbat ended, there was a vigorous controversy between those who believed Him, and those who angrily swore He was insane, filled with demons, and speaking heinous blasphemies.

CHAPTER 18 – FINAL MINISTRY CAMPAIGN, the Seventy, Lazarus, Winter AD 30 / Spring AD 31

[100] That night we again began packing to head back to Galilee. It was none too soon for me to get away from this hot spot! But again Yashua stopped us. "My friends, I will not go back to Galilee this winter. The harvest here is too great. Gather My closest male disciples in the area. We will start a new ministry campaign from here in Jerusalem."

I couldn't believe it. That was really asking for trouble! But we sent out word. Soon seventy committed disciples had gathered. He sent them out, just like He had sent us out from Galilee. He gave them the same commission: heal the sick, cast out demons, and preach that the Kingdom of God is come. He impressed upon them how short the time, how vast the harvest, and how few the laborers. He told them what cities He Himself planned to visit, and told them to prepare the way for Him by ministering in His name. The campaign was to last six months. One week before Passover next spring they would all meet back at Mary, Martha, and Lazarus' big house in Bethany of Judea. (They were strong supporters of the ministry [101] ever since Yashua had stayed at their home and ministered to them.)

It was really cool to watch them. They acted like eager young puppies, with their first chance to minister in the name and power of Yashua. They went out with such zeal and enthusiasm that I and the other eleven apostles were reinspired! We followed behind the seventy, supporting Yashua on His planned circuit.

[102] The cities we visited were already eagerly expecting us, due to the ministry of the seventy. It was great! They did all the work, and we got to come along and reap the harvest. Frankly, it was the most fun I've ever had in my entire life! I could see that Yashua enjoyed it, too.

[103] Since we were still in the area, we took a break from the ministry circuit to spend Hanukkah at Jerusalem. I had never gone up to Jerusalem at the Feast of the Dedication – we didn't usually travel in the winter. But it shouldn't have surprised me. Nothing had changed since Sukkot. Our religious rulers were still trying to trap Yashua, or discredit Him, or get Him to discredit Himself in what He said. They caught us at the temple gate, and asked, "Why are You keeping us in suspense? If You are Messiah, just say so, clearly, so everyone may hear."

"I did say so, clearly. Still you do not believe. The works I do in My Father's name bear witness of Me. But you do not believe Me because you are not My sheep. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them. They also know Me and follow Me. I give to them the Life of All Ages – Spirit Life! They shall never perish, nor shall anyone pluck them out of My hand. My Father YHWH, who gave them to Me, is greater than all. Certainly no one could ever pluck them out of Father YHWH's hand! **I and My Father are one.**"

And there it was. Deja vu, all over again. The angry shouts and cries of blasphemy, dragging Him out toward the edge of the hill, picking up stones to stone Him, the whole bit. This was really getting old. I just stayed there by the gate, kneeling in prayer. Trying to defend Him was futile, and He had proven before that He had no need of our defense anyway. One loud shout came through, "For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy! Because You, being a man, make Yourself out as God!"

I chuckled to myself at that. We'll see if He is just a man, when they start throwing the stones! *I was finally starting to believe that He really* ***is*** *God incarnate, and that no stones or anything else could ever hurt Him.*

Sure enough, He walked through their midst again and came back to us. But this time rather than laughing about eluding them, He was sad, almost weeping. "It's time to pack up and leave here. Their hearts are just too hard. [104] We'll move our headquarters down to Bethabara beyond the Jordan [in Perea], and continue our ministry circuit from there. We have less than four months left."

"That's smart, Master! Yochanan's old neighborhood." I tried to cheer Him up. "That should keep us out of the way of those dopey ruling elders who want to stone You."

"John, you are worried about the wrong things. Our religious rulers cannot touch Me until it's time. I had hoped to reach them! We still must come back to Judea before Passover. We go to Perea because I have many dear ones there who believed Yochanan, but have not yet had the opportunity to know Me."

It was a relief to cross the Jordan. The district of Perea was much more receptive to our ministry, and we reached many new believers. Though none of the seventy had been here, the people had been well prepared for Yashua by Yochanan, who had told them to expect Him. It was sure fun to see people healed, but even more I was growing to enjoy seeing them cleansed from sin and given faith in Yashua! I realized that was the real ministry. When they truly acknowledged Yashua as the Messiah and bowed to worship Him, I shared His joy and overflowing love.

105 Two months later came some bad news. Lazarus, of Bethany in Judea, was deathly sick. Mary and Martha loved Yashua and supported His ministry. Their letter pled for Yashua to come and heal their brother before he died.

Yashua merely said, "His sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God and His Son." So we continued the ministry beyond the Jordan. I was relieved. Judea was still way too dangerous for Him.

But two days later, Yashua seemed to change His mind. "Let's go up to Judea again."

"Rabbi, do You think it's wise? Our religious rulers are still seeking to stone You there."

"Still fretting about that? Let's take each day as it comes. Brother Lazarus has fallen asleep. I must awaken him."

"But Lord, if he is sleeping, it means he's getting better."

"Lazarus sleeps the sleep of death."

"Dead? Oh! I'm so sorry! Then we're already too late. Poor Mary and Martha. We should have gone when we first heard he was sick." My accusation was a bit sharp.

Yashua just smiled. "For your sakes I'm glad we didn't. Now you can see the power and glory of God through Me, that you may believe. Let's go to him."

Exasperated, Thomas made the side comment, "Okay, let's go, guys, that we may die with Him!"

The trip took four days, as Yashua took His time and ministered to others along the way. ***106*** As we reached Bethany, Martha came running out to greet us. "O Lord! Thank You for coming. If only You had been here earlier, my brother would not have died. But I still believe in You. I know that whatever You ask of God, He will give You."

"Your brother shall rise again."

"Yes, Master. I know he will rise again in the general resurrection on the last day."

"Martha! **I am the Resurrection and the Life.** He who believes in Me has Life even if he dies, and everyone who has Life through faith in Me shall never die. Can you believe that, dear Martha?"

"Yes, Lord. I believe. You are Messiah, the Son of God, even He who the prophets of old said would come to us."

And with that powerful confession, she turned and fled back toward her home. I was stunned. It sounded like she had more faith than I – I who had been with Him His entire ministry! In no time she was back, with her sister Mary trailing her, and many of their friends and relatives not far behind. Mary was sobbing. She flung herself at Yashua's feet and wailed, "Oh Master, if only You had been here earlier, I know my brother would not have died."

I'd never seen Yashua so deeply moved. He knelt down beside her, put her head on His shoulder, and wept with her for a long time. In fact, for a while nothing but weeping could be heard in the whole group. Then someone said, "How much He must have loved him…" and another voice, "But this is the One who opened the eyes of the man born blind! Could He not have kept him from dying?"

At that, Yashua stood and dried His eyes. "I weep not for Lazarus. He is in a far better place. I weep for you and for your children. The power of sin and death is so strong here. Even among those of you who have believed in the Life I offer, your continuing faith in the power of death maintains its fatal grip. Though Lazarus would prefer to remain where he is right now, I must break your faith in death, so you can receive Life. Where is he buried?"

They led us to the tomb, a cave with a large stone over the entrance. "Roll away the stone!"

"But Lord, it's been four days already! There'll be an awful stench!" It was Martha, who had just given such a powerful confession of faith in Yashua. What had become of her faith? Yashua was sure right about the power of our negative faith in sin and death.

"If you choose to believe, you will see the power and glory of Father YHWH." So they rolled away the stone. Yashua looked up to heaven and prayed out loud, I think mostly for our sakes. After His prayer, He shouted into the darkened tomb, "Lazarus, come forth!"

I'm not sure what I believed. Certainly I had seen a lot of miracles, even several people raised from the dead before. So I knew that Yashua could do it. But on the other hand, I remember staring at that dark hole and thinking, *What if he doesn't come out? Yashua really stuck His neck out on this one! If this doesn't work, our ministry is finished.* Maybe I too still had too much faith in the power of sin and death. Then a ghostly apparition materialized in the entrance. We all jumped and gasped. Though he was clearly all bound up in grave wrappings, not a person moved to help him. We all had chills playing pinochle on our vertebrae.

"Hey! Loose him and let him go free," Yashua chided, breaking the spell. We gathered around Lazarus, untying the grave clothes, laughing, and hugging him and each other. (Yes, I sniffed him. He smelled a bit sweaty, but with no hint of corruption.) Some in the group also came and knelt before Yashua, confessing a renewed faith in Him. He just stood there enjoying it all, wearing the biggest grin.

107 That evening during the celebration at his house in Bethany, Yashua grew more serious. "One of our number has betrayed us to the Pharisees and Sadducees. Since the Sadducees do not believe in a resurrection, we have gained some new and powerful enemies among them, and they have now reached agreement with the Pharisees to kill Me. I can no longer walk publicly among them. We must move our ministry headquarters again. We'll go north into the Judean highlands to the city of Ephraim."

Now, that was a smart move. The people in that area were good to us. Some of the seventy had gone to the city before us, healing, cleansing, and telling everyone about Yashua. So when we came, they welcomed us royally. They put us up in the finest home in town. We used that as our home base for the next two months, until it was time to return to Jerusalem for Passover. It was a perfect location – on the edge of the wilderness, where our religious rulers never went, yet near enough to Judea so we could finish visiting the towns Yashua had told the seventy to prepare for Him. Though we still went out to minister every day, our time in Ephraim was like a grand vacation, after Judea!

CHAPTER 19 – FINAL ASCENT TO JERUSALEM – 13 Days Before Passover – Nisan 1 (W/Th) Apr 11/12, AD 31

The month of Nisan came quickly. We were to meet the seventy at Bethany of Judea on the week before Passover, so we packed up on the first of Nisan for our final ministry circuit. We took the road going north toward Galilee, to visit the last of the towns on Yashua's itinerary. I did a quick tally and was amazed. There were 208 Judean cities and towns in Israel between the Wilderness of Judea in the south to Mount Hermon in the north and between the Great Western Sea to the vast Arabian desert that lies beyond the Mountains of Abarim. (That is not counting the ten Greco-Roman cities of the Decapolis.) As near as I could figure, with this circuit Yashua will have visited every single one of them over the last two years. Clearly, He wanted every Israelite to have at least one opportunity to believe in Him. But now that He was almost done…?

108 After going through Samaria, we headed down toward the Jordan to visit Aenon and Salim. We reached a small village between Mount Gilboa and Mount Ebal. Ten lepers, one a Samaritan, stood off the path, waiting there for us. Some of the seventy had been there, but had been unable to heal them and had told them to wait for Yashua.

They were obediently waiting. "Lord Yashua, Master! Have mercy on us!" they called. "Go show yourselves to the priests," He called back, without a pause in His pace.

Hmm. That seems a bit hard-hearted! I thought. *The nearest priest is probably way back in Samaria or Shechem.* The ten looked sadly at each other, turned and trudged up the road. It would be doubly difficult for them, as they had to cry out "Unclean!" to everyone they passed.

I looked at Yashua and frowned. *Well, I guess anyone can have a bad day.* I decided to just let it pass and not chide. I was totally unaware that I had once again slipped back into my old judging mode. We left them and entered the village to minister. That afternoon, we heard shouts, "Praise God! I'm healed! I'm healed! Yashua! Wait up!"

We turned and saw the Samaritan leper come running up to us, perfectly well. His skin looked as soft and clean as a baby's, and his fingers and toes had all grown back. He fell prostrate at Yashua's feet. "Thank You, my Master; my Lord; my King! You have my undying gratitude!"

"Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? Is it only this foreigner who will give glory to God?" He looked at us shaking His head. What could we say? We Jews do have our pride! But at least I was learning to be less prejudiced against Samaritans. "Rise, Gerald. Go your way. Your faith has made you completely whole. The other nine were cleansed only on the outside. Your sins are forgiven and you have been cleansed in your heart and soul as well."

I knelt down, my heart condemning me for my earlier judgment of Yashua. I had been wrong. Somehow Yashua had known, when He had sent them away to the priests, that the nine Jewish lepers were not yet able to receive His forgiveness and cleansing. Yet this Samaritan had. How could He have known? "Yashua! That was awesome! It must be the time for Your Kingdom to come!" I declared, thinking about my tally of the cities and towns of Israel.

109 The commotion had drawn some local Pharisees to the crowd. They heard my comment, and immediately got interested. "Teacher, if You are Messiah, then tell us when the Kingdom of God will come. How will we know it?"

"God's Kingdom isn't coming in a blaze of glory with outward signs to be observed; it is already in your midst. Don't look for outward signs. Days are coming when the outward signs will be negative. If that is all you can see, you will miss it completely. My day will come silently, like the dawn, gradually brightening the sky from east to west. But first I must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation. Only those who remain awake, prepared and alert, will receive Me. The rest will be eating, drinking, buying, selling, sowing, reaping, marrying, and partying right up to the day they are swept away in their blindness and ignorance. They will be like those wicked men in the days of Noah or in the days of Lot. Of two sleeping in a bed, one will be taken and the other left. Of two grinding at a mill, one will be taken and the other left. Of two working in a field, one will be taken and the other left."

"Where will they be taken, Lord?"

"Into judgment, where the decaying corpses are, where the vultures gather. Only after the wicked are taken away will the sons of the Kingdom fully inherit the Land of Promise, to dwell in it forever and blossom like the Rose of Sharon in a well-watered garden."

Once again my heart was strangely thrilled with thoughts of the Kingdom, and of my growing love for this humble King before me, who ruled with compassion and love rather than force, even though all the powers in the universe seemed to be at His fingertips.

11 DAYS BEFORE PASSOVER– Nisan 3 (F/S)

110 He told us stories and parables all the way down to the Jordan and back into Perea, where we spent Shabbat. And what a Shabbat it was! I'll never be the same! I look back on that day and call it my birthday into the Kingdom!

111 It all started with this group of judgmental, hard-hearted Pharisees. They were waiting for us when we returned. They started grilling Yashua on the subject of marriage and divorce – some really tough questions. But He answered them beautifully (and even explained them to us later in private). He told the Pharisees that although Moses permitted divorce due to the hardness of our hearts, yet God's design was for a sacred and indissoluble oneness between a man and his wife, beyond our comprehension.

And right in the middle of this heavy discussion, the people of Perea were laughing and dancing around us, weaving wreaths of flowers to throw on Yashua, and even bringing their children up to Him to bless them. I couldn't believe it. I'm glad they appreciated our ministry here, but couldn't they see we were busy? This was important stuff! I considered it my job to make sure that the ministry was not impeded. These people were getting in the way! ***112*** So I tried to shoo the kids off. Yashua saw what I was doing and spoke sharply to me, "John, let the children to come to Me. Don't hinder them. The Kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God as a child shall not enter it at all."

Yashua glanced at the Pharisees, standing there in their fine robes with their arms crossed sternly over their hard hearts, then looked back at me. Suddenly I understood. "Just look!" I whispered to my brother James. "See how the little children love Him?" They were joyfully dancing circles around Him and running up to hug Him. Those whom He had helped and healed were openly proclaiming their gratitude, worshiping at His feet. "They don't try to criticize Him, grill Him, or judge Him; they just love Him! His Kingdom is a Kingdom of Love!"

Overhearing me, Yashua walked closer and smiled. "That's right, John. Children receive the Kingdom so quickly because it is easy for them to simply open up their hearts to My unconditional love. Adults have more trouble because they have to judge everything first…" He glanced over at the Pharisees, who were glaring at the children with scowls on their faces. "…and their judgment often boils down to what is convenient, what suits their own desires, what lines up with their religious dogma, or what fits their agenda, rather than what is right in God's sight."

He looked deep into my eyes, and my knees felt weak. He was not just talking about children and Pharisees. This was about me! And I was no better than those Pharisees! Ever since I had first met Him I had been judging Him, evaluating Him based on my own ideas and desires, and loving Him only for things I judged as good. Suddenly I felt overcome by love – not my growing but conditional love for Him, but His infinite and unconditional love for me! I knelt at His feet, put my face to the ground, and bawled. I was unworthy of such love! Yet He reached down, drew me close, and wrapped His arms around me, hugging me until I felt enveloped in a sea of love. It was like I was a child again, wrapped in my father's embrace, except now my Father was the infinite, almighty YHWH in the Person of Yashua my Savior.

I don't know how long that moment lasted. When I again became aware, the Pharisees were nowhere to be seen, and I was totally surrounded by children of all ages, all sharing in this infinite love of Yashua. And now I was one of them. I had just become a child again. A lifetime of hard-hearted judging and coldness had melted in puddles at my feet. Now there was no more evaluating; no more looking for miracles to bolster my faith; no more analyzing or coldly calculating the goodness of His deeds; no more comparing myself to others to assure myself that I was okay; no more anything at all except pure unreserved acceptance of His love for me and wholehearted reflecting of His love back to Him.

I died that day. Died to my self. Yet I still live, but it is only for His Life in me. Now you begin to see why they call me the Apostle of Love. Not my love at all; oh no! My heart was hard and cold. I was never very good at loving anyone but myself. My brother James will testify to that. In fact, I still have times when I forget and slip back, as you will see.

But I was the first of Yashua's disciples to fully receive His love, and it transformed me that day. My weakness became strength in His hands. From then on I overflowed with love for Him – for everyone around. It was incredible. I can never be the same. Even now as I dictate, I weep in sheer joy for the pure, holy love we share, me and my King Adonai Yashua haMashiach my Savior. Bless His name!

If you, my friend, have not yet tasted of this incredible love of Yashua, I urge you – do not delay! Nothing else compares to it. Though it were to cost the world and all its treasures, the price would still be small. Once you have known it, everything else of value falls into perspective: relationships, possessions, responsibilities – all come into balance with God's most precious gift: divine love, and the peace and boundless joy that go along with it.

113 But the day was not over yet. That afternoon, a few of the same Pharisees who had been grilling Yashua returned with a warning. "You'd better not go back to Jerusalem! King Herod is planning to kill you. You must flee far away where he can't find you."

"Herod? Go tell that fox, 'I must continue healing and casting out demons for two more days, and on the third day I shall reach My goal.'" He smiled wryly. "It just would not do for a prophet to be slain outside of Jerusalem, now would it?" Then with the smile still frozen on His face, His tears started to flow. He lifted His eyes toward the Judean hills and cried out as if in incredible agony, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, like a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you wouldn't let Me. Behold, your house is left to you desolate! You shall not see Me again until you can say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of YHWH!'" (Ps 118:26) Then He put His face in His hands and sobbed.

I was shocked, and didn't have a clue how to respond. But strangely enough, it was the Pharisees who responded. "Uh, Sir," one of them said. "We're all gathering at my house for a Shabbat feast in a few hours. Would You care to come and join us?"

114 I refused the offer, smelling a trap, but Yashua shushed me. His tears turned to a smile and He nodded His acceptance. "Thank you, My friends," He responded, with no trace of animosity at the grilling they had just given Him. "May I bring My disciples James and John as well?"

"Yes, of course. The meal will not yet be ready, but if You follow us we'll lead You to the house."

Right off the bat the reason we had been invited became clear. They had there a poor fellow suffering horribly from edema, barely able to walk. They were all watching to see if Yashua would heal him on Shabbat! It was a trap, exactly as I had suspected. And Yashua had fallen for it.

Before I could figure out how to help Him, Yashua spoke up. "Is it lawful to heal on Shabbat?" The Pharisees remained silent. Yashua smiled broadly at them, as if their silence was an affirmative answer. "Thank you, friends. You have shown wisdom." Turning to the sick man, He gave him a hug, slipped some money into his pocket, and sent him home, perfectly well, joyfully praising God.

"Hey!" one of the Pharisees started to object. But before he could get any further, Yashua looked straight at him and said, "Which one of you, having a son – or even just an ox or a lamb – fall into a well on Shabbat, would not care enough to pull him right out?" Once again, the group fell silent, Truth dawning on their faces.

Other guests began to come, and there was the typical scramble for the best places near the host. We, of course, ended up at the very far end of the table, the lowest place of all. But as the meal began, a fascinating thing happened. When Yashua began to speak, everyone else grew quiet and every eye turned toward Him. I almost laughed out loud. The table had been turned! Now, we were at the place of honor, and all those who had fought for the places of honor near the host were the farthest away!

Yashua used this as an example to teach us about humility, pointing out that their struggle for seats of honor was only hollow pride, but the real honor comes when the Master sees your humble place and raises you to a place of honor. "Everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, but he who humbles himself shall be exalted."

He then spoke directly to the host, at the far end of the table. "Speaking of honor, My friend, most of your guests you invited only to return the favor on another Shabbat. But this one thing you did right, and I encourage you all to do the same. Invite the poor, the sick, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and then send them home with a blessing as we've done today. You will receive the greater blessing, since they have no means to repay you. Then My Father in heaven will smile upon you, and you shall receive His blessing at the resurrection of the righteous." Looking pointedly at the host, Yashua paused, His face breaking into a beaming smile. "You pulled a sick person off the street at random, not caring about his healing but only wanting to trick Me. But I turned your little trick into a great blessing for you. When by your silence I obtained your permission to heal him, My Father was pleased. He is smiling upon you and your home this day. He has allowed Me to work miracles among you and to teach you many things of the Kingdom of YHWH. The resulting blessings upon you and upon your house shall never cease."

I was in awe! I could hardly believe it! This had never happened before and never would again. Right there in that house full of previously antagonistic Pharisees, Yashua freely taught many things of the Kingdom. It was almost like they had all become His disciples! They even responded, with exclamations like, "Blessed is everyone who shall eat bread with You in the Kingdom of YHWH!" All during the meal, all afternoon, and to the end of the Sabbath at sunset, He taught them, with stories, parables, encouragements, prophecies, and even other miracles and healings among the Pharisees themselves. They began to thaw. Instead of just grilling Him to find fault, they asked real questions, and thought about His answers.

When it was over and the guests were starting to leave, Yashua walked over to the host and put His hand on his shoulder, saying, "Thank you, My friend, for inviting Me and permitting Me to heal and to minister here. I said the blessings upon your house shall never cease; even now it begins. Your youngest grandson died about noon today. The sounds you hear outside your gate are mourners, bringing you the sad news. But for your sake I grant him life. He will grow up to bring honor to your family name. Go visit him this evening. Give him and his parents a hug from Me!" He was so stunned he couldn't speak as we went out the gate. Sure enough, a group of mourners were just approaching, but Yashua shooed them off, saying, "You are mistaken. The boy lives. Return home and give glory to God." Our erstwhile host grabbed his coat and scurried after them, calling, "Thank You!" over his shoulder.

115 We stayed in Perea an extra day (Nisan 4), healing, teaching, telling parables, ministering to the multitudes, just because the good people there were so open to us. Yashua wanted to personally touch each one – and now I finally understood. His love also flowed to them through me. It was like I had never known love before! I finally saw the incredible, infinite preciousness of each individual. I wanted to spend the entire day with each one!

But it was time to move on if we were to make it to Bethany in time to meet the seventy. ***116*** We packed to leave. But as we started out, a Pharisee came striding up. I recognized him as a leader of the Pharisees, a very wealthy and influential young man who had listened earnestly to Yashua yesterday at the Shabbat feast. I was startled and pleased when he knelt before Yashua and pleaded, "Good Teacher, my name is Rabbi Sha'ul. Your lessons on the Kingdom of God impressed me greatly. Especially when You talked about 'eternal life with YHWH'. What must I do to inherit this eternal life?" What an opportunity for Yashua to score big time with our religious rulers!

Yashua's answer was just the opposite of what I would have said. He challenged him, "Why did you call Me good? No one is good, save God alone." The Pharisee's jaw fell open. I could see by the look on his face that he knew exactly what Yashua meant: *Are you ready to acknowledge Me as God, or at least as the Messiah sent from God?*

He finally closed his mouth, without answering. I knew right then that we had lost him. Yashua continued, grilling him on the Ten Commandments, which he defensively claimed to have perfectly kept from his youth (though anyone over the age of six had to know he was stretching it a bit). Finally Yashua told him to merely sell everything he had, give all the money to the poor, and follow Him.

That got him. There was just no way. This was a very rich guy. To ask him to give it all away was like asking a fish to give up swimming, or a bird to give up flying. I mean, give me a break! None of us could have met Yashua's challenge if we had been that rich. He shook his head sadly and turned to go. We had made another enemy among the Pharisees, instead of a friend.

I rolled my eyes in exasperation, trying to think of a nice way to tell Yashua to be more tactful. He turned to us, and I knew that one of His 'learning moments' had come.

"How hard it is for those who are wealthy to enter the Kingdom," He started out. I looked around and noticed that most of the others were glaring at Him, too. I wasn't the only one to feel that Yashua had just blown His big opportunity. And I didn't even realize I had slipped back into my old judging mode.

Yashua could tell that none of us was really listening yet, so He said it again, another way. "It is easier for a large rope to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God."

Suddenly we were reminded of our own little 'riches'. We realized that even poor working folk like us had little pet treasures that we were unwilling to give up. After His lesson on the divine love of the Kingdom, I was shocked to notice some petty things that I was still hanging on to in my heart. All our lives we Jews had been taught that riches were a sign of God's blessing! It was startling to find that they were a hindrance to entering the Kingdom. This was getting to be a major paradigm shift. More things on which I had placed my affections flooded my consciousness. *These affections! Good Lord! They were in competition with my affection for Yashua!*

"Who then can be saved?" I asked, breathless.

He looked at me and smiled, and I knew that I had caught the point. "With men, it is indeed impossible. But all things are possible with God. All it takes is a miracle of divine grace." He looked at me again, and I could sense that very miracle being worked in my own heart. I closed my eyes and bowed in worship, giving in to the miracle, allowing Yashua's Spirit to take anything He found in my heart and transform it by His divine love. There must be nothing left I would not give up for Him. All my other affections must bow before divine love!

Then I heard old Peter blurting out, "Behold, we have left everything and followed You!" and I knew that Yashua was dealing with Peter's heart, too. Yashua nodded to him and smiled. "Yes, Peter, and I tell you truly. For you twelve who follow Me to the death, in the Restoration when I sit on My glorious throne you also shall sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left his home or land or family for My sake and for the sake of the good news of the Kingdom, shall receive a hundred times as much now in this present age, and in the age to come, eternal life. But beware; even now all is not as it appears outwardly. Many who consider themselves first and most deserving, shall find themselves last or even cast out entirely; while many who consider themselves the least deserving shall find themselves first."

117 Then He told us the parable of the landowner who went out five times during the day to hire workers for his vineyard, yet the ones who were hired the last hour got the same wage as those hired first thing in the morning. "So don't assume," He concluded, "that just because you have worked the longest or the hardest that your reward will be the greatest. For the first shall be last and the last, first."

I am ashamed to say that I had kinda stopped listening after the part about the twelve thrones and us disciples judging over the tribes of Israel. Most of the others were in the same boat, latching on to the good stuff about our rewards in the Kingdom. If Matthew had not been taking shorthand throughout Yashua's talk (as usual), the rest of what He said might have been lost to history. I glanced over at James and then at our mother, Salome, who had come with us on this last tour. I wondered how they felt.

Thus we missed it completely when Yashua continued, *118* "We are going up to Jerusalem now for Passover, and this Son of Adam will be delivered up to the chief priests and scribes. They will condemn Him to death and deliver Him to the Gentiles. They will mock Him, spit upon Him, scourge Him, and finally crucify Him just as the Pascal lamb is slain. Then three days later He will rise again."

I heard Him say it; we all heard Him, but somehow it just didn't click that Yashua had to die first. That was incomprehensible. Our minds were all filled with visions of power and glory. We were sure that we were heading toward Jerusalem now to take over the government.

119 I went over and whispered to James. He was feeling the same way. Now the euphoria of all that Yashua had done to make us such a great team rather swept away our good sense. Arm in arm, we went over to Mom, and James whispered to her. Then before I knew it, there was Mom, bowing before Yashua. "Please, Rabban, I have a request."

"Yes? What do you wish?"

"Command that when You come into the glory of Your Kingdom, my two sons, James and John, may sit next to You, on Your left and on Your right."

Indignant gasps came from the other disciples, and James and I turned red as a beet. But Yashua neither chided us nor laughed at us. He looked at us seriously and said, "Are you able to drink the cup that I must soon drink, and be baptized with the baptism into which I must soon be immersed? Do you have any idea what I…"

"Yes, Master, we are able!" we spoke in unison.

He shook His head sadly, and I could tell He was on the verge of being exasperated. "You have no comprehension of what you are saying. Yes, you shall indeed drink My cup and be immersed into My baptism, though not because you are able! However, to sit at My right and left hand is not Mine to give. Those places of honor were determined by My Father YHWH before time began."

He turned to the rest of the group and beckoned us closer. "Don't be indignant at James and John." He knew what we were thinking. "You've all been having visions of grandeur here. I understand. That is just human nature. The rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them. The greatest of them exercise their authority over the weak. But in the Kingdom of God it is not so, and it must not be so among you. The great ones among you are the servants, and the one who desires to be the greatest of all must become the servant of all. Look at Me, for I am your example. I did not come to sit around and be served, but to serve, and to give My life as a ransom for many.

"Now we've got to get started for Bethany. Tomorrow begins the week before Passover, and the seventy I sent out are arriving at Lazarus' house even as we speak. This is one Feast that I…" His voice faltered, "…will not miss."

9 DAYS BEFORE PASSOVER– Nisan 5 (S/M)

120 A lot of people were on the road that afternoon, and it was very slow going up the steep path toward Jericho. Yashua didn't seem in any hurry, talking and laughing with them, touching and healing their sick, answering their questions and delivering them from their burdens of guilt and sin. The sun hung low and the shadows were long even before we reached Jericho, and I wondered if we would get any farther this day.

As always, we saw some beggars at the city gates. They had learned about Yashua from the seventy. When they heard the commotion and found out who was coming, they began screaming at the top of their lungs, "Yashua, Son of David, have mercy on us!" Their handlers (who were making a rather substantial living off their begging) tried to shut them up, but they just yelled all the louder.

Now when Yashua heard the term 'Son of David' (which is a Messianic term), His ears perked up. He told us to find out who was calling and bring them. We discovered it was two blind men, Bartimaeus and his young friend Billy. We led them through the crowd to Yashua, who asked them, "What is it you want Me to do for you?"

"Rabboni, we want to see!"

"Then receive your sight and go your way, for your own faith in your Messiah has made you well," He responded, gently touching their eyes.

Then we started off again, but the blind beggars didn't exactly 'go their way'. Oh no. After marveling for a few minutes in their newly recovered eyesight, they began following along behind us, shouting glory to God, and explaining what Yashua had done for them to anyone who would listen. The happy crowd responded with joy and praises to God. It was always thrilling to see the power of God in our midst, and the excitement was catching. It spread in waves through the city, bringing others to find out what the commotion was all about.

Yashua was delighted and energized by the crowd. He continued to minister to everyone He passed. But when we finally reached the far side of Jericho Yashua seemed intent to continue toward Jerusalem, though it was really getting quite late. Jerusalem was another five hour climb. I did not relish arriving there after everyone was sound asleep.

121 But then, just outside Jericho's west gate, Yashua stopped under a sycamore tree and called out loudly, "Zaccheus, come on down. I'm spending the night at your place." I saw this short tubby fellow struggling to climb down the tree. He was obviously rich – his robe and head-dress (and overhanging belly) indicated his high status. But a lot of people in the crowd groaned and started to grumble when they heard Yashua call his name.

"Who is this Zaccheus? And how come everyone seems to be grumbling?" I asked a local fellow.

"Zaccheus is the chief of all tax collectors in the Arabah north of the Salt Sea. I can't believe your Master is even willing to talk with him. Look at him! El Tubbo Lardo! How do you think he got his filthy riches? And you're spending the night with him?!!"

We looked at him. He was bowing low again and again before Yashua, saying with each bow, "Lord… Master… Rabboni… I am so pleased… Thank You for calling me… I'm honored that You would consider staying with me…"

This might have gone on a long time, but Yashua stopped him by reaching down, lifting up his head, and looking into his eyes. That did it. Zaccheus collapsed to his knees with his face on the ground and began to bawl.

The crowd stepped back, looking at each another with raised eyebrows or shrugs. This was a side of Zaccheus with which they were not familiar. Their whispering and grumbling died down.

After letting him wail for a bit, Yashua again lifted him up, smiling at him. "Why do you weep, My short friend?"

"Because I am a sinner, Lord – a wicked, greedy old man. I am unworthy to be in Your presence."

"Well, well. What are you going to do about it?"

Zaccheus stopped blubbering, wiped his eyes, and thought for a minute. "Behold, Master, I will give half of my possessions to the poor. And everyone whom I have defrauded or stolen from, I will return to him four times as much!" He spoke it loudly.

A ripple of surprised delight swept through the crowd. It never ceases to amaze me how quickly the mood changes when the pocketbook gets involved!

Yashua gave Zaccheus a big, happy hug, kissed him on both cheeks, and then raised His arms for silence from the crowd. "You criticized Me for even stopping to talk to this tax collector, because you thought he was too big a sinner for the Kingdom of God. But he, too, is a child of Abraham. Today, salvation has come to him and his house, for the Son of Adam has come to seek and to save those who were lost. From this day forward you shall not call him 'that despised tax collector', but rather your trusted friend and benefactor, paragon of wisdom and goodness in Jericho." He smiled at the crowd, obviously trying to encourage their faith, though I saw some wrinkling their noses or shaking their heads in that cynical 'yeah, right' attitude.

"And now, My friend," turning back to Zaccheus, "I am looking forward to a fine evening of fellowship around a meal at your home. Shall we go?"

Zaccheus took Yashua's arm and led us all back into town, his head bobbing furiously as he insisted on bowing to everyone he saw along the way. He actually turned out to be a wonderful host, too, honoring us with a sumptuous feast and raptly listening to every word that Yashua said.

Yashua had a good time, too. He spent the evening telling stories and parables which made us all think. One in particular really sticks in my mind. A friend of Zaccheus told us about Archelaus, son of Herod the Great, and the beautiful palace he had built in Jericho. Archelaus had left his servants in charge, and had gone to Rome to receive Caesar's coronation for the kingdom he had inherited from Herod. He had taken over a year to return. While he was gone some of his servants had taken advantage of his absence for their own benefit. Of course they were caught and summarily slain when he returned.

Yashua smiled. "You know, the Kingdom of God is rather like that," He responded. I've heard Him start out with those same words at least a thousand times. It seems like just about any subject under the sun reminds Him of some aspect of the Kingdom of God.

Yashua continued, "You all are thinking that I am about to receive My Kingdom from My Father, and you're right. But it won't happen as you expect. I'm not going to just walk into Jerusalem and take over – ascend to the throne of David – just like that.

"Allow Me to illustrate with a parable. Once upon a time, a certain nobleman was called to a distant country to receive a kingdom for himself. Before he left, he called his trusted servants, gave them a reserve of funds, and instructed them in taking care of his estate in his absence.

"Well, he was gone a long, long time. Much longer than they expected. Some of the servants remained faithful and built up the nobleman's estate. Others did poorly. Some did nothing at all except to help themselves, and a few stole from him or let their portion of the estate go to ruin.

"Then suddenly one day, when they weren't expecting him (and some had forgotten about him) he returned in power and glory, having received his kingdom as well as riches and legions of soldiers. He immediately rounded up his servants and demanded a strict accounting of what they had done while he was gone.

"Those who had done well with his estate were given authority in his kingdom, to rule with him over the cities for which he was now responsible. But those who had done poorly and had wasted and ruined his estate… Well, the little they had was taken away. They were cast into the dungeon, tortured, or even slain for their treason."

We all looked at each other. The implication was pretty conclusive that Yashua was not planning to immediately appoint us, His servants, into positions of authority in His Kingdom, but rather that He would be gone for a long time, testing us, to see if we would remain faithful servants during His absence. But of course that was ridiculous. We all knew it would only be a few months, or a year at most, before He would take over. Just look at how popular He was already! We justified our thinking by noting that for Archelaus, a 'long time' had been only one year.

8 DAYS BEFORE PASSOVER– Nisan 6 (M/T)

We slept in luxury that night. The next morning we awoke refreshed, and prepared to travel on to Bethany to meet the seventy. I was relieved that we were right on time. Zaccheus served us a lavish breakfast, then in traditional Eastern manner, begged us to stay just one more day.

We thanked him profusely for his invitation and began the intricate process of politely declining, when to our amazement, Yashua accepted! Had He forgotten about the seventy already gathering at Lazarus' house? Tonight would begin the seventh day before Passover, the day we were supposed to meet!

Yashua saw our questioning looks. He explained His choice when Zaccheus went to the kitchen to give his servants their orders for the day. "You have to be flexible," He said, "to just follow the leading of Spirit. I too thought we'd be heading for Bethany by now, but as I prayed this morning Spirit bade Me stay. Father must have something more here for us. I'm sure the seventy will have a good time celebrating their victories, even without us. As much as I'd enjoy the party, Father's ministry here is more important."

What a day it was! All day, from breakfast to after dark, a steady stream of people came visiting. These were not Zaccheus' friends – oh no! These were people whom he had wronged, cheated, stolen from. I had no idea any man could have so many enemies! They had all heard the fast-spreading news of his public change of heart, and his promise to repay fourfold any he had wronged. So they hurried over to get their share. Most were demanding, angry, bitter, belligerent, suspicious, accusing; some even came armed and threatening. Zaccheus would never have survived – he would have broken down and reneged on his promises – if it hadn't been for Yashua there beside him.

Yashua loved them all. He kept smiling the whole day through. He healed them of their bitterness; He soothed their anger; He placated their hostility. His sweet, gentle spirit brought peace to the arguments, enabling them to agree on how much Zaccheus had cheated them.

Then when Zaccheus made good his promise, and counted out into their hands a full four times that amount, you could just see the sunlight come back into their eyes. It was just so ultra-cool. One minute they would be arguing bitterly. Then as the money poured into their outstretched hands, their mouths would drop open and big smiles would appear on their faces. Even tears would come to their eyes as they finally realized that it was all real. He had meant just what he had said. He really was a changed man!

Finally they would look to Yashua, and realize for the first time the awesome power of the salvation He had wrought in this household. Then Yashua would have the opportunity to work the same salvation in them! It went on all day, over and over – so many that Yashua had us disciples ministering, too. What a day! It was incredible!

7 DAYS BEFORE PASSOVER– Nisan 7 (T/W)

I have to estimate that over a hundred families came into the Kingdom as a result of that day, for each man that went home from there certainly brought his whole family to that same faith in the salvation of Yashua.

Late that night as we went to bed (exhausted), I realized how significant this one day delay was. By following the Spirit instead of our own plans, one of the most populous (and wealthy – and wicked) areas of Israel had been reached for the Kingdom of God.

But we were a day late. The seventy had gathered last evening. And this morning of all mornings, Yashua picked to sleep in. We finally roused Him, but even then He didn't seem at all anxious about leaving. Zaccheus served us another lovely breakfast and he and his visitors (who were mostly friends by now) just sat around and chatted with Yashua for hours. It was nearly noon before we took our leave of 'Bob' and headed up the hill toward Bethany. We kept glancing back as long as he remained in sight. Sure enough, Zaccheus continued to live up to the private nick-name we had jokingly given him: his head continued to 'bob' up and down in loving worship toward the One who had saved him from his greed and self-centeredness.

122 As we neared Bethany, toward the end of the seventh day before Passover, we were stopped by a man I did not recognize. He obviously knew Yashua, for he boldly came up to Him with a brief bow and said, "Rabboni, everyone is looking for You, and the chief priests and Pharisees have given orders that if anyone sees You they must report it. They are determined to seize You as soon as You show up, before the Feast, because they can't control You. You're too popular with the people. So please, Master, don't go up to Jerusalem! Hide Yourself! You've got to…"

"I know, My friend. Thank you for the warning, but you needn't worry about Me. They cannot take Me before the appointed time. And no, I will not go to Jerusalem now. We'll take the shortcut around behind Mount Olivet, leading directly to Bethany. I have an appointment to meet My disciples there. You return to Jerusalem. For your own safety, tell no one of our meeting."

"Okay… Uh… You won't go up to the Feast, then?"

"I will go wherever the Spirit leads Me, for where He leads Me is perfectly safe, even if He leads Me to My death. Thank you for your concern."

I could see that one set him back a bit. He walked off, up the road to Jerusalem, shaking his head and wondering how death could be safe.

We took the path around the back side of Mount Olivet. But instead of continuing on to Lazarus' house, now only fifteen minutes away, Yashua stopped halfway. He led us to climb up a bit off the path to a secluded place on the mountain, and asked us to pray with Him for one hour.

"But Master, we're already a whole day late…" I started to argue, then bit my tongue. *How could I argue against the Master after all He had taught me about love and trust and following the leading of the Holy Spirit? Was I really still judging Him according to my own human understanding?*

Knowing the struggle going on in my heart, He looked at me and chuckled. "John My beloved, we are one hour early. You will see, then you will believe. Blessed are they who believe without first having to see."

Even that gentle rebuke stung like a whip. Was my love and faith really so small that I had to see to believe? I spent that hour in deep prayer, wrestling with God for the answer. It seemed like minutes before Yashua touched my shoulder, then lifted me up with a smile and a cheery, "Time to move along, John."

6 DAYS BEFORE PASSOVER– Nisan 8 (W/Th)

We reached Bethany just after sunset. We were exactly 24 hours late. We found a large crowd around the homes of Simon and of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha. The seventy had obviously stayed the night camped on the hill around their homes, and had spent the day partying there. As we walked up, they gathered around us, excitedly talking all at once. Yashua strode through the mob, shaking hands, giving greetings and hugs, until He reached Lazarus.

Finally, to bring a little peace and order to the crowd, He shouted out loud, "Lazarus, My brother! So good to see you! You look well! Thank you for hosting all My rowdy friends. So, tell Me the news of the last six months."

"Six months? How about the last six minutes! Do You realize that if You had come six minutes earlier You'd be in chains in the hands of the scribes and Pharisees right now? They came here one hour ago, searched the entire area for You, and left down that road to Jerusalem, just six minutes before You came down the path from the backside of Mount Olivet. We are all under strict orders to report to them immediately as soon as You show up."

One hour? Six minutes? My head was spinning. I looked over at Yashua, and He returned my gaze with a wink. I staggered to my knees, mouthing the words, "I believe!" But Yashua had turned back to Lazarus and was laughing uproariously. "What a great joke on them! So aren't you all going to rush right down and report Me to them?" And the whole multitude broke up in laughter and backslapping. What joy! What oneness! What love! *And what a much-needed faith builder for me!*

123 The seventy stumbled over each other to tell us the stories of their travels – stories of freedom from bondages, fantastic healings, deliverance from demons, and restored joy and faith and hope in Messiah among those who had been mired in sorrow and hopelessness. "Why, Master, even the demons obey us in Your name!"

"Yes! I was watching you. I saw Satan himself fall like lightning to the ground – with his demons coming down like raindrops behind him. I have given you authority to tread upon those serpents and scorpions – over all the power of the enemy! Nothing can harm you! Yet rejoice not in this, that the spirit world is subject to you, but rather rejoice that your names are written in Father's Book of Life in the heavenlies. Yes! Rejoice in this! Rejoice in this!"

Overcome with joy, He fell to His knees with His hands and face lifted up to the heavens. "I praise and thank You, Father, Master of heaven and earth, that You hide these wondrous things from the wise and powerful, yet reveal them to these children. Yes! Father! Yes! It is so, for so it seems good in Your sight!"

Oh what a party we had that night! On into the wee hours of the morning around the campfires, there were grand stories, feasting, jokes, and the finest of fellowship. I, of course, was rejoicing with the seventy, and was not even thinking about myself, when Yashua smiled at me and nodded. In a flash I remembered that I had wanted to be the star of the party a year ago, after He had sent us twelve out to minister. Because of my wrong attitudes of pride, I had never been able to share the incredible things that James and I had done in the power of Yashua's name. I suddenly realized that Yashua wanted me to share them now, and at the same time, I was startled to discover that I no longer wanted to be the star of the party! Somehow, Yashua had dealt with my pride. I was perfectly content to let others take the limelight. The thought rejoiced my heart, and I just returned Yashua's smile and kept silent.

"It's okay, John. I'd really like to hear your story now." Yashua gave me a hug. The crowd quieted.

I looked around. Every eye was on me. So with another look at Yashua's encouraging smile, I stood. "A year ago, Yashua sent twelve of us out just like He sent you seventy," I began, shaking my head. "But I had so many bad attitudes at the time it is truly a miracle what Yashua accomplished through us. You'd never know it now, because James is my very best friend, but back then I used to fight him on just about everything. Yashua's love healed our relationship and made us a great team." James nodded, grinning from ear to ear. "But my worst attitude was my pride. I wanted the credit for what Yashua was doing through us. I wanted to be the star of the party when we returned." I could hear murmurs from the group and realized that my point had hit home with more than a few of the seventy.

"Yashua taught me a lesson I shall never forget. He said, *'If you were ministering in your own name, or for your own glory, you could have accomplished nothing at all.'* That is so, so true. I'm sure you all have found it to be true in your ministry as well. To Yashua belongs all the glory for any good we may have done." I looked around, couldn't think of anything else to say, and sat down, amazed at how much I had changed from the glory-hound I was a year ago.

But Yashua nudged me. "Come on, John My beloved. You're not getting off that easily! At least you've got to tell us the story of Simon."

"Well, really, James should tell that one…" I began, getting back to my feet. "I would have failed miserably…" I glanced over at Simon the leper and saw him beaming up at me, his baby-soft skin glowing in the campfire light. "When I first saw Simon, he looked so horrible that I, well, I just had no faith for his healing. His skin was gray and dead, his hands and feet were terribly deformed. He was calling out to be healed, reaching his arms toward us, but I was terrified, ready to turn and run. It was like, well, like your worst nightmare. All my life I had been taught that lepers are unclean – to stay far away – and here was one reaching out to touch me!

"But James gave me an encouraging shove toward him, whispering, 'John, remember! What would Yashua do?' and I saw him lift his eyes to YHWH in prayer. Suddenly, with a boldness not at all mine, I reached out, touched Simon, and prophesied his healing in Yashua's name. The power of Spirit through James' prayer nearly knocked us both over! Right before my eyes, Simon was healed, just as you see him now." I looked down at my hands. "It was incredible; these hands… it was like a bolt of lightning flowing through them. It was so obviously all of God and none of me – I don't know why I ever thought I should get any of the glory. I'm s-s-sorry, Master!" I shuddered.

"John, John, this is not time to be sorry! You're already forgiven. This is the time to rejoice! You did it, John! You obeyed and accomplished My will! And Simon, his family, and all of us receive the blessing of your obedience!"

I sat back down at Yashua's side, again overwhelmed at His forgiveness and love. But Simon was already standing. "You think it was hard for John? I had been a leper for over twenty years. All that time I had to stay away from people and cry out 'unclean' everywhere I went. My own family – all those I loved – I had to stay away from them for fear they would catch my leprosy. So when I heard that Yashua had healed a leper in Galilee, I got excited and started looking for my own opportunity. Then here came James and John! As they ministered to people I heard them say to each one, 'In the name of Yashua our Master…'

"That was all I needed. His name thrilled me – and still does. There's power in Yashua's name! As soon as I heard it I knew I'd be healed. I just knew it! That was what gave me the courage to break the quarantine laws and approach James and John as I did. In the name of Yashua – YHWH saves – I have been saved from this horrible living death! I and all my family are eternally grateful. We count it a great privilege to be able to return some of the blessing by sharing our home with His servants." Simon, wide-eyed, breathless, and a bit red-faced, abruptly sat down, making me realize how shy he normally was. This was the first time I had heard his testimony from his own lips.

"Thank you, Simon, for your boldness in sharing your heart." Yashua was now standing. "I, and all of us here, very much appreciate your generosity in working with Lazarus to provide for us. Let's hear it for Simon!" … much enthusiastic clapping and cheering. "And let's hear it for Lazarus, Mary, and Martha!" … the clapping continued. "Now, let's hear it for My faithful ministry team, James and John, whose obedience and courage made it all possible!"

Suddenly I was overwhelmed. I couldn't believe it. *They were all applauding for me! As if I was the star of the party!* The words of Yashua to the Pharisees when He had healed that fellow of edema became vividly clear to me that day: "Everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, but the one who humbles himself shall be exalted."

We slept in the next morning. It was nearly noon when the seventy began coming to Yashua to say their farewells. They needed to go to be with their families, so they could complete the purification for the Passover and select their Pascal lamb. The lamb had to be cleaned, inspected for blemishes, anointed with oil, and brought into each home by the Tenth of Nisan, four days before the Feast.

5 DAYS BEFORE PASSOVER– Nisan 9 (Th/F)

124 By dinner time that evening, we were pretty much down to just the twelve and a few of our wives or mothers, plus Simon and his family and Lazarus, Mary, and Martha, so we crowded together for dinner in Simon's house. He graciously wanted to host us all, even though his house was much smaller than that of Lazarus next door. I shall never forget that dinner, as long as I live. My thoughts were drifting off to tomorrow, attending the ceremony for bringing the Pascal lamb from Bethlehem to the temple, and purchasing our own lamb for the household as the law required – the customary details of preparing for Passover. Yashua had said nothing about it, so we assumed we would just do it as it had been done ever since the Exodus.

But as we all were reclining after dinner, with Sandi (Simon's wife) and Martha cleaning up the dishes and putting away the leftovers, Mary surprised us all. She had a little bottle of the finest, most expensive perfume, made of pure spikenard. She came up behind Yashua, and before anyone realized what she was doing, she broke the seal and poured the perfume all over His head. It drenched His hair and ran down over His clothes, filling Simon's tiny house with the most exquisite, powerful fragrance.

We were stunned speechless. We looked at each other wondering what to say about this brazen extravagance – we who were always pinching pennies to try to keep the ministry afloat. Judas Iscariot, who was our treasurer and kept the ministry purse, did his duty by giving Mary a proper scolding. "Why did you waste this entire bottle of expensive perfume? It could have been sold for nearly a year's wages and the money given to the poor!"

We all nodded our heads in hearty agreement. (Little did we know back then that he only said it because he used to pilfer money from our purse, if we had any!)

But Yashua stopped him short. "Let her alone. You will always have the poor with you, but you will not always have Me with you. She has anointed Me in preparation for My burial. She has understood what the rest of you have missed. Today is the Day of Preparation. At some time today before sundown, every family in Israel will buy a Pascal lamb. They will bring the lamb home, clean it, inspect it to be sure it has no blemish, anoint it with oil, and, as the sun sets and Shabbat begins, they will bring it into their homes to live with them for four days, until it is sacrificed as their offering for sin.

"That is a picture of the true Pascal Lamb. Mary has looked at the picture and recognized the One it portrays. She has inspected Me and found Me without blemish. She has anointed My head with the finest of perfumed oils. And she has invited Me into her house for these next four days before My death and burial for the sins of the world. I tell you truly, wherever the good news of the Kingdom is preached around the whole world, what she has done for Me will be mentioned in honor of her."

At this, Mary, who had been beaming up at Him, bowed her head to softly weep. The rest of us felt shamed by our insensitivity and lack of perception.

However, Yashua was not chiding us, merely teaching. He chuckled and changed the subject to ease the sting. "Do you think the seventy could actually keep quiet about My arrival here? We must thank our gracious hosts and return to Lazarus' home to greet the visitors!"

Sure enough, the visitors were already knocking at his door by the time we got back. From then until late in the evening a steady stream of friends stopped by to greet us. Many were those whom Yashua had healed, not just from Jerusalem, but also from other towns we had visited on our tour. They were all in Jerusalem for the Feast. As soon as they heard that Yashua had come, they just had to see Him. I'm sure they also came to see Lazarus, since the news of his resurrection from the dead had spread far and wide.

Many of them again warned Yashua about our religious rulers' orders to report Him so they could seize Him. And some had further news. It seems that now even Lazarus was on their hit list because his resurrection had caused so many to believe in Yashua. Yashua thanked them for their warnings and assured them that He'd be careful.

But careful for Him seemed to have a different meaning than for the rest of us. The very next morning He told us, "Now that I'm anointed as the Pascal Lamb, I must present Myself before all the people for their inspection. But don't worry. Even our religious ruling elders, however much they grill Me and accuse Me, shall find no blemish in Me." He didn't even seem worried about yesterday's threats.

125 He then sent a few of us down Mount Olivet to the road connecting Bethany with Bethphage, and told us to go into Bethphage to "get a donkey and her yearling colt, on which no one has ever ridden."

We found that exceedingly strange. First, because it was at this time that all the people were gathering to hail the Pascal lamb as the priest brought it from Bethlehem to the temple for the official ceremonies there. And second, because we didn't know anyone in Bethphage who owned a donkey, and even if we found one we fully expected to be turned down.

We found the animals as Yashua had said. Sure enough, when we began untying them, the owners came out to stop us. We said what Yashua had told us to say, simply, "The Master has need of them."

"The Master? [Gasp!] He is here for the Feast? Oh, praise the holy name of YHWH forever and ever! Yes, by all means take them! God's blessings upon your heads! Will He be coming this way? We must get ready!"

"I think He's going with the crowds to see the Pascal lamb brought up from Bethlehem," I replied. "But how did you know whom I meant when I said, 'the Master'?"

"Yashua healed my paralysis. And besides, never a man spoke as He speaks. He is 'the Master' of whom all other esteemed rabbis are as nothing. He might be the Messiah! We have hope that He will become our King in Israel!"

I looked closely at the young man and his lovely wife and baby, then beyond them to their small but comfortable home. Slowly recognition dawned. "Oh! You are Joshua! He healed you in Capernaum – when your four friends made the hole in the roof to let you down. How did you…"

"Yes, I'm Joshua ben Levi. That was two years ago, shortly after the Feast. You're wondering how I went from a paralyzed beggar to this…" He cast a loving glance at his wife and their baby daughter. "YHWH's blessings have been so richly upon me these last two years. I've worked hard, and He has blessed the labor of my hands, even my going out and coming in. I am so grateful! And it all started when Yashua healed me and forgave my sins. Take the donkey and her colt. It is an honor and privilege for me to give back a little of all He has given me."

We led the donkey back up the path. The colt followed happily behind. I pondered how in the world Yashua knew that the one He had healed in Capernaum had settled here in Bethphage, and had even acquired a donkey.

By this time there were many people on the road, each with his obligatory palm branch and extra robe or blanket to throw down before the high priest, who would soon be carrying the chosen lamb from Bethlehem into Jerusalem. Not wanting to miss the ceremony, we hurried back to Yashua. He met us on the path. "Put your extra robes on the colt and follow Me," He laughed, a twinkle in His eyes.

We obeyed and followed, not understanding. The trail He had chosen led around the backside of the mountain and headed south into the rugged Judean wastelands, dropping slowly down to the Dead Sea and bypassing Bethlehem. It was the most level and most direct route from Jerusalem to Engedi and Masada. Nobody was on it. They wanted to welcome the Pascal lamb into Jerusalem. Joining the Engedi trail is a steep trail up to Bethlehem, and Yashua turned up that. As we reached the top and saw the city, I began to understand. The high priest stood at the gate to the sheep pens at Migdol Eder, the watchtower of the temple flocks. All the Pascal lambs for the temple had been born and raised there, for a thousand years. Yashua pointed and informed us, "I was born in that sheepfold."

All along the highway the people were prepared, cloaks and palm branches in hand, eager to take up the traditional shout welcoming the Pascal lamb in anticipation of the Messiah. In a flash of insight I saw what Yashua was doing. He is Messiah! And just today He had told us that He is the Pascal Lamb. Now I knew what to do! I led the donkey across the valley to the main highway. The colt obligingly followed its mother. Sure enough, when we got to the highway, Yashua climbed onto the cloaks we had spread on the colt. I knew what to do. Yashua didn't have to say a word. I simply turned the donkey up toward Jerusalem and began the ancient traditional shout: "**Hosanna! Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of YHWH! Hosanna in the highest…**" From Psalm 118, you know, the same refrain we'd all shouted every year of my life.

One lonely voice, leading a lowly donkey. But I knew this was right more than I had ever known anything in my life! I shouted it out boldly, with all my heart and soul, as a great thrill went up and down my spine. My brother James caught on right away. Soon the other disciples joined in.

The colt, never complaining or balking at being ridden for the first time, followed quietly along behind its mother. The people around us quickly picked up the shout. *"Hosanna! Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the name of YHWH! Hosanna in the highest! Blessed is the King who comes in the name of YHWH! Peace in heaven and highest glory!"*

In no time at all, it was ringing across the valley and echoing back from the hills, in the thunder of a million joyous voices. And the palm branches were waving wildly, the cloaks were being thrown down in Yashua's path, and the people were bouncing up and down with joy.

One youngster shouted above the din, "Daddy, that's not the Pascal lamb. It's just some dude on a donkey." His dad yelled back, "That's Yashua! Our Messiah! He comes to be our King! Remember our studies in Zechariah?" So I too recalled where Zechariah (in 9:9) had prophesied, "Fear not, daughter of Zion. Behold, your King is coming to you… humbly seated on a donkey's colt."

Several of the Pharisees who had seen us start the whole thing came running up from behind. I didn't see them. I was facing Jerusalem, shouting with all my might. But Martha later told me they looked awfully funny, with their robes hiked up around their knees, huffing and puffing angrily and desperately trying to catch us. We disciples were all leading ahead of Yashua, so they reached Him first. "Rabbi! Rabbi!" they gasped, and I could tell when I heard them that they were out of shape and not used to running anywhere. "Rebuke Your disciples! This is not right! The Pascal lamb for the temple has not gotten here yet! You've got to move everyone off the road and make way for the Pascal lamb!"

I looked back at Yashua, trying hard not to laugh at the great joke we had pulled. But Yashua was not laughing. His voice was like steel as He declared, "This is more right than you could possibly know, and I tell you of a certainty that if these…" He waved His arm over the people, "…were to be silenced, the stones themselves will cry out in My honor."

His words had such power that the Pharisees were set back on their heels, paralyzed with awe. So we left them standing there with their mouths open and their tongues hanging out. I turned back to Jerusalem with renewed enthusiasm, shouting the Hosannas with all my might. When I got to the line, "Blessed is the KING who comes in the name of YHWH" I shouted even louder, with my emphasis on the word 'King'. This was it! This had to be it! Yashua was coming into Jerusalem to be crowned King! Forgetting all He had told us about the long wait before His Kingdom, about our being tested first, about His own suffering and death, and even about the significance of the Pascal lamb who would be slain at the Feast as our atoning sacrifice for sin, I poured out all my energy into the shout.

It was slow going, as we ascended the hill to Jerusalem. There were too many people in the road, and they all had to lay their branches or cloaks in front of us while they continued to chant Hosannas. I had been to many previous ceremonies welcoming the Pascal lamb, but never one like this. It was as if the people were inspired and filled with a supernatural enthusiasm, ourselves included. What joy! What love! What faith, and eagerness to crown Him King! Other than a few sourpusses among our religious rulers, every face in the crowd beamed joyfully at Yashua with honor and approval.

As we reached the top of the hill, Yashua bade me halt. I looked back to Bethlehem. The high priest had begun his march from Migdol Eder with the Pascal lamb selected for the temple. The priests and religious leaders were trying to initiate the traditional chant all over again. But their efforts were futile. The people were still focused on Yashua.

Jerusalem's gates lay just ahead, an appropriate place for Yashua to proclaim Himself King. *Surely this is it! The people will escort Him through the gates in triumph, and… Wait! Why is Yashua weeping? This is nuts!*

I left the donkey in the crowd and moved back to Yashua's side so I could hear Him above the shouts. He was openly sobbing, as if His heart were broken. I heard Him cry, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem! You who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you! How often I would gather you as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you would not. Behold, your house is left to you desolate, and I tell you, you shall not see Me until you are willing to truly say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of YHWH.'" It was a repeat of what He had told the Pharisees down in Perea, when we had finished our last ministry tour and just before we started our ascent toward Bethany.

"Master," I responded, "Just listen! They are saying, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of YHWH!'"

"They chant it from tradition, but not from their hearts. Soon nearly everyone here will be clamoring for My death. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem! If you had only known the day of your visitation! If you had only known the things which make for peace! But no, such things have been hidden from your understanding. The day shall soon come when your enemies will throw up siegeworks against you, and surround you, and entrap you, and raze you to the ground with all your children within you. They will not leave one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the day your King came to visit you from on high."

I shook my head in exasperation and returned to the donkey. *The greatest day of His life, and He was weeping? Would I ever understand this man?* "Come along, donkey. We'll lead Him into Jerusalem. They will make Him King, and then just see if He can weep!" Once I again took up the chant, "Hosanna! Blessed is the KING who comes in the name of YHWH!" and led the donkey triumphantly in through the ancient gates.

When we got to the temple entrance, a huge crowd was there to greet us. Everyone had heard that "Yashua, the great prophet from Nazareth in Galilee" had come to be made King. They were in agreement. This should be easy. *Somehow we had to get Him up to the altar, anoint Him with oil, gather some strong men around Him, find some weapons, enlist a defense force…* all these things were going through my mind. But as I plotted, Yashua got off the colt at the outer court and began ministering to the people crowded at the temple gates. There was already a line of sickies and outcasts, and one by one He was healing them, comforting them, encouraging them, and forgiving their sins. *Didn't Yashua know we had more important things to do than that? For heaven's sake, we had a kingdom to establish here!*

I tried and tried; God knows how I tried! But it just didn't happen. As usual, Yashua was far more interested in serving and ministering than in being made King. Well, I had known that our chant was right, and I knew this was right. Everyone in the crowd (except a few of the leaders) confirmed it. They all wanted to make Him our King. How could all those thousands of people possibly be wrong?

The people had mostly ceased to shout the Hosannas, but now the children had picked it up. There must have been hundreds of them, dancing all around the court and up and down the steps to the Nicanor Gate. They were all laughing, throwing up their hands, and gleefully chanting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Hosanna to Messiah! Blessed is the King who comes in the name of YHWH!" It went on all afternoon, and they kept dancing circles around us and getting in the way of my efforts to assemble a strong defense force. Again I'm ashamed to say that they were really beginning to irritate me.

When the chief priests and scribes arrived, they couldn't control the crowds either. They were more annoyed than I at the children's chant. Finally they pushed their way up to Yashua and accused Him of allowing the children to blaspheme. "Don't You hear what they're chanting?" they asked indignantly.

Yashua responded cheerfully. His previous tears were gone and it looked like He was enjoying this very much. "Yes, I hear them. Have you never read in the Psalms, 'Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babes Thou has prepared perfect praise'? The purest worship is that which comes naturally, unbidden, from a child. You could learn something from them!" And with a twinkle in His eye, He went back to ministering, while the priests stood there with their mouths agape once again.

4 DAYS BEFORE PASSOVER– Nisan 10 (F/S)

At evening, the impending Sabbath caused the crowds to dwindle quickly, as everyone hurried home to enjoy the Shabbat meal with their families. So we headed back toward Bethany. We stopped by Joshua ben Levi's little house in Bethphage to thank him and give back his donkey and her colt. But the sun had just set – an awkward time to show up at a friend's door. I tried to talk Yashua into quietly leaving the animals tied by the door, but He walked right up and knocked boldly.

When Joshua came to the door, I could see they had just begun their Shabbat meal. What lousy timing! According to centuries-old Eastern tradition he was going to have to politely ask us all to join them for dinner. Of course we were going to have to figure out a way to politely refuse – how could all thirteen of us possibly fit into his tiny house? And how could he possibly serve us all if we did? What an impossible situation! But the next thing I knew, Yashua was beckoning for us to follow Him into Joshua's house. I couldn't believe it! There was simply no way!

But it turned out I was wrong. Once again I had totally underestimated Yashua. The house was just big enough, though we used every square inch of it reclining around a tiny table in the center. And the food – well, it just sorta multiplied as we passed it around. We all had more than enough to eat.

Then there was the wondrous fellowship! After Yashua expressed His gratefulness for the use of the donkey and her colt, Joshua and his wife poured out their hearts full of thanks for Joshua's healing, and all the blessings that had come upon them ever since then. I quickly saw how wrong I had been. They really needed this time to express their gratitude. It was simply overflowing their hearts, and it needed time to come out. What pure, childlike worship flowed from them to the Master, as they ministered to Him and to all of us! They washed our feet, anointed us with oil, showered us with hugs and kisses, kept bringing us more treats, and poured out hearts of love. And all evening I kept thinking, *the Pascal Lamb, brought into the home on Nisan the 10th, inspected and found perfect, without any blemish, anointed with oil…* I was finally beginning to get it.

After the meal, while all of us relaxed around the table, Yashua entertained us for hours with jokes and stories. He was such a comedian! I had never seen Him so joyfully content. Yet His stories had a profound moral to them, and I realized He was teaching us as well as entertaining us. Some of His anecdotes moved me so deeply that I'd like to repeat them for you in His own words. [Note: these stories have all been recorded for us and preserved in the Talmud, pretty much directly from Matthew's shorthand.]

Two learned rabbis were discussing the law. Rabbi Akiba asked, "Why is the law compared to gold and glass?" "Ah, that is easy," replied Rabbi Meir. "It is both as hard to acquire and as precious as gold, but then it is forgotten with as much ease as glass is broken." "No," replied Rabbi Akiba. "When either gold or glass are smashed, they may be melted down and reworked into other shapes, which may be even more exquisite than the first. Just so it is with the student of the law. Though he may fail and sorely break the commandment, yet there is always hope that he may be forgiven and restored, wiser and more committed to the law than at the first."

During Rabbi Meir's absence from home to serve in the temple, two of his sons tragically died. Their mother, the godly Beruryah, hiding her grief, awaited their father's return. When he got home, she said to him, "My husband, some time ago two jewels of inestimable value were placed with me for safekeeping. He who left them with me called for them today, and I delivered them into his hand." "That is right," responded the rabbi approvingly. "We must always return cheerfully and faithfully all that is placed in our care." The rabbi then asked for his sons, and Beruryah took him by the hand and led him to their chamber of death. Meir gazed upon his sons, then wept bitterly, crying out to God in great distress. "Weep not, beloved husband," said his noble wife. "Didst thou not say to me we must return cheerfully when 'tis called for, all that has been placed in our care? God gave us these jewels. He left them with us for a time, and we gloried in their possession. But now that He called for His own, we must not repine." The rabbi sadly agreed. "Yes, that is our act of worship."

The king, wishing to befriend himself to the Jews, sent the leading rabbi a valuable diamond, requesting a token of friendship in return. The rabbi, after due consideration, sent the king a Mezuzah. [Strip of parchment inscribed with verses from the Pentateuch, intended to be placed upon the doorposts of the house.] "My friend," said the king. "This gift of thine is of small value, compared to the rich offering which I dispatched to thee." "There is indeed great difference between the two gifts," the rabbi agreed. "That which thou gavest me I must watch and guard lest it be stolen from me, and in passing on, I must leave it behind. But this which I have sent thee will watch and guard over thee, even as it is written, 'When thou walkest it will lead thee, and when thou liest down it will watch over thee.' And when thou departest this life, it shall go before thee in the world to come, even as it is written, 'Know therefore that YHWH your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His lovingkindness to a thousand generations of those who love Him and keep His commandments.' and again, 'Forever, O YHWH, is Thy Word settled in heaven.' Therefore rejoice, O King, that the eternal Word has entered thy house this day."

Consider the man who possessed a horse, a colt, and a calf. To both the horse and colt he measured out each day a limited amount of food – no more, no less. But the calf was allowed to eat as much as he pleased. The aggrieved colt said to the horse, "We are being unfairly treated! We work hard for our food, while this lazy and useless calf does nothing but eat and sleep. Surely we should get as much as he." "Be thankful, my friend," replied the horse. "We receive enough food to keep us healthy and strong, for the master's use for many years. But the calf is being fattened for the slaughter." Even so the wicked may seem unfairly prospered while the righteous suffers a multitude of labors and trials, but ultimately the fate of each is certain.

Upon his deathbed, a famous rabbi blessed his pupils saying, "I pray that you may fear God as you fear man." "What!" exclaimed his pupils. "Should we not fear God more than man?" "I should be well content," answered the sage, "if your actions proved that you fear Him as much. When you do wrong, you first make sure that no human eye can see you. Now show the same fear of God, who sees everywhere and everything at all times."

There was once a rabbi who asked his students, "How can we determine the hour of dawn, when the night ends and day begins?" They gave him various responses such as "When you can distinguish at a distance the difference between a dog and a sheep," "When only the morning star remains visible in the sky," or "When you can distinguish the difference between a fig tree and a grape vine," but he shook his head at them all. Finally the students gave up. "Tell us," they said. The wise rabbi answered, "Dawn has arrived when you can look into the face of a total stranger and recognize in him your brother. Until then it is night, and the darkness still rules within."

A proud rabbi once bore a son named Moses, who turned out to be a deep disgrace to him. Moses refused to submit to his father's teaching, and showed no aptitude for his Torah studies, preferring a wild and riotous living to the discipline of his father's house. Finally in dark rage, the proud rabbi drove him from his home, vowing that he would dishonor the family name no more. While traveling the countryside, penniless and friendless, Moses chanced upon a learned rabbi, surrounded by a group of eager, happy students. Curious, he crept up to find the source of their happiness. Spotting him, the learned rabbi called for him to come forth. Afraid, Moses turned to run, but the rabbi spoke sweetly, "Fear not, my friend! Though we have never met, yet I know thee, and I shall explain unto thee all that thy heart desires." Moses came before him, bowed, and spoke, "How is it that thou knowest me though we have never met?" The rabbi smiled, with a twinkle in his eye, and explained, "I see thy rags and thy hungry belly and know that thou art a rebel, unwilling to submit to the discipline of thy family, school, or job. I see the fire in thine eyes and know that thou art angry at perceived injustice and dishonesty, hating those who would lord it over you while being no better than you. But I also see within thee an earnest hunger for righteousness and peace and happiness. That is what drew thee here. Here is where you shall find all you seek, for my discipline is only gentle, in love, and my teaching is only truth, in meekness and humility." With many words the learned rabbi convinced Moses to stay, and in time he became his star pupil. True to his word, the rabbi spoke to all his heart's desires. Moses came to greatly admire his mentor, so much that he studied zealously and sought to emulate everything he did.

The years passed. As often happens, Moses became all that he admired in his teacher. One Shabbat afternoon he gave a compelling sermon at a neighboring synagogue on his favorite topic: how to inspire young men to study and love Torah by being their joyful example, rather than their harsh taskmaster. Many from the surrounding villages came to hear him, for word of his wonderful wisdom and eloquence had spread far and wide. Amongst the crowd came his brothers and his father, the proud rabbi, now aged and humbled. At the end of the sermon, his father stood to respond. "This Moses, my son, would not submit to my discipline, so I drove him away as a worthless son, unworthy to bear my name. Now I see instead that I was unworthy to be his father, for I was the harsh taskmaster, but never the joyful example. I was concerned for my own honor and my family's good name, but never cared enough to see his needs. Forgive me, my son. You have brought more honor to our family name than I." His son fell on him with hugs, saying "Nay, my father! Not so! Thy discipline was true and right. I was the proud and selfish rebel. Only after thy well-deserved rejection was I desperate enough to seek after wisdom. Bless the gracious name of YHWH! For He has given us both a second chance."

Some rabbis once went to Damah, a heathen diamond merchant, to purchase a jewel for the ephod of the high priest. However, the key to the safe which kept the jewel was in possession of Damah's father, who was sleeping. Damah refused to wake his father for the key, though in their impatience the rabbis offered him a much larger sum of money than he had asked. Finally his father awoke, and Damah delivered the diamond to the rabbis. Delighted with it, they gave him the larger sum, at which he returned all but the original price, saying, "I will not make a profit from honoring my father." The rabbis were thus shamed by this heathen, who honored his father more than they.

Speaking of honoring one's father, remember Rabbi Abahu, who would not permit his five sons to open the door for their grandfather or attend to his wants whenever he himself was at home. Why? Because he considered that sacred duty to be his most important task and privilege. He hoped by this example to teach his five sons to honor him in his old age.

With all these stories and more we were entertained and taught, as at a great feast, so that humble Shabbat meal at the tiny house of Joshua ben Levi became one of the highlights of our lives.

It was late when we got back to Bethany. We fell into our bedrolls exhausted but rejoicing. What an incredible evening – what an incredible week!

The next morning, Martha chided us for not coming back to her home for the Shabbat meal. She and Mary had fixed a very special one, just for us. Yashua apologized, "I'm sorry, Martha. I know you were expecting Me. But I'm so weak now, so limited! I can only be in one place at a time. Spirit led Me to the Levi's. You had a house full of wonderful, precious people. They enjoyed what you had prepared. They had wonderful fellowship appreciating each other, and talking about Me. They all went away full, satisfied, and rejoicing. What more could you ask? You honored Me greatly by serving them. I thank you for that, Martha. But I needed to honor Joshua ben Levi by eating My final Shabbat meal at his home." Martha, of course, graciously accepted the apology. She seemed satisfied with that answer. She rejoiced that Yashua had noticed and accepted her service even though He hadn't been there.

126 Just the same, Martha's criticism seemed to hurt Yashua deeply. He seemed discouraged and sad. On our way back to the temple, we saw a fig tree. Yashua, having skipped breakfast, headed over to see if He could glean a few figs. I told Him that the figs wouldn't be ready for four months, at the summer harvest, but He ignored me. Sure enough, there were only leaves on the tree. Then Yashua startled us all by cursing the tree. "May no one ever eat figs from you again!" *Boy,* I thought, *He has skipped breakfast before and I've never seen Him this grumpy!* I didn't even notice that I had slipped right back into my old 'judging' mode of unbelief.

127 That was just the beginning. When we got to the temple, the first thing Yashua did was overturn the tables of the money changers and drive out those selling pigeons and doves for the temple sacrifice. I was horrified. "It is written that My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you have made it a robber's den," He yelled at them. That infuriated the chief priests and scribes, but there was not a thing they could do. All day as He taught in the temple, the people crowded around Him hanging on His every word, astonished at His teaching.

128 Toward evening some Greeks in the crowd outside the temple asked Philip if Yashua would come out and talk with them. Philip came in and told Simon Peter's brother Andrew, and together they approached Yashua about the matter. We didn't really expect that He would leave the temple just to talk to the Greeks. His ministry had always been to the Hebrews only. But what happened next is worth sharing. He stopped His preaching, and a look of untold sadness came over His face, reflected in the setting sun. "The time is come," He said, "for the Son of Adam to be glorified. Truly I say, that unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains alone. But if it dies, it bears much fruit. My soul is greatly troubled, but what can I say, 'Father, save Me from this hour'? No! It was for this hour that I came into the world. So I shall only plead, 'Father, in all I'm about to go through, glorify Your name.'"

Immediately an exceedingly loud voice thundered out a response from the heavens in ancient Hebrew (Kasdan, the first language). It was so different from human speech that many thought it was thunder. No man could have shouted one tenth as loud, yet I heard not an angry shout, but a gentle, loving voice with incredible power behind it. I sensed it was Father YHWH Himself, speaking from the heavenlies in all His majesty and authority. Most of us couldn't understand the ancient tongue. But Matthew, bless his soul, had studied Kasdan. He understood it, and translated it for us: "**I have glorified My name – through You! And I will continue to glorify it through You.**"

Yashua turned to us. "This voice came for your sakes. Now it is time. Now judgment has come upon this world. Now, when I am lifted up on the Roman cross, the satanic ruler of this cosmos shall be finally and forever subdued and cast down. Thus I will draw everyone to Myself as your rightful King."

Someone in the crowd shouted out, "The Tenach tells us that the Messiah must remain forever, yet You talk of dying on a Roman cross. Who are You?"

"As I said, I am the Light. For only a few days longer you will have the Light walking among you." He turned and waved His arm at the brilliant fiery clouds of a spectacular sunset. Shabbat had just ended. "I urge you, my friends. While you have the Light, believe in the Light and walk in the Light, that you may become sons of light. Then the rapidly approaching darkness will not overwhelm you."

3 DAYS BEFORE PASSOVER– Nisan 11 (S/S)

Then Yashua turned aside and said quietly to me, "My ministry today is finished, John. Come with Me."

I glanced around. The other disciples were taking advantage of the remaining twilight by ministering to individual needs. So I hurried after Yashua. He took my arm and guided me through the crowds. To my surprise, they didn't notice us go. We soon found ourselves alone on the path to Bethany. "Now that we're out of the temple You can talk to the Greeks who asked to see You," I urged.

He put His arm around me and leaned rather heavily on me as we walked. He was exhausted, and seemed to be in pain. "I told you, John, My ministry today is finished. But when I heard that the Greeks also are seeking for Me, I knew that My ministry is nearly finished for good. I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. The time has now come for Me to return to My Father. From now on, you, My disciples, shall carry on My ministry to Israel – and to the Greeks, to the Romans, and even to the farthest corners of the earth – to every ethnic group under heaven." He smiled at me. "I cannot do that, except through you."

This statement would have a big impact on me later, but at the time I was upset that He seemed ready to quit. "Yes, Master, but why did You just sneak away like that?"

"Sneak away? John, John – I left out of sadness that even after all I've done they still do not believe in Me."

"But Rabboni, they do! They love Your teaching! They want to make You King! If You would just stop rejecting their honors and sneaking off like this…" I was miffed.

"No, John. They're not really believing. The words of Isaiah the Prophet have come to pass: 'Who has believed our report, and to whom has the power of YHWH been revealed?' No, they don't really believe. They can't, for as Isaiah says, 'He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, lest they see with their eyes, and perceive with their heart, and come to Me to be converted and healed.'"

"But they are believing in You! Even some of the leaders now! If You would just stand up and proclaim…"

"No, John. They see the miracles and know that I am sent from God. But that is not 'believing in Me'. Just the opposite. Knowing who I am yet rejecting what I say is an unforgivable blasphemy. Satan also knows who I am and rejects what I say! These people enjoy being entertained and fed by Me, but they will not actually follow Me, because they love the approval of men rather than God, and they're afraid of being put out of the synagogue."

129 The next morning, the first of the week, we again started out early for the temple. As we passed the fig tree, we were surprised to see it wilted, dried out from the roots.

Peter exclaimed, "Rabbi, look at the fig tree You cursed. It's already shriveled up! How did it happen so fast?"

"If you have faith and do not doubt, you also shall do what I did to this fig tree, or even move this mountain and cast it into the sea. Anything you ask in prayer, believing fully in your heart, you shall receive."

"But why, Lord? Why did you destroy a perfectly good fig tree? Just because the fruit wasn't ripe?"

"Ah, Peter, have you compassion on the fig tree? How much more should you have compassion on the nation of Israel My people, who are blessed with the abundance of heaven, yet refuse to return the harvest to the Master of the harvest. Now they have rejected their King when He came to gather the harvest. Look well upon that shriveled fig tree, to see the nation of Israel a few short years from now."

"Not so, Yashua," I interjected hotly. "They have not rejected You! They love You! They want to make You King! Everyone is ready to do whatever You say!"

"In three days, John, you will see how much they love Me. You are still looking only at the outward evidence. But I have prayed for you, John, that someday you will stop judging according to your human understanding and begin to see as My Father sees." Yashua turned and headed down Mount Olivet, leaving me smarting from the well-deserved rebuke. I humbled myself, wondering, *How many times must I relearn this lesson?* I repented, asked the Father to change my heart, and then hurried after Yashua.

I caught a glimpse of what He was saying as we came into the temple. Our religious rulers were there, glaring at us and obviously plotting how to stop us. But there was not a thing they could do and they knew it, as everywhere we went, the eager, happy people crowded around to listen to Yashua. But the crowd couldn't prevent them from grilling Him and trying to trip Him up with their many laws.

130 The temple was already packed. Everyone was excited to see Yashua. But just as He stood to teach, a large group of chief priests, scribes, and elders of the Pharisees confronted Him. "Tell us by whose authority You are doing this!" they ordered.

"Okay." He smiled at them. "But first, answer Me this. Where do you think Yochanan got his authority? Was his baptism truly from heaven, or just from man?"

A ripple of approval went through the crowd. They all knew about Yochanan the Baptizer, and nearly all of them considered him a true prophet sent from God. His recent death, and the fact that their religious rulers had not even gone to Herod to intercede on his behalf, still stung. So they were anxious to hear if their elders would even acknowledge him as God's prophet. In fact, I think the people may have started a riot and stoned their own elders if they had spoken against Yochanan.

But after conferring among themselves, they simply told Yashua that they didn't know where Yochanan got his authority to baptize. A groan went through the crowd.

Yashua answered, "Then neither will I tell you where My authority comes from." He grinned. "But I assure you that when you discover the answer to My question you will have the answer to yours." At that, the crowd cheered and clapped. Clearly, their leaders had been put in their place. They went back to their huddle to plot something else.

131 Yashua began teaching in parables. He told about a man who told his two sons to go work in the vineyard. The first said he would, but didn't. The second said he wouldn't go, but later repented and went, actually fulfilling the will of his father. Yashua compared the former to our religious rulers, and the latter to those who had repented at the preaching of Yochanan the Baptizer. At that, you could see them stop their whispering and start to really listen! Yashua concluded, "The tax collectors and harlots will surely get into the Kingdom of God before you, for when Yochanan came preaching righteousness, they believed and repented of their sins. But you who claim to obey God saw their repentance and changed lives, but still wouldn't believe and didn't even feel any remorse." A murmur of approval went through the crowd, for most of them had indeed believed and been baptized by Yochanan, while their leaders had stood with their arms crossed over their royal robes, judging and questioning his authority.

Yashua continued with another parable about a landowner who planted a vineyard, rented it out to gardeners, and went on a journey. At harvest time he sent his servants to collect his share of the produce. They beat them and sent them away empty-handed. After three attempts, the landowner finally sent his own son, but the sharecroppers took him out and killed him. "So," He asked, "What will the landowner do when he returns?"

"He will bring those wretches to a wretched end, and will rent out his vineyard to others who will pay him the proceeds at the proper seasons." You could see that the people were really getting into these parables. But one of the leaders of the Pharisees saw where this was leading. It was getting far too personal. He shouted indignantly, "May it never be!"

"Have you never read the Scriptures?" Yashua pointed to him. "The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. [They all knew that passage, from Psalm 118.] Therefore I tell you, the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you Jewish leaders, and will be given to a nation which will produce fruit for the King. So whoever falls on this cornerstone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust."

Again the people all clapped and cheered for Yashua. Everyone recognized how He had put their leaders down. They were ready to make Him King. I could see it. They totally agreed with His condemnation of their leaders, and in fact enthusiastically agreed with everything He said and did. Somehow, during the Feast, we just had to find a way to pull this off.

132 Our religious rulers strode off angrily. I saw chief priests (the Sadducees), Pharisees (ruling elders), scribes (their lawyers), and even some Herodians (who supported the Roman presence in the land) all going together. I'm sure they planned to debate how to trap Him to try to destroy His ministry. It is remarkable whenever all those characters can actually get together to agree on anything! I wasn't surprised when a group of them came up a bit later with a question. A sharp-looking lawyer led, starting of course with a little blatant flattery: "Teacher, we know You speak correctly, and are not partial to any, but teach the way of God in truth. Instruct us then, is it lawful to pay tribute to Caesar, or not?"

You could hear the gasps going through the crowd; then, silence. It was pretty easy to see what a trap this was. Most of the crowd fervently believed that paying Caesar's poll tax was doubly wrong; first, because they were resentful of Roman rule and hated paying taxes to live on their own land; and second, because paying tribute was a symbolic acknowledgment of Caesar's supposed lordship over them, and they considered it morally wrong to acknowledge any other god besides the one true God, YHWH. However, our religious rulers knew that keeping favor with the Romans was their ticket to power, so it was not politically correct to say anything against paying taxes to Caesar. And the Herodians went so far as to say that the Roman government was beneficial and should be whole-heartedly supported. Then of course the Roman soldiers, standing right there listening, could literally 'have your head' for insurrection if you started to teach against the Roman poll tax. Yashua was caught! There was absolutely nothing He could say without getting in big trouble with one group or another.

"Why are you testing Me?" Yashua responded with a pleasant chuckle. "Bring Me a coin of the type used to pay Caesar's poll tax."

A Herodian brought one and handed it to Him. He held it high, and spoke loudly so all could hear. "Look at this. Whose likeness and inscription is on it?"

"Caesar's!" they all said in unison.

"Correct. And in whose likeness are we created?" He took a handsome young man standing nearby and turned him to face the crowd. His bright face literally beamed. You could tell he was one of Yashua's ardent supporters.

"We are made in God's image!" They knew the answer to that one, too. They knew Torah. Besides, the image of God fairly shone from this young man.

"Then give back to Caesar that which belongs to him, and dedicate to God that which belongs to Him," He said confidently. He smiled at the people, who were in awe of His profound and perceptive answer. I think He got a big kick out of astounding them. Or maybe His delight was in seeing the lights turn on across their faces.

I grabbed Judas and whispered, "Judas! Today is the day we've got to make Him King! The crowds all love Him! It's now or never!" Judas nodded.

After giving the young man a hug Yashua turned to the Herodian who had loaned Him the coin. As He returned it, He asked, "Friend, who is your god? Have you given back to him all that belongs to him?" The Herodian realized his mouth was open and closed it abruptly. He looked into Yashua's loving eyes, and realized that his god, Caesar, to whom he had given his all, was no god at all. He dropped to his knees, then bowed to the ground, weeping softly. Yashua's love had won another heart for the Kingdom.

133 That entire day continued with more questions and even more profound answers. Just as Yashua had warned, He was being inspected for blemishes. They found none. First He silenced the Sadducees, who don't believe in the resurrection of the dead, by reminding them of God's claim to be the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and insisting that He is not God of the dead, but of the living. Then He silenced the scribes and Pharisees in their own area of expertise: the Mosaic law. They tried to trip Him up and get Him to say that one of the Ten Commandments was greater than another, but He showed them that all of the law depends upon the greatest commandment of all, "You shall love YHWH your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength," and its earthly equivalent, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Yashua looked at the lawyer who had asked Him that question, as if to ask, "Well, are you going to accept My answer, or will you keep hardening your heart?" There was a pregnant pause, as the lawyer, a stout, stern-faced scribe with a full black beard, weighed the risks of agreeing with Yashua and then possibly being excommunicated by the Pharisees. Suddenly truth won, and he blurted out: "That's right, Teacher. You have truly stated that YHWH is one, and there is none beside Him, and to love Him with all the heart, all the understanding, and all the might, and to love one's neighbor as himself, is the very heart of the law. That is more than all the burnt offerings and sacrifices."

Yashua beamed with love and acceptance. "Well said, Joseph of Cyprus, well said! You are not far from God's Kingdom! Come follow Me. I have much more I want to teach you about this love relationship with King YHWH."

At first I thought the lawyer might leave everything else behind and follow us then and there. But then he looked back to his fellow collaborators (who were glaring daggers at him), and turned sadly away. He knew what was right – they all did! But out of the fear of man and their desire to maintain their established positions in their religious order and their culture, they deliberately rejected the truth. They knew the truth with their heads, but, just as Yashua had said, refused to believe it with their hearts, wanting man's approval more than God's.

However, the religious leaders were certainly awed at Yashua's perceptiveness in avoiding all their traps, and after that, no one dared to ask Him any more questions. [134] So Yashua took the initiative, and began to ask questions of them. He quoted to them Scripture after Scripture that pointed to Messiah, and asked how they interpreted them. It was obvious to me where He was leading. As experts in Torah, I'm sure it was even more obvious to them. But they didn't dare answer Him anymore, and Yashua refused to come right out and declare, "These Scriptures all point to Me, the Messiah." It seemed clear that He wanted each of them to make his own choice to believe in Him or not.

Our religious rulers chose not to believe. You could just see them standing there hardening their hearts. I do not understand how they could make that choice, with all the evidence Yashua had given them, from the very Scriptures on which they claimed to be experts! I looked at Joseph of Cyprus. He wanted to believe – I saw the tears in his eyes! Yet he stood with those whose faces were stern and cold.

[135] Yashua began speaking rather harshly about them to the multitude: "The scribes and Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses, but I warn you to live only according to their words, not according to their deeds. They place heavy burdens upon others, and are unwilling to lift a finger to bear those loads themselves. They do all that they do merely to be noticed by men. Their fancy robes, their long, ritualistic prayers in the public square, their respectful greetings in the marketplace, being called 'Rabbi', sitting in a place of honor at their feasts – it is all just for appearance's sake, and therefore they will receive the greater condemnation.

"**Woe** to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites. You have shut off the Kingdom of Heaven from men, being unwilling to enter in yourselves or to allow those who are entering to get in ahead of you.

"**Woe** to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites. You devour widow's houses, saying long prayers for them to make it all appear righteous. Therefore you shall receive the greater condemnation.

"**Woe** to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites. You travel across land and sea to make one convert to Judaism, only to make him twice the son of hell as yourselves. Woe to you blind guides! Fools! Your bold vows and holy oaths only display your ignorance of what is really true and holy.

"**Woe** to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites. You tithe on your mint leaves and on your dill and caraway seeds, but you neglect the important things of the law such as justice, mercy, and fidelity.

"**Woe** to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites. You are so careful to fulfill the laws of ceremonial washing for the outside of the cup, but inside it is full of robbery and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisees! First clean the inside, so when you clean the outside, the whole cup will be clean.

"**Woe** to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites. You are like whitewashed tombs. Outwardly clean, but inside full of dead men's bones and all forms of uncleanness. So you appear righteous to men, but inwardly you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

"**Woe** to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites. For you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous dead, claiming that if only you had been living in the times of your fathers, you would not have put them to death. But you bear witness against yourselves, by admitting that you are the sons of those who murdered them. Go ahead, then. Fill up the full measure of the guilt of your fathers. You serpents! You brood of vipers! How shall you escape the sentence of hell?!

"Therefore I am sending you prophets and wise men – some you will scourge in your synagogues, some you will persecute from city to city, and some you will torture and kill, that upon you may fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel all the way to the blood of My uncle Zacharias, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Truly I tell you, all these things shall befall this generation.

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem! Who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together like a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you would not. Behold, your house is now left to you desolate! For I say to you, from now on you shall not see Me until you are able to say from your hearts, 'Blessed is the One who comes in the name of YHWH.'" Yashua shuddered, bowed His head, and began to sob.

This was obviously not a small thing with Him. It was the third time He had concluded with basically the same words. [136] We gathered around and tried to comfort Him. I led Him over to a bench near the temple offering boxes. It made an entertaining show, watching people put their tithes and contributions into the big boxes. I figured it would distract Him and cheer Him up to see how generous the people were. They went out of their way to make sure the people could see how much they were dumping in.

In the middle of all the display, we saw a poor widow, dressed in a well-worn plain brown robe. Yashua perked up. "Watch her!" He pointed. She walked behind a group of priests, and while they made a big show of their giving, she reached up to slip in two cents. Two copper pennies!

"Why in the world did You want us to watch her? She only gave two cents!" I felt a bit indignant.

Yashua raised His eyebrows at me. "I'm trying to teach you to look beyond the outward appearance, John. Her two cents didn't look like much to you, but to God it was more than all the other contributions we've seen today. They gave out of their wealth a very small part, in a mock show of generosity to cover their selfish and greedy hearts. But she, out of her poverty, gave all she had to live on.

"Her life has been cruel and hard since her husband died. She wanted to make a gift today. She decided to skip breakfast, supper, and anything else she may have needed, just so she could reserve her two cents for the temple. See, there she is, bowed in worship. She is pleading with YHWH to accept her sacrifice, her worship, to let His face shine upon her again, and to either take her life, or show her what she must do to survive. She plans to continue in prayer however long it takes to get an answer, whether today, at the end of the Feast, or until she starves to death. Get up." He grinned. "Let's go answer her prayer."

We walked over to where she knelt by the temple steps. Yashua touched her gently on the shoulder. She started, stood up quickly, and covered her face with her robe. "What do You want with me, Rabbi?"

"YHWH has heard your prayer. He does not want to take your life. He wants you to live it for Him. He has accepted your sacrifice, and He is pleased. He has forgiven your sins. From now on, YHWH will be your husband. He will provide for you, lead you, and give you wisdom, so you will never again be in such desperate poverty. Now, your rebel son that ran away? He has had a change of heart, and is looking for you. Hurry to where you previously lived and you will meet him there."

She gave a gasp, dropped to her knees, and bowed her face to the ground. "Yes, Master! Oh thank You, Master! Thank You with all my heart for caring about a poor old wretch like me! I was preparing to die. You saved my life and gave me hope again."

"Yes, My daughter. That is exactly why I came…" He said quietly as she obediently scampered off.

2 DAYS BEFORE PASSOVER– Nisan 12 (S/M)

137 We left the temple, and I assumed that we would go back to Bethany for the night. But no, Yashua led us past the shriveled fig tree to the top of Mount Olivet, where we watched a glorious sunset. We had a spectacular view. This turned into another one of those 'learning moments' – as we chatted about the beauty of the temple buildings glistening with the setting sun, He began to teach.

"Gather close, My friends. I must leave you. My time is short. I have much to teach you before I go. Do you admire the temple and its beautiful stones? Now look again. See them as My Father sees them… I tell you truly that days are coming when not one stone will be left in place upon another. The temple will be pulled down and burned, and the people of Israel will be conquered and exiled."

He paused, while we gasped with horror at the thought. At that instant, the rays of the setting sun caught the gold on the temple just right, so it looked like the whole temple complex had just caught fire! Chills wrapped themselves around our spines like cold snakes.

"When, Master? Tell us when!" " What will be the sign that these things are about to happen?" "Does that spell the end of the age?" " Why must You go?" " When will You come back to take up Your Kingdom as You promised?" We all started asking questions at once. Yashua knew that at least for now, He had our undivided attention.

"Be careful that you not be misled! Many will come in My name, acknowledging that I am Messiah but preaching 'The time is at hand! He could come at any moment!' Do not listen to them. Many terrible things must take place before I will return in My power and glory. There will be global wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes, pestilence, famines, dreadful storms, and widespread plagues. These horrible things must take place, but still the end does not follow immediately. Before all these things are completed, you, My disciples, will suffer terrible tribulation. But don't fret; I'll see you through it. Jerusalem will be devastated, brought low under the heavy hand of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. My people will be scattered abroad, even to the farthest corners of the earth. Everywhere you go, you will be hated and brought to trial on account of My name. But don't be anxious; My Holy Spirit will teach you what to say. For this good news of the Kingdom must be preached to every ethnic group around the whole world before My return.

"Now listen carefully to My warning! Some of you will still be in Jerusalem when the pagan armies surround her. Watch for your chance! When it comes, let those in Judea flee to the mountains, not even stopping to look back at the Holy City. Pray that that day not come on Shabbat or in the winter, for you won't even have time to go back and get your coat. Woe to those with little children or nursing babies! How hard it will be for them! This will begin a long time of horrible persecution and tribulation, such as has never occurred before nor ever shall again.

"Then after the tribulation, when you have been tested and found faithful, you will see great signs in the heavens and upon the earth – the sun will be darkened, the moon will not give its light, the stars will fall from the heavens and the powers in the heavenlies will be shaken. There will be terror among the nations, with men fainting from fear and dismay at their impending doom.

"Then and only then will you see the sign of the Son of Adam, coming in a cloud with power and great glory for every eye to see. All the tribes of earth will mourn. But when you see all these things taking place, straighten up! Lift up your heads! Your redemption is drawing near!

"My Kingdom is like a healthy fig tree. When it puts out its leaves in the spring, you know that summer is near. Just so, when you see all that I have told you coming to pass, you know that the Kingdom of God is near. But just as the harvest of figs must wait until the end of summer, just so My return to gather the harvest for the Kingdom must wait until all these things I have told you are completed.

"Remember the fig tree I cursed. It portrays our ruling elders, the hypocrites I cursed with seven woes. Like the shriveled tree, their religious establishment shall never bear fruit again. The true religion of Spirit will replace their false religious system of outward laws and rituals which they have built up into such a heavy bondage.

138 "So beware of them. Listen to Me! For I'm warning you in advance. False christs and false prophets will arise, and will show marvelous signs and wonders in order to deceive even the elect, if possible. So when they proclaim 'Here is Messiah!' or 'There He is!', don't follow them.

"Remember what I told the Pharisees? My day of glory will come like the dawn, gradually brightening the sky from the east to the west. Those who are alert and prepared for it will welcome it. The rest will be swept away in their blindness and ignorance, like the wicked in the days of Noah and the days of Lot. As I said, all who are unprepared will be taken into judgment. Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures gather. Those who seek to save themselves will die, but those who lose their lives for My sake will live. Only after the wicked are taken away will the sons of the Kingdom be able to fully inherit the Promised Land, to dwell in it forever as promised in the Psalms." (37:28, 29)

"Lord, when? You still haven't answered when!"

139 "You must always be on the alert, for you do not know when your Lord is returning! I cannot tell you the appointed time because I don't know either. Even the angels in the heavens don't know, but only My Father, and He's keeping it a secret. He wants you to be on your guard at all times. Don't allow your hearts to be weighted down with dissipation, drunkenness, and the worries of this life so the day springs upon you suddenly like a trap. I tell you, it will come on the whole earth like a trap! For the Son of Adam will return at a time when people least expect Him, like a thief in the night. But you must keep on the alert at all times, praying and walking by My Holy Spirit, so the day will not come upon you like a thief, unaware. Pray that you may have strength to endure the terrible things that are coming, so you may be found standing faithful and true before the Son of Adam at His return."

This was obviously an important point with Yashua, for He proceeded to tell four parables: one about the strong man keeping alert to not allow his house to be broken into; another about two kinds of slaves, one faithful who is rewarded, and one unfaithful who falls under judgment; the third about the ten virgins, five wise and five foolish; and a fourth about the man who entrusts his three slaves with his finances while he is away – two bring him an increase while the third hides his money in the ground. In each one of these parables, He emphasized that we don't know when the master will return – he could come very soon, and he could delay a long time. Therefore we must be continually alert and ever faithful and true, so we will be found in faithful obedience when our Master returns.

140 Yashua finished with a parable of a shepherd who separates out goats from his flock of sheep. He compared that to separating the wicked from the righteous when He comes as King. He surprised me by defining the righteous (and the wicked) not by what laws they kept, not by what they believed, not by how much they loved and served God, and not even by whether they followed Him, but by whether they loved or served His people, His 'precious ones'. "Truly I say to you, to the extent that you minister to My precious ones, even to the least of them, to that extent you have ministered to Me. Therefore these wicked will be sent off to times of punishment in the fires that have been prepared for the devil and his angels – terrible punishment of the soul, which will discipline every evil deed based on the motivation of the heart, until that bent toward sin is destroyed. The righteous likewise will be rewarded for every good deed based on their heart motivations, and will inherit the abundant Life of All Ages in My Kingdom."

"Master?" It was Judas Iscariot. "Shouldn't we be off to Bethany for the night? Look, the stars are all out already."

141 "No, Judas. We'll sleep these last two nights here on Mount Olivet. These spring nights should be warm. We need to get to sleep soon so we can get up early to return to the temple tomorrow. Go ahead; get comfortable, while I say one last thing that has been laying heavily on My mind. You know that Passover comes after two days. The Pascal lambs will be slain, and this Son of Adam will be delivered up for crucifixion. The chief priests and religious rulers are already plotting how to take Me by stealth so it won't start a riot at the Feast. I'm warning you in advance…" But somehow our eyes had gotten so heavy that we drifted off to sleep while He was still talking. We heard it, but we never really comprehended what He was saying.

142 As I look back on it, I also had this vague, unsettled feeling about Judas, but I fell asleep before doing anything about it. Evidently Judas was really miffed that Yashua wanted to postpone the Kingdom until after the times of tribulation, and he wanted to force the issue. He had been working along with me trying to set things up so Yashua could take over the kingdom right here at the Feast. But Yashua had just made it abundantly clear that He wasn't going to do it that way, and Judas was not taking it very well. He had never been a very patient man. I'm sorry. Very sorry. It was partly my own fault. Like the others, I had heard Yashua say again and again that He had to suffer and die, and that it would be a long time before He returned for His Kingdom, but none of us wanted to believe it. Yashua confided to us later that Satan had taken advantage of Judas' impatience and had entered into him that very night. He had left us while we were falling asleep, and had gone to the chief priests and offered to betray Yashua into their hands. He had even taken their money, blood money, thirty pieces of silver, and had bound himself with an oath to betray Yashua to them at his first opportunity, as soon as he could get us away from the crowds.

We never knew until later. Judas was back with us by morning, and stayed right with us all the next day as we ministered in the temple. He seemed as excited as the rest of us at the full day of successful ministry – our religious rulers were no longer daring to challenge us, so we pretty much had free rein. Yashua took advantage of that to help a lot of people and teach them many things. That evening, we again went and spent the night on Mount Olivet. Again poor Judas seemed restless and a little disinterested in the things Yashua was saying. But none of us figured out why.

THE DAY BEFORE PASSOVER– Nisan 13 (M/T)

143 Besides another full day of ministry (our last before the Feast), this was the day to prepare for the Pascal meal. I assumed that we would go back to Bethany and eat the meal with Lazarus and Simon and their families, so I didn't worry about it until evening. After all, Yashua had talked about Mary recognizing Him as the true Pascal Lamb and inviting Him into her house for these four days, so it was a logical assumption. Maybe I was just getting lazy. It was rather nice just letting Mary and Martha serve us.

By 3:00 in the afternoon the crowd had mostly gone home to prepare for the Passover, though there was still a group of people waiting for a personal touch from Yashua. Just out of politeness I asked Him, "Where would You like us to prepare the Passover? At Mary and Martha's house?"

"No, John." Yashua paused and heaved a weary sigh. "Spirit wants Me to get alone with just you twelve. Mary and Martha are busy preparing for a large crowd of My brothers and sisters. They are happy to minister to Me by serving them. I already told them I won't be there tonight. I'd like you and Peter to go into Jerusalem to prepare the Passover for us there."

"Where, Lord? Every house will be overflowing!"

"No. One home is ready to receive us. Spirit says that a dear brother of Mine has prepared a large upper room, especially for us. He's been turning down requests all day for that room, in faith that I would come. Go quickly now. We must not disappoint him. After you enter the city, you will spot a man carrying a pitcher of water. Follow him to My brother's house. I know you will give him great joy when you tell him, 'The Teacher says, "My time is come. Where is the guest room that I may eat the Passover with My disciples?"'"

I thought that was rather presumptuous, especially at this late hour. Nobody waits until the afternoon of Nisan 13th to find a place to eat the Passover! The table must be set and the meal all prepared by sundown (which begins Nisan 14th). But Peter and I did as we were told.

To our amazement (why am I still amazed at Yashua?) it turned out just as He had said. We almost missed it because of our prejudice against the scribes and Pharisees.

You see, the man carrying the pitcher of water was a teacher of the law, a scribe of the Pharisees, one of the ones who had been grilling Yashua and plotting to put Him to death! He was a tad pudgy, about fifty years old, with a dark beard and a stern, almost angry look on his face. But then, all scribes and Pharisees look like that, you know. I'm afraid I was beginning to despise them all. I didn't want to follow him. So I told Peter, "He can't be the one. Yashua called him a dear brother, not a Pharisee!"

Peter's simple obedience and faith in Yashua pulled us through. He retorted, "How many other men have you seen carrying pitchers of water? In all my life I've never seen a man carrying a pitcher of water! So hurry already, before we lose him in the crowds!"

We barely caught up to him as he was entering a large, ancient two-story home in the middle of the old city. "Please, sir…" Peter was puffing a bit. "May we speak to the master of the house?" The Pharisee stood there in the doorway, with the pitcher still in his hands, glaring down at us, obviously evaluating us. I was thinking, *Uh oh. He recognizes us as Yashua's disciples. He's not even going to bid us good day*. But suddenly his face softened and he opened the door wide. "Yes. Please come in and speak to my father. I believe he has been waiting for you." We entered.

"My name is Joseph of Cyprus." The stern-faced scribe was friendly. Now I recognized him as the lawyer whom Yashua had commended for acknowledging that love is the greatest commandment. *Why had we not recognized him before?* "The man whom you seek is Yacov ben Levi, my sister's father-in law. I have adopted him as my father, since his only son Heber, my sister's husband, died. He is old and frail, and quite blind and hard of hearing. But he is a great man, a very great man, an esteemed rabban who for many years was a leader in the temple and at the city gates. Now that he is confined to bed, the younger priests no longer come to him seeking council, but they should!" He led us through the house and into a lavishly decorated bedroom. "Father!" he called loudly. "I have brought you fresh water from the pool of Siloam. And I have brought you the visitors you've been expecting."

I was aghast. A shriveled old prune, who looked like death warmed over, struggled vainly in his bed to sit up. His paper-thin skin stretched over gnarled bones – he looked like a fresh breeze would blow him right out the window. "My Master! My Lord! Come in, and welcome! All I have is Yours!" I almost laughed at his comical attempts to bow to the blank wall. He couldn't even sit up! Then I realized that he was addressing us.

Peter recovered first. "Uh, good sir, we're not anyone's master or lord. We're just disciples of Yashua. He is the great Rabbi who has been going through Israel teaching and working miracles. I'm sure you've heard of Him. He sent us to tell you, 'My time is come. Where is the guest room that I may eat the Passover with My disciples?'"

Old Yacov relaxed back in bed, chuckling to himself. "Yashua! It is He! Hallelujah! Yes, of course He would send His disciples. Tell your Master," Yacov turned his head in the direction of Peter's voice, and I could see his eyes were clouded over with cataracts. "I have been eagerly expecting Him. I have a large upper room set aside for His use. It is a good room – I hope it is big enough for all His disciples. I bought this house years ago just so I could serve Him here. I knew He would come! I've been praying for Him. My servants have already prepared it for Passover."

Yacov pointed to his eyes. "I was longing to see Him one more time before I die, but alas, I shall have to be satisfied with just hearing His voice." He pointed a bony finger behind us. "Out that door. Up the stairs. Arrange things however you like. Let me know if there is anything else you need. Joseph! Mary! Rabban Yashua and His disciples are my honored guests. Please instruct my servants to attend to their needs. Yet grant them their privacy. We will eat the Passover separately down here."

Joseph bowed respectfully. "Yes Father. I'll tell them. But here, have some fresh water first." And he gently helped him to sit up and drink.

"Thank you, kind sir." I remembered to speak loudly. "But could you tell me… How did you know Yashua would want to eat the Passover here?"

"I've been praying for Yashua every day for more than thirty years. So I grew sensitive to His Spirit. I know that His time is come. I begged YHWH (bless His holy name forever) for the privilege of assisting Him when He claims His Kingdom. This is the way He chose."

Peter and I had time for a good chat with Joseph of Cyprus, who was open-minded and really quite friendly as we got to know him. Though he understood the Pharisees' concern about Yashua leading the multitudes away from the traditions of the elders (and was afraid to cross them), being an honest man he also could see their duplicity and hypocrisy in the matter. He and his sister Mary dearly loved and admired her father-in-law. They figured that since old Yacov loved Yashua so much, they wanted to hear more from Him.

Mary came in while we were talking, bringing her son Marcus and her servant Rhoda. They were eager to get to know us, having heard Yashua preach in the temple. Marcus, who was about fifteen, was especially excited to meet Yashua. Right from the beginning I could tell he wanted to join our little band of disciples. But when he whispered something in his mother's ear, I overheard her rebuke him, "No, Marcus! We've not been invited!" Still, all the time we were there he stayed as close to us as he dared and listened attentively to everything we said.

The sunset had painted the clouds a flaming red when Yashua and His other disciples finished up their ministry for the day and showed up at Yacov's house.

Except for the Pascal lamb itself, we were ready for the rest of the disciples when they knocked on the door. I had figured that old Yacov ben Levi, who was obviously wealthy, would share some of his lamb with us, since there was usually only one lamb per home. So while everyone else was trooping up the stairs, I spoke to Yashua about it. "Master, we found it just like You said. He was expecting You, and had his upper room all prepared for the Passover. Except we have no lamb, so we need to talk to your friend. He is so gracious! He said that if there is anything we need, to just ask… He is really old. I think he just forgot."

But Yashua was laughing at me. "John, I am the Pascal Lamb. You will eat and drink Me tonight."

"Huh?! No roast lamb?" I didn't get it.

Yashua laughed heartily at my perplexity. "I have been roasted by the scribes and Pharisees all week! Don't you think I'm pretty 'well-done' by now? Come, come, now; we've worked hard all week. It is time to rest and celebrate. Please introduce Me now to the master of the house. What is his name?"

"Introduce You? But… You said he was a dear brother of Yours. You don't even know him?"

"Not yet. Spirit led Me here and told Me he is a dear brother, but did not tell Me who I would find."

"His name is Yacov ben Levi. He seems to know You."

We went into Yacov's bedroom. He was still sitting up. "Old Yacov, here is my Master, Yashua," I shouted.

His face lit up with joy. He bowed his head respectfully. "My Master, my Messiah, my King! King of Israel! You honor me by coming under my roof. Everything I have is Yours. Long have I awaited this moment! Now may Your servant depart in peace, for at last I have come face to face with my Savior and the Redemption of all Israel." Tears flooded his eyes and his hands raised in worship.

Yashua just stood there, His eyes wide and mouth half open in surprise. I allowed myself a quiet chuckle… this was only the second time in my life that I had seen Yashua surprised! I congratulated myself that I wasn't the only one to be shocked by such a frail, old man.

Finally Yashua knelt beside the bed and took both of Yacov's hands into His own. "Old man, I do not know you. How is it that you know Me so well?"

"My name is Yacov ben Levi. I first met You thirty years ago at the temple on the Last Great Day of the Feast, when Yoseph brought You for B'rit Milah [ritual circumcision]. I recognized You then as Messiah. I have faithfully prayed for You every day since then. I met You again at Passover when You were twelve. Remember? You amazed us all by Your understanding of Scripture. YHWH (bless His holy name forever) has now honored my prayers by allowing me to hear Your voice and offer You my home before I die."

A flash of recognition washed across His face and Yashua mouthed the words, "Thank You, Spirit! Such a delightful surprise!" Then He spoke loudly to old Yacov, "Now I recognize you. I have long felt the undergirding power of your prayers. I often wondered who could be so faithfully praying for Me. Spirit kept it from Me just so I would have the delight of such a joyous surprise. Would to God all in Israel had such faithful prayers supporting them! I am most grateful. Most grateful! And now, dear old friend, you would like something from Me, I know."

"No, Master. I need nothing. I realize that You have healed many, and even raised some back from the dead and made them young again. But I don't want to be healed or made young again. You have now satisfied all my life's ambitions, and I am ready and even eager to return to my Maker. Nothing in this world attracts me any longer."

"You want to see My face."

Old Yacov's mouth dropped open with a little gasp, and tears flowed freely over his clouded eyes. "I don't want my eyesight back. I have seen way too much of this world's wickedness. But…" he wiped his eyes on his bedsheets. "But I would be most honored if I could just catch a brief glimpse of Your beautiful, beautiful face."

"And you shall. Come." Yashua stood up, looking toward the heavens, and held out His hand. Old Yacov struggled to rise, but I could see that he'd never make it unless Yashua stooped down to help. Before I could reach out to assist, Yashua began to glow with that exquisitely white otherworldly brilliance that we had seen on Mount Hermon. Then the frail old man dropped back in his bed as if dead, but from him rose up a strong and handsome young man, who took Yashua's outstretched hand and leapt up beside Him. They were both glowing brightly, and I struggled to see through the brilliance. It was like I was looking through a bubble into another world, a beautiful world filled with green pastures, bright-colored flowers, warbling birds, friendly animals, graceful trees, delicious scents and joyful sounds… a world more alive than I could imagine. But there was no sun. It seemed as if all the light in that world was coming from the pair who stood there gazing in deepest love and admiration for each other. Angels filled the heavens around them, but at a distance, reverently covering their faces with their wings at the holy encounter. I too fell on my knees in awe and worship, the vision was so overpowering. I felt small and unworthy, rather like a kid caught peeking through the keyhole. It reminded me of my lessons on love – all that the Master had worked so hard to develop in me – but my love for Him was still shallow and lukewarm compared to this!

I could hear them talking together through the bubble. "I knew it! I just knew it!" Yacov – no longer old! – was saying. "Yours is the most beautiful face in the universe! Fairer even than my fondest dreams! How could anyone not love You?"

Yashua was smiling with a joy and acceptance beyond my comprehension. "You asked to see My beautiful face, remember? In this realm I am indeed the most beautiful form in the universe. But in the world from which we came, I am considered plain, homely, even ugly except by those who know Me well. You never asked to see My ugly face. Do you wish now to change your mind?"

"Oh! No, no, Sir… This is far better! Beyond anything I could have hoped for." Yacov glanced around. "Well… I know I just asked for a quick glimpse, but now that I am here, I feel I never want to return… never want to leave Your side… this glorious place. Must I go back?"

"Dear friend. You have stood with Me so long. I must go back and complete the task for which My Father sent Me. My toughest times lie just ahead. I would be honored if you would continue your covering prayer a little longer."

"Yes, of course, of course. One last hug and I shall be totally content. You've satisfied my lifelong dream. Thank You, my Messiah, my King, my God!"

Suddenly the bubble dissolved. Yashua gently laid the unconscious young man back into the old, frail body. He immediately woke up and asked, "Yashua! Is that You? Are You still here with me? I saw Your beautiful face! Was that really You, or was it just a dream?"

"I am still here, dear friend." The loudness of His voice startled me. "And that was no dream. That realm is far more real than this physical world. You will see Me again there very soon, and next time you will never have to leave it again. Now, I must go up to eat the Passover with My disciples. Thank you for providing your home for us. And thank you for your covering prayers. I shall have great need of them especially today and for the next three days."

"Yes, my King! I bless You in the all-powerful name of YHWH! Go now in peace to claim Your victory. You have honored me with the great privilege of praying for You, and I shall continue to my dying breath."

"YHWH bless you as well, *O you mighty warrior in My Kingdom!"* Yashua stood and beckoned me to follow. And old – very old – Yacov sank back into his bedding, still praying fervently and praising YHWH.

We closed the door reverently behind us and headed up the stairs. I couldn't resist a comment. "Mighty warrior? He looked just as weak and frail as ever. And You didn't even heal his blindness or his deafness!" It came out like an accusation – a bit caustic, I'm ashamed to say.

Yashua stopped and turned to face me on the stairway. A sadness had come into His eyes. He looked as if the weight of the world was upon Him. "Are you still judging Me, John? After all we've been through together, is it so hard just to love Me, trust Me, and believe? You still see things too much with the eyes of man – not enough with the eyes of Spirit." He spoke softly, gently, entreatingly.

"Right now, old Yacov is the greatest warrior on earth for My Kingdom. He is doing precisely what he has been called to do, in strict obedience to Father's highest plan for his life. He prays with unwavering faith; faith that doesn't depend on outward signs. He sees right through all the seeming defeats to My victory. He is undistracted and focused. His prayers prevail with God and triumph over demons. He is achieving great things for My Kingdom. He shall soon receive highest honors and rewards which shall last forever. Would you have Me deprive him of that by healing him, making him young again, and filling his brief life on earth with worldly distractions?"

I stared dumbly back at Yashua, my mouth hanging open, humbled, again realizing how much I had yet to learn about loving this incredible man of Spirit.

CHAPTER 20 – FIRST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD – PASSOVER, Nisan 14 (T/W) April 23/24, 31 AD

144 We gathered around the table. Everyone was exhausted; the last few weeks had been really hectic with all the crowds needing ministry. We all sorta plopped our hind ends down around the table and looked at each other, waiting for someone to serve us. I did, too! *Was I so dense? Or just being lazy?* I felt really foolish when Yashua, who surely had to be more exhausted than any of us, got up, put aside His robe, wrapped the servant's towel around Him, and without a word, took the basin to wash our feet. We all felt foolish. One of us should have done that. It just didn't seem right for the Master to be serving His disciples!

I looked over at James and frowned, wondering if there was any polite way of saying, "Peter and I prepared the table. Isn't it about your turn to wash our feet?!" But we just sat there squirming and looking embarrassed.

Finally, when Yashua got to Peter (who was halfway around the table from me), he couldn't stand it any more. He jumped up and tried to wrest the basin and towel away from Yashua. "Yashua, You're my Lord and Master, not my servant! I can never allow You to wash my feet!"

"If I do not wash you, then you shall have no part in My Kingdom," Yashua quietly replied.

Peter gasped and froze for a long moment, while the enormity of that statement sank in. "Oh… then… then wash all of me! My hands, my head, just dump that basin all over me!" And he fell on his face.

"That's My beloved Peter!" Yashua responded jovially, pulling him back up. "Impetuous and wholehearted! I sure appreciate that in you! But no, after you've bathed, only your hands and feet need washing. Then you will be completely clean. But…" His smile faded and His eyes swept around the room, stopping on Judas, "not all." We didn't understand that at the time. Later we learned that He already knew Judas had taken money to betray Him.

Yashua finished without further incident, redonned His robe, and took His place at the center of the table. "Do you understand what I've done for you? You call Me your Lord and Teacher, which is correct – that is who I am. But I have been a servant to you, just as I have always been to the multitudes. Please remember that. The true master, lord, or ruler serves, just like a true shepherd serves the sheep. As I have done for you, so you do for others."

His jovial attitude was gone now. I had never seen Him so serious as when He stood to light the Pascal candles. (With no woman among us, Yashua chose the servant role again.) Eyes glistening, He fervently recited the traditional prayer that opens the Pascal Seder, "Barukh atah Adonai eloheynu melekh ha'olam, asher kidshanu bidevaro uvishmo anakhnu, madlikim haneyrot shel yom tov."

Blessed are You, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who has set us apart by Your Word, and in whose name we light the festival lights.

He sat back down and leaned against Judas, who had been given the first place of honor at His right. I leaned against Him, in the second place of honor at His left. I sensed such incredible love from Him – yet awful sadness as well. He spoke softly. "I brought you to this secluded place to get away from the crowds. I've earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you – just you twelve – before My death. This is My last day. I shall not eat the Passover with you again until the day it is fulfilled in the Kingdom of God. Thank you, My disciples, for coming and sharing this time with Me. I love you so much…" and He gave Judas and me a big hug. We all felt very, very loved.

But then I saw His lower lip trembling, and tears came to His eyes. "Actually, I don't speak this to all twelve of you… I know whom I have chosen. But the Scripture must be fulfilled: 'He who eats My bread has lifted up his heel against Me.' I tell you this so when it comes to pass you will believe that I am the fulfillment of these Scriptures." Again He looked at Judas, and again the rest of us missed it.

Yashua proceeded with the Pascal Seder, both leading and serving. He led us through the **Cup of Sanctification** and the Kiddush (prayer of sanctification) just as we always had done it. But then He took three whole matzos, bound them up in a napkin, and held them up for all to see. "These three matzos represent My Father, Myself, and My Holy Spirit," He said simply. Then without another word, He took the middle of the three, broke it, put half back, and put the other half under the pillow on which He reclined. That was really strange! Totally different from all our Passover traditions. We were all bursting with questions about it, but didn't dare interrupt, as He poured for us the second cup of sweet wine, the **Cup of Instruction**, then reclined again and presented the most beautiful Haggadah ['the Telling' of the Israelite's escape from Egypt - see Vol 1, page 139] that I have ever heard. He made it come alive, almost as if He had been there Himself.

At the end, He looked around. "Why is no one asking questions? This is a night to ask questions! From now on, when you eat the Passover, let the younger ones among you always ask questions, so you all may learn. Nathanael! You are the youngest here. Do you have any questions?"

"Yes, Lord." Nathanael voiced what we all had been wondering. "Those three matzos… What did You with them, and why, and what does it mean?"

"Good question! I gave you a simple physical picture of an important spiritual truth, so even the youngest can understand. The matzo is made of unleavened bread. Leaven represents sin, so the matzo, having no trace of leaven, represents God Himself, who alone is without sin. It all came from one batch of dough. Even so there is only one God. But I took three whole matzos to represent the three aspects of God's nature: The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. I wrapped them up together in the napkin to represent that these three are still one. There is no division or antagonism between them. Then the middle matzo, representing Myself, I took out from between the others. That portrays My leaving My glory in the heavens and coming to earth as the Son of Adam. I broke that matzo and put half under My cushion, representing My body, which will soon be broken and buried. The other half I returned to its place between the other two matzos, saying that I shall soon return to My place within the Father and the Spirit." He smiled at Nathanael. "Any more questions? Anyone? – Yes, James?"

"That piece You hid under the cushion is still there. You didn't tell us what happens to it."

"You're right. That piece seems to be lost, doesn't it. Maybe we can find it later." James looked a bit crestfallen. "Any other questions? How about you, Andrew?"

Andrew looked at Him and started to shake his head, then stopped. "Uh, that Scripture You quoted about the one who eats Your bread lifting up his heel against You… that can't be one of us… uh… could it?"

145 A look of sadness clouded His face. "Yes, Andrew. One of you twelve will betray Me." We all gasped, and began questioning each other and Him: "Who is it, Lord? Surely not I, is it Lord? Who of us could do such a thing? Could you ever betray the Master?" The hubbub grew, for we were all deeply grieved. Yashua remained silent, head bowed as if He couldn't bear to answer. Finally, quieting us, He said. "Let's proceed with the Midrash [recitation of Scripture], and I will answer you in a few minutes."

After the Midrash, we sang the Hallel and drank the Cup of Instruction, feeling well-instructed on everything except for that hidden matzo and the open question on the betrayer. Then once again Yashua put off His outer robe, put the servant's towel around His waist, and took the washbasin. Getting some clean water, He came around the table and washed our hands in preparation for the meal.

Again, it seemed so incongruous that the leader should be the servant, but this time everyone accepted it without complaint. We all wanted to have a part in His Kingdom! I noticed that He took special care washing Judas' hands. And I saw tears in his eyes as He did so.

Then to start the meal, Yashua opened up the napkin and took out the top whole piece of matzo and the middle half-piece. Breaking them into pieces, He passed them out, saying, "Each of you eat it, dry, with nothing on it. There is nothing that you need to add to God for Him to become your life; simply eat Him and live, for His Words are your life. And there is nothing that you **can** add to get Him to love you, for His love for you is already unconditional, as well as infinite and eternal. It is just you and God, in a beautiful, joyful, Life-giving love relationship. Nothing can separate you from Him. Meditate on that as you eat it."

We tried to meditate on God's infinite love as we munched, but Simon the Zealot interrupted the silence, "Master, does God love the betrayer, too?"

"Yes, Simon, of course He does. God's love is never diminished by man's sinfulness. If it were, I think you'd all be in trouble! However, sometimes a father has to punish. If God never punished the sin in each of you, you would never learn to walk in His holiness and He could never have close fellowship with you. What kind of love is that, with no relationship? Even though I must be betrayed that the Scriptures be fulfilled, I urgently warn you that the betrayer will receive such terrible punishment – it would be better for him if he had never been born!"

Again we all gasped and looked at one another, but He was proceeding with the seder. "This third matzo, the one representing the Holy Spirit, is very special. It will not be eaten dry! While you can add nothing to God for Him to be your life, His Holy Spirit adds spice to your life! He adds another whole dimension of sights and sounds, filling your lives with richness and fullness. Each of you take a big piece of it, break it in two, and put a little of the maror [bitter herbs] in between the two halves. If you ate it like that, it would be very sour. But before you eat it, dip it into the bowl of sweet kharoset. This represents several things. Slavery in Egypt was bitter and hard, but it had its sweet side, too. The hard labor made you strong and healthy. It also made you willing and eager to go when it was time, so you could escape with YHWH in victory. Even so, walking with the Holy Spirit can seem hard, even bitter at times, as it is a death to your self-nature, your self-will. Yet it is also an abundant and victorious life, sweet fellowship, peace and joy in walking with YHWH without anxiety…"

He continued talking, but I'm ashamed to admit that I was distracted, as were several of the other disciples. Peter waved to me and whispered across the table, "Get Him to tell us who the betrayer is!" So I leaned back on Yashua's chest, waited for a pause in His monologue, then butted in, "Yashua, please. Who is the betrayer? Tell us clearly."

"It is he who dips with Me into the bowl, and for whom I dip and return it to him," He replied. I just shook my head. That didn't make sense to me.

Without another word, Yashua put the bitter herbs on His own matzo, then reached over to the big bowl of sweet kharoset in the center of the table. We had all been dipping our pieces of matzo when we were ready, so there was nothing unusual about the fact that just as Yashua reached out to the bowl of kharoset, so did Judas. They both dipped at the same time. But Judas' hand trembled, and his matzo fell and lay on top of the kharoset. Yashua graciously reached out with His left hand, picked it up, dipped it deeply into the sweet mixture, and put it to Judas' mouth, just as He was putting His own to His own mouth. Then He smiled at him, a warm, loving, accepting, caring smile, as they both chewed their sweet 'n sour matzos. That didn't make sense to me, either. *Judas certainly couldn't be the betrayer – not after Yashua had given him the first place of honor at His right side, washed his hands and feet with such special care, hugged him with such closeness, helped him so graciously, smiled at him with such warm love – no, not Judas! Anybody but dear Judas! How much he loved Yashua! How hard Judas worked to help Him establish His Kingdom!* As you can see, I was still judging by outward appearances.

I noticed that his face was rather greenish white. He swallowed hard, and I chuckled at the effect of the bitter herbs on him. I barely heard him whisper, "Surely… surely it is not I, is it Rabbi?"

"It is as you have said yourself, Judas. Now go; what you must do, do quickly." And just like that, Judas got up and headed for the stairs.

Still we all knew it couldn't be Judas! He was the most honored and trusted among us. Yashua had entrusted him with all the ministry finances. He often honored him with the first place at the table, and always spoken well of him. We knew it couldn't be him, so we just figured that Yashua had sent him out to buy something for the Feast, or to give some money to the poor so they would have enough to celebrate the Passover, too. ***146*** Anyway, why should Judas be so honored all the time, and I only placed at Yashua's left hand? And there was old Peter, across the table. Surely he should be as esteemed as Judas! Pretty soon we were discussing who really was the greatest among us, anyway.

Yashua shook His head in exasperation. "No, no, you still don't get it. The rulers of the pagans lord it over them, but it is not so with you. Let him who is the greatest among you be as the youngest, and your leaders as your servant, just as I, your Master, have served you. You have stood with Me in My trials, and you shall indeed be honored. Just as My Father has granted Me the Kingdom, so I grant you to eat and drink at My table in My Kingdom and sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. But only as you learn to humbly serve My people as I have humbly served you and given My life as a ransom for many.

147 "Now is the time for the Son of Adam to be glorified, and God is glorified in Him. But it means that I can only be with you a little while longer, for where I am going, you cannot come. After I'm gone, just don't forget to love and serve one another, as I have loved and served you. That is how everyone will know that you are My disciples, by your love for one another. That will guarantee your reward."

Peter interrupted, "Lord, where are You going, and why can't we come?" Just like the rest of us, he was hearing only the good parts about the Kingdom.

"It is quite impossible for any of you to follow Me now, but you shall follow later…"

"Lord, why? Why can't I follow You right now?"

"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded to sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you, that your faith not fail. When you have repented, strengthen your brothers."

"But Master, I'm ready to fight for You, go to prison with You, and even lay down my life for You!"

"Will you lay down your life for Me? I tell you surely, Simon, that before a rooster crows this morning, you will deny Me three times."

We gasped, and Peter fell back heavily on his cushion, stunned. *Old Peter? The betrayer? No way! That is utterly inconceivable!* Yet Yashua had just said it!

We finished the Pascal meal in a subdued and somber mood. Yashua even talked about getting ready for a battle, by selling our robes and buying swords. But when Peter and Simon the Zealot showed Him their swords, He said it was enough. We kept glancing at old Peter, wondering how in heaven's name he could ever be the betrayer. Big, enthusiastic, loving, faithful old Peter! He was just an oversize teddy bear! Peter could never betray the Master! I was secretly glad he was one of the ones who carried a sword. Yashua seemed glad, too. Somehow, He had to be mistaken on that one. None of us was thinking about Judas, for we hadn't even noticed that he'd never returned.

When the meal was finished and we lay back full and satisfied, Yashua continued with the seder. "Nathanael, remember the half-matzo that we lost? See if you can find it and tell Me what it represents."

Nathanael dug under the cushion and came up with it, still unbroken. He returned it to Yashua, saying, "You said it represents You, the Son of God."

148 "Very good, Nathanael. That is correct." He held the matzo high and blessed it in the ineffable name of YHWH. "This matzo represents My body, broken…" He broke it suddenly with a loud snap, startling us, "…for you. Every one of you must eat of it, or you will have no part with Me in My Kingdom. Do this in remembrance of Me every time you eat the Passover. In this way you will commemorate My death, and My victory over death, until I return."

"Lord?" I interrupted, holding up my piece. "This is entirely new to the Pascal Seder. What shall we call it? And shall we teach others to do so, too?"

"Yes, yes! All who believe in Me must remember My death in this way. Call this, 'afikomen' [Greek for 'I came'], so all may know that just as I came, so shall I return. Go ahead and eat it with Me now." Then as everyone munched his piece, Yashua took the fresh, new wine and poured out the third cup, the **Cup of Redemption** or the **Cup of Blessing.** Again holding the cup high, He blessed it and gave thanks in the matchless name of YHWH. Then He passed it around the table, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My own blood, which is poured out for all who will accept it for the forgiveness of their sins. All of you drink from it. Do this every time you eat the Passover, in remembrance of Me. For as often as you eat this matzo and drink this cup, you are proclaiming My sacrificial death for the sins of the world, until I return." (1 Cor 11:24-26)

So we all drank the Cup of Redemption and repeated the familiar traditional blessing together. Then, relaxing back on His cushion, Yashua continued teaching us. "Remember that the third cup, the Cup of Redemption, points to YHWH's third promise to Israel: *'I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgment.'* This applies right now. That 'great judgment' falls now on Me, as I take upon Myself the sins of the whole world for your redemption. However, the fourth cup, the **Cup of Praise**, is for the future. It represents YHWH's fourth promise to Israel: *'I will take you for My people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am YHWH your God, who brought you out from under the bondage of the Egyptians and into the Land of Promise.'* This applies to the restoration of Israel under her King. But Israel is not ready to receive her King. She has rejected Me. After all I've done, she is unwilling for Me to take her as My bride. Therefore I tell you truly, I shall not taste of the fruit of the vine with you again until that great day when I drink it new with you in My Kingdom. Then we shall drink it anew to celebrate your restoration."

149 We looked at each other, a bit unsettled that Yashua should be skipping such an important part of the Pascal Seder. He caught our feelings right away, and smiled. "Don't let your heart be troubled. Just because we skip the Cup of Praise for now doesn't mean that we can't praise YHWH. We will close with the Hallel as we always have. I know that you've put your faith in YHWH; now have faith in Me as well. My Father's house is a spiritual house, with many dwelling places in the spirit realms, but you cannot enter them as long as you see Me only as a physical person. I must go, to prepare a place in My Father's house for you, so where I constantly dwell, at the Father's right hand in the heavenlies, you may learn to dwell also. I will be gone only for a short time, and then I will return to abide with you forever. Finally you will be able to see things as My Father sees! I have told you this in advance so you will know the way and be able to follow Me."

Thomas interrupted: "Lord, we don't even know where You are going. How can we know the way?"

"I am the way! I am the Truth! I am the Life! You can only come to My Father through Me. There is no other way to enter My Father's house."

"Lord, just show us the Father, and that will be enough for us." Shy Philip had been quiet until now.

"Dear Philip! I have been with you for three years now, and still you don't know Me? When you have seen Me, you have seen the Father, for I, and only I, am the full bodily revelation of the eternal Father to these realms of time and space. That is why I say that no one can come to the Father but through Me. Listen closely. I will tell you how it works. It all starts with faith. Believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me. When you see the works that I do, believe that it is the Father doing His works through Me. Now, take that faith a step farther. Believe that the Father can do those very same works, and even greater works, through you as well, as long as you are abiding in Me as I abide in My Father. You are My representatives; you bear My name, just as I bear the Father's name. Everything you do, do in My name, that the Father may be glorified in Me. Then anything you ask, I will do – not for your glory, but that I receive glory in you. We share a love relationship, and you will keep My commandments out of love for Me."

I raised my hand. "Master, I do love You, with all my heart. I never knew I could have such love for any person. And I do keep Your commandments as best I can. Yet there is just no way I could ever do the marvelous works that You do, much less greater works! I am still stunned, awed by them. How in the world can You expect us to…"

"John, My beloved disciple! I expect nothing from you apart from Me. When did I ever expect anything from you apart from Me? Remember when I sent you throughout the cities of Israel to minister in My name? I was with you by My Spirit, interceding, supporting you, standing with you. Did you not sense My presence as you ministered?" I nodded, again recalling His words to me: *If you had been ministering in your own name or for your own glory, you could have accomplished nothing at all.*

"That is how you can always live. I won't leave you as orphans in the world. I must leave you now, but I will intercede before My Father, and He will send My Spirit of Truth to you as your Comforter, Guide, Wisdom, Healer, Protector, and Friend. The world won't see Me any more, but you will see Me! I've lived with you as your Master, but I will return to you as much, much more – I will return as your very Life! Then you shall know that I am in My Father, and that you are in Me and I am living in You."

Judas Thaddaeus (Judas Iscariot was still gone) was still thinking in terms of a physical king ruling the world. "How can it be, Lord, that we will be able to see You, but the world won't? Surely when You become King they…"

"Judas, the world doesn't love Me. The world hates Me! They will not have Me as king over them! They will never keep My commandments. But upon you who love Me and keep My Word, My Father will pour out His love upon you. We will come to you and make Our dwelling place with you. Our Holy Spirit, for We are Spirit, will become your Helper. He will bring to remembrance all that I spoke to you. He will teach you all things and will lead you into all Truth. So don't be fearful about My leaving. Rejoice at My leaving, for it is only in My leaving that I can grant you My perfect peace in your soul! The world can give only a temporary external peace, but when I return to you as Spirit and make My home within your heart, within your soul, I will be to you lasting peace, for I am your Peace."

Yashua stood to leave. He looked exhausted. "I wanted to leave you with this warning so when it comes to pass, you will believe. The dark ruler of this world is come to kill and destroy, but he has no occasion against Me. He cannot touch Me, because I dwell with My Father. Now you must dwell in Me and I in you. That is your protection against him." He sighed a deep sigh, and I could tell He wanted to go find a quiet place to pray. "Arise. Let's go to…"

"But, Yashua?" I interrupted, bewildered. "I don't understand what You mean by "dwell in You." I looked around at the others, and they all nodded. Yashua had already reached the door, but, sensing a learning moment, He returned to the table.

150 "Okay John, I'll give you an illustration," He said, sitting back down. "I am like an ancient grape-vine, thick and strong, with roots buried deep in the rich earth. Every year I send out branches, which bear lush, juicy grapes. My Father YHWH is the vinedresser. He makes sure that I am well-watered and get plenty of sunshine. He also prunes My branches, cutting off dead ones that bear no fruit, and pruning the rest back to bear more fruit.

"You, My disciples, are My branches! I bear My fruit upon you! But you cannot bear fruit if you are separate from the vine. You must continually abide in Me, just like a branch abides on the vine drawing life from the vine, or you will wither and die. This is why I said that I will return as your very Life. After I leave you physically, I will return as Spirit, to dwell in you, fill you, and become your Life. Apart from Me you can do nothing, but as long as you abide in Me and I in you, drinking deeply of My Life and keeping My Words, then you shall bear much fruit.

"Indeed, you shall ask whatever you will, and it will be done for you. That will make My joy complete, for My joy will fill you; My peace will fill you; My love will fill you – yes, fill you and be completed in you. My Holy Spirit will remind you of all that I have said and will teach you to love one another as I have loved you. This is what I command, that you love one another. And if you do what I command, I will call you My friends. This is the greatest love of all, that one is willing to lay down his life for his friends.

151 "The world will hate you. It hated Me! If you were of the world, it would love you, but I call you out of the world systems to live a life apart; a holy life; a heavenly life; a life divine, for it is My Life of Spirit flowing through you. Then when the world sees you, your holiness will confront them with their sinfulness, leaving them no excuse. Some will come to you and ask how they too can be delivered from their sin and receive My Life within. But most will hate you. They will try to find some fault in you, rail against you, and persecute you. Don't take it personally. They did the same for Me, even though I loved them enough to lay down My life for them. True is the Scripture, 'They hated Me without just cause.' [Ps 35:19; 69:4] They will make you outcasts from the synagogue, and will even think that killing you is doing service to God. They will condemn you for the very crimes that they justify in themselves. When that hour comes, remember what I have said!

152 "I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away, for then I can send My Spirit to be with you as your Helper. When He comes, He will confront the world through you. My Life in you will convict the world of sin, and righteousness, and judgment. Of sin, because they do not believe My Words so as to receive My Life as you have received it. Of righteousness, because though I go to the Father and you no longer see Me, yet you still dwell in My righteousness and reveal it to them. It is My Life within you, and they see it and cannot deny it. And of judgment, because the god of this world has been judged and found lacking. I have gained the victory over him. All his power and cunning cannot overcome you. Even the weakest of My disciples is stronger than him when abiding in Me.

"I have many more things I could say, except you aren't ready for them. But it is okay. When the Helper comes, My Spirit of Truth, He will guide you into all the Truth. He will glorify Me, for He will take all that is Mine from the Father and carefully disclose it to you as you become ready to receive it. In a little while I'll be gone. Then I'll come back for a brief time, and then leave again…"

We were losing it. James poked me, and whispered, "What do you think He means by, 'In a little while I'll be gone'?" He was obviously worried and sad.

"I don't know," I replied. "Maybe He means He has to go hide out during the Pascal Feast." I also grew sad at the thought of Him leaving us during the celebrations. I was still seeing things far too much according to the physical realm, though I didn't realize that until later.

As always, Yashua seemed to hear our thoughts. "Yes, you are sad now at the thought of My leaving. And you'll weep and lament while the world mocks us in our tragedy. But I assure you that our tragedy will be turned to victory, and your sorrow will be turned to joy. It's like a woman in travail. She cries out in pain because her hour has come. But after her baby is delivered, she forgets her pain and anguish for the joy that her child is born.

"Just so My hour is come. My departure is sorrow now, more agony than you can possibly comprehend, but it will turn into great joy that no one can take away. As My Father sent Me into the world, so now I am leaving the world and returning to Him in triumph, having completed the task for which He sent Me into the world."

James brightened up. "Now I understand. Thank You for speaking so plainly. We do believe that You came from God and are returning to Him."

"Do you really believe, James? Will you still believe when the hour of travail comes upon Me? Any of you? No. You will be terrified. Every one of you. You will abandon Me and be scattered to your own homes, leaving Me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is always with Me.

"I have warned you in advance, so when it happens, you may receive My peace. In the world you will have tribulation, but don't be anxious. Take courage! I have overcome the world. Abide in Me, and I in you, and you will have perfect peace within, even through the worst the world can do to you. In Me, you already have the victory!"

153 Yashua stood again, and I could see the pull within Him to depart to a quiet place for prayer. I put down my pen and paper, leaned back, and rubbed my sore fingers. Ever since Matthew had taught me shorthand, we had taken turns recording Yashua's talks; tonight was my turn. But this was too much. My writing hand was cramping.

Then Yashua raised His arms and lifted His eyes to the heavens. With tears streaming down His face He began to pray right there. This was a rare opportunity, as He usually prayed alone. I grabbed my pen. "Father, the hour is come. Glorify Me now with the glory that You gave Me from the beginning of time. I will return Your glory by finishing the work for which You sent Me. I revealed You to those You gave Me. They are Yours, for they have kept Your Word. They believe that I came from You, and that You gave Me authority over all mankind. So I have given them Your Abundant Life of Spirit – to them and all who believe in Me by their word. For this is eternal Life, to know You as the only true God, and to know the One whom You have sent.

"I ask on their behalf, Father – not for the rest of the world, but just for these believers. I now return to You, yet they remain in the world. O holy Father! Keep them in Your name! Share the name You have given Me with them, too, that they all may be one, even as We are one. You in Me, and I in You, Father, just so may they be in Us. I don't ask that You take them out of the world. Oh no! But rather, as long as they remain in the world, guard them from the evil one. Sanctify them in the Truth which is Your Word.

"And for all the others who will believe in Me through their testimony, I pray for them, too, Father. Join them all in oneness with Us. I have shared the glory You gave Me with them, too, to perfect them in unity, that the world will see it is You who sent Me.

"Father, reveal to them the greatness of Our love! Show them all how to live where I am! That is My greatest desire! That they may dwell continually with Us in the secret place of Our holiness, that they may behold My glory that You gave Me in greatest love from the beginning of time, and share Our joy in sweet fellowship and communion with Us. Yes, Father! The world cannot understand. But these have understood, and have come to know Me, and to know Your holy name through Me. And though I return to You, yet I will continue to make Your name known to them, that the divine love You have poured out upon Me may also be in them, as I am in them. Then and only then, Father, will they be that living testimony to Our love, that the world will believe that You sent Me. Even so, Amen! Let it be, Father, let it now and forever be!"

154 Yashua sank to the floor in silent prayer. I gave a grin and a nod to Matthew to let him know I had gotten it all down. He stood up and led us in a Pascal hymn while I massaged my hand. Finally, with a deep sigh (almost a groan), Yashua got His cloak and headed for the stairs. We got our cloaks and followed quietly. We were deeply touched by His prayer, and awed to see His face shining with an otherworldly luminescence. It made the darkness of the night seem even darker and more foreboding.

His family having finished their Pascal meal hours before, Marcus had been sitting on the top stair listening. He started to scamper down but Yashua called him back. "Marcus! I am honored that you wish to listen in on us. Go ask your mother – if she allows it, you may follow us." Marcus did end up following, that night and long after.

Yashua then headed for the Garden of Gethsemane on Mount Olivet, where we'd been sleeping the last few nights. But tonight He wanted to pray, not sleep. Along the way, He said, "You will all fall away from Me this night, as it is written, 'I will strike down the Shepherd and the sheep will be scattered.' [Zech 13:7] But after I am raised, I will meet with you again and go back to be with you in Galilee."

Good old Peter, still stinging from Yashua's accusation, answered bravely, "Even though everyone else falls away, Master, I will never forsake You!"

Yashua repeated, "I tell you truly, Peter, that before a rooster crows this morning, you'll deny Me three times."

"Not so, Lord! I swear it! Even if I have to die with You, I will never deny You! I am not the betrayer! I swear it!" And we all fervently agreed with Peter. All twelve of us… Oh! I looked around. There were twelve of us with Yashua, but the twelfth was young Marcus!

I noticed for the first time that Judas Iscariot had never returned. But even noticing didn't help me to understand. I felt sad that he had missed that beautiful discussion and prayer after the meal. But I didn't worry about him. He knew where we were, and he knew where we'd spend the night. He was a big boy. He could always catch up with us.

[155] What I did not realize until later was, at that moment Judas was betraying us to the chief priests. The second watch (9 PM) had begun, and our religious rulers wanted to get a good night's sleep in preparation for the big day tomorrow – when all the remaining Pascal lambs would be slain for the families of Israel. [See endnote 4.]

But Judas had come to them right after dinner and had told them the whole situation: that Yashua had stolen away from the crowds to eat the Passover with us disciples, that He was heading toward Mount Olivet to spend the night, and that now was their last chance to capture Him before the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread.

At first they didn't want to do it right then – too many things to do and not enough time before the high Shabbat beginning the Feast, at which they absolutely had to be ceremonially clean so they could eat the hagigah (peace offering) which the priests shared with the people at their festal meal.

But Judas had a plan. "Lookit. He has said He's going to leave us during the Feast, to go back to the Father and 'receive His Kingdom', whatever that means. This may be your last chance. But you don't have to capture Him. You don't even have to touch Him. He has claimed to be a King, and to any Roman that's high treason! Caesar is the only king to them. Just call on the Roman garrison at Antonia Fortress [the Tower of Marc Antony], and tell them of His treason. Let them do the dirty work. The Romans take care of traitors immediately!"

"And you know where He is now?"

"Of course. He was just finishing dinner when I left. He's been spending the night at Mount Olivet so He could come early to teach in the temple. He'll be there, no doubt in the Garden of Gethsemane as before. He only has His disciples with Him, just eleven men. If you get the Roman guard right now, you'll catch them sleeping."

"Okay, sounds good. Let's go talk to the Romans."

At Antonia, our religious rulers told a centurion their story. The centurion, Alex, had just been getting ready to retire. He was unconvinced. "Hey. I've heard this guy, too. He didn't sound dangerous to me. It's already the second watch. Come back in the morning and we'll see about it."

But Judas was not about to be put off so lightly. He stepped up and bowed respectfully. "Sir, I don't believe you understand the gravity of this situation. I was one of Yashua's disciples and I know what His plans are. He intends to take over as King of Israel. And He is popular enough with the people to do it, too. If you wait until morning He will be surrounded with a big crowd of ardent followers, and you'll never be able to take Him. You've got to do it tonight."

"Hmmm. One of His followers, eh? So why are you betraying Him to me?" Alex was skeptical.

Judas turned red, but in the darkness, no one noticed. Thinking fast, he responded, "Uh, I've always been loyal to Caesar! I followed Yashua as long as He was just healing and helping others, but when He claimed to be King, I saw how dangerous He could be. I think He intends to take over during the Feast, so tonight might be your last chance to capture Him alone with just His other disciples. He only has eleven men with Him. I know where He is, and I can lead you right to Him."

The big centurion yawned and rubbed his chin. "Eleven men… How will you identify Yashua for us?"

"Oh, I'm one of His favorites. We always greet each other with a kiss. I'll just walk right up to Him as always, and He'll never suspect a thing. Just watch the one I kiss, and seize Him. Don't worry about the others. They could never be a threat without Him. They'll be too scared to fight. They only have two swords among the lot of them."

"Two swords, eh? Okay. Wait here while I get approval from my commander and gather my men."

So they waited, impatiently, for nearly an hour. Finally the centurion showed up again. "My liege laughed at me, but finally agreed that this guy is getting too popular. He told me I could do whatever I want with my hundred, but he will not send any of the rest of the cohort. I'm sure a hundred will be plenty, but we Romans like to play it safe. So go get everyone you can round up. Your slaves, friends, everyone in agreement with capturing Him. Have them bring any weapons they might have, swords, clubs, knives… Oh, and don't forget to bring torches. There is a big psychological impact if we have lots of torches. My men will have their swords, lances, torches, and a set of chains to bind Him."

It was near the end of the second watch (midnight) before they got it together and marched down to Mount Olivet. Meanwhile, [156] Yashua had led us into the Garden of Gethsemane (on the side of the mount) to pray. I hate to admit that I don't remember much of that time. I vaguely remember that Yashua kept telling us to, "Keep watching and praying, that you don't enter into temptation." And I remember feeling a little proud when He took Peter and James and me a little farther into the garden to comfort Him while He prayed. But somehow, whenever we would kneel to pray, we'd fall asleep.

He kept waking us up and urging us to pray some more – I think that happened three or four times – but as soon as He stopped talking, I'd fall asleep again. We'd had a big day and a feast at supper, and my eyelids were just too heavy.

The first thing I really remember was when He said, "Are you still sleeping? Arise! The hour has come, and the one who betrayed Me is at hand." At the word "betrayed" all that He had said about the betrayer flooded back into my mind. I looked at old Peter, who sat beside me rubbing his eyes. He had been sleeping as soundly as I.

"Old Peter… Y-you're not going to betray… Y-y-you wouldn't…" I stuttered.

155 "Huh?" was all he could manage. Then both of us were startled by Judas tripping gaily up to us and greeting the Master. "Hail, Rabbi!" he called cheerily, too loud for the quietness of the garden. He reached out, wrapped his arms around Yashua, and kissed Him on both cheeks.

"Judas, really?" Yashua's voice seemed infinitely sad as well as tired. "Do you betray Me with a kiss?"

Suddenly we saw the soldiers, the torches, the swords and clubs. It seemed to me like hundreds of people, all crowding into the garden, all focused on Judas and Yashua. Peter and I finally woke up!

Peter grabbed for his sword, shouting, "Master, the Pharisees are still trying to kill You! Shall we strike with the sword?" Without even waiting for an answer he drew his sword and started slashing wildly. There was a blood-curdling scream, and in an instant every sword and lance in the entire Roman Army seemed pointed right at us.

"Stop, Peter!" Yashua commanded. "No more of that!" The high priest was right there, and his slave was kneeling beside him, screaming with pain, his hands over his right ear. Yashua strode over and stood nose to nose with the high priest, who quickly stepped way back and lowered his eyes. But good old Peter! He moved right alongside. You have got to admire his courage and commitment! With what seemed like a thousand swords and spears pointed right at him, he was ready to take 'em all on!

"Peter, put your sword back into its sheath," Yashua said softly. Then He stooped and touched the slave's ear, and it was instantly healed. The screaming stopped, and for a few moments the garden was intensely quiet. "You must understand, Peter, that those who trust in the sword for their defense are destined to die by the sword. My defense is My Father, who would at once put more than seventy thousand angels at My disposal if I were but to ask. But if I did that, how could the Scriptures be fulfilled? No, Peter. I appreciate your commitment, but this is the cup that My Father has given Me to drink. Shall I not drink it?"

Yashua stepped forward, to again stand facing the high priest, and asked him quietly. "Whom do you seek?"

After an awkward silence the high priest finally found his tongue. "Yashua the Nazarene." His voice squeaked.

"I am He." Yashua spoke with no harshness or malice, yet strangely His words seemed to have such impact that many in the group fell to their knees or to their faces on the ground. Even those with swords and spears backed off. There was another intense, breathless silence.

"So… Whom do you seek?" Yashua repeated.

"Yashua the Nazarene." The high priest said again. He sounded choked, like he was having trouble breathing.

"I told you that I am He. So if I am the one you want, take Me already, and let these others go their way." He held out His hands, empty palms up, in a gesture of… was it surrender? Or an invitation to believe and receive Him?

Alex, the Roman centurion, finally commanded his troops to move in close and told his slave with the chains to bind Yashua's arms. A few brave soldiers hesitantly formed a circle around Him. Yashua ignored them and spoke to the high priest. "So now do you come out with swords and clubs to arrest Me as if I were a common thief? While I was with you daily teaching in the temple, you did not lay a hand on Me. But this is your hour, the hour of darkness and the powers of darkness."

As if to punctuate His words, the call of the changing watch rang out like a sinister battle cry across the valley from the Antonia Fortress. It was midnight. The air grew suddenly very cold. Feelings of horror gripped us all. A big soldier seized Marcus by his linen robe (Mk 14:51), and that did it. All restraint was gone. We fled in terror like madmen. Agile young Marcus twirled out of his robe and ran naked before me. It seemed like the entire Roman army as well as all the demons of hell were right at our heels, but when we flung our exhausted bodies down in the bushes and looked back, no one was there. Peter wound up in the same bush as I. We hung our heads in shame – we who had just promised to stand with Him even to the death!

We crawled out of the bushes, panting hard. "I can't believe it," Peter gasped out what we both were thinking. "Whatever came over us? Yashua even warned us in advance! When they grabbed Marcus I lost it completely!" Hearing his name, Marcus popped his head up out of a nearby bush. Peter kindly loaned him his outer cloak.

"Look! There they are!" We could see the procession of torches and glinting armor moving across the valley.

157 We had caught our breath, so we jogged together into Jerusalem. We came up behind them as they entered the courtyard for the Sanhedrin Council Chambers. (This is a large court just west of the Temple, surrounded by temple out-buildings.) We waited as the Roman soldiers left Yashua under the charge of Annas and trooped back out the gate. (Annas had been high priest for many years. He was the father-in-law of the current high priest, Caiaphas.) I knew them all well, and their gatekeeper allowed me to enter. But in my hurry to find out what they were going to do to Yashua, I forgot about Peter. The gatekeeper didn't know him and wouldn't let him in. So I went back to the gate. "Hey Susan, that's Peter. He's with me. Please let him in."

"Sure, John. I didn't know," she responded pleasantly, opening the gate. "So, Peter. You must be one of Yashua's disciples, too?"

"I am not! I am just a friend of John." I couldn't believe I had just heard that. I looked across the courtyard at Yashua. He glanced at us sadly.

Annas was interrogating Him about His teachings. He responded, "My teachings are public knowledge. I spoke openly to the multitudes in a synagogue or in the temple. So why question Me? Question those who heard Me." For that, one of the temple officers slapped Him across the face for disrespect to the high priest. Yashua smiled at him. "You know what I say is true. If you thought I was wrong you would debate it rather than just lashing out in anger." With that, Annas realized he'd get no favors from Yashua. So he sent Him, still bound, across the courtyard to the temple quarters of the high priest. Caiaphas gave the order for the entire Sanhedrin (Council of Elders) to assemble.

158 The centurion and about ten of his soldiers had stayed behind just to play it safe. The night had cooled a bit, so they had gathered with an officer of the temple guard and some of the slaves of the priests in the middle of the courtyard around a small charcoal fire. As Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin began interrogating Yashua, I noticed that Peter had joined himself with the group around the fire. I felt indignant that he should sit with them. They were all against our Master! *What in the world was wrong with Peter? First he says he's not Yashua's disciple. Then he goes to sit with the enemy rather than standing here with me, supporting and praying for Yashua!*

Susan came from the gatehouse behind me. "Hey John, what are they going to do to your Master?"

I jumped, and she giggled at my surprise. "I d-d-don't know. And don't scare me like that."

"What are you scared of? Have you done something wrong? How come you're here so far from your Master? Sounds like He could use a little support just now." The bitter accusations against Him were ringing heatedly across the courtyard. I noticed that now He was standing silent, not even trying to defend Himself. "They been lying about Him. Even I c'n figure that out. Their stories don't even agree with each other! And where 'r all His disciples? He must 'v had a zillion of them in the temple yesterday! Is there no one who'll stand to defend Him? I kinda like Him. He's one really cool dude. I heard Him preach. Awesome! An' I got to see Him heal some people! I'd hoped He'd be our King. So why in the world are our elders and priests so dead set against Him? Yashua would make us a better king than Caesar, for sure! So why's my master so threatened by Him? If He can heal people – I heard He even raised the dead – why, He could even deliver us from the Romans! He's really good with words. He makes everything so clear! Why is He silent now? He should be telling my master…"

Susan chattered happily on, blithely unaware of the turmoil inside of me. I had criticized Peter in my heart for sitting with the Roman soldiers instead of standing with Yashua but was I any better? As near as I could measure with my eye, I was no closer to Yashua than Peter was – and just as scared to walk up and try to defend Him. I couldn't even defend Him before this slave girl! I felt so ashamed.

I began to agonize in prayer as I stood there, praying that the Father in heaven would give me the courage to do what was right, whether to try to defend Yashua before the Sanhedrin, or even to just testify to Susan. About that time Sally, another of the slaves of Caiaphas, came out and began to cross the courtyard toward the gate. "Oh, goodie. Here comes my relief at the gatehouse. Now I can go over and enjoy the charades!" Susan headed toward Yashua.

"Wait! Susan, I…" She turned back and looked up into my troubled and tear-stained face. Just then we heard Sally challenging Peter, "Hey! Who are you, and what business do you have in the high priest's court?" Peter looked as white as a sheet. The firelight gave him a pale, ghostly appearance. He couldn't find his tongue, so Sally, studying him, answered herself. "Ah, I see. You're here for the trial of Yashua the Galilean. You're one of His disciples."

159 The soldiers all went for their swords, but Peter had found his tongue at last. "No! No! I don't know what you are talking about, woman! I don't even know Him!" He spat the words out with a sharpness that I had never heard from Peter before.

Susan came back to my side. "John, what in Hades is bugging your friend Peter? And how come he's your friend, and you are Yashua's disciple, and yet he claims he doesn't even know Him? Somethin' doesn't add up…"

Sally, satisfied that she had recognized Peter in spite of his denials, waved at Susan and went into the gatehouse. The soldiers settled back around the fire. Suddenly I knew what I had to do. "Susan, I will answer your questions, but can we do it in the gatehouse? Do you have time?"

"Sure. I'm used to working late." We walked together back to the gatehouse. Sally welcomed us. "Hi, John. Come on in. Good to see ya'. What's with your friend out there? I saw him at the temple with you and Yashua, several times. Standing right next to you both. I'm quite sure of it. But now he swears he doesn't even know Him."

"Sally, Susan… I have good news and bad news. Listen carefully, as I may not get another chance to say this. Yashua is the King! He is the Messiah! He was sent directly from our heavenly Father through the womb of the virgin exactly as foretold by the Prophets. We, Peter and I and the others, have been with Him for almost three years now. We've seen Him do many mighty miracles. He heals all who come to Him – even raises the dead! He casts out demons, and forgives sins, and helps people live in peace. But more than that, we have known the most miraculous, infinite, divine love of the Father through Him. There is no longer any doubt. Yashua is Messiah! Faith in Him is our salvation! You've just got to believe in Him…"

"So what's the bad news? Your friend over there doesn't seem to believe in Him much!" Sally's face hardened, and she crossed her arms over her chest. "And where are all His other disciples? I saw lots of them… hundreds…"

"The bad news is that Yashua said He has to leave us. He thinks our religious rulers are going to try to kill Him. Maybe tonight! That's why Peter and I, all His disciples, are so terrified. We're afraid they might succeed. We don't know what to do! We want to protect Him. Peter even tried to fight them! He cut off Malchus' ear with a sword…"

"Oh no!" Susan squealed in sympathy. "Poor Malchus! Is he going to be all right?" Sally raised her eyebrows and frowned, as if to say, "Oh, him? Fight for Yashua when he denies even knowing Him? Not very bloody likely."

"Malchus is fine. Yashua told Peter to put away his sword, and He healed Malchus by just putting a hand over his ear. Look at him over there. I saw the whole thing. His right ear was completely gone. Now it's whole again."

"Yeah, right!" Sally stared skeptically at Malchus.

"Sally! Stop it! Why are you being so negative? If John says it, then believe it. He's always been kind and truthful to us both, and you know it. And…" Susan looked back at me. "I've heard that Yashua is kind to women and to slaves, too. John, will you please tell us more about Him? Why is my master so antagonistic to Him? And what is He on trial for? And why in the middle of the night? And…"

So there it was. A perfect invitation to share the gospel with an open, hungry, needy heart. When she finally ran out of questions, I did just that. Susan received it gladly, eagerly. The joy on her face when her new faith came alive in Yashua as her Messiah was a big contrast to the hostile grilling that Yashua was enduring out in the courtyard. Truly the powers of darkness were strong that night, but after my quick prayer for courage, Susan and I had eluded them here in the gatehouse.

Susan was weeping for joy at my feet. I had never seen her speechless before. She was a changed woman!

But Sally had become offended. She could not hear the truth through me. With her arms crossed in front of her, she seemed as hard as a stone wall. I think it was because of Peter. His denial had a powerful effect on her. Her heart was getting harder and harder, and I was not helping a bit.

I gave up and opened the gatehouse door so I could hear what was going on at the trial. If you could call it a trial. Yashua was silent, not even trying to defend Himself. His accusers seemed to be fighting each other. Susan was right; they were lying about Him. Not a soul stood with Him. Where were all those who had wanted to crown Him King?

The night was waning. The first hint of dawn tinted the eastern sky. Malchus' little brother Jamie finally had had enough. He wandered over to the campfire and saw Peter. There it was, deja vu all over again. "Hey, you're the guy… I saw you in the garden. You were the joker swinging the sword! You and Yashua are both Galileans. I heard you talking with Him, and I can tell by your accent. Shouldn't you be over there on trial with Him? Hey, guards…"

Peter jumped up, swearing like a sailor. "Man, I don't know that guy. I don't know what you're talking about!"

At that moment the first rooster of the morning crowed off in the distance. We all heard it. Peter and I remembered Yashua's prediction about Peter's denying Him three times before a rooster crowed. He looked at me; I looked at him; then we both looked at Yashua, who shook His head sadly at us. We all knew, and we all knew that we all knew. Peter had just denied the Master three times!

Poor Peter ran for the gate, bawling like a baby.

A few of the soldiers jumped up to give chase, but the centurion laughed and called them back. "Let him go. He's no threat. He's just an ignorant, untrained peasant, scared of his own shadow."

Sally uncrossed her arms and stood beside me in the doorway. "Uh, John? What in Hades was that all about?"

"Sally," I began hesitantly. Maybe this was the open door that I needed to plant in her the seed of faith. "You have no idea how much Peter loves Yashua! He is terrified that he will lose Him. Please try to cut him some slack…" And I explained to her about Yashua's prophecy of Peter's three denials before the first rooster crowed.

"Wow! How could He have known…?" Sally was beginning to thaw. I prepared to answer, but Susan had already started talking – rather, bubbling over. I never got another word in edgewise. She was so excited about her new faith, and so eager to share it with her beloved friend. Sally was open to her in a way she had never been to me. I finally left them, rejoicing together in each other's arms just like two long-lost sisters, which in a way, they were.

Jamie was still with the circle of soldiers. I walked over to him. "I'm glad your brother is okay, Jamie. Peter really didn't know what he was doing. When he woke up and saw all the soldiers, he panicked. He was only trying to protect Yashua. He has no malice against any of you. Honest!"

"Oh. Hi, John. I believe you. It's all okay. I'm glad you came. What is going on with my master? He's gone crazy! I have never seen him this angry before. What has Yashua done? Those lying fools accusing Him sure don't know!"

"Here's what He has done, Jamie. He has healed the sick, made the blind to see and the lame to walk, cast out demons, raised the dead, brought peace to the troubled soul and joy to the brokenhearted, freed those enslaved by sin, and preached with wisdom, power, and authority the good news that God's Kingdom is come. He just loves everyone, even sinners, and has never hurt anyone in His life. Your master and the chief priests are jealous of Him because their religion is one of outward show just to keep themselves in control, while Yashua's religion is a love relationship with Him and Father YHWH, and with each other. There is tremendous power in His love! Once it has touched you, you'll never be the same."

Some of the soldiers overheard me and laughed in scorn. "Go find another campfire. We'll have none of that religious nonsense around this one!" So we moved away by the wall. There I was privileged to again share the gospel with a hungry heart, who received it joyfully. Somehow it seemed so right. This was my defense of Yashua – not before our angry, hard-hearted religious rulers, but before these precious souls who were ready to receive Him.

Day had broken. The first rays of the sun lit the clouds a fiery red above us. Yashua looked over at me and smiled, just as I gave my new brother Jamie a big hug. At that point I saw the Council of Elders (the Sanhedrin) assembling formally in their judicial chambers at the other end of the courtyard. I realized that the trial was over. By law they were not permitted to conclude a trial except during the daylight hours, so I guessed that the time had come. Jamie and I moved to the open door to try to hear their verdict.

160 After a private caucus with the Council, the high priest, Caiaphas, called Yashua to the bench at the front of the council chamber. He stood nose to nose with Him and demanded, "If You are Messiah then tell us already!"

Yashua opened His mouth, and the Council fell eerily silent. This was the first time He had spoken in His own defense. "If I tell you, you won't believe. If I ask, you won't answer. But I will say this: one day you will see this Son of Adam on high, seated at the right hand of YHWH's power [Ps 110:1], and returning through the clouds of heaven as your Redeemer, Judge, and King." (Dan 7:13)

He had spoken softly, but His words washed through the company like a flood, leaving everyone gasping for air. As before, His claim to be Israel's Messiah was absolutely clear to everyone present.

But you've got to hand it to old Caiaphas. He stood his ground bravely. "I charge You under oath by the living God, that You tell us whether or not You claim to be the Messiah, *the Son of YHWH,* blessed be His holy name forever and ever," He thundered out, his voice only wavering slightly as he uttered the 'heretical' words, 'Son of YHWH'.

"Exactly as you have said, **I AM.**" (Ex 3:14)

Gasps of indignation swept through the crowd. "What blasphemy! As if YHWH could have a Son!" Caiaphas punctuated his words by tearing his robe down the front. "What need do we have of further witnesses? You heard His blasphemy yourselves! I say He is deserving of death! What do you say?"

"Death! Death! Death!" They all seemed to be shouting it out. At that, the soldiers around the campfire roused themselves and came running into the judicial chamber. "What's going on here?" the big centurion boomed.

161 "We have concluded our trial, sir. We determined unanimously that this man is deserving of immediate death. He is a big threat to our society and to Caesar's peaceful rule here. He claims not only to be King, but also to be God Himself. We have heard His confession with our own ears. He has too many followers; were He to appear at the Feast it is quite likely that there would be a huge riot and they would attempt to take over. Therefore He must be executed immediately, before the Feast. Please, sir, take Him bound to Pilate. We will go also and present our case to have Him executed, since by law we are not permitted to do the execution." With that, Caiaphas spat on Yashua's face and shoved Him backwards toward the soldiers. It was like throwing meat to vultures.

Jamie and I recoiled in horror as the soldiers came trooping out past us, laughing, joking, and manhandling Yashua. He said nothing, only glancing sadly our way as if to say, "This is it. Just like I told you…" We could not believe how badly the soldiers were treating Him. Had they no sense of common decency? They were beating Him with their fists, mocking Him, spitting on Him, and shoving Him around between them. Then they wrapped a blindfold around His eyes and took turns smashing Him great blows in the chest and back, and then jeering, "Prophesy to us, You Messiah! Who just hit You?"

The sun had just reached the tops of the hills, still the first hour of the day. (6-7 AM) As we were going out the gate toward Pilate's mansion, I saw a man standing in the shadows by the wall. It was Judas! He too had come to hear the verdict and to see the result of his murderous kiss.

"Yashua! Yashua! Just blast them, and make Yourself King!" he cried out as they passed.

"You already have that kind of kingdom, Judas. And in fighting it that way, you have joined yourself to it." Then a cruel blow from a soldier sent Him reeling out of earshot.

162 "Judas! What have you done?" I cried when we reached him. Tears were flowing down his face.

"We've all seen the miracles… His incredible power… He is King! I thought if I arranged a confrontation, He'd be forced to use His power and… But I didn't want it to turn out like this! Why doesn't He just walk away, like He did before?" He put his face in his hands and wept bitterly.

I felt no malice, only compassion, as I put my arms around Judas to draw him close. But he pulled away. "Judas, He will forgive you! He knows you're repentant! He has forgiven much worse sins than yours! I know He'll forgive you!"

"How can He forgive me after He's dead!" Judas wailed. "I can never be forgiven! Never!" He turned suddenly and ran toward the temple.

I was torn. I wanted to follow Yashua, but Judas really needed my help. "Jamie, please! I need you to follow the soldiers. Let me know everything that happens to Yashua! I need to go help dear Judas. I'll meet up with you again as soon as I can."

I hiked up my cloak and ran like the wind after Judas. I caught up to him at the Court of the Priests, in front of the temple. "Judas! Wait up! Don't do anything rash!" I called.

He turned to me and held out his hand. In it were thirty silver coins. (Zech 11:12) "This is blood money! I've got to return it." So we went in to the courtyard together to find a priest. They were still preparing for the morning oblation.

One recognized Judas, and came over to the door of the sanctuary. "Ah! Judas! Back so soon? Have you fulfilled your vow for which we paid you so handsomely?"

"I have sinned by betraying innocent blood!" Judas cried. "Here! Take it back! It's blood money!" He shoved his handful of silver at the priest's face.

"What is that to us? It sounds like your problem, not ours." He turned on his heel and walked away.

Judas gave a cry of anguish, and threw the silver into the sanctuary with all his might. I stood aghast as some of the coins even hit the priest! If it weren't so tragic, it would have been comical to watch the priests scurrying around picking up the coins. By the time I turned, Judas was gone.

I ran back out. He was nowhere to be seen. So I ran into the Xystus Marketplace. A few early risers were setting up their stalls to take advantage of the last shopping day before the Shabbat of Unleavened Bread. I started asking around, "Did you see a young man running through here a few minutes ago? He was in trouble and I'm trying to help."

The third person I asked was standing by his canopy, trying to prop a crate against one pole. "Yes, he was just here. He borrowed my rope that I use to tie up this canopy. He said he only needed it for a few minutes, and then I would get it back." He pointed south. "He was heading toward the Potter's Gate." (That is a small refuse gate. It opens to a hill above the Potters Field, where people throw their broken and ruined pots into the Valley of Hinnom.) "He didn't say what he needed it for. He was in an awful hurry. I'm sure he'll be back with it shortly…"

He wanted to chat, but I had to run. "Thanks, my friend. I gotta catch him!" Again I hiked up my robe and took off like a scalded cat. I had this horrible feeling deep in the pit of my stomach. I ran through the gate… There he was! He was standing at the edge of the hill, bending over, doing something with the rope. Oh no! He already had the rope tied up in a tree overhanging the hill! "Judas! Don't do it! I'll help you! It's all going to be okay! Don't do it!" I yelled.

He looked up at me, and I saw stark terror in his eyes. "I can never be forgiven!" he wailed, as he put the hastily tied rope around his own neck.

"You can! Yashua will forgive you! He loves you! We all love you! Don't jump!" I yelled, sprinting toward him.

But I was too late. He leaped away from me. I lunged for his feet, but too late, too late, too late…

I skidded on my face on the brow of the hill, while Judas went sailing over the edge to hit the end of his rope with a sickening jerk. I frantically scrambled to my feet to catch him when he swung back. Maybe his neck wouldn't be broken. Maybe I could untie the rope before he strangled to death. Dear Judas! My trusted friend; my brother…

But alas, he had tied the knot too hurriedly. At the end of his swing, the knot slipped and he fell, turning end over end in the air and landing with a gut-wrenching thud. His body burst open, splattering across the pottery shards.

I knelt and wept there for him for a short time. My stomach churned, and I lost whatever was left from last night's meal. Poor Judas! So recently he'd been working with me trying to arrange for Yashua to be crowned King! I wanted to just stay there and be sick awhile, but I knew I had to get back to Yashua's trial. I untied the rope from the tree and took it back to the merchant.

"Thank you, friend. Did it work okay for him? What did he need it for?" He still wanted to chat, but I didn't have the stomach for it. "No, it didn't work. But thanks anyway. He decided to try a different way." I turned sadly away.

Heading back toward Pilate's quarters, I met the priest who had gotten hit with Judas' silver coins. Evidently the priests had just finished the morning oblation and he was going home to prepare for the big slaughter of all the Pascal lambs today.

"Boy, was your friend ever bent over that money! Ya' know, that gives us a bit of a problem. It's not lawful to put it into the temple treasury, since it is the price of blood. Got any ideas?"

"Yeah. You can use it to bury him. He just hung himself over at the Potter's Field." (Zech 11:13)

"What? Serious? Boy, he really was bent! But it doesn't take that much money just to bury a man."

"Well it'll take a lot to bury him. He's splattered all over the field. The knot slipped and he fell."

"I'm truly sorry to hear that. He seemed like such a nice fellow. Agreeable, good at making compromises… mm… ya' know, with that much money, we could buy the whole field. Use it as a burying place for strangers and criminals and the unclean. That's a great idea! I'll talk to Caiaphas!"

So he left, immensely pleased with himself for having thought of that, while I went on, mourning quietly inside, to try to catch up with Jamie.

I ran down to the Hippodrome and climbed the grand staircase to the temple. The high priest had just finished inspecting the Pascal lamb, and his traditional shout rang out, "I find no fault in him!" *Yeah. Right.* I smiled wryly to myself. *They find no fault in the Pascal lamb, then they kill it. Well, they found no fault in Yashua these last four days, so they want to kill Him, too. Just like the Pascal lamb…*

I could hear all the normal commotion going on there as the priests prepared for the slaughter of the Pascal lambs. That would last from the third hour 'til at least the ninth hour, because there were so many lambs – one for each household. [See endnote 4, on timing.] No Jamie. So I crossed the bridge and headed west to Herod's temple complex where Pilate's palace was. But when I reached the Praetorium it was quiet. Strange. Pilate was seated inside, but the crowd clamoring for Yashua's execution wasn't there. Not knowing where else to go, I turned around to go back. It was still the second hour (7 – 8 AM Roman time).

"John! John! Wait up!" It was Jamie, running out from Herod's palace. "I'm glad I caught you. They're coming back to Pilate – they're on their way here right now."

"What was Pilate's verdict? And why were you in Herod's palace?" We walked back to the Praetorium.

"Well, even though the chief priests accused Yashua of all kinds of bad things, Pilate didn't buy it. He questioned Him privately in the Praetorium. We waited outside so we wouldn't defile ourselves and would still be able to eat the hagigah tonight. I couldn't hear it all, but I did hear Him tell Pilate that though He is a King, His Kingdom is not of this world or else His servants would be fighting. That seemed to make Pilate happy. When he came out, Pilate shouted to us, '**I find no fault in Him**!'

163 "Pilate sent us to Herod, who questioned Him in the great hall. Herod was polite at first. I think he wanted to see some miracles for himself. But then he became mocking and cruel. He put one of his own royal purple robes on Him and laughed at His claim to be King. But he got no answers, and had nothing to condemn Him about, so he sent Him back to Pilate. I think Pilate might release Him!"

"Wow! That is good news! Thank you for keeping track of things here. My news isn't so good. Judas is dead. He was so upset about his betrayal that he threw the money he'd been paid back at the priests and then went out and hanged himself. I tried to stop him, but I was too late. I'm so sorry."

164 But things were happening too fast for me to have time for mourning. The crowds were already gathering for the governor's traditional pardon of any prisoner that the people chose. The priests were back at the Praetorium, demanding that Yashua be executed. The soldiers brought Him back to Pilate, still in chains, wearing Herod's purple robe. Pilate opened a sealed note from Herod and read it. Then he looked up and waved the note at the priests. "Herod agrees with me. He also could find no fault in Him worthy of death. I will therefore scourge and release Him."

Jamie and I cheered, but we were quickly drowned out by the cries of the priests: "No! Crucify Him! Crucify Him! Release for us Barabbas instead, but crucify Yashua!" The priests were circulating among the people inciting them to join their noisy chant, "Crucify Yashua! Release Barabbas! Crucify Yashua! Release Barabbas! Crucify Yashua!"

"Why in heaven's name do they want Barabbas set free?" Jamie asked. "He's a robber, murderer, and rabble-rouser. He used to be a political zealot. I watched his trial. He's slated for execution. He is one really ba-a-a-ad dude!"

"I don't think they care about Barabbas. They just don't want the governor's pardon to be used to release Yashua!" I tried not to sound bitter.

Well, the chief priests sure knew how to work the mob. I don't think most of the people even knew what they were chanting for, but the priests got them so worked up that they drowned out all of Pilate's attempts to release Yashua. Finally they went back inside the Praetorium. After having Yashua scourged, Pilate, taking a cue from Herod, had the soldiers weave a wreath from a rosebush in his garden and put it over Yashua's head. He almost looked like a king, with Herod's robe of royal purple and the fresh spring rosebuds in His hair. But the soldiers pushed the wreath down cruelly, so the thorns penetrated His scalp. Soon blood was flowing freely down His face. Pilate studied Him closely as the soldiers continued to beat and mock Him. Still no response from Yashua; no vindictive looks; no angry remarks. He didn't even try to defend Himself.

As Pilate was watching from his Tribunal seat, his wife came up behind to plead for Yashua. "Have nothing to do with that righteous man," she urged. "I suffered horrible nightmares last night because of Him!" Her high-pitched voice was shaky and she appeared very distraught about it.

Pilate nodded to her and put a stop to the soldier's cruel sport. Bringing Yashua back to the doorway, he called out in a noble voice. "Behold, the man! King of the Jews! I have examined Him further, under extensive scourging and great duress. I still find no fault in Him. So if you insist that He must be crucified, take Him and do it yourselves."

A leading scribe of the Pharisees shouted back, "We have a law, and by our law He must die, because He made Himself out to be the Son of God!"

Pilate's face turned pale. Could Yashua actually be related to one of the Caesars? Without another word he brought Yashua back into the Praetorium. We went to the big arched doorway so we could hear. "Who are You, really?" No answer. "Whose son are You? Where are You from?" No answer. "Are you just a Jew, or are you related to one of the Roman leaders?" No answer. "Why will You not speak to me? Don't You know that I have the authority to either release You or have You crucified?"

Finally Yashua spoke. "**You have no authority over Me except that given you from My Father in heaven.** [Dan 2:21; 4:17] Thus those who delivered Me to you have the greater sin. You are only trying to keep the peace. But they are working to kill the King of Peace. I grieve for them, for instead of peace they have chosen war, suffering, and bloodshed. Great tribulation will fall upon them and will not depart from them until My Kingdom comes."

"Ahh… You are the King of Peace. Now I understand." Pilate smiled. "Your 'Father in heaven' is the Jewish God, YHWH. Thus Your 'kingdom' is only a spiritual metaphor. All through the scourging and the abuse from my soldiers, You acted most nobly. I believe You. You are indeed a king – a king of the Jews. I shall release You."

"Believing My words is not enough. Many have seen the miracles and believed My words, yet they are now crying, 'Crucify Him!' You have a choice, Pilate. Either put your faith and trust in Me as the Messiah Son of the high King YHWH in heaven and allow Me to rule as King over your own heart and life [Dan 7:13-14], or you will bow to their wishes to have Me crucified. There is no third alternative."

"No, Yashua. That's nonsense. I'm a Roman. Caesar is my king. You're a king of the Jews but You're sure not king of any Romans! Our gods are more down-to-earth. But I see that You are innocent of all their accusations, so I will release You!" He stuck his nose up proudly. "I have the full authority of my god Caesar to do so."

Yashua bowed His head and remained silent. I looked at Jamie. He shrugged. "He would rather have Pilate believe in Him than release Him."

"Pilate won't do it. He is too loyal to Caesar." But at that moment Pilate rose and started for the door, so we turned and fled back into the crowd.

Remembering what the priests and scribes had been doing, Jamie and I started circulating among the crowd to encourage all of Yashua's disciples to be more vocal in His support. But after working futilely for a while, I began to realize that all of His close disciples were not in the crowd. They had all fled, even Peter! I was reminded of what Yashua had said at the Pascal meal last night, about all of us abandoning Him, scattering, and leaving Him alone. It had all happened just as He had said.

Pilate brought Yashua out to the Praetorium and stood Him on 'the Pavement' beside the judgment seat. He was still wearing the royal purple robe and wreath of rosebuds. With a regal flourish, Pilate seated himself. "Behold your King!" he proclaimed in a commanding voice.

"Crucify Yashua! Release Barabbas!" The chant grew in intensity, and I realized I had failed. Were these the very same people who had been shouting, "Hosanna to the King who comes in the name of YHWH!" only a few days earlier? No wonder Yashua had wept on the hill at the gates of Jerusalem!

"Shall I crucify your King?" Pilate responded to the multitude. I could see his resolve weakening.

"We have no king but Caesar! If you release Him you're no friend of Caesar's! Everyone who makes himself a king is the enemy of Caesar!" The shouts came from different places in the crowd, as our religious rulers had placed themselves around strategically to control the chants.

In fact, it looked like they were deliberately trying to start a riot if Pilate wouldn't agree to their wishes. I was indignant. It wasn't fair! I frantically tried to come up with a counter-plot, but I was too late. Pilate made his choice. He rose from his judgment seat, ordered his slave to bring a bowl of water, and ceremonially washed his hands in front of the crowd. They quieted down. "You have condemned an innocent man to death. I wash my hands of the whole affair. See to it – I am innocent of His blood."

My skin crawled with goose bumps when I heard the Pharisees and their scribes respond with the fateful words, "His blood be upon us and our children!"

At that, Pilate sat back down in the judgment seat for his final proclamation. "I pardon Barabbas at your request. Release him immediately. Scourge Yashua, and take Him to be crucified with the other criminals on death row. Put Yashua in the center, up on the pedestal beneath Golgotha. The sign above His head shall say, in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek, '**Yashua of Nazareth, King of the Jews**'."

I grew faint and fell to my knees. The world spun around me but I did not feel a part of it. My tears seemed to have run dry. In the distance I heard the soldiers scourging Yashua again, and making cruel sport of Him. ***165*** I faintly heard our religious rulers, ever the nitpickers, arguing with Pilate about rewording the signs to say, "He claimed to be a King of the Jews," or worse, "He claimed to be the Messiah, Son of YHWH." It was sickening. Jamie knelt beside me for comfort, but there could be no comfort now.

166 "They're making Him carry that heavy cross! It's huge! He's not strong enough. He's weak from loss of blood. He's not gonna make it… He fell! They're beating Him to force Him back up, but He can't get up with that heavy cross. Oh, John! That's Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus. He's trying to help Yashua get up. Lord, bless him, he must be a believer too… Oh, good! Now they're telling Simon to carry the cross. He seems glad to do it. He's strong. They're going off through the gate, and the multitudes are crowding along behind."

"Jamie, please – follow them and tell me what happens. I think I'll just… uh, pray here awhile. I don't feel strong enough to stand right now."

"Okay, John." Jamie scampered off. I put my face back on the dirt and finally let loose the tears, great wracking sobs, making puddles on the pavement.

"Hey, buddy." Someone touched my shoulder. I just ignored him; my pain was too deep. So he tried again. "Lookit, <expletive deleted>. Qui'cher cryin'. You haven't suffered near's much as I have. I need to know who is that poor devil they just drug outta here." I wiped my eyes and looked up. Over me hovered this dark, filthy man with a thick, matted black beard, long, straggly hair, and wild eyes. His face was smeared with grime and he stank like he hadn't had a bath in years. I shrank back. "Who are you?"

"Barabbas. I been in prison fer three years. Who is that God-forsaken wretch who just saved my life? I mean, that shoulda been me carrying that cross! Why'd everybody hate Him so? 'cept you. Everyone else was yellin' "Crucify Him!" but you're crying, so I figure you must know Him – 'n care about Him…"

"You're Barabbas, the murderer?"

"I'm not a murderer! I'm a patriot! A Jewish hero! I only killed to… No, no. This isn't about me. I must know about that sorry dude with the piercing eyes. He looked at me as they were letting me go – just one glance. But I swear, I'll never be the same! He knew me! I never seen Him before, but He knew me! His eyes, they looked right through me! He saw all the angry, hateful things I've ever done and, well… I can't explain. It don't make sense. Seemed like He just forgave it all and l-l-loved me anyway, as if He actually wanted to take my cross and… d-d-die in my place! I don't get it…" Barabbas knelt beside me and began to sniffle.

And so there, right in the middle of the Pavement where the crowds had so recently been yelling to crucify Him, I was able to lead this rough, hardened criminal to a saving faith in Yashua haMashiach. I was amazed. He was so ready, so eager to believe and to repent and receive God's forgiveness. Maybe that was because he saw more clearly than any of us that Yashua had personally taken his own place on the cross.

I was amazed at Yashua, too. Even as He went toward His death, He gave life to those who would receive it. What a transformation it was! The joy and gratefulness shining from the face of Barabbas! He was a filthy, stinking wild man no more. Now he was my brother, righteous and pure from within. We hugged, and then hurried off after Jamie to find out what was happening to Yashua.

Pilate's Praetorium and judgment seat on the infamous 'Pavement' are all part of Herod's palace complex. A pool for footwashing is just outside the gate. Wanting to be as clean on the outside as he now was on the inside, Barabbas tore off his clothes and plunged naked right into the pool, coming up laughing and bubbling over with joy. When he got out, I gave him my outer tunic – I was getting too warm anyway. So, like his sins, we left his rags behind in a grimy pile and hurried after Yashua.

As we ran together through the almost deserted streets toward the Damascus Highway, I looked over at my new brother. His long black hair streamed out behind him like the loose white robe I'd given him, and his beard was still dripping wet. I couldn't help but notice how much like Yashua he looked. Not outwardly. Maybe it was his spirit. Love shone from his face and a joyous light from his eyes.

The height of the sun told me it was nearing the end of the third hour (8 – 9 AM Roman time). We didn't catch up to the multitudes until we went outside the north gate on the Damascus Highway.

And there they were – a big crowd at the base of the cliff / escarpment called Golgotha in Hebrew, which means 'the skull'. (At this distance I could see why. Above the places where the cross holes were carved into the bedrock, three large holes were cut into the side of the cliff for signs. They looked like the empty eyes and nose of a skull.) But no crosses were standing yet. We sprinted to find Jamie.

"Jamie! Guess what? This is why I had to stay behind. Give our new brother a hug. Guess who!"

Jamie gladly hugged the big man, then stood back and stared into his shining face. "I don't have a clue. No one I've ever seen before."

"Sure you have. You saw him just today, as he was being released by Pilate."

"No!" Recognition dawned. "Not Barabbas…?"

"Yes, Barabbas! Yashua saved him with just a glance. Look at the love in his face! He's a different person!" But his face had already dimmed and the tears were starting to flow. He was looking at the three crosses on the ground beside the roadway. The soldiers were busy putting one of the criminals on his cross. They tied him to the vertical beam, then nailed his wrists to the transverse beam. They finished by putting his feet together and pounding a single long spike through both feet into the base of the cross.

For some reason they left Yashua for last. I guess they were afraid of Him. They let Him lie where He had fallen, and worked on the two criminals. The soldiers looped a rope through a hole carved into the rock cliff above. Two soldiers yanked on the rope in jerks (accompanied by screams of pain), while two others guided the cross into its hole in the bedrock. It fell with a thump and a scream.

Yashua was still lying there next to His cross. All our eyes filled with tears. Jamie stood close to me. "I don't know why, but it seems like the same ones who had been yelling 'Crucify Him!' were mourning and lamenting Him as He was brought here. But He never criticized them. All He said was, 'Daughters of Jerusalem, don't weep for Me. Weep for yourselves and your children. For the days are coming when those of you who have no children will be glad. **Then you will say to the mountains, "Fall on us!" and to the hills, "Cover us!"** [Hos 10:8] For if they do these things in the green of springtime, what will they do in the heat of summer?'"

Yashua was the 'featured criminal'. One soldier put the big sign saying, "Yashua, King of the Jews" into the hole in the rock above where He would be crucified. The square cross hole at the base of the cliff was centered in a "display pedestal," a platform carved in the bedrock. Yashua lay on the platform, face flushed with fever and pain.

One of the women gave Him some wine mixed with gall, myrrh, and other pain-deadening drugs (Ps 69:21) but after tasting it He spit it out and wouldn't drink it.

167 Finally there was nothing else for the soldiers to do. They hesitated, frozen for a long moment, then attacked Him with a ferocity that shocked me. They cruelly stripped Him naked, tied Him to the cross, viciously hammered the nails into His wrists and feet, jammed the rosebud wreath deeper into His scalp, and jerked the cross up, laughing at His screams. Then they cursed the heat, made crude jokes about His nakedness and the bloody 'crown' He wore, and sat down on the edge of the platform to divide up His clothing. They cast lots for Herod's purple robe. I could see the strained levity. The other soldiers were gone, but these four had been impressed by Yashua. They put on a show of macho strength and bravado but I knew that inside they were quaking in fear and shame at what they'd just done.

I looked around. The chief priests and Pharisees and their scribes still stood in the crowd, faces hard, hurling abuse and mocking Him. "He saved others, but He can't even save Himself! Hey! You! King of Israel! Come down from the cross and we'll all see and believe. Phony king…" I also heard a passing lawyer joining in their mockery, jeering, "Ha! You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days… so surely You can save Yourself – if You're really Messiah the so-called 'Son of YHWH'!"

"**Father!**" His face contorted with the effort, He looked up to heaven. "**Forgive them! They don't understand what they are doing!**"

Suddenly the cursing and mocking died down. Every heart was pricked, every conscience touched with shame. His words were powerful, even in death. I looked at the priests, scribes, and Pharisees. Most of them, their faces contorted, were turning away to wander off, unable to endure Yashua's words any longer. I heard one say bitterly, "He trusts in God; He claimed to be His Son! He often called YHWH His Father! So let Him deliver Him already – if He takes pleasure in Him!" (Ps 22:8)

Almost everyone was focused on Yashua. Nearly all of them had their mouths open in wonder and their faces streaked with tears. The greatness of a man willing to forgive even those who killed Him had their full attention. *No one would notice if I talked with the soldiers. I could not defend Yashua before Pilate or the hard-hearted priests, but surely I could defend Him before four soldiers.*

Wait! Where had that unexpected thought come from? Yashua had told us to go only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. I looked up at Yashua, hanging there bleeding and torn, laboring in agony for each breath. As always, He knew what I was thinking – *maybe that thought had come from Him* – and He gave me a nod. That reminded me of what He had told me three days ago after the Greeks had wanted to talk to Him outside the temple. Surprisingly, I remembered it exactly: "From now on, you, My disciples, shall carry My ministry… to the Greeks, to the Romans, even to the far corners of the earth, to every ethnic group under heaven. I cannot do that, except through you."

So I walked close and sat down. One of the soldiers threw me a few ugly cuss words. I smiled at him. Another one deliberately bumped me with his shoulder, hard. It almost knocked me over. I turned and smiled at him, too.

"So you are one of His disciples." It was not a question. It was an accusation, a condemnation.

"Yes." I smiled at him, too. "My name is John."

He laughed uproariously. "Well, John. I guess it's over, now, ain't it!" Again, it was not a question.

"No," I responded quietly. "It is just begun."

"What in hades are you talking about? And why the <more vile expletives> are you smiling about it?" The first real questions.

"I'm not smiling about what is happening to my Master. His suffering is already more than any of us could bear. It's just that… well… I know why He's suffering, and I know that in the end, He wins."

"Huh?!" They glanced up to ensure the nails and ropes were secure, and looked to see if His disciples might be gathering an army to defend Him. Not a chance. Not with those wimps. "Looks to me like in the end, He just dies."

"The Pascal lamb always dies. Only the blood of the Pascal Lamb can wash away our sin. Yashua is the Pascal Lamb. He Himself told us." The priests had gone back to the temple to begin the slaying of all the Pascal lambs (which would take from the fourth through the ninth hours – roughly 10 AM through 3 PM Roman time). The bleating of the lambs punctuated my statement.

"So? He still dies. How could He win?"

"Just look at the sign. He is the King of Israel. Even Pilate knew that."

"Yeah, right… So what good's a dead King?"

"He told Pilate, 'My kingdom is not of this world, or else My disciples would fight.' He is the King of heaven; the King of Spirit; the King of my heart."

"I thought there was something unusual about Him, not even trying to defend Himself." All four were looking at me now. I had their undivided attention.

"He is the Son of God, Creator of the Universe. He is the Life of All Ages, from before Adam 'til now, and to the end of time. You can kill His body – only because He is willing to give it up – but you can't kill Him, because He is Spirit. He told us He's returning to His Father, YHWH, God of heaven. But first He had to die as the Pascal Lamb, to atone for our sins. If you believe in Him, He will cleanse you of your sins, too. He will then give you His Spirit Life, His Abundant Life, that lasts forever." I felt strange, saying this to these Romans, but I was sensing God's love for them.

"That's utter nonsense!"

"You're crazy. Now I know why they killed Him."

"Wait. You said, 'His Spirit Life' as if His Life was somehow different from ours. Don't we have spirit life?"

"Yes, but our spirit is often angry, bitter, selfish, fearful, and contentious. He gives us His love, joy, peace, patience, faith, trust, and kindness. Our life is like a battle. He brings an inner peace that is beyond human understanding. Have you ever tried to love someone – a wife, brother, friend – and then found yourself getting into a big fight? I have. My older brother James and I used to fight all the time, until Yashua put His divine love in our hearts for each other!"

They looked up at Yashua, laboring for each painful breath. He looked down at them, smiled, and nodded. "He is the Son of God," I reminded them. "The Spirit of God lets Him know what we're talking about or even thinking."

The one they called Brutus stood, angrily jammed the butt of his spear down, swore, and turned away.

"Hey! You self-proclaimed Son of God!" It was the thief on the cross to Yashua's right. "Did You not claim to be the Messiah? So save Yourself and us already!" And he let out a string of black oaths.

But the other thief, hanging to Yashua's left, cried out, "Don't you fear God, even as you're dying? We are only getting what we deserve, but this man…" He looked over at Yashua. "This man has never done anything wrong!" His voice strained. "Lord Yashua, Master, Messiah! Please, remember me… when You come into Your Kingdom."

"I give you My solemn promise, that this very day you shall feast with Me in Paradise."

Brutus whirled around, dropping his spear and almost falling to his knees. The other three soldiers jumped back, their mouths open in astonishment. Yashua's words had been spoken weakly between gasps for air, but with such total confidence that we felt a bit lightheaded. We knew that He could and would keep His promise.

Two of the soldiers were trying to drown out their growing conviction by cursing and swearing at Him, each other, and everything else. But a third, whom I later knew as Rufus (Rom 16:13; not Rufus son of Simon), stopped them. "Horus! Baalio! Shut up! Have you no respect?"

Rufus then turned to me. "John. How long were you with Him? Tell us about Him. Was He really the leader of an insurrection?"

"I was with Him for almost three years. During that time His focus was on helping people, ministering to their needs, healing them, teaching them how to live and how to love one another. He was a leader, not of an insurrection – you might call it a revolution. But not a political one. He never spoke against the government, either Roman or Israeli. He did speak against religious rulers who tried to control and manipulate people through their fear of God.

"That's because His revolution was a spiritual one. He set people free from bondage to the religions of men. He taught them how to have a personal love relationship with God Himself – how to fear God, rather than living in fear of men who put themselves in place of God."

Horus and Baalio were gambling on the ground and pretending not to hear, but Brutus had turned and was listening intently. I spoke to Rufus, but loud enough for them all to hear. "Most revolutions are built on hate against the established order. Yashua's revolution was built on loving the Truth, loving God, loving each other. The only things He ever hated were the things that keep us away from God, the sin and lies and hypocrisy, and all that religious mumbo jumbo that is such a burden and blocks people from knowing God in truth."

I paused. The cries and groans and gasps for breath from those on the three crosses, mixed with the bleating of the Pascal lambs being killed, were rather distracting, and we just listened awhile. Finally Brutus walked toward me. He had really been thinking. "I know what hate and lies and hypocrisy are – I do that myself. But what is sin? And what do you mean by religious mumbo jumbo?"

He spoke softly, so the others wouldn't hear. But we had their interest! They all moved a little closer.

"When YHWH made the universe, He built into it His perfect Laws of Wisdom and Righteousness, reflecting His own nature and character. He calls them the Laws of Life because our life really depends on obeying them. Sin is breaking those laws, and trying to live our lives by our own selfish foolishness. The reason He hates sin so much, is that He loves us! Really loves us! Even though sin might seem like fun for the moment, He knows that in the end it will destroy us, because it violates the laws of the universe. Sin always results in death. So in His great love, He hates the sin destroying us. The religious mumbo jumbo is all the stuff we do to try to convince YHWH that we are living by His Laws of Life, when actually we're living in sin. We make excuses, and invent all kinds of religious rituals and mumbo jumbo to try to make us feel better about our sin. But YHWH sees through it all. That is why He sent His Son, Yashua, as our Pascal Lamb – to cleanse us from our sin – He took our punishment so we could be forgiven and have the love relationship with YHWH that He always wanted."

168 "John!" It was a gasp from Yashua.

"Yes, my Lord!"

"I am nearly gone. **There is My mother. Take care of her as your own mother.**"

"Yes, Master! I will care for her in my own home."

"She is Mariam, a widow," I explained to Brutus. "Yashua's real Father is YHWH, but His earthly father, Yoseph, died in an insurrection twenty years ago. I am delighted to care for Mariam as my own m…"

I heard a gasp beside me. It was Barabbas. "Oh God! Mariam the widow? Yoseph? Was that Yoseph son of Jacob of Nazareth in Galilee?"

"Yes. He died when some zealots…"

"I know how he died." Barabbas' face was pale and sweating. "I was there. I… I'm sorry." He bowed his head and tears came to his eyes. "I was a hotheaded fool. I led those zealots. I organized a raid on the Roman outpost in Nazareth. We killed most of the Romans, and the rest ran off. When it was over, there was Yoseph dead on the road, with his wife Mariam weeping by his side. I honestly don't know who killed him. It could have been any of us, even me. We were all a bunch of hotheads. But I was the one responsible. I'm sorry." He looked up at Yashua. "I'm sorry I killed Your dad." He knelt, weeping. "Would He still have taken my cross if He had known I was the…?"

"He knew, Barabbas," I interrupted. "He knew and still forgave you and took your cross." I put a hand gently on his shoulder. "Look! Yashua smiled at you!"

Mariam, who had come near when Yashua called, touched Barabbas' other shoulder to add, "I forgive you, too, Barabbas. Remember me? I didn't recognize you…"

"You're Barabbas?!" Big Brutus leaned forward, eyes wide in astonishment. "What happened to you? You were the worst <multiple expletives deleted> son-of-a-jackass in the prison. I don't know why Pilate let you go. All the Romans you killed… why, you shoulda been hangin' there instead a' Him!" He pointed back with his thumb.

"I know. I…" Barabbas paused. The accusation stung.

So I broke in, "In some ways Barabbas is no worse than any of us, when it comes to keeping YHWH's Law of Life. But when he believed in Yashua as the Messiah sent from YHWH, and accepted the cleansing bought by Yashua's sacrificial blood as his own Pascal Lamb, he was changed. His heart is clean from the inside. Now he wants to do what is right and good. I assure you, Barabbas will never again be a robber or murderer!"

Horus and Baalio swore at Brutus for talking with us. "Get away from those filthy Jews. We're Romans! We're not interested in their religion or their gods. They have no respect for Caesar or our rule here…" but at that moment, the sun dimmed and a low rumble shook the earth.

169 Everyone looked up. The sun was right overhead (the sixth hour – noon Roman time) and there were no clouds in the sky. It couldn't be an eclipse; the moon (being full at Passover time) was on the other side of the earth. But a thick, eerie darkness swallowed up the sun, and the chill we felt was more than physical. The rumble in the earth grew in intensity, bringing many to their knees. Some even fell on their faces crying out to YHWH for mercy. There was no more jeering or mocking now! It was replaced by weeping and wails of fear and remorse.

I looked up at Yashua. His agony must have been incredible – and not just the straining against the nails through His feet and wrists. The darkness swirling around Him looked demonic, as if Yashua was at the center of a battle against all the devils of hell. Yet in that blackness we saw a dim glow emanating from the 'Light of the World'.

Over at the temple, renewed bleating of the lambs told us that the priests were now continuing their job of slaying the Pascal lambs by torchlight. But at Golgotha we had no torches. We were in near total darkness, black as night. With nowhere else to focus, no other way to keep our sanity, everyone fixed his eyes on that faint illumination radiating from Yashua on that center cross. Now there were no unbelievers left in the multitude. No more joking, railing, or idle chitchat. No more arguing over who He was.

Mariam had stepped back to comfort some others who were mourning a little distance from the cross. She seemed to understand and accept what was happening to her Son better than any of us. Alex, the centurion in charge of the four soldiers, came up to the foot of the cross, obviously worried. Jamie and Barabbas stood on either side of me. Each put an arm around me, either for their own support, or perhaps instinctively to support me. Even the soldiers had fallen silent and were staring at Yashua in awe.

I prayed, "Father, this seems like a 'learning moment', as Yashua would say. Don't let me waste it wallowing in sympathy or fear. Please, what should I do?"

Yashua looked briefly at me and nodded. Suddenly I knew what to do. I just opened my mouth and began to speak, allowing the Spirit of Yashua to speak through me as He had when He had sent us out. The earth continued to shake, but Jamie and Barabbas supported me. Now I was really fulfilling what Yashua had told me back when the Greeks were seeking Him outside the temple. For almost three hours I poured out my heart of love before them, and they listened! They sensed my love – God's love! As I look back, I think this was when I started being the Apostle of Love that Yashua created me for. What incredible love! Me – the one who had always been fighting, criticizing, and judging – Yashua had taken it all and replaced it with His infinite love. Even for those who had just betrayed Him, tortured Him, mocked Him, crucified Him – yes, Romans and Jews alike – it doesn't seem to matter to infinite love.

The rumble in the earth grew in intensity. Cracks began to appear in the ground. I spoke louder. I think it was only my calming influence that kept everyone from fleeing in terror and panic. The hellish darkness was so thick that most people just remained where they were and listened. Even Horus and Baalio were on their knees, drinking in every word. Alex was standing by the cross, hanging on to the beam to keep from falling, trying to look like he was in charge, but I could tell that he was listening, too. Big Brutus finally voiced the question in everyone's mind. "What then must we do to be saved?"

Rufus added, "Do we have to kill a Pascal lamb and splatter its blood on the altar? We can't do that! Romans aren't permitted in th…!" He was interrupted by a high pitched scream from the temple mount behind us. We all spun around and looked toward the flickering torchlight above the temple walls. The rumble in the earth paused, and for a moment there was an expectant silence. [170] Then a shrill cry rang out across the valley and echoed back from the surrounding hills. "The veil before the most holy place! It's torn in two! I saw it tear – from top to bottom! The way to the most holy place is now open and unguarded! Anyone could go right in!"

A shocked silence ensued. Waves of apocalyptic panic washed across us all. Someone behind me was repeating, "Oh God! Have mercy…" Another cried, "How could it ever happen? That veil is more than a handbreadth thick! Two teams of oxen pulling in opposite directions could not rend it! This must be the end of the world!"

The rumbles in the earth resumed, breaking the silence. I answered Rufus and Brutus. "No, Rufus. No one will ever again need to slay a Pascal lamb or sprinkle its blood on the altar. Our Pascal Lamb is here, on the cross. His blood is enough for all, Jew, Roman, Greek or pagan alike. Each of us is redeemed by faith in Him, from this moment on. You heard what the high priest shouted: *The way to the most holy place is now open for anyone to enter in!*

"And Brutus, here is what you must do to be saved. Accept that Yashua is Messiah, the King of the Universe, Creator of all things, Almighty God, and that He wants a love relationship with you by His Spirit living within you. He is much more than that dying body. He is a Life-giving Spirit! He is Life! But He is holy, and Holy can never dwell with sin. So you must confess to Him all the ways that you have broken His Law of Life, and ask Him, as the perfect Pascal Lamb, to forgive you and to sprinkle His own blood on you as the atonement for your sin, to cleanse your heart and make you holy, too. Then you must invite His Holy Spirit to come live within you, to be Lord, King of your life. He will teach you how to live in a holy way that pleases Him, and will give you the power to turn away from sin and the temptations that try to drag you back into sin."

So then and there those four soldiers, coarse and wicked as they were, gave their hearts and lives to Yashua by faith and received His salvation. It was amazing that there could still be a little joy in the last moments of the agony and death of our Messiah! The centurion saw it, too. He continued to stare at that illumination on the cross and wondered at the awesome power this dying man seemed to have over the hearts of his newly transformed soldiers.

[171] Suddenly Yashua cried out with a very loud voice, startling us all, especially the centurion, who thought He was too far gone to have the strength to cry out. His words, from the ancient Hebrew, were, "**My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?**"

Those of us who knew the Psalms instantly recognized this as the first phrase of Psalm 22. When I translated it into Latin for the Romans, Rufus was skeptical. "I thought you said He is God! Why would He say that?"

Not knowing the answer myself, I prayed quickly for wisdom, and began talking. "There is an ancient Hebrew custom of quoting just the first phrase of a Scripture to remind listeners of the entire passage. Maybe Yashua wants us to remember Psalm 22 in light of His suffering and death. It has a lot of things in it that may apply, such as, '… a reproach of men, despised by the people. All who see me sneer at me. They make mouths at me, they wag their heads saying, "He committed Himself to YHWH, so let Him deliver him, let Him rescue him if He delights in him."' and, 'A band of evildoers has encompassed me. They pierced my hands and my feet. I can count all my bones. They look at me. They gape at me. They divide my garments among them, and for my robe they cast lots…'"

The soldiers glanced at each other and hung their heads in shame. "But," I said with sudden inspiration, "I think there is another reason Yashua asked His heavenly Father, 'Why have You forsaken Me?' Don't forget, YHWH is God most holy. He cannot even look on sin. Sin always results in separation from YHWH and ultimately death – always! We were born and raised in sin, so we are comfortable being separated from YHWH. But Yashua never had any sin of His own! He had a close relationship with YHWH all His life – until right now! He just took all your sin (and mine) upon Himself as the Pascal Lamb. That's why He's dying. He's bearing our sin. The agony of being separated from His Father for the first time in His life may be more painful to Him than even the pain of His crucifixion."

We all looked up at Yashua. The soft light from His face was the only point of stability in a world overcome by evil. But now even that light had flickered and dimmed. The darkness swirling around Him looked like every demon from hell was dancing in glee at His agony. Yashua was straining to look up, and there was horror written all over His face as if, for the first time in His life, His piercing eyes couldn't pierce through to see His heavenly Father. I had never seen Him look anxious or afraid before, but now I saw stark terror in His eyes. The sweat running in rivers down His body was dark, as if His heart was broken and His sweat was laced with macabre trickles of blood.

He took another shuddering gasp of air, then, still straining to look up, He cried out, "**I thirst!**"

The rumblings in the earth seemed to echo the cry; then I realized the echo I'd heard had come from the high priest, who had cried out, "I thirst" at virtually the same moment as Yashua. For a thousand years, the high priest has called for some wine after the labor of sacrificing all those Pascal lambs. Of course he was thirsty. But Yashua! I suddenly realized that all those old Hebrew traditions pointed right to Yashua, and He was now living them, one by one.

I shook my head at the paradox. Yashua, the Living Water, had said, "If anyone is thirsty let Him come to Me and drink. He shall never thirst again, for the Living Water shall be in him a well of water springing forth to eternal Life." And now His source of the Living Water had been cut off, and for the first time in His life, He really did thirst! What an awful thirst it must be!

Barabbas reacted first. He stuck a sponge on the end of a hyssop branch, dipped it into a jar of old, fermented wine-vinegar (Ps 69:21), and lifted it up to Yashua. I noticed that his hand shook and tears streamed down his sweating face. He knew more than any of us that Yashua had personally taken his own cross, and he desperately wanted to do something for Him in return. I was glad that he had this opportunity. So was Yashua. He took the wine gratefully. Barabbas even received a nod and a brief smile in thanks.

And then it was over. The rumblings in the earth again ceased and perfect silence covered us all like a blanket. There was no more bleating of Pascal lambs being slain. Even the groans and screams of the two robbers paused, as they also looked up to Yashua. An overwhelming sense of awe flooded the land. It was as if all of Creation awaited His final words. "**Father!**" He shouted it out with surprising force. "**Into Your hands I commit My Spirit.**" I recognized Psalm 31. It seemed like everything Yashua did and said was a fulfillment of Scripture somewhere.

One bleat of a single dying Pascal lamb broke the silence from the temple mount. And suddenly we all knew what was to come. For a thousand years the high priest had slain the final Pascal lamb – that special one that had been selected to represent all of Israel, the one he had brought from Migdol Eder in Bethlehem four days earlier – and had caught its blood in a golden bowl with the triumphant shout, "IT – IS – FINISHED!" to assure the people that their sins of the past year had been atoned for by the blood of the lamb. But this time, the shout of the high priest was matched, word for word, with a mighty shout of Yashua from the cross: "**IT – IS – FINISHED!**" Then His head fell forward and He gave up His Spirit.

Everyone there heard it and they all knew exactly what He meant. The last Pascal Lamb had died, that special One from Migdol Eder in Bethlehem, the One who had entered in triumph into Jerusalem four days earlier, who had been anointed, inspected, and found faultless. Thus our sins were atoned for, not just for another year, but once for all time, for all who would accept Yashua as their Messiah.

Hearing Yashua's words and recognizing His stunning victory, the foul demons swirling around His head fled in dismay. The sun blazed through with shocking brilliance. It was about the ninth hour (3:00 PM Roman time). I glanced around, to see a bigger crowd here than I had thought. Most of them were on their knees, blinking in the sudden brightness and wiping gritty, tear-stained faces. Not a one had been looking anywhere but up at Yashua.

The earth suddenly let loose with a powerful quake, knocking us all to the ground and creating great splits in the rocks and cracks in the ground. I would have fallen flat on my face had not Jamie pulled my arm and turned me to roll on my side. I think Alex the centurion was the only one who didn't fall down. He was hanging on to the cross for dear life, his mighty muscles taut. In the stillness following the quake, as Yashua's body sagged in death, Alex looked up at Him in awe and wonder, and I heard him whisper, "This was far more than just an innocent man. Truly, this was a son of the gods!"

"Alex!" I called. "You heard some of what I told your troops about Him, but you missed this. Yashua is not a son of the gods. He is much more! There is only one true God, Creator and Sustainer of the universe, the Life and Light of all ages, the almighty, all-powerful, all-knowing YHWH, eternal Father of us all. Yashua is His only Son, the one YHWH sent to earth to reveal Himself to us. He is not dead as you suppose. Only His body is dead. His body had to die as our Pascal Lamb. His Spirit, for God is Spirit, shall return to YHWH, where He will always live as our all-wise, all-loving King."

Alex finally let go of the cross and sagged to his knees, shaking. Right there, in the shadow of the Savior, I led the centurion to saving faith in Yashua. This was a moment of triumph, for though I had been unable to defend Him in the religious or government courts, I had succeeded in defending Him before individuals, the people He loved, those He had died to save, even the hardest and most vile.

CHAPTER 21 – WHAT JOHN SAW

What happened right after that was so astounding, so utterly unbelievable, and so incredibly beyond even our wildest imaginings, that I must first give some background before I can tell the story.

You see, the temple in which we Jews worship is not THE temple. A lot of Jews forget that, but none who are serious about the Tenach (the Law, the Prophets, and the Sacred Writings). That is because the Tenach prophesies that the latter temple will be greater than the former. This substitute temple that Herod constructed for us is rather nice, even grand. But the temple that David and Solomon gave us? Oh, the splendor, the beauty, the surpassing glory! *That glory is still missing.* So we who believe the Tenach also believe in the times of the restoration of all things, when, as Haggai 2:6-9 says, YHWH will shake all the nations. So they will come with all their wealth, and YHWH will fill His temple with glory and give us peace. Thus its latter glory will be even greater than the former.

When we see this temple, the one Herod built, we remember that not only the golden utensils, furnishings, and glorious Ark of the Covenant are missing, but also the Shekina Glory of YHWH is gone. We mourn the loss.

Back when Jeremiah the Prophet was warning Israel to submit to Babylon or be destroyed, YHWH told him what to do. He knew the Israelites would rebel and be exiled into Babylon. So just as the Babylonians overran Jerusalem, Jeremiah gathered a few faithful priests and removed the priceless, glorious furnishings from Solomon's temple. He took them to a secret grotto which Solomon had prepared for that very purpose, deep under Mount Moriah.

After they had taken great pains to protect them in every way possible, they sealed the secret grotto with stone to make it look like there was no entry. Then as they came back out, they continued sealing passageways along the route, so no one could ever discover the precious temple furnishings unless they were supernaturally led. When some tried to mark the way so others could find the Ark, Jeremiah reprimanded them. "The place shall remain unknown until God gathers His people together to show mercy to them. Then YHWH will bring these things to light, and the glory of YHWH will appear with the cloud, as it was seen both in the time of Moses and when Solomon prayed that the temple might be worthily consecrated."

Over the years, much time and effort has gone into locating Jeremiah's grotto, but until now, no one has even come close. But today, I found it! And with it I found the Ark of the Covenant, the greatest treasure in all of Israel. Oh, blessed be the majestic name of YHWH forever!

172 Back to my story, Alex the centurion was just getting up from his knees, tears streaming down his weathered face (but this time tears of repentance), when we saw a small troop of soldiers from Antonia Fortress marching out the city gates. Alex wiped his eyes and tried to compose himself. The troops studiously ignored us Jews and reported directly to him. "Sir, Pilate has commanded (at the Jew's request) that the criminal's legs be broken so they will die right away. This evening begins a high Shabbat of the Jews, and these bodies must not be allowed to remain on the crosses during Shabbat."

The centurion's face blanched, and he backed up a step closer to Yashua's cross. "See to it, then!" he ordered. Without hesitation they went to one robber and ruthlessly smashed his legs with the butt end of a spear. A weak scream, the sounds of choking, a brief struggle, and the thief suffocated, unable to push his body up enough to expand his chest for air. The soldiers came to the middle cross. Alex backed up another step, until he was touching Yashua's feet, and pointed with his nose to the other side. The soldiers went over and brutally smashed the second robber's legs, causing him to suffocate just like the first. The cruel hardness in these soldiers gave me the willies.

The troop came back to the middle cross, where the centurion was still standing between them and Yashua's legs. "He is… already dead!" Alex struggled with the words. "You… you don't need to break His legs." His own legs were trembling.

"Oh, so soon?" One of the soldiers came up to Yashua's right, and before Alex could stop him, he carelessly thrust a spear up into His side. Out of the wound poured what looked like dark, thick blood and a clear substance like plain water. "Well, <expletives deleted>, so He is…"

But at that instant, the planet itself could take no more. It cried out with an incredibly powerful blast that threw us all flat and left our ears ringing.

And I saw. I, John, saw it all with my own eyes. I bear testimony, and my testimony is true, and I know that I am telling the truth, and I know that I know, and I could never possibly doubt again.

For the earth split open right at the foot of the cross, a deep crack into the bedrock of solid granite. It opened up eighteen inches wide directly underneath me. I fell face-down, spread-eagled across it. The afternoon sun shone only a few feet into the fissure, yet deep down, over twenty feet down, below where the sun could possibly penetrate, I saw a brilliant gleam, a fiery Presence – I recognized it as the Shekina Glory of YHWH Himself! In His light I saw into Jeremiah's grotto, and the Ark of the Covenant was there! With my own eyes I saw blood and water gushing from Yashua's pierced side and falling directly down onto the Mercy Seat of the Ark of the Covenant!

I watched in awe as the precious blood and water absorbed directly into the Shekina Glory. Though it fell right onto the Mercy Seat, yet the Mercy Seat was neither stained nor bloodied. It sparkled like the sun after a rain shower. It was as if I were looking directly into the face of YHWH as He received the sacrifice of His own Son Yashua into Himself.

As I'm sure you can imagine, thoughts flooded through my mind far quicker that it takes to tell, but I must take time to tell them, as I believe this was the most significant event ever to happen in the most significant life ever lived.

I felt sinful, born in sin, filled with sin, totally unworthy to look into the face of God. I knew I should be instantly struck dead, just like Uzzah when he reached out his hand to steady the Ark and was struck dead for his presumption. I felt like Isaiah when He saw YHWH and said, "Woe is me, for I am ruined! I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell among a people of unclean lips; yet mine eyes have beheld the King, YHWH of Hosts." I needed to fall on my face before Him and avert my sinful eyes from His holy, holy, holy Presence.

Yet I was already on my face before Him. I don't think there was a single person in the crowd not on his face before YHWH, and not just because of the earthquake! The awe and holy fear of YHWH had covered that whole place like a thick blanket. I could not avert my eyes, either. I could only look straight down into the chasm. I could not even cover my eyes with my hands, as they were spread out across the abyss to keep me from falling in.

My next thought was that YHWH had placed me here in this precise position and had not slain me when my eyes beheld His glory, because He wanted me to testify of the perfection of His plan and the greatness of His glory. But if that were true, then He must have figured out a way to atone for my sinfulness for, as everyone knows, YHWH cannot coexist with sin. I should have been slain lying here looking at Him face to face. I felt something warm and sticky upon the back of my hand, and I realized the truth. The precious blood and water of Yashua was there in abundance. Some of it had splashed upon my hand. I had personally been baptized into Yashua and cleansed in His blood, sacrificed for me as my own personal Pascal Lamb!

What an incredible thought, but true! I was at that instant perfectly free of sin, immaculate, holy, even as YHWH is holy, holy, holy. I lay there staring into His face and relished the thought, with fearful joy overflowing me like waves. In Yashua, I was accepted before YHWH. His face shone upon me. He loved me. He was taking delight in my love for Him. He wanted me there, wanted my love, even wanted a personal relationship with me. His heart was more full of joy than mine! The ecstasy was almost more than I could bear. What incredible love! Nothing on earth or in heaven can compare with this incredible love!

How could He have such love for me when it was my sin that had caused the death of His Son Yashua? How could He have such joy over my life when His Son Yashua had just given up His life?

Then I knew – YHWH's joy was not in losing His Son. Oh no! That grieved Him more than I could even imagine. His joy was in receiving the perfect blood sacrifice as the law required to break the power of sin once for all time, so I (and you if you will receive it) could be made holy, to live in His presence, to share His love, to walk with Him in holiness. He gave His only Son to die, that He might bring many other sons to life, to holiness, to freedom and joy and peace, and to His incredible, amazing, infinite love.

No wonder they now call me the Apostle of Love. I was immersed in it! Drenched in it! Flooded with it! And overwhelmed by it! How could He love me, an adopted son, a prodigal son, a wayward, weak, and wishy-washy son, a judging, condemning, self-centered, proud, prejudiced, and hateful son, as much as He loved His own true Son? As much?! Ha! Maybe even more! YHWH gave His own true Son to die, that I might live! What astounding love! Words could not express… simply could not express.

I lay there, time suspended, totally enraptured by His love – receiving it with my whole heart and returning it to Him the best I could, pouring out my heart, in gratefulness and joy. I was born of YHWH! I am a son in His heavenly family! In Yashua's death I have been given His victory – a victory that can overcome the world! A victory of faith! There could never again be room for doubt that Yashua is the Son of God; I had seen it with my own two eyes!

He had come both with the water and with the blood. Not just the waters of baptism and blood of the Pascal lamb, but with the Living Water from His heart and with the Life-giving blood from His heart. And there on my face before Him, His Spirit bore witness to my soul, the very Holy Spirit of Truth that He had promised to send after He went away. For there are three that bear witness in heaven: YHWH the Father, Yashua His Son the Living Word of YHWH, and that Holy Spirit of Truth from heaven; and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness on the earth: the water and the blood that I had seen, and His Holy Spirit of Truth in me, confirming them to my heart; and these three are also one, in perfect agreement.

On earth you believe the testimony of three witnesses, but the witness of God is greater, for not only does the Father bear witness to His Son, but also the one who believes has the witness within himself, that is His Spirit of Truth – all three are in perfect harmony. This witness is confirmed, in that God has given us eternal Life, and this Life is in His Son Yashua. He who has Yashua has the Life. He who does not have Yashua does not have the Life.

These things I wrote to you that you also may know – not just hope, not just believe, but really know that you have eternal Life, and know that He hears you and answers the requests that you ask Him in accord with His perfect plan, and know that you are His child, born of Him and protected from the evil one, and know Him who is Truth, and know that you are in Him and He in you. For knowing God and knowing Yashua haMashiach whom He sent – that is eternal Life, His Life of Spirit. (1 Jn 5:4-13; Jn 17:3)

Suddenly a thought came to me: *What a complex series of events just to get Yashua's blood sprinkled on the Ark of the Covenant. Why couldn't Father YHWH have arranged to have it sprinkled on the altar with the other Pascal lambs?*

Just as suddenly came the answer. *YHWH could not compromise His holiness to the tiniest degree, no, not even to save the world.* He could not receive the blood of Yashua the Pascal Lamb from the bronze altar, for it was tainted with sin. He could not receive it from the ground, for it also was tainted with sin. There was no spot on the face of the earth that was not polluted with sin, for we sons of Adam had filled the earth with our sins. So, how could a perfect, sinless sacrifice be completed in a world filled with sin? How could the precious blood of Yashua ever be accepted?

Wait, there was still one spot on the earth that was not yet tainted with sin. One spot that had been kept pure and holy throughout the ages. It was the Mercy Seat of the Ark of the Covenant, YHWH's throne on earth! He had kept it pure and undefiled, even at the cost of Uzzah's life, and Nadab and Abihu's lives, and the lives of the priests who on the Day of Atonement had looked upon the Ark without proper atonement for their own sins and had to be dragged out of the most holy place by that rope tied to their ankle. Now hidden deep in the earth, He was still keeping it pure.

On that earthly throne, YHWH Himself could receive the perfect, untainted, sinless blood of Yashua, not offered with hands. No human hand was holy enough to sacrifice this blood. No, the blood had to fall on its own directly from the pierced side of Yashua to the Mercy Seat. There YHWH, in all His awesome holiness, received it with joy. Finally the words of the ancient prophecy had come to pass. "IT – IS – FINISHED!" Finished indeed!

Time resumed. The noises of earth, cries, groans, tears of repentance and pleading for mercy, came back to me like a flood. Many were getting up and fleeing the area, beating their breasts and wailing in the agony of knowing they'd just crucified their Messiah. Truly had Zechariah prophesied that, "They shall look on Him whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him as one mourns for an only son…" (Zech 12:10) The earth gave another groan and a sigh as the fissure slowly closed up around my nose, so only a finger's width of the crack remained. Thus the light of the Shekina Glory was obscured from my sight.

I pulled my face up out of the crack and tried to stand. Barabbas was hanging tightly onto my ankle. I gently pried off his taut, quivering fingers and got up, shaking, but not with cold. I looked around. The world seemed flat, drab, and dirty after the glory I had beheld. The women who had supported Yashua were kneeling at a distance, weeping and shaking in fear. It dawned on me – *I was the only one who had seen! I had to tell them, to restore their faith!*

The hardened soldiers from Antonia recovered first. Their mission accomplished, they jumped up, regrouped, and headed back to Antonia Fortress. They made a valiant attempt at regaining their pride in their march, but looked to me more like cats dancing across a hot bitumen roof.

The centurion and his four soldiers were looking from Yashua to me, their faces blanched with fear. Jamie and Barabbas again stood up on either side of me, clinging to me, their bodies trembling like mine. The afternoon sun was now blazing hot, but we shivered as if it were freezing. Alex the centurion was the first to find his voice. "What happened? What does it mean? I've never felt such terror!"

"I was sure the end of the world had come! Why are we all still alive, when Yashua the Life of All Ages, is dead?" A remarkably astute comment from Brutus, who must have been really listening to me.

"He died, so I could live!" answered Rufus.

"He was the Creator of the world! See how the world mourned His death!" chimed in Baalio.

"I thought we were doomed when the earth split open." added Jamie. "Thank God we were all thrown clear!"

"John wasn't thrown clear. He fell right over the chasm. He might have fallen in, but I grabbed his foot and hung on for dear life!" Barabbas clearly had gained a higher view of the value of a human life.

"What did you see down there?" Horus asked meekly. They all looked up to me to explain.

I opened my mouth. They waited. After a while I closed it and then opened it again. Nothing came out. Finally I gave up, put my face between my knees, and bawled. I had to testify, but I couldn't do it. I was an emotional basket case. I had been up too high and had come down too fast. The incredible glory I had witnessed was too momentous to be put into the common languages of sinful mankind. My new brothers gathered around and comforted me.

We moved over to where the women were standing. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jacob and Joseph wanted to wait behind and see what happened to the body of Yashua. Alex and his four guards promised to look after them until their shift ended, and to tell their relief guards to watch out for them as well. The others couldn't bear to stay any longer, so I walked with them back into Jerusalem where they were staying. I finally was able to give a weak testimony about seeing the water and the blood from Yashua's side and believing, and knowing beyond any shadow of doubt that I tell the truth. (1 Jn 5:4-20) But I never did tell the part about seeing the Ark of the Covenant and the Shekina Glory of YHWH. Even years later I still have serious difficulty talking about it. It's too personal, too precious, and too awesome. When I try to tell it, I feel like I'll spoil it, taint it with my pride, as if putting it into words would detract from the incredible love and holiness in which I was immersed at the foot of Yashua's cross.

But now His love in me compels me to testify, as YHWH is bringing together a many-membered Bride for Yashua. His love for her is so great, He laid down His life for her! And for you also dear Reader, so you could experience the cleansing flow of the water and blood by faith, baptizing you into His holiness and love, at the foot of His cross.

173 But my story is not over yet. Oh no! The best is yet to come. Evening was fast approaching. Though the soldiers from Antonia Fortress came and callously dumped the two criminals in a common grave, the body of Yashua was lovingly taken off the cross by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, two elders on the Sanhedrin council. They had been secret followers of Yashua ever since He had 'planted the seed', and hadn't agreed to His death. Joseph got permission from Pilate himself. They took Yashua's body to Joseph's own tomb, hand hewn in the solid rock as is the custom of the very rich. Nicodemus brought the spices (75 pounds of myrrh and aloes). The two Marys helped them bind His body with the spices in a burial shroud covered by a long linen wrapping. They wrapped His head with another wrapping. They all wept as they sealed Him in Joseph's tomb with a heavy circular stone.

174 Working fast, they made it just in time. The sun set; the high Shabbat of the Feast of Unleavened Bread began. The two Marys hurried back to the upper room and told us where Yashua's body was buried.

CHAPTER 22 – FIRST DAY OF THE FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD – Nisan 15 (W/Th)

That night we celebrated the Feast in a somber mood. Though Yashua had spoken clearly numerous times of His rising again in three days, abiding with us, not leaving us as orphans, coming again to receive us unto Himself, and so on, we had somehow spiritualized it all away, and not one of us actually expected Him to bodily rise from the grave. I'm ashamed that we had so little faith. I was grateful that old Yacov continued to allow us to use his upper room, and even more grateful that he and his family didn't bug us with a lot of questions about what had happened to Yashua – questions we could not have answered.

Someone had gotten a Pascal lamb for the meal. There were more than sixty of us there, and we should have had at least two lambs, but strangely, we didn't run out. I think that most of us were too heartsick to eat much lamb. We celebrated in the traditional way, eating the hagigah (special festive meal) together, sharing matzos and wine. Lazarus led us – for some reason everyone started looking to him now that Yashua was gone. I guess they all realized that not one of the twelve, er, eleven now, was emotionally able to handle leading anything.

Lazarus made a big point about Hag haMatzot (the Feast of Unleavened Bread) being a joyous time. "The 'Bread of Affliction' must not make us mourn. Its message is deliverance from Egypt! Freedom from our bondage! Forgiveness of sin! Acceptance into the family of YHWH!" He again reminded us that Yashua had promised to return, and soon. "Though His body is dead, His Spirit has ascended to the Father where He even now is praying for us." Lazarus did a beautiful job, and we should have responded with cheers, shouts, and psalms of joy.

But instead we just sat there in a cloud of gloom. Our hearts ached with the tragedy. There was an emptiness, a loneliness, that all the friends and all the celebrations could not begin to replace. Most of us had simply run out of tears. We sat there staring empty-eyed out into space. Even knowing what I knew about YHWH receiving the blood of Yashua so Father God could have a joyous love relationship with each of us did not dispel the cloud. My mind, like everyone else's, kept flashing back to those horrible images of Yashua hanging on the cross in agony – it was all too real, too recent – everywhere we looked we saw His blood dripping, smeared, gushing out – every sound reminded us of His groans and screams.

Late that evening, after the seder was over, a few of the women came up with a plan to go out after Shabbat and buy some embalming perfumes and spices to anoint Yashua's body. Nicodemus and Joseph had not had time before Shabbat to really finish the job. I must admit I was very negative. I shut them up by saying that He was dead, and that was that. Nothing could help Him now, even if they could roll away that big stone sealing up the grave.

We continued to rest according to the commandment. But we later learned that our religious leaders were rather busy for a high Shabbat. The chief priests and Pharisees went to Pilate and told him that Yashua had said, "After three days I am to rise again." Strange how they seemed to understand His words better than we, His disciples. They were afraid we would try to steal away Yashua's body and claim that He had risen from the grave, in order to start some new religion or something. Fat chance! As if any of us had enough ambition left for starting a new religion! As devastated as we were, we barely hung on to a distant hope of Resurrection Day, and a desire to resume our fishing.

Anyway, that's what they told him. He ordered a Roman guard at the tomb and put his own seal on the tombstone.

At dusk, Peter, Andrew, and my brother James went to visit the tomb. The soldiers told them the whole story, and they reported it back to us. So by the end of Shabbat it was doubly impossible for the women to get into the tomb with their spices and perfumes. And I told them so.

CHAPTER 23 – SECOND DAY OF THE FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD – Nisan 16 (Th/F)

That evening we ate together another gloomy meal, mostly in silence. The women had not given up their plan, but after my grumpy put-downs, they were keeping quiet about it. Early the next morning (as soon as the shops opened) Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of Jacob and Joseph, and Salome (my mother) went to the market and bought the spices and perfumes. When they came back and started mixing them in preparation for anointing Yashua's body, it filled the house with perfume. I'm afraid I really lost it then. I yelled at them and called them stupid. Then I felt so ashamed at myself I went off and cried the rest of the day. I had still not gone over to visit the tomb, though all the rest had gone at least once. I was having a bad case of reality-check and was miserably failing the test.

After the women finished mixing the spices, they came over to comfort me. They assured me they had forgiven my little outburst. Mary praised my bold calmness at the foot of the cross, which made me feel even more ashamed of myself for falling apart so badly afterwards. They said they understood; that in the physical it seemed impossible, but they still believed that somehow, God would provide a way for them to anoint Messiah properly for His burial. At that point, they had more faith than I did!

The women went to the tomb toward evening. Sure enough, the Roman guards, though not hostile, wouldn't let them get close. But they came back more determined than ever. I reminded them that by now Yashua's body was starting to stink, and if they didn't get to Him soon it would become impossible to approach Him. Mariam quoted the old Hebrew proverb, "No man is truly dead until he's been in the grave three days."

"Well, this is the second day, and tomorrow is Shabbat, so there's your three days!" I shot back spitefully, and immediately was ashamed of myself. I was judging her as impudent and unrealistic. I suddenly realized I was worse! After all my pious bravado at the cross, I had now become critical and unkind, as well as faithless.

My words hurt, but Mary bravely stood her ground. "So for our Shabbat prayer we will just pray that YHWH will shoo off the Roman guards already, or put them to sleep or something. Can you not agree with our prayer?"

"Yes, Mary. I'm sorry. I've been a real bear lately, haven't I. I will consent to your prayer, though I'm afraid I haven't much faith for it."

CHAPTER 24 – THIRD DAY OF THE FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD – Nisan 17, SHABBAT (F/S)

So Mary led the prayer opening Shabbat. I have never heard a woman pray so fervently, as she poured out her heart of love for the Savior. And when she asked YHWH to remove the Roman soldiers and roll away the stone, we all gave our hearty "Amen," even me. I felt strangely warmed by her prayer, as if it really were the right thing to pray. It certainly increased my faith.

Again we rested according to the commandment. None of us went to visit the tomb. We sat around in fellowship, and for the first time since His death we were able to talk about it. James and I shared our hopes and dreams of the Kingdom, and how all our delusions of grandeur had been so violently shattered. It seemed like just yesterday that our mother had begged Yashua for a special place of honor for us at Yashua's right and left hand in His Kingdom. How indignant (rightly so!) the other ten had been.

I laughed mirthlessly. Yashua as King over our hearts seemed not nearly so much fun as Him taking over Israel and ruling over our fellow countrymen – and the Romans!

The day passed quickly, as all our walls and pretensions came down. We just leveled with each other and began to bear each others' burdens of grief and pain. The love of God was still strong among us.

I'm glad to report that Barabbas was accepted into the fellowship with love and understanding, as were many others. Jamie had led his older brother Malchus to faith in Yashua. He had brought him, along with the gatekeepers, Sally and Susan. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus also joined us, as did Joseph of Cyprus, the Levite lawyer who lived downstairs. Though still scribes and Pharisees, they too were believers and we welcomed them. Joseph's sister Mary, her son Marcus, and her servant Rhoda were there hosting and serving us. I had brought Simon of Cyrene, who had carried Yashua's cross, into the fellowship, with his wife and two sons, Alexander and Rufus. Many of the seventy from the last tour also came with their families.

Thus there were a lot of people crammed into that big upper room. I only wished that I could invite the Roman soldiers, Alex, Brutus, Rufus, Baalio, and Horus, but of course Gentiles were not permitted to fellowship or share a meal with Jews. (That remained unchanged until God sent Peter to the house of Cornelius. Acts 10.)

Joseph of Cyprus and his sister Mary were very kind, and most generous. They became such an encouragement! I mean, this was their home. We should have shown our gratefulness by giving to them. Instead, they were paying for most of our meals, serving us, showering their love upon us, and sharing our grief just as if they had been His disciples for years. When Joseph told us how he had left his home and everything he had in Cyprus, and had come to help care for Mary's father-in-law after her husband Heber had died, we all agreed to change his name to **Barnabus.** It means Son of Encouragement or Son of Consolation. That just fit; and besides, we had two other Josephs.

'Barnabus' told us that Mary's father-in-law, old Yacov ben Levi. was with us in spirit, though physically too weak to climb the stairs to the upper room. So Peter and I and some of the others went down to thank him for his continuing support. Strange. Old Yacov didn't seem at all discouraged by the sad ending.

When we returned, Barnabus had an interesting story to tell us about old Yacov ben Levi. He had been praying the whole time we were having our Pascal meal, and had refused to eat. (If you can imagine a priest refusing to eat the Passover!) After we had left, Barnabus had tried to get him to eat a little before retiring for the night, but again he refused. Finally, Barnabus had gone to bed, worried that his 'father' might be too weak to eat at all by morning. He was too thin and frail to fast for a full day. But next morning Barnabus had been awakened by the sounds of fervent intercession from old Yacov's bedroom. He had prayed all night! He was not weakened, he was stronger! He was even sitting up in bed, storming the gates of heaven for Yashua.

"It was amazing!" Barnabus told us. "When I tried to get him to eat a little so he would have enough strength to continue praying, he quoted from Psalm 118: 'YHWH is my strength and my song. He has become my salvation.' Except Yacov deliberately misquoted it, saying instead, 'Yashua is my strength and my song. He is my salvation.'

"So I gave him some more water and knelt down in prayer beside his bed. I admit that I was torn. I had never prayed in the name of Yashua before, and it just didn't seem right. It didn't seem right to change YHWH to Yashua in the Psalms, either! But the more I tried to pray, the more wicked and unworthy I felt. I, too, skipped breakfast, and prayed with old Yacov for hours. Finally I broke into sobs, pleading with YHWH for forgiveness. That was when old Yacov climbed out of bed and knelt down beside me. I was shocked! He had hardly been out of bed for a year! Where did he get his strength, after no food for a full day?!

"He put an arm around me, saying, 'Yashua is Messiah! You must believe in Him.' Then he quoted to me from Isaiah 53, except he put it in the present tense and again inserted Yashua's name. 'Yashua is being pierced for our transgressions; Yashua is being crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brings us peace is falling upon Yashua, and by His scourging we are healed. All of us like sheep have gone astray; each of us has turned to our own way; but YHWH has caused the iniquity of us all to fall upon Yashua! Pray to Him, Joseph. Tell Him you believe in Him, and plead with Him for forgiveness!'

"Out of respect for my adopted father, I tried it. Though it still felt strange, even a little blasphemous, I prayed in Yashua's name, confessing my sins and asking Him for cleansing. And suddenly, I was clean! I was filled with peace, and I just knew that the Spirit of God had come into my heart. But suddenly I had a horrid thought. 'Father, what did you mean by saying that Yashua is being pierced through… is being crushed for our iniquities?'

"He stared sightlessly at me and, with tears in his eyes, just said, 'Why don't you go out and see?'

"So I went out and tried to find Yashua. It was nearly the sixth hour [noon]. He wasn't at the temple, but I heard the crowds farther north, at the Damascus gate. I reached the gate and was shocked and horrified to see Yashua hanging on a Roman cross at Golgotha. How did my father know?! Was Yashua really suffering there for my iniquities?

"Then the sun went dark, the earth began to quake, and the powers of the heavens were shaken. I clearly sensed a great battle in the realm of spirit. Suddenly I knew why my father was praying. I ran back to him, stumbling over things in the dark, prepared to join him kneeling in prayer beside his bed. Except when I got back, he was no longer kneeling! He was standing, arms raised to the heavens, interceding in a loud voice. I don't know where he got the strength to stand, but I joined him, and together we prayed until after the sun brightened up again, about the ninth hour. Finally, he sat back down on his bed. He had been standing, pacing the room, for more than three hours. 'It is finished,' he assured me. 'Yashua the Messiah has won the victory over Satan and death and hell. Thank you, my son, for joining me in this battle. Let's have breakfast.'

"'But Father,' I cried. 'Yashua is out at Golgotha dying on a Roman cross! I saw Him myself!'

"He paused a moment, staring sightlessly at a wall. Then he turned to me and said, 'Your problem, Joseph, is that you still have your sight. If you were blind like me, then you could see. He has won the victory, I know. Now, I'm really quite hungry. Shall I get my own breakfast?'

"Then and there I determined to ask to join your group. My father has weakened as before, and is back in bed, but I told him to bang on the wall when he needs me. Thank you for welcoming me into your fellowship!"

"Thank you for sharing your story with us, Barnabus," I responded. "I know He has won the victory, even though He is dead. The Pascal lamb always dies. But now our sins are really forgiven, and we are redeemed back to YHWH. We will never again need to sacrifice a lamb at the temple, for Yashua's victory is for all people everywhere for all time. Though we are sad, even crushed with grief at His death, yet we still rejoice in His great victory. I know. I saw the water and the blood! I know that YHWH has accepted His sacrifice as 'the perfect Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world', just as Yochanan prophesied about Him." I started to say more, to tell my story of what I'd seen down in the chasm, and to rejoice in His victory. But again overcome with grief at the horror of His death, I put my face down in my hands and bawled like a baby.

The fellowship that Sabbath was deeply moving with so many new believers. Many bonds of love were forged and strengthened that day as we bore each other's grief. It is amazing how much is accomplished when we just rest on Shabbat and allow YHWH to work His perfect work of grace and peace in our hearts. By sunset that evening we had forgotten Mary's Shabbat prayer.

CHAPTER 25 – FOURTH DAY OF THE FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD – Nisan 18, First of the Week (S/S) – DAY OF THE FIRSTFRUITS OFFERING

175 But YHWH had not forgotten. At sunset there was an incredible earthquake. I have never felt a quake like it, before or since. Even the quake that had knocked us down at the foot of the cross was less severe than this. Not one of us remained standing. The noise left our ears ringing. We thought sure that our roof would collapse, and there would be thousands dead in Jerusalem as all the old stone structures fell. When it was over I praised YHWH that our roof had held up. Mary of Magadan grabbed my arm. "The tomb! Something's happened at the tomb! Let's run and see!" My mom took my other arm and squealed, "Yes, John! Maybe YHWH answered Mary's prayers and opened it up for us. Maybe the quake moved the guards away! Grab the spices! Everybody! Let's go!"

I shook my arms free with a firm, "No! The tomb is carved in solid bedrock. It's just fine." I could not believe I was dishonoring my own mother in front of the group like that. But instead of apologizing, I tried to justify it. "We've got to go help those in the city who weren't so fortunate. I'll bet half the roofs in Jerusalem have fallen in! The temple is probably collapsed entirely! After all, the veil was torn in two during the crucifixion. That's what YHWH is doing with the earthquake – destroying the old religious order so everyone will have to accept Yashua as the Pascal Lamb. We've got to go help the priests who are trapped under the rubble. This gives us a perfect opportunity to confront them with the consequences of their wickedness in slaying Messiah! They'll be forced to believe in Him now!"

So we all ran out to try to assist others. Until it was pitch dark, we helped others up, dusted them off, reassured them, and gave them our peace. But amazingly, though a lot of roofs had fallen in, few were injured or killed.

I ran right over to the temple, but it was still standing firm, beautiful as ever. I watched for a few minutes as the priests went about their special duties on this day after Shabbat during Unleavened Bread. The Sanhedrin had a special barley field just for Firstfruits, which they had reaped with a sickle and brought to the temple. No one was permitted to touch the barley harvest until the Firstfruits were offered. On the evening of the first day of the week, the priests threshed their barley with rods, parched it over an open flame, and winnowed it in the wind. They were now sifting it over and over again until it became the finest of fine flour. First thing the next morning (our Sunday), they would mix an omer (about five pints) of this flour with olive oil and a small dusting of frankincense, and wave it before YHWH as the Firstfruits Offering.

As I watched them quietly perform their duties as they had for 1500 years, my conscience began to trouble me. I have always considered myself well-educated, logical, and clear-thinking – superior to Peter, who was uneducated and tended to jump to conclusions. Now for all my logic, it seemed I was wrong. But I was yet to see just how wrong.

When we all gathered back in the upper room, it must have been the third watch (after midnight). Everyone was a bit boisterous, rejoicing that we had been able to minister Yashua's love and healing to the few casualties we'd found. I determined to make a public apology for my obviously wrong statements. But before I could speak, a stranger showed up at the door.

"Alphie?" Mary, Jacob's mother, asked with shock all over her face. She fell to her knees and rubbed her eyes. Another shouted, "Grandpa!!!" And one whisper, "It's Alphaeus!" Jacob whirled, "Dad?!" The room grew silent.

The stranger stood there smiling broadly and enjoying his moment of glory. "What 'r you standing 'round with your tongues hangin' out fer?" He chuckled. "You look like you've seen a ghost!"

Jacob slowly walked toward the door, his little nephew clinging to his arm. "Dad?" he repeated. "I guess we have seen a ghost. You died three years ago. What… How…?" His nephew let loose with another, "Grandpa!!!" and sailed into Alphaeus' arms. Mary, weeping profusely, finally got up and ran to his side, crying, "I've missed you so… I've missed you so…"

"I don't know what happened. I was hoping you would tell me that. All I know is that the tomb you all buried me in has a huge crack in it, and I am alive and feeling quite fine, thank you. A tad hungry though. It was a struggle to get the grave wrappings off. Musta taken three hours. I first looked up through the crack in the tomb just at sunset."

"I think I know." Everyone turned to look at me. "I was wrong. My mom and the two Marys were right." That was as much of an apology as I could do. "Remember Mary's prayer opening Shabbat? Well, I think YHWH answered her with this earthquake. No doubt it scattered the Roman soldiers so the women will be able to properly anoint Yashua for burial. I noticed all through the trial and the crucifixion that Yashua was ministering life by His death. I'm sure it's not just Alphaeus, but other saints, too. It seems obvious to me that the earthquakes during Yashua's death were the means He used to open up the tombs and minister life to Alphaeus and others He loved."

The ladies got excited. Mariam, Yashua's mother, cried, "What are we waiting for? Let's go to the tomb! All you men can easily roll the stone away!" Mariam looked up at me pleadingly.

You would think I had learned my lesson when I had dishonored my own mother, but no. Now I crossed the mother that Yashua had asked me to care for. "Mariam, it's the middle of the third watch already. It will be pitch dark in the tomb even if we do roll the stone away, and if we bring torches we're sure to attract the attention of the Roman soldiers again. We're all exhausted. We need to get some sleep. We will go with you to check out the tomb first thing in the morning." And with that, I turned and headed for my bedroll, my cheeks burning with the disrespect I had shown to Yashua's mother.

I'm both ashamed and encouraged as I think back on it. The ladies were foolishly impetuous, and I was logically correct. But I was still unkind, and my bad attitudes made us miss the celebration of Yashua's resurrection. However, God turned it around for good. By not going to the tomb after the 'quake, we had been able to aid a lot of people.

Here is what had happened. The earthquake came at the close of Shabbat, exactly three days and three nights after Yashua was placed in the tomb. We should have known! Yashua had told us plainly, and I quote, "An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign. Yet no sign shall be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet. For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so shall the Son of Adam be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." That was the only proof He gave our religious rulers that He was the Messiah. They remembered. But we forgot.

Yes, the earthquake had opened the tombs of many of the saints who had died. We saw them later with their happy families. And no, the earthquake had not cracked Yashua's tomb. At least those parts of my guess had been correct. But everything else was wrong. [176] The quake had not scattered the Roman guard. Though they had been knocked down, they had quickly gotten up and grabbed their weapons, fully alert and ready to fight to the death to fulfill their mission. Don't forget, these were the best trained soldiers in the civilized world, and proud of it.

CHAPTER 26 – THE MASTER OF THE DANCE

The soldiers heard some noise above and behind them. They turned toward the tomb and looked up. No one was there, but the noise persisted, like the sound of a million voices singing in the skies. They rubbed their ears, still ringing from the quake, and were about to dismiss it as an illusion, when the clouds rolled back, like peeling an orange, and they caught the briefest glimpse of thousands of angels dancing and singing as if celebrating something.

They were! Yashua had risen with the earthquake. In an intense flash, the Light of the World had moved through the grave clothes and through the stone tomb as if they weren't even there. While the poor Roman soldiers were still picking themselves up off the dirt, He had ascended into the second heaven to rejoice with the angels until the time appointed to present Himself before the Father.

In an explosion of sound and light, the watching angels gave a mighty shout of triumph that rocked the universe. Instantly the Master of the Dance was swept up into the arms of a zillion dancing angels, who passed Him back and forth between them with an irrepressible enthusiasm that defies description. Never before had the Dance been so passionate, so fervent, so boisterous, so joyous! From one end of the universe to the other with wild abandon, the angelic host expressed their love for the Master of the Dance as they celebrated His homecoming. "We've all missed You so!" Michael confided. "The heavenlies were just not the same without You!"

Logos laughed. "It's so good to be back home! I must admit, when I became human I forgot the joy we share here. I forgot many things. Being human is so limiting, so tense! It's so dark down there – it's a wonder they can see anything at all. Now I understand their weakness and pain, their anxious fears, their ignorance and foolishness. What a delight it shall be when I lift them up to join the Dance!"

"Yes!" Michael chimed in. "Then it will all be worth it, those thirty-four years we spent awaiting Your return so we could dance again."

"Awaiting?" Logos was surprised. "Don't tell Me that you never danced while I was gone!"

"How could we dance without You, Master?"

"How can you NOT dance? With all the joy that fills the heavenlies! With all the love and peace here! With the music of the galaxies singing the praises of Father YHWH! Even though I was bound in human flesh, locked within the weakness and darkness of earth, yet how could you not dance in faith and expectation of our victory?"

Gavriel and Michael glanced at each other, not wanting to admit their own anxious fears. Logos discerned their discomfort. "Come, come, now! Don't tell Me you were worried that I'd fail! You know Me better than that!" He laughed uproariously.

Now it all came out. "But Logos!" Michael voiced it for all the angelic host. "We know You in Your strength, Your glory! When You entered the womb of Mariam You became so tiny, so frail and helpless! How could we not fear? You put Yourself at the mercy of those selfish, cruel humans and vile rulers like Caiaphas and Herod! Oh, we danced a little when You were successfully born; when we saw You take Your first breath; and when the shepherds recognized You as their Messiah and gave You worship. But then we realized how truly weak You were! I guess we expected You to be some kind of miracle baby, still filled with the wisdom and power of the ages condensed into a tiny body. But when we saw You cry and nurse, pee and poo, babble and burp, spit up on Mariam's dress just like any other baby, well, we figured out that You really had left it all behind, not just Your power and glory, but all Your wisdom and authority, too! It was truly frightening!"

Gavriel added, "We realized You'd forgotten who You are! Forgotten Your mission! You were utterly ignorant! And though YHWH allowed us to protect You, yet we were prohibited from reminding You of why You went to earth! It was horrifying!"

Logos could hardly contain His laughter. This was the best joke ever. "Surely you danced when at the age of nine I discovered My real Father!"

"No, Lord. We became frantic when we realized that, even knowing Your real Father, You still did not know how to pray! We held our breath for months while You learned how to hear the voice of Spirit! I was terrified when I discovered that Satan was trying to imitate Spirit's voice in hopes that You might think he was Your Father!"

"Ah, yes! And that temptation in the wilderness when Satan came quoting Scripture and offering Me an easy way out… you feared I would fall for that?!"

"Well, not from his misquoting the Word. We saw how well You already knew and understood the Scriptures when You were twelve at the temple. But in the wilderness, after fasting for forty days, You were so weak! And after Spirit showed You Your mission – that You would die as the Pascal Lamb - we were scared You'd take the easy way rather than Father's way. YHWH had told us that You could have failed!"

"Surely when I rejected Satan's easy way out, you danced while you strengthened Me?"

"No. Not even then, though that was indeed a great victory. As we ministered to You, we again realized how unbelievably weak You were! Your ministry had barely begun! The first Adam had failed with only a suggestion from the Serpent. You yet had years of heartless railing and condemnation ahead of You! And by then we really knew Your weakness. I think we might have abandoned hope if we had not heard James, John, and Yacov praying for You. They encouraged us immeasurably."

"Encouraged by their prayers, yet you did not dance? Did you not celebrate the choosing of My disciples? The wedding at Cana? The crowds following Me and listening to all My teachings? The healings, casting out of demons, proclaiming the Kingdom of God? Did you not dance at the fulfillment of every prophecy? At My revelation of Myself as the Messiah at the Feast of Tabernacles? At all who received Me at the Last Great Day of the Feast? Did you not dance at the great joke I pulled on the priests when I took the Pascal lamb's place at their traditional ceremony from Migdol Eder? At My triumphal entry into Jerusalem? Did you not dance when Lazarus' sister Mary anointed Me as the Pascal Lamb? Or when the priests found no fault in Me with all their grilling? Did you not dance when I cried out, 'It is finished!' just as the last Pascal lamb was slain, to pay the price for all the sin of the world and successfully accomplish My mission?"

"How could we dance? Even then, we thought we'd lost You! We didn't know the Father could rescue You from the pit across the chasm. No one has ever escaped before! Satan had the keys! We knew Your victory would allow the Father to create a many-membered Bride to take back to eternity with Himself, but we didn't see any way that You Yourself could possibly survive."

"I clearly said I'd rise again on the third day."

"But… but we didn't know it would be You. I mean, really You! We all thought Your sacrifice would free Your many-membered Bride to rise up in Your place; that the sons of God would finally be one in spirit as You prayed that Passover evening; and that only Your Spirit would rise up within them on the third day."

Logos was beside Himself with laughter. His guffaws rang the heavenlies. "You got duped just like My disciples. They spiritualized it all away! Think of all the celebrating you missed because you were afraid for Me. We've got a lot of partying to catch up on! Father's Plan of the Ages is always higher and better than anyone can imagine!"

One of the celebrating angels slipped through the rent in the sky and moved quickly down to the tomb. He was dazzlingly white, and came down like a bolt of lightning toward the soldiers. You could hardly blame them when they screamed in fear and fainted dead away on the ground. They had never seen an angel before. But He ignored them. He merely rolled the stone away and sat on it, like he was waiting for visitors. Indeed he was – us!

When the soldiers came to, the angel was still sitting on the tombstone, shining like a tiny sun. They were terrified, but he just sat quietly, so after a while they challenged him. "What are you doing here?"

"Waiting for Yashua's disciples, to invite them to join the heavenly celebration of His resurrection. They're due any minute." He spoke kindly and made no threatening moves, so the soldiers got more bold.

"Why did you break the seal and roll back the stone?" they demanded. "We're in charge of guarding Yashua's body, so His disciples don't steal it."

The angel chuckled. "Yashua's 'body' is more alive right now than you will ever be. He is doing cartwheels across the heavens with ten zillion of His angels. I'll join them as soon as I can pass along my invitation to His disciples. I opened up the tomb so they – and jokers like you – can see that He really has arisen. Go ahead. Take a peek inside."

With white faces the soldiers slowly went in. The angel came in behind them to light their way. Sure enough, the grave was empty. The officer in charge of the troop now realized that he had failed in his mission (a capital offense). He whirled, lowered his spear threateningly, and accused the angel. "What did you do with Yashua's body?"

"Me?" The angel raised his hands in mock surrender, and then gave a hearty laugh right in the officer's face. "As if I could do anything to the body of the almighty King of the universe, Creator of us all and Master of the Dance! Do you think I am God? I'm just an angel, one of His servants. He does whatever He pleases, and I consider myself very blessed to have served Him in this small way – Bless His holy name forever!" And he knelt and lifted his hands in praise, lightning flashing from the folds of his garments.

The officer tried to prod him with the tip of his spear, but it passed right through his body. So the soldiers ran off to tell their superiors, leaving the angel now bowed in full worship within the tomb. Another angel came, drawn to join in the compelling worship.

But those disciples who were supposed to show up? Well, they didn't. And it was all my fault for not listening to the Spirit's promptings through the women.

In fact, we male disciples all slept in the next morning, being emotionally and physically exhausted as well as still discouraged and with very little faith.

177 But Salome, Joanna (the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward), and the two Marys were up early, leaving for the tomb before dawn with their spices and perfumes. They quietly snuck out, not daring to wake us up for fear that I would prevent them – again. On the way there, my mom wondered, "Now who can we get to roll back the stone for us? I should have awakened James and John. John usually isn't so disrespectful to me. I wonder what got into him?"

"Don't worry about it, Salome. I'm sure YHWH has a purpose even in that. If He wants Yashua to be anointed for burial, He will provide a way." Mary Magdalene had such faith, and such love! She was an incredible help to us all during this time.

The ladies got there right at first light. There were no soldiers, nobody at all in sight. "Praise YHWH! Now all we have to do is find someone to help us roll the stone… Mary! Look! The stone is already moved!"

They ran closer. Singing came from inside, and a faint other-worldly luminescence. It reminded them of the face of Yashua on the cross during the three hours of darkness, so they ventured near and called out, "Who's there?" The singing stopped and the luminescence flicked out.

All four crowded into the entrance. It was very dark. They realized that they should have brought lamps. The sun hadn't yet peeked its sleepy head above the hills, and its light didn't penetrate into the tomb. But it sure looked empty – so far! Suddenly there was a blaze of light, as bright as the sun except much more gentle on the eyes. The three women dropped their packages in panic at the entrance and were about to turn and run.

"Sorry, sorry. I didn't mean to startle you. Please! Don't be afraid. We were, ah, engaged in worship and you caught us by surprise." Two young, handsome men stood there, their robes flashing with the brilliance of a noonday sun.

The women, still terrified, bowed their faces to the ground. "I'll leave, Raphael," Gavriel whispered. "You will do better alone with them. Be gentle!" The women lifted up their faces in time to see one of the two angels vanish in mid-step, like he had just stepped through a doorway in space. The other one sat down to the right of the place where they had lain Yashua's body three days before.

"My name is Raphael," he said softly. "I stand in the presence of YHWH under Gavriel, chief minister of the most high God. My present assignment is guardian of the physical presence of Logos, Creator of the Universe, whom you know as Yashua the Nazarene. You needn't fear me." The ladies stood up, encouraged by his gentle tone. "So, tell me, my friends. Why do you seek the Author of Life from among the dead?" He chuckled.

The ladies were too much in awe to give him an answer, so he tried again. "I know you are looking for Yashua, who was crucified and buried here." He indicated the spot with a wave of his hand. "Well, He has risen to life, just as He promised. He is right now dancing in the heavenlies with the angelic host, and preparing Himself as the Firstfruits to the Father. Go ahead, check out the place where He was lying. Don't you remember what He told you, even way back when you were in Galilee? He said that He must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified, and on the third day He would rise again."

The ladies nodded, and their faces flushed with the embarrassment. They could clearly see the empty grave clothes, but didn't dare touch them.

"Now go," Raphael continued, confident that they had understood him, "and tell His disciples. It's too late now to join the celebration – we dare not be late for Firstfruits – but after Firstfruits Yashua will come to meet some of you. Then He'll go before you into Galilee just as He said, and will meet with all His disciples there. Also, please tell Peter that Yashua has a special message for him."

At his urging, the ladies turned and ran from the tomb. Their feet flew up the path into Jerusalem, both from joy of the news and fear of the angel. When we saw them running toward us, Peter and I had just gotten up. We were out by the well washing up. I opened the gate.

178 "The tomb is dark and empty! No one is there!"

"Two shining angels are there, lighting up the tomb. They told us that Yashua is risen! Dancing in heaven with the Father for Firstfruits! But we're too late to join Him."

"Yashua is gone! I saw His empty grave wrappings!"

"The angel told us that Yashua has a special message for you, Peter. He wants to meet you in Galilee." The ladies stumbled over each other trying to tell us the news.

They were emotional basket cases. Mary Magdalene, who had spent all her energy in the run, came puffing up behind them and fell on Peter, sobbing, "They took our Lord from the tomb. We don't know where they laid Him!" Her great love for the Master had overloaded her emotions.

With such conflicting stories, Peter and I looked at each other and shrugged. There was no sense trying to sort it out here. We had to go see for ourselves. We pointed the ladies toward the house, and took off together in a dead run toward the tomb.

Though Salome, Joanna, and Mary the mother of Jacob had gone into the house to tell the others, we didn't notice Mary Magdalene. In her tears she had turned around again and was following us back toward the tomb.

I had never raced Peter before. He was bigger than I, and very strong, though I was younger and more energetic. Still, it was a long way down the empty streets and out to the garden. Near the end I was getting tired and he had caught up. So my second-born competitiveness kicked in. I put on a burst of speed and got to the tomb first. The morning sun now shone directly into the opening. When I stooped to look in, I could see the empty grave clothes. I stopped, astounded. Indeed Yashua was missing!

Old Peter came pounding up behind and pushed me aside. "Either come in or go out, but don't block the light!" he commanded, kneeling by the burial niche. I came in and knelt beside him. The body wrappings lay there, still intact, as if the body they had wrapped had just vaporized. We inspected them closely. The outer horizontal winding was tight and even, though collapsed since there was no body inside. It was not cut or torn or pulled aside like it would be if a living person had been struggling to escape. I remembered Alphaeus saying that it had taken him three hours of wrestling to escape from his grave wrappings, and imagined what a mess that would have made. But here, there was no sign at all of a struggle. The head wrapping was rolled up neatly and stacked by itself. Clearly this was neither the work of grave robbers, nor had Yashua come back to life and struggled to free Himself.

We reverently brought the grave wrappings into the sunlight. I carefully slid the inner vertical body shroud out of the wrappings and looked closely at it. It looked slightly burned inside. I checked for the burial herbs, the myrrh and aloes that the women said they had used. There didn't seem to be any left. The smell was still there, but it smelled cooked, or smoked. I stood up and held the body shroud out before me. Yes! There was an unmistakable image of Yashua Himself, stripes, bruises, blood splatters, and all, imprinted on the inside of the shroud; but it was burned into the fibers, like there had been an intense flash of heat when the body had been taken. Peter and I looked at each other. We didn't quite know what to think, but at that point I began to believe that Yashua really had risen. How else could the shroud be in this condition? This shroud was going to prove a valuable piece of evidence! I rolled it up carefully and took it with me as we left the tomb.

"Well, John. I don't know about this 'special message for Peter in Galilee'. The ladies were confused. They really contradicted themselves – couldn't even get the number of angels straight. But I can't wait. So I'm gonna head off to Galilee to find out. D'ya wanna come?"

"No. The ladies said nothing about me going to Galilee. I'm going to take this shroud back and show it to the others to see if we can figure out what it means. I think we ought to get it straight before you travel all the way to Galilee. I don't think the ladies understood what they were saying. Mary Magdalene totally contradicted the others!"

"I'm not waiting around for your guesses! I need to know!" With that, impetuous old Peter took off like a scalded cat for Galilee (a two- or three-day journey) with no food, water, money, or spare sandals. As I said, he was uneducated and quick to jump to conclusions. But then, how many times had I been wrong recently? A fat lot of good my education had been. I shook my head, hoping he had understood correctly. Then I headed back for the upper room, meditating on all I had seen. [179] I completely missed Mary Magdalene on her way back to the tomb.

Mary, unused to all this running, arrived in the garden totally exhausted. She stopped outside the tomb, fell on her knees with her face in her hands, and wept the great wracking sobs of a broken heart.

And up in the heavenlies, Yashua's celebration with the angels came to a screeching halt.

"I told her that You had risen." Raphael was perplexed. "I reminded her of Your promise to rise in three days. I thought she understood."

"Yes, dear Raphael. You did just fine. Her great love for Me, her crushing grief at My death, and her emotional and physical exhaustion has confused her. You forget how weak and frail humans are. But I understand. I take delight in going to strengthen them." Yashua opened a rent in the veil between heaven and earth and started to step through.

"But Lord – Your presentation before the Father as the Firstfruits of all Creation – the priest is all ready. It is but minutes away! I don't think you have time."

"I didn't think so either. But now Spirit is leading Me differently. You've got to be flexible to keep up with Spirit! Things are moving fast now. Come on!" And He stepped through the veil into the garden, with Raphael and Gavriel close behind.

Mary sensed their presence and looked up. Raphael and Gavriel had seated themselves inside the tomb at the head and feet of where Yashua's body had been laid. Mary recognized them, and bowed low before them.

"Well, woman," Raphael addressed her respectfully according to Eastern custom. "We meet again. Do you not remember what I told you? So why do you still weep here at the place of the dead?"

"Because they have taken away the body of my Lord, and I don't know where they've laid Him!"

Exasperated, Raphael shook his head and just pointed behind Mary. She turned to look. There stood Yashua with a welcoming smile on His face. But through her tears she couldn't see, and thought He must be the gardener. "Please sir," she asked. "If You have carried Him away, tell me where You've laid Him and I will come get Him."

"Mary!" One word. Recognition finally dawned.

"Rabboni!" Mary fell to her knees and reached out to kiss His feet, but Yashua stepped back.

"Don't touch Me! I have not yet ascended to the Father. I am the Firstfruits to YHWH, so He must be the first to touch Me. But go and tell all My brethren that you've seen Me alive. It is time right now. I'm sorry that I don't have time to chat. I must ascend to My Father and your Father, to My God and your God. But I will visit you again after the Firstfruits are presented." With that He was gone. But in those few moments with Yashua, Mary was strengthened and encouraged. Her fears were laid to rest. She headed excitedly back toward the upper room to tell the others.

At that very moment the high priest had lifted the omer of barley meal which had been prepared for the Feast of Firstfruits, and was waving it before YHWH as required by Torah. His prayers of praise and thanksgiving for the coming harvest was ascending to the Father as a sweet-smelling incense. Surrounded by ten million angels, Yashua jumped into the breeze of fragrant prayers and was wafted up to the throne of the Almighty. There Yashua, whose name in the heavenlies is Logos, strode up to the throne, His face beaming.

"I have accomplished all You asked of Me, and fulfilled Your Word. I come to You as the Firstfruits, My Father…"

"And I have accepted Your sacrifice, My Son. Welcome back to Our throne! Come give Me a hug!"

Every angel in the heavenlies froze and held his breath as Logos, not even stopping to bow first, leapt into the Father's open arms.

The light on the throne blazed brightly, and for a time there was only one Light, one Spirit. Logos had merged completely into the pure brilliant splendor of Light that is YHWH's Shekina Glory. But finally the Light separated into two and Logos, now also known as Yashua ben Adam, again became visible. The Father was speaking. "…the Firstfruits is oh, so sweet. But now You must go to begin preparing the rest of the harvest. It is time now to keep Your appointments with the women, and with Peter…"

Logos laughed. The angels laughed with Him, a joyous, sparkling silvery sound like that of a million musical bells. "How strange, Father, to hear You speak of time as if You, too, were afflicted with this malady to which I submitted."

"Ah… but I am!" YHWH laughed too, a resonant, booming laugh at which the angels dropped back on their knees in joyous worship. "Though I still dwell in eternity, yet I hold all times right here in My hand. I jealously guard each one, so not a syllable of My eternal Word, not a single one of My plans and purposes, can ever be broken. Now go. When you meet Peter, give Him a hug from Me!"

"Yes, Father!" And in instant, joyful obedience, Logos stepped back from the throne, opened a rent in the veil around the heavenlies, and stepped onto the earth.

Meanwhile, Mary, Salome, and Joanna, though failing in their attempt to explain their story to the male disciples, had won one believer – Mariam. But she too was confused at their story. They retreated to the maid's quarters, away from the scorn of the men, where Mariam questioned them to try to get their story straight. "Now what was it that Mary Magdalene said about 'they've taken away the body…'? And why did she run back to the tomb?"

"We saw the angel and he said…"

"No there were two of them…'

"But one of them left. And the other one, I think his name was Raphael, said that Yashua had risen. He said, 'Why do you seek for the Author of Life among the dead?' And he said Yashua would meet with us after Firstfruits, and then meet us all in Galilee. That means He's alive!"

"The angel said He was dancing in the heavenlies and preparing Himself as Firstfruits to the Father. A body can't dance in the heavenlies, can it? It's too heavy. I think that just means Yashua died and went to His reward."

"But His body wasn't there! Whatever happened to His body? We went to anoint it with the spices and perfumes."

"Mary of Magadan was sure somebody had taken the body. She was crushed that we couldn't anoint it like we had planned. I think she went back to look for it. Poor Mary… and she had such faith for Him!"

"We all had faith for Him, but when they hoisted Him up on…" Vivid pictures of Yashua's horrible crucifixion again flooded their minds. They were emotionally spent; physically exhausted; mentally stretched beyond the breaking point. The room grew cold and their doubts grew strong. The disbelief of the male disciples flooded over them, too. Their conversation dissolved into sobbing.

180 "Shalom! [Peace] Good morning!" Suddenly the darkness and coldness of the room, the doubts and fears, and yes, the spirit of unbelief were all forced to flee before the cheery warmth and brightness of the Author of Life standing before them.

"Oh! My Lord and my God!" Mariam – Yashua's mother but now obviously in a different relationship with Him – flung herself at His feet in worship. The other women followed, covering His feet with tears and kisses. How could they ever have doubted?

Yashua relished in their worship for a while, glowing as if His clothing were made of sunshine. When He spoke, His voice held no condemnation, only encouragement. "Don't be afraid! All that you've ever hoped and believed for Me is now come to pass, and more! I've won the victory, and have been accepted as the Firstfruits to My Father. Now go, tell My brethren. Encourage them, for they also have been weak and distraught. And tell them that I shall meet with them in the upper room and then again after the Feast when they return to Galilee."

181 Peter was moving fast. He wasn't running, but he was walking with an urgency that he'd never felt before. The excitement from last night's earthquake and this morning's discovery at the tomb had not worn off. Indeed, it had built a burning fire in him. Galilee was a long walk, but by traveling light and taking no rest breaks Peter was determined to do it in one long day. *Certainly he could fast for one day!* He had to find Yashua!

Foolish Peter! He drove himself on, ignoring his body's desperate need for fuel. He had forgotten that though he had often fasted for days, it was always at rest, at home. No dinner due to the earthquake; no breakfast this morning because they had slept in; by noon his big body was near fainting. Yet he only forced himself to walk faster.

The world began to waver in front of him. Peter began seeing and hearing strange things. A brilliant flash of light that exceeded the noonday sunlight. The sound of many people singing. Still he drove himself on. Then the world started to spin, his ears took up a high-pitched ring, and his vision began to slowly narrow and fade to black.

He never even made it through Samaria. His legs stopped of their own accord. His blood-sugar level had gotten so low that his body no longer obeyed him. His knees buckled and he started to topple. Just in time a strong arm wrapped around him and sat him gently down at the side of the road.

A kindly voice urged him, "Here, take a drink from my canteen. It's fresh, new wine. It will strengthen you." Peter obeyed. As he drank, he began to realize how thirsty – and hungry! – he was. The freshly squeezed grape nectar felt like liquid life flowing directly into his veins. The canteen was half empty before he paused, a question mark on his face. "Go ahead. Finish it if you like. It looks like you really needed it."

Peter finished it, gave a satisfied, "Ahhh…" and handed the empty canteen back. His strength was returning, and he could see again. "I am most grateful. I believe you saved my life. I was foolish to think I could go this far without food or drink. But I was in a hurry to…" Peter hesitated. The stranger couldn't possibly understand.

"In a hurry to…?"

"Well, this is going to sound really stupid, but you know the three crucifixions just before Passover?" The stranger nodded. "The middle one was Yashua, my Lord and Master." Peter said the words with great emphasis, then hung his head. "I dishonored Him horribly just before He died, and, uh, I want to make it up to Him. Ahhh… I know this sounds crazy, but I have reason to believe that He came back to life. After all, He raised others back to life. Why can't He raise Himself back to life?" Peter looked at the stranger defensively. "I was with Him for three years. I saw Him raise people back to life!"

"Oh, I quite believe you," the stranger assured him. "But what is this about dishonoring Him?"

"That's kind of a long story. And I'm in a frightfully big hurry. Yashua sent a message that He wants to meet me in Galilee." Peter stood to leave. "I've really got to go…"

"Galilee? That is rather a long way to go with no food or water. Here, take some figs. And I have some matzos in My pack, and a little cheese. And I have a large flagon of new wine here, and you'll need…"

"But sir! You'll have nothing left for yourself!"

"It's okay. I don't have far to go. I'm just heading over to Emmaus – only a half day's journey. You won't make it to Galilee at all if you have no sustenance."

"Thank you, sir. You're too kind!" Peter sat back down next to the pile of food he was offered. "I guess the least I can do for all your generosity is to answer your question about dishonoring my Master. You see, He warned us He was going to be captured and killed. But I swore I'd stand by Him and fight for Him, even unto the death. I really meant it, too! But when the time actually came, I got scared and ran off. Then during His trial, instead of defending Him, I actually denied I knew Him! Three times. I can't believe it. I had no idea I was so weak and faithless. I'm so ashamed. My bold promises were only self-confidence and pride. In reality I'm just a spineless fool." Peter began to sniffle, and wiped his face with the hairy back of his arm.

"But I still love Him. He's still my Master and my Lord. And if He's still alive, I will do anything to try to make it up to Him. Anything! That's why, when I was told He had a message for me in Galilee, I started out without taking the time to gather provisions for the journey. That was stupid. I guess I thought I could… could travel faster if…" Peter started to blubber, and finally he put his face in his big hands and began to bawl.

"Peter!" The crying stopped. *How did the stranger know his name?* "I have a message for you from our Father!" Peter wiped his eyes on his hairy arm again and looked up. The Stranger was standing with a big grin on His face and a familiar fire in His eyes.

"Our Father…? Are You…" Recognition dawned. "Yashua, my Lord and King!" Peter bowed down.

"Don't you want to hear Father's message? Stand up!" Peter hesitantly stood up. "Father has forgiven you! He loves you! This hug is from Him." Yashua wrapped Peter in a big bear hug. "And I forgive you too."

"I'm so unworthy." Peter began blubbering again.

"That is why I died."

"But I am the worst of all! I not only left You, I also dishonored You and denied Your name!"

"They all left Me and dishonored Me."

"John didn't. He's so much more worthy than I!"

"John has dishonored Me twice just today."

"But…" Peter pushed back to look in Yashua's still-smiling face. "How… how can You still love us?"

"Our love does not depend upon your strengths or weaknesses, or your response to Our love. I made you, Peter. I can take each weakness and turn it into a strength, if you will let Me. And I can take those strengths, My strength in you, and use them to turn the world upside down. Will you let Me?"

"Yes! Yes, Lord! But how…? What should I do…?"

"Your present attitude of repentant humility is a very good start!" Yashua laughed, a joyful, loving, accepting laugh, as He rested His hands on Peter's broad shoulders. "From there, it is a simple matter of remaining in prayer as I taught you, so you will hear the promptings of My Spirit. Then be ready to do what I lead you to do."

"Yes, Lord!" Peter didn't yet fully understand, but he was willing. Yashua's forgiveness and acceptance had won his heart. "What shall I do right now?"

"Peter, Peter! My impetuous friend! Right now, accept this hug from Me!" He drew him back into another big bear hug. Thus gradually, Yashua's infinite love melted Peter's walls of trying to earn His love and forgiveness, and Peter finally gave in to the unconditional love of God.

When I, John, heard Peter's story, I understood totally. That is what had happened to me back in Perea on the way to Jerusalem. That is what Yashua did for each one of us disciples, eventually. And that is what He will also do for each of you, my dear Readers, if you will let Him.

Anyway, when the hug was finally over (although that hug was never really totally over), Yashua said, "Now, if you are ready, I do have a small task for you."

"Yes, my Lord? Ask anything. I'll do it!"

"Take the food and wine. You still have need of more strengthening. Go back to Jerusalem, to the upper room. Tell My disciples there that I have risen, and that I will meet them there tonight."

"Jerusalem? But… I never made it to Galilee…"

"You made it far enough for Me to see your heart! And I like what I see, Peter. Be encouraged! I saw that you are willing to lay down your life for Me, as you said before. However, the ladies misunderstood the message through the angel. I never wanted you to leave Jerusalem during the Feast. That would not be right. After the Feast is over and you return to Galilee, I will go before you and meet with you and with all the other disciples who live there."

"I wasn't supposed to go meet You in Galilee?"

"No, Peter. But as with all things that YHWH does (bless His holy name forever), even the misunderstanding worked out for good. It gave Me the opportunity to see your heart and give you His message of forgiveness and love. Don't think that you have to understand, or even complete, all that I lead you to do. Your job is to obey, as best you can, what you do understand and what you do have time to complete. I'll make up the difference.

182 "Now, I have an appointment with a few brothers on the road to Emmaus." He paused to chuckle gleefully, like a kid thinking up a good prank to pull. "Maybe I'll lead them in a few Scripture prophecy lessons before I let them recognize Me." He laughed out loud at the thought. He always did love a good joke. "After I talk with them, I'll send Athenatius and Cleopas over to the upper room."

"Yes, Lord. But You will need some of this food. Emmaus is a half-day's journey away…"

"With My new resurrection body, Emmaus is but two steps away for Me, My friend! Good-bye until tonight!" Yashua laughed again, ringing silver bells of joy in Peter's heart. Then He stepped through a nearly invisible tear in the air and was gone.

Peter hurried back toward Jerusalem, munching on matzos and cheese along the way. Gratefulness bubbled over in his heart. *Understood! Loved! Forgiven! Even his physical need met in abundance. What an awesome Lord and Master he had! Just wait 'til he tells the guys in the upper room that he just met the Lord! Alive! Gloriously radiant! And able to get to Emmaus in two steps…? Well, maybe he'd better just skip that part. They'll have enough trouble believing as it is.* He finished off his breakfast with the figs. They were incredibly sweet and satisfying! Just like the awesome love of YHWH!

The group in the upper room was in turmoil. I had showed them the body shroud and confirmed to them what the ladies said about the grave being empty. Some of the others had also visited the tomb and also found it empty. Then Mary Magdalene had come to the upper room with the other women. They were talking all over each other to say they'd actually seen Him, just now!

183 But the Roman soldiers were claiming that we had come that night and stolen away Yashua's body while they slept. As absurd as that lie was, some of the people were actually believing it. As if we could have broken the seal and rolled away that heavy stone without waking up the soldiers! And we didn't see any soldiers being executed for sleeping on the job! It was obvious that our religious rulers had cooked up that story. And now they were out to get us.

So we were in hiding, rather fearfully, I'm sad to say, and awaiting further proof. Then Peter returned and told his story. I had all the proof I needed. I rejoiced that Yashua was alive. I trusted Peter. Besides, there is just no way his simple mind could have invented such a wild tale.

But many others in our group still didn't believe. ***184*** Even after Cleopas and Athenatius returned from Emmaus and told us how they had recognized Him at the breaking of the matzo, the majority of us couldn't really believe it.

Poor Thomas had the worst trouble believing. Before Peter returned he had gotten scared and had gone over to stay with his cousin on the far side of Jerusalem. I can't blame him. The rest of us were frightened, too. Too many others knew where we were hiding. If our religious rulers found out… well, let's just say we kept the curtains pulled and the doors locked up tight!

CHAPTER 27 – FIFTH DAY OF THE FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD – Nisan 19, Second of the Week (S/M)

Peter was excited. It was sundown, and he claimed that Yashua was going to visit us that evening. He made sure that dinner would be ready, had us all prepare the table and set a place for the Master, and then posted a lookout at the window, peeking through the curtains. He assigned another to stand by the door and rush down to unlock the outside gate when Yashua showed up.

But when Peter told someone to get Thomas, everyone pooh-poohed him! I couldn't believe it! They really didn't believe Yashua would come. Old Peter was trying hard not to be exasperated, ***185*** when suddenly, without a sound, Yashua materialized right there in our midst.

Peter stopped speaking in mid-sentence, his mouth hanging open. He glanced at the lookout by the window, who gave him a blank look and shook his head. He glanced at the locked upper door, and at the guard he had assigned to unlock it and the main gate downstairs. He also gave him a blank look. Then he slowly looked back at Yashua, his face turning pale with fright. Someone gave a little shriek, and the tingles went up and down my spine. Was it really Yashua, or was it an illusion or a ghost? Seeing the confidence of old Peter melting, and watching him stand there in stark terror, was more than any of us could bear. Even I, I'm ashamed to say, gave in to a whirlwind of doubts and fears and scrunched back against the wall.

"Why are you so troubled, O you of little faith? How hard are your unbelieving hearts! You should be receiving Me with joy and glad shouts of greeting, yet you are shrinking from Me as if I were a ghost! Did you not hear the good news from the women, from Peter, and from Cleopas and Athenatius? Why do you entertain doubts and fears in your hearts? Look at the wounds in My hands and feet. Here, see where the soldiers pierced My side. It is I, Myself. Come touch Me, and believe. A ghost does not have flesh and bone such as I have."

Quite a few of us had fallen on our knees, and there were tears of joy on many faces, but not a one had yet said a word of welcome to Yashua. He smiled at us and said, "Well, it looks like you were about to eat. Here, pass Me a little of that broiled fish. I'll prove I'm not a ghost!"

That broke the spell. We gathered close to Him while He ate the fish. Finally the tears were turning to smiles and glad expressions of love and joy, as He gave hugs all around. Then we crowded around the single long table and ate our meal while Yashua encouraged us with stories.

We invited Him to join us with the matzos and wine, but He politely declined. "Remember what I said? From now on, the matzos and wine at the Feast are symbols to remind you of My death as your Pascal Lamb. I do want you to eat and drink them in My memory…" He smiled. Now we understood that! "But I will not partake of them with you again until My Father's Kingdom is unveiled.

"So while you eat, I'll tell you about My welcoming celebration in the heavenlies after My resurrection. Spirit did invite you – I'm sorry you missed it. I've never seen the angels so excited, so joyous! What a delightful romp we had, dancing and doing cartwheels across the heavenlies! Take the young maiden's dancing at Yom Kippur, multiply it by a billion graceful angels in flowing robes… And the singing and glad shouts… you should have heard! The universe joined in, even the far planets, stars, and galaxies singing in glorious symphony!" He paused to chuckle. "The Roman guards caught a few moments of the Dance when Raphael rent the heavenlies to open the tomb… it was so awesome it terrified them! But it won't terrify you. Next time Spirit invites you to join, you should accept.

"Speaking of Roman guards, the story they concocted with our rulers is obviously preposterous – as if you, scared and faithless as you were before tonight, could have had the courage to face them and try to steal away My body! Yet many will believe it because they do not want to believe the truth. So beware. They will speak against you, persecute you, torment you, throw you in prison, even try to kill you for My name's sake. But don't be anxious. I'll protect and guide you until it's time for you to come Home. You just focus firmly on the Truth and reject their lies.

"So be at peace within. In the world you may see terrible tribulation, but do not be afraid or succumb to anxious thoughts, for I have overcome the world. Take My peace, for I am the King of Peace. Give it a permanent resting place in your hearts. Just as the Father sent Me into the world, so I now send you into the world. As long as you rely fully on Him as I have done, you will lack nothing. My ministry will expand through you until it covers the earth.

"Covers the earth?! Ha! Covers the entire universe! Guess whom I visited after Cleopas and Athenatius? You'll never guess!" Yashua snickered gleefully like a kid with a humongous secret. None of us could guess, so with His voice lowered to a stage whisper He confided, "I returned to Hades, to the Dungeon beside the pit, where the souls of those who had died at the time of the Flood had been imprisoned for their disobedience and violence." (1 Pet 3:19) His voice then rose in excited crescendo. "I told them the good news, that I had won the keys to death and Hades and the way to the Father was now open for all who would believe and accept Me as Savior and Lord. I planted seeds of hope where before there had been none. When I left, many were beginning to understand and believe already. I unlocked their prison doors and invited all who were believing in Me to follow Me into Paradise, where Gregory (the thief who died on the cross next to Mine) and My other friends were feasting, awaiting Judgment Day. Yes, my friends, it's been a very busy day…"

"Paradise?" I was shocked. "Paradise in Hades?"

"Of course. Hades is the spirit equivalent of this entire physical realm. Do you not have places of delight here as well as places of torment?" He chuckled at our ignorance. "Hades is a vast and spacious place – a many-splendored realm, filled with delights and rewards as well as regrets and punishments. I have now experienced them all, from the peaks of joy in Paradise, to Tartarus the dark Dungeon, and beyond to the depths of the pit of despair and torment in the lowest level of Hades, the Abyss, the lake of fire, called Gehenna. Yes, I've been there too – for each of you. I'm willing and able to walk with you through it all."

So the evening after Firstfruits was passed in delightful fellowship, as we all finally fully accepted the fact of His resurrection from the grave. When He was ready to leave, He gave each of us a parting hug, and breathed upon us, saying to each one, "Receive the Holy Spirit as I promised."

He concluded with this last exhortation: "I've asked Father to send you the Holy Spirit, and I've prepared your hearts to receive Him. In His power, you also will forgive the sins of some and retain the sins of others, and Father will honor your prayers. I must go now, but I'll visit you again after you return to Galilee, as the Spirit leads."

Once again we were startled as He stepped back into what appeared as a tear in the atmosphere and disappeared from our sight, with the windows and doors still shut and locked. Peter shook his big head to clear his brain. "I saw Him do that when He came to me on the road to Galilee," he confided. "But I'm not sure I'll ever get used to it. He said that Emmaus was only 'two steps away'! He's incredible!"

Well, Peter finally got his volunteers to go get Thomas! We all wanted to go! But in the interest of maintaining a low profile, Peter sent only James and me. We returned a few hours later. I was sad to announce that Thomas had refused to come. He didn't believe us. We'd told him the whole story and he still wouldn't believe. He had seen Yashua die with his own two eyes, and couldn't get past it. We didn't see Thomas again until the last day of the Feast.

CHAPTER 28 – EIGHT DAYS FROM PASSOVER, THE LAST DAY OF THE FEAST OF UNLEAVENED BREAD – Nisan 21, Fourth of the Week (T/W)

The eighth day of the Feast is also a high Shabbat. We all joined together again in the upper room for the evening meal opening Shabbat. Thomas, though still fearful and unbelieving, returned. It's in our blood, you see. Jewish tradition from ancient times would not let him stay away. But he swore that until he saw the scars from the nails in Yashua's hands and feet, and put his finger into the hole in His side, he would not believe. I felt so sorry for him. We'd tried to tell him what we'd seen and the sweet fellowship we'd had with Yashua. But he would not hear of it.

The windows and doors again were locked. We still were very concerned about our religious rulers. We settled down to enjoy the festive meal – but it seemed so strange. There was no unity among us. We should have felt peace and joy. But instead, our relationships were strained to the breaking point. I almost wished that doubting Thomas had not come. It seemed like he had brought with him a spirit of unbelief that the rest of us could not shake off.

Again Mary Magdalene was chosen to recite the prayer opening Shabbat. Her pure heart was always like a bath of fresh water to us all. But Mary startled us when, right in the middle of the traditional prayer, she interrupted herself to blurt, "Oh, please, Father! Send Yashua to dear Thomas, so he can again believe and be one with us in fellowship!" Then with her hand over her mouth, she shrank back, shamed at what she had done, while we glared at her for violating the tradition of the Feast with such an uncouth outburst, and on this high, holy Shabbat, yet!

186 Suddenly, with a flash of otherworldly brilliance, there stood Yashua beside her, His left arm drawing her into His hug, while His right arm reached out to us. "My peace be with you all!" He commanded. "I am come to answer Mary's prayer." He paused to smile warmly at her. "She has not violated the tradition of the Feast. She has found the true meaning of it: Oneness in fellowship and faith, sharing the love of the Father with each other. How can you have sweet fellowship together if any of you is faithless? I come bringing faith.

"Thomas, My dear brother. Here I am. Reach out your finger and touch the wounds in My hands and feet. Reach out your hand and put it into the wound in My side. Be no longer faithless, but believe."

Thomas fell to his knees with his face at Yashua's feet in worship, repeating over and over, "My Lord and my God! My Lord and my God!"

We were shocked. It is one thing to acknowledge Yashua as the Son of the living God. He's making us sons, too. But it's quite another to fall down in worship and acknowledge Him as God! None of us men had done that before! (I learned later that some of the women had.)

We stared, open mouthed, and wondered how Yashua would correct him. I fully expected Yashua to quickly respond, "No, Thomas. I am just a Son of God. Remember, like I told you that you all are to be sons of the heavenly Father. You can't worship Me as God Himself! YHWH is a jealous God. He will not share His glory with another."

But that was not what He said. I remember His words just as clearly as if it were last night. Yashua stood there, radiating faintly with that glory from the heavenly realm, and smiled lovingly. "Dear Thomas! Because you have seen Me physically – because you now behold the glory of My resurrection body – now you can believe who I am?"

He looked around the group, smiling an invitation to all of us, and added quietly. "You all believe now, because you have seen My glory. How blessed are those who have never seen Me, yet still have faith to believe who I am!"

There were gasps around the room; probably one from my own lips too, though I do not remember. Yashua looked right into my eyes, and my heart smote me for my own faithlessness. I felt ashamed. In one instant doubting Thomas had more faith than all the rest of us put together! As one, we all fell on our knees before Yashua in worship.

He smiled at us, glad to receive our worship. Finally He said He had to go, as the Father had a special gift for Him. He reminded us of His appointment to visit us again after we returned to Galilee. Then He vanished from our sight.

The rest of that high Shabbat, as we rested and had sweet fellowship, we felt a oneness, a spiritual unity, greater than we had ever had before. The greatest joy is sharing with all those bound together in unity of the faith!

CHAPTER 29 – AFTER THE FEAST. Nisan 22 (W/Th) and Nisan 23, Preparation Day (Th/F)

That evening, we bought provisions and prepared to return to Galilee. Yashua had promised to meet us there. It's a two-day trip, and we only had two days before the weekly Shabbat. We left old Yacov's home early the next morning. Fat chance! We never got past the front door! We spent the entire day greeting Yashua's many admirers, encouraging them that He had indeed risen, and sending them home from the Feast with a blessing.

That night, exhausted, we argued. One day left. There was no way to make it through Samaria, no one had any desire to spend Shabbat in Samaria, and to stop short of Samaria would be wasting most of our last travel day before Shabbat. Then Thomas, who had been quiet ever since Yashua had left, spoke up. "Let's pray about it."

Again I felt ashamed. I should have thought of that. Thomas led us in prayer, then we all waited silently. Finally Thomas spoke up again, "I believe Yashua would have us spend Shabbat in Perea where we stayed just before Passover. Our friends there know that Yashua was crucified, but probably haven't heard that He rose again."

Suddenly there was no more argument. We knew it was right. Even though the road was longer and more difficult, we knew we had to visit Perea and report back to those beloved people the joy of the resurrection of our Lord. They had received us so gladly and treated us so well – we owed it to them to share the good news. And thank you, Lord Yashua, for the strong faith of Brother Thomas!

Most of the Jerusalem believers returned to their own homes. We slept one last night in the comfort of old Yacov's upper room. Early the next morning we headed on down the Jericho road toward Perea.

CHAPTER 30 – APOSTLE OF LOVE, Nisan 24, Shabbat (F/S) and Following

The good people of Perea again received us gladly, and put us up for Shabbat, and the next day, too. It was almost like coming home. They believed and rejoiced in our good news. We had wonderful times of fellowship and worship with them. When they finally sent us on to Galilee, they loaded us down with food and gifts, and warmed our hearts with hugs and kisses and invitations to return. What a joyous time! And to think we almost missed it because we were so anxious about getting back to Galilee that we forgot to pray about it. As we traveled north up the Jordan River Road past Decapolis, I thanked Thomas.

He smiled at me and said, "You know, John, I've really been thinking about it. Yashua as our Lord and Master is one thing. We followed Him for almost three years, and He led us to do a lot of great things. But when He's not with us, we tend to wander around aimlessly, or argue and fight.

"However, Yashua as God is another thing entirely. He hears our prayers and leads us through prayer even when He is not physically with us. Remember when He sent us out two by two? He was praying for us, and it was just like He was with us, leading us, every step of the way. I think He wants to continue doing that for us, every day, all day."

What a revelation! I instantly knew in my heart of hearts that Thomas was right. Thomas, faithless, doubting Thomas. Now he was challenging all of us to greater faith and obedience! As far as I had come, and I don't belittle all the many lessons Yashua had taught me, I was beginning to see how much I had yet to learn about being a disciple of Yashua. Thomas' humility sure learns a lot faster than my second-born competitiveness and pride!

When we got to Galilee, we spent several days waiting for Yashua to show up, visiting our families and friends, gathering together for fellowship – it dragged on into a week, and then two. Our finances were running low, we were getting grumpy, and our faith was being sorely tested. Not a one of us could doubt that Yashua had said He would go before us into Galilee, so where was He already?

Most of the new believers in that upper room in Jerusalem had returned to their own homes after the Feast. Barnabus had stayed to continue helping his sister Mary care for old Yacov. But Barabbas had no other home, so he had come with us to Galilee. So besides us professional fishermen (Peter, his brother Andrew, James, and me), we had Thomas, Barabbas, and Philip waiting there with us.

187 Finally at one of our evening meals together, Peter stood up and said, "I'm going fishing!" As I recall, not one of us prayed about it. We all wanted to go with him.

We just took one boat. None of us wanted to split up. The little fishing boat was a bit overloaded, but who cared? The night was calm. At first it was great fun. Just like old times. Thomas, Barabbas, and Philip had never fished before but were eager to learn. It was a joy working with these men with whom we had such a unity of heart and purpose. We joked and laughed together as we fishermen told stories to the newbys of earlier fishing trips.

I told of the partnership that old Peter and Andrew used to have with James and me. I shared about our successes, and some of our failures and catastrophes, too. Though we had left it all with our parents in order to follow Yashua, we had gone back to it twice to help out the ministry finances – except we hadn't caught anything either time. Big help we turned out to be! Except that once. I'll never forget it.

I told the story. We were washing our nets after another all-night fishing bust, rather disgusted with ourselves. Yashua had come and talked to the multitudes all morning using Peter's boat to stand in. I'm afraid I was too sleepy (not to mention too embarrassed) to hear much. Then at noon, which is the worst possible time to fish, Yashua had told Peter to put out into deep water and drop his nets.

Everything was wrong – the time of day, the location – we had been fishermen all our lives, and our parents and grandparents before us. We knew better than that! Yet that once, we had caught more fish than both our boats could hold. [42] It was awesome! Where did Yashua learn to fish? His dad was a carpenter, for heaven's sake! He didn't even want the fish for the ministry finances, either. We just left everything for our folks. And we hadn't fished ever since… [187] 'til now.

We enjoyed the stories and jokes, but as the night wore on it became painfully obvious that we weren't catching anything. Nothing at all. Maybe Yashua didn't like us going back to fishing. But He had said He would go before us into Galilee, and He hadn't showed up! What else were we to do? By first light, we were all a little miffed, and ready to pack it all in and go home.

Then this beach bum came wandering down and called to us, asking if we had caught anything. When we told him we hadn't, he had the gall to tell us to move our net to the other side of the boat! It was like rubbing salt in a wound. I mean, give me a break! The fish don't care which side of the boat the net is on! We had always fished from the port side of the boat. All our tackle is set up that way. Besides, we were professional fishermen, and who was he?

But we were too tired and grumpy to argue with him, so we moved the net. And, deja vu, all over again! Suddenly, the net was full of fish! I mean full! Our tackle to draw in the net was still set up on the port side of the boat, so we couldn't pull 'em in. If we had, it would surely have sunk the little boat. We already were overloaded with people.

I looked at Peter and he looked at me. "That has to be the Lord!" I said. Peter threw on his outer robe and jumped into the lake, almost flipping us over.

We slowly rowed the boat back to shore, dragging the net full of fish. There was old Peter, dripping wet, kneeling at Yashua's feet. As we struggled with the boat, Peter came and helped us pull in the net. There were 153 fish. Nice big ones. Good eating. We had never caught so many in one catch before. I couldn't help but think what a high price they would bring at the market.

I inspected the net, expecting to find many tears. But I found none. Not a single broken strand. An overpowering sense of awe came over us all. This had to be a miracle. How did He know about the fish on the other side of the boat? We looked up at Yashua. He smiled and invited us to share breakfast with Him. He had a little charcoal campfire going there, with some fresh fish already laid on it. Where did He get the fish? He didn't have a pole or a net.

We know this man! This is Yashua, of Nazareth. We've been His disciples now for three years, we kept thinking to ourselves. And yet our minds were still filled with awe and wonder, as if this was some mystical superhero we had never met before and we didn't even dare to ask His name!

"Gather My disciples together," Yashua told us after we finished eating. "Tell them to meet Me on the mount near Capernaum overlooking the sea. My ministry is over, but I have some parting words before I return to Father. The day after tomorrow is Shabbat. Let's meet together the next day, first of the week, right after breakfast."

Then He took old Peter aside and had a man-to-man chat with him. He urged Peter to continue the ministry in His absence – to follow in His footsteps. He told Peter to shepherd His sheep and to love His little lambs in the same way that He loves them. He then privately challenged the love of Andrew, Philip, and Barabbas in turn, just like He had challenged old Peter. I eagerly waited my turn. I was not going to let Yashua out of my sight if I could help it!

After finishing with Barabbas, He nodded to me. I came and fell at His feet in worship, my heart overcome with love and gratitude. I didn't say anything. Somehow, when you become aware that you are in the very presence of the almighty God, there isn't a whole lot you need to say. I had finally really learned who He is, and I worshiped Him for that, for being the Ruler of the universe, the Creator of all things, the Master of time and space, the Lord of all flesh, the Source of all that is good, the effectual Sacrifice for all my sins and weaknesses, King of kings and Lord of lords, my Lord, Master, Redeemer, Guide, Wisdom, and Friend, and the greatest Master Fisherman of them all.

He read my thoughts. He knew my heart. He whispered into my ear as I knelt there before Him, "Apostle of Love. Apostle of Love. I've chosen you as My Apostle of Love. Let My love in you overflow to My brothers and sisters. Never lose that hot, fervent love! Guard it. Fan it. Use it. Everyone will know that you are My disciple by your love."

I must have remained there on my knees for two hours. When I finally got up, Yashua had finished with the others. They had everything cleaned up and stowed in the boat, and the fish ready to take to market. Yashua was gone. I never saw Him leave. In fact, I feel like He never left me. His words still ring in my ear: *Apostle of Love! Apostle of Love!* I shake my head in utter amazement. The very weakest point in my character, He changed into strength.

There was my older brother James, helping to launch Peter and Andrew in the boat. I searched my heart. I really love him now! I could find no more of my old ego-filled competition, my fighting, my jealousy, my desire to best him and put him down, my efforts to take our father's love all for myself. I really love him! That has got to be the love of God in me!

We walked together down the beach, keeping pace with old Peter and Andrew in the overloaded boat. "What did He tell you, John?" James asked.

"Well, uh… He called me the… the Apostle of Love," I responded hesitantly. I was sure they'd all laugh at me. Especially James. He knew me.

He didn't laugh. He thought about it for a long minute, looking me over. "Yes," he paused again, and I could see him wrestling with it, too. "He is right. You are the Apostle of Love. Other than Yashua Himself, I have never seen a man with more love than you. You had enough love for Barabbas, the people in the earthquake, even the Roman soldiers…" My mouth dropped open in amazement. This from my own brother, who knew me at my ugliest. "Thank you, John, for… well, especially for loving and accepting me. I'm so proud and pleased to be your brother and your friend." That walk with my big brother to the markets in Capernaum was one of the highlights of my life!

CHAPTER 31 – LAST SERMON ON THE MOUNT

188 In three days we had the Galilean disciples gathered on the mount where Yashua had given His famous sermon at the beginning of His ministry. Five hundred people crowded around, with more still coming. These were all genuine believers, too – supporters of Yashua's ministry. They had mourned His death. They were excited to hear He was alive, and eager to hear Him preach once again.

He had been praying up higher on the mountain, and you should have heard the applause when He came down to talk to them. It was great, just like old times, only better. He spoke to us for hours, explaining things like why He had to die, how He had chosen to give up His life willingly (Jn 10:18) so we couldn't blame our religious rulers or the Romans, and what He had done after His resurrection, in presenting Himself as the Firstfruits to the Father.

22 He told us the story of His temptation three years ago. "After Yochanan baptized Me, Father's Spirit filled Me and led Me into the wilderness. He explained My mission – that I was the Pascal Lamb, and I would be sacrificed to atone for the sins of the world. I was devastated! I spent the next forty days fasting and praying about it. Then at My weakest point Satan came to Me. He took Me up to a high mountain and showed Me all the kingdoms of the world. He offered to give them all to Me if I would bow to worship him. He gave me just a glimpse of all those precious people living out their lives in fear, ignorance, and black despair, always under the thumb of their evil king who only wanted to torment and destroy them. That was the hardest temptation I ever faced. I knew now that I would have to suffer and die to win those kingdoms away from Satan, but here he was, offering Me a shortcut, an easy way out – just a simple bow in worship! It almost got Me. But Satan's use of the word 'worship' reminded Me of the Scripture, 'You shall worship YHWH your God, and serve Him only.' [Deut 6:13] In desperation and with My last ounce of strength I quoted that to him, then deliberately turned My back and lifted My hands in worship to My Father YHWH. Satan fled in shock and fear!" Yashua laughed joyfully. "That old dragon never could stand being in the presence of true worship!

"Anyway, I chose to do it the hard way, My Father's way, through suffering and death. And He honored Me above My wildest imaginations. The reason I was delayed in meeting you in Galilee, was that My Father gave Me a surprise present. He took Me on a tour of all the kingdoms of the world. And this was not just glimpsing them from afar as Satan had done. I got to go through each one and actually see and appreciate all the precious people in them! It was a wonderful vacation! Father showed Me what My obedience had won. Rather than owning these people as My slaves, as that old liar Satan had promised Me, I had won their heart, their friendship, respect, and loyalty – their love! Oh, I'll still be their King, but they will serve Me willingly, in peace and joy, rather than out of fear, by force or deception, as they did for Satan when he was god of this world." Yashua paused to laugh again, a laugh that was joyful, welcoming, and drew us all into His joy.

He also told us what He had done right after His death. "After My Spirit was released from My slain body I went to the Welcoming Park, as with all who pass from this realm. When Gregory, the thief from the third cross, came, I was waiting for him. He was eager to receive My salvation, in true repentance and faith. So I took him right down to the river (the spiritual Jordan) and baptized him.

"When we came up from the water I showed him the Book of Life and the door to My Father's throne, and assured him that it would not be long before I would open it for him. Then we returned to the entrance to Hades.

"The dragon, Satan, had come to greet us. Two paths exit the Park into Hades: a broad lower path goes down to Tartarus and the pit (Gehenna), and a narrow upper path leads to Paradise. He usually waits by the lower path, which becomes visible to all who choose him and his ways. The upper path becomes visible only for truth-seekers, yet there he stood with a welcoming smile. The old serpent knows who I am, but he tried to bluff Me. 'Welcome! Come in!' he said sweetly. 'You have many friends eager to greet You in here. They will all be delighted to see You, I'm sure! All of Paradise is eager to hear Your big news!'

"'Skip the small talk and give Me the keys to death and Hades!' I ordered. [Rev 1:18]

"'Keys? The way is open! You don't need a key…'

"'The keys you won from Adam!' I insisted.

"'Those keys are mine!' He began to cower. 'In Your own words I won them from Adam, fair and square!'

"'And I just won them back from you, when you failed to drag Me down into sin by your temptations, even to My death. You know the Law!' He could see I meant business.

"For a moment his self-assured façade cracked, and a little of his pitiful, despicable nature showed through. He threw the keys down right in front of him, hoping to make Me bow before him to pick them up.

"Gregory ran to get the keys. Boldly turning his back to the fearful dragon, he snatched them up and brought them to Me with a smile of pure faith. The dragon fled down the broad path, finally realizing the magnitude of his defeat. He had subjected all people to bondage through fear of death, but by My death and resurrection I had nullified his power. With those keys I would ultimately set his captives free! [Heb 2:14-15] Gregory and I walked together up the narrow path to Paradise. We were welcomed by My friends from past ages. I explained how by My death I had won the keys to death and Hades, and told them that the way to Father would soon be open. They were ecstatic!

"We feasted together, with Gregory at My side. But I knew what I had to do. Leaving him there with My friends, I took My precious keys across the River Jordan to the Book of Life, and left them in the care of My Father. Then I headed down the broad path to the lowest pit, even beyond that dark realm where those disobedient souls who had died in Noah's Flood had been imprisoned. [1 Pet 3:19]

"I reached a high stone wall surrounding a lake of fire. I found an ancient pair of gates in the wall. Spirit led Me to enter, but they were locked. I shouted, 'Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be lifted up, O ye ancient doors, that the King of glory and honor may come in!' [Psalm 24:7]

"'Who? Who is this King of glory and honor?'

"'YHWH, strong and mighty. YHWH mighty in battle. YHWH, who through His only Son Yashua has won the ultimate victory over death and Hades, thus rendering powerless the dragon who once was lord here. Now lift up your heads O ye gates, and be lifted up, O ye ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in!' I ordered.

"'Who is the King of glory?' It was that old dragon again, desperate to find a way to block Me. He was hiding behind the gate, on a drawbridge over an impassable chasm. Beyond that lay the Abyss, the lake of fire.

"'YHWH of Hosts, He is the King of glory!'

"'You cannot enter here! You are righteous and only the wicked may come in here!' the dragon said in his most commanding voice. 'You know the law. No one can cross the chasm! You cannot help them!'

"'I didn't ask your permission. I gave you a command. Do you dare to disobey the King of glory?!'

"The dragon trembled as he unlocked the gate, then ran back across the chasm on the drawbridge. He quickly raised it, shouting. 'I won't let You cross. You can't free them! All these have chosen me! I know my rights!'

"'Worried I'll stage a jailbreak?' I showed him My hands, palms open. 'Look. I didn't bring the keys. Why do you think I needed you to open the gates?'

"'Oh. Why didn't You say so?' He smiled and lowered the drawbridge, nodding to welcome Me as I crossed.

"But I saw the gleam in his eye. I knew what he was thinking. He thought he had Me trapped there forever. I smiled and nodded back, saying, 'Father has My keys. After sin's debt has been paid, He will set us all free.'

"'Noooooo!' he screamed. Then quickly composing himself he said in gravest tones, as if he cared, 'Lord! You cannot come in here, for You are holy! Only sinners enter here. These are mine. They have made their own freewill choice to follow me. They rejected You, so You cannot save them. They are mine to torment forever. Surely Lord, You know the law! Your holiness will be forever tainted if You enter into the punishment of sinners!'

"'I'm glad you finally acknowledge that I am Lord. On Judgment Day we shall see who is yours and who is not. But as usual, you twisted the truth.' I laughed mirthlessly. 'I am more full of sin than any who came here before Me, for I bear the sins of all mankind. The law must be fulfilled. I must experience the worst that this vile pit has to offer, for I've come to taste death for everyone throughout all time. [Heb 2:9] Those who receive My sacrifice by faith will never have to enter this place!' At that, I turned My back on the old dragon, lifted My eyes, and prayed, 'Father, into Your hands I commit My Spirit.' That prayer took more faith than anything I'd ever done before, as I felt more separated, more abandoned by My Father than ever. Now I know what the term 'God-forsaken' means! I turned away from the only exit, those ancient gates for which Father now had the only key, and stepped into the flaming Abyss. For three days and nights I passed through every cell in the pit. I was tortured with every grief and sorrow, every pain and torment, every regret, every abandonment and loneliness, every sense of guilt, bondage, hopelessness and helplessness that man can experience for every sin ever committed, God's just, perfect punishment to fulfill the law of sowing and reaping according to each one's deeds. It is indescribable! Trust Me, you don't want to go there, even for a minute! Use this to warn the unbelieving!

"Finally after three days and nights, God's justice was satisfied. The price was fully paid – full atonement for all the sins of the world. So Father restored Me. [Gal 1:1] He didn't even need that key. He reached down by His Holy Spirit [Rom 8:11], lifted up My soul, and returned Me to My body in the grave. My body was transformed by the power of resurrection Life – power to translate directly through the grave clothes, through the stone, and into the heavenlies. I celebrated with the angels and prepared for My presentation as Firstfruits to My Father. And, you know…" His eyes misted over and a shadow crossed His smiling face. "…I endured the cross, the shame, and the suffering for the joy of doing My Father's will. [Heb 12:2] But it was really for your sake, because We love you…" He spread His arms wide, embracing us all. "I've experienced the devil's worst. I understand your trials and sorrows! I assure you that I'm ready and able to assist you, to see you through, and to bring you also safely to My Father!" [189]

Every knee on that mountain was bowed. Every heart was awed with the greatness of His love and compassion. The incredible magnitude of all He had gone through for us washed over us like waves.

Finally Yashua started talking again, quietly, but with even more fervency. He explained the coming of God's Kingdom, showing how the Kingdom had already come in Him, but only like a tiny seed. It still had a lot of growing to do within each of us before His Kingdom would be fully manifested on earth as it is in heaven.

All those beautiful people in all the kingdoms of the world that He had won – they didn't know Him yet. One of the greatest joys in the Kingdom would be introducing them to Him, teaching them about Him, and winning their hearts to the willing, eager service that the Father had promised Him. He was just as joyful and encouraging as ever, only now the force of His character, His innate love and goodness and joy and perception and all, seemed like it had been multiplied manyfold. It was truly awesome.

Many on the mountain, especially those He had healed, came to recognize Him as almighty God, the only true Son of YHWH, and worshiped Him there. But that is a big step of faith – others there still wrestled with doubts. It is hard to take that leap from seeing just a physical man with all his human weaknesses, to recognizing that Yashua is much more than just a man. Give them time. Love 'em, and pray for their faith. They'll come around. I keep thinking, *God came down so low, to lift us up so high… what love! What incredible, infinite love!*

Yashua concluded His talk with the challenge: "Father has given to Me all authority in the heavens and the earth. By that authority I now commission you. So as you travel around the world, preach the good news of My Kingdom to all creation. Not just Israel. Every ethnic group under heaven must hear it! Father promised that every kingdom of man will become Mine! No place or person is off limits for you. Minister faith in Me. Baptize them into My full name, Adonai Yashua haMashiach, which is the names of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit combined in Me.

"Then make disciples of them. Teach them to do all I've told you. Demonstrate to them the joy of serving Me. He who has believed and is baptized into My name shall be saved from the wrath to come and welcomed into My Kingdom of love, peace, and joy. But anyone who rejects your message condemns himself to the fiery Abyss when I return as Judge. These signs shall accompany all you who believe: in My name you will cast out demons; you will speak in languages you never learned; you will have power over deadly serpents (both physical and spiritual); poison will not harm you; attacks against you will fail; when you pray I will hear you; and the sick will recover when you pray, lay hands on them, and anoint them with oil. Of all the great works that I've done, you shall do even greater. For lo, I'm with you always, even to the end of the age."

Then He prayed for us again, and breathed upon us, saying, "Receive the Holy Spirit!" He warned us never to go out to minister on our own, but to wait until we receive that inner power from the Holy Spirit as He promised. He told us that He was returning to Jerusalem to repeat everything He had just told us, to the saints down there. After that, He would ascend to the Father and never see us again in the physical realm. He said that casually, happily, but we responded with groans and shocked, sad faces.

"Hey!" He stopped us short. "Why do you groan? It is good that I'm going away physically. For most of you, seeing Me as a man has hindered your faith in who I am. Rejoice that I go away, for then I can come again to live within you, to personally direct and empower each one of you constantly! Isn't that better than My being limited to one small place at a time, constrained in this one body? I willingly took on this limitation called time and space, but only so I could identify with you in your weaknesses and subject Myself to the trials and temptations you face. But now that the time has come for Me to be healed and restored to My realm, I can hardly wait! Rejoice and be glad that I go away, for I am coming back, freed from the limitations of time and space, never to leave you again! When you begin to enter My realm of Spirit, you will understand." Even so, it was very hard to say good-bye. There were a lot of tears and weeping as Yashua sent them all away. I was glad that we didn't have to leave Him yet.

190 Before returning to Jerusalem, we made one last stop in Nazareth. Yashua was sad. There was still so little faith there. They had rejected Him early on. To them, Yashua was just the illegitimate son of a local carpenter. Even His own siblings, James, Joseph, Simon, Judas, Anna, Sharon, and Tamara, had never really believed in Him. (Jn 7:5)

Now that Mariam was living with my mom at our house, James had taken over the old homestead that Yoseph had built, where Yashua had grown up. He was there with Jude. (His name was Judas back then. That used to be everyone's favorite name, after the great hero Judas Maccabeas. But ever since Judas Iscariot betrayed Yashua, we don't use it so much.)

The customary greetings were rather formal and cold. Huge walls seemed to separate Yashua from His brothers. Or maybe it was just that they couldn't quite believe He had returned to life.

Yashua got right to the point. "Please, James, Judas. Call all My brothers and sisters and their families and have them meet Me here. My relatives are very precious to Me. I want to give each of you the chance to see Me face to face before I go." There was a long pause. Nobody moved. "You know, I love you," Yashua tried again. Still nobody moved. Sweat beaded their brows as they struggled with their unbelief. Yashua tried a third time. "I must go away. May I give you a good-bye hug before I go? I will never see you in the flesh again. I must return to My Father."

At the words 'My Father', James looked startled. It was quite clear He was not talking about their father Yoseph. "Yashua?" James hesitated.

"Yes, James?" Yashua smiled at him, and you could see the walls begin to come down.

"Is it really You? I mean, we were there. We saw You die. It was ghastly. We… well, we never supported Your ministry much, but You were always a pretty good person; always a good big brother; always kind and honest and caring and all. I couldn't believe they killed You! You didn't deserve that. But… but… I saw You die! They put Your body in the grave and sealed it up tight. How…"

Yashua held out His arms, palms upward. The scars on His hands and feet from the crucifixion were still plainly visible – red and ugly. There was no mistaking who He was or what He had gone through. He reached out to James.

Suddenly the walls came tumbling down, and James fell sobbing into his big Brother's arms.

"Yes, James, Judas. I am Yashua. Yes, I died, but I rose again the third day as I promised, and I came back up here just so you could see Me and believe. You see, I was never really your big brother through your father Yoseph. I told you before, but that was so hard for you to understand. Our mother was the virgin prophesied in the Scripture to bear Messiah. I left My heavenly home with My actual Father, YHWH, and came into Mariam's womb while she was still a virgin, to be born of her. I am God become man. Death could not hold Me, because I never fell to Satan's temptations. So I am still your big Brother, but only as you allow My true Father, YHWH, to also be your Father."

It was glorious! First James, then his youngest brother Jude, and finally all of Yashua's other close relatives came to faith in Him. I found out later that Yashua had been praying for them for years and years. He had been sorely tempted to give up on them, but He hadn't. And now, at the very end, He saw His prayers answered! What a glorious week we had with them there in the old homestead!

191 Yashua invited His family to come to Jerusalem with us. Some did, including James and Jude. The meetings in Jerusalem were even better than with the five hundred in Galilee. We all met together in old Yacov's big upper room, where we had spent our last Passover together. Now it was really packed – about 120 of us! Yashua spent two weeks with us there, saying basically the same things that He'd told the disciples in Galilee, but with greater detail and more intimacy. We all had the chance to ask questions and give Him hugs. We felt so loved! He spent more time in Torah showing us passages that we had never realized applied to Himself. I mean, we knew those passages! Or thought we did. Somehow our minds had been closed to all but the traditional interpretation. We felt like Yashua just reached out and touched our minds with His words, opening up our understanding to the truth about Himself.

Yashua did something else for us in Jerusalem that the disciples in Galilee missed. He first told us the story of old Yacov ben Levi, ending, "All My life, Yacov supported Me. His prayers covered and strengthened Me more than you can understand. I am very grateful. Thank you, Barnabus. In taking care of Yacov, you too were caring for Me." Yashua grinned like a kid at a birthday party. "So now, I have a surprise." He asked us to clear a space at the door. Then He stepped up into a hole in the air and was gone.

Abuzz with expectation, everyone moved away from the door so I could open it all the way to the wall. When I looked back, there stood Yashua, holding old Yacov's frail body in front of Him. "Old Yacov has been on this earth for 100 years, today." Yashua reached his arms around Yacov and grinned in that childlike way again, as if about to divulge a deep secret. "He seems very old to you, but to Me he is just a newborn baby, the first to fully enter into My Kingdom. I have some birthday gifts to give him – the same gifts that I will give to all who enter My Kingdom. But for him they are special because he is the very first one.

"So I want you all to be My witnesses at this historic birthday party. But first, old Yacov has carried the mantle of intercession for Me and My body on earth for 32 years. It is time for him to pass his mantle on to a worthy successor, another great, though silent, warrior in My Kingdom. Friend Barabbas, please come here. Stand before Me."

I heard gasps around the room as Barabbas struggled through the crowd to Yashua and Yacov. "Lord, You keep calling me a mighty intercessor and a great warrior in Your Kingdom," Barabbas pleaded, and I then realized what Yashua had told him that morning on the beach. "But I'm not! I'm not even worthy to tie Your shoelaces! I'm the worst sinner here! I earned that cross – it was rightly mine – and You suffered it for me! Why, I even killed Your dad! How could I ever be a worthy successor to a great man like Yacov?" And he sank to the floor sobbing.

Yashua waited for the sobs to die down, then lovingly pulled Barabbas back up to his feet and lifted his chin so their eyes met. He smiled a loving, heart-melting smile. "You forget, dear Barabbas; I created you. From the beginning of time I made you to be a mighty intercessor and a great warrior in My Kingdom. Do you think that I am not now able to undo all the ways Satan has perverted that in you, and remake you into what I intended all along?"

Barabbas wiped his eyes on the back of his sleeve. "Yes, Lord. You are able, for You are worthy." And he again bowed his head.

Yashua pulled it right back up. "But are you willing?"

"Yes, Lord." This time Barabbas looked Yashua in the eye. Yashua grinned at him, then took old Yacov's hands and placed them upon Barabbas' head. "Prophesy now to Barabbas, old friend," He said. "Give to him your burden of intercession for My body, with My love and blessing."

Old Yacov, sightless eyes streaming with tears, began to speak in a surprisingly strong voice. "Barabbas, you have died, along with all you once were. But Yashua took your cross, dying in your place, and gave you new life. In this new life, all that once was your strength has become your weakness, and everything that was once your weakness has become your strength. You are no longer motivated by hatred of the Romans, but rather by love for the brethren. You no longer do battle with a sword in your strong arms, but rather with a prayer in your strong spirit. You no longer long for the land of Israel to be set free from its bondage to Rome, but rather for the people of Israel to be set free from their bondage to sin. You are no longer cruel, impulsive, loud-mouthed, or vulgar, but rather quiet, meditative, kind, and reverent. And for all these changes you give the glory to Yashua haMashiach and eagerly seek to serve Him in His Kingdom. Therefore I give you my mantle of intercession, along with the love and blessing of Yashua Himself. You will find this mantle to be a heavy, all-consuming burden, but then as you take it up you will also find it to be easy, a light burden, and a wondrous joy and strength. Many people will respond to Spirit because of your prayers, and in the end, an entire army of faithful believers will stand before the Father's throne on high in gratefulness for your mighty work of intercession…"

Old Yacov paused, then it was like the fire went out. His arms dropped to his sides. He slumped down at Yashua's feet. Yashua picked him up like a tiny bundle of dried twigs and held him close. It all happened so suddenly that our old terror of death had not yet had time to take over. Besides, Yashua's whole face was beaming with joy as He held up old Yacov's body and shouted out in triumph, "Now, come and join us at Yacov's birthday celebration!"

Instantly our eyes were opened. Where we had seen a man holding a dead and shriveled body, we saw the King of the Universe in glorious splendor, shining like the sun, embracing an eager, energetic old man. "Welcome, Yacov ben Levi, blessed of My Father!" the King fervently cried. "You ministered wholeheartedly to Me by your prayers for My body on earth. You loved Me as I love you. You stood firm in the faith. You overcame through much suffering and tribulation. Now enter into the joy of your King! Share with Me the glory of My victory over sin and death, for I have banished sin and death from this, My realm, and you will never need to leave it again. We shall never again have to part. Come now. I have the highest honors and rewards for your faithful service to Me." [See diagram, page 321]

"But my King, I wanted nothing more than to see Your beautiful face…" Yacov started to protest as he was being ushered along a flower-strewn path down the hill toward a broad river. Yashua insisted, "You'll like it here. This is Hades. All come here to the Welcoming Park after leaving the physical realm. Here is the spiritual Jordan, the river of the Water of Life flowing from My throne. Don't fear the water, for I am your breath of life!" They plunged right in.

After a few minutes, they came out of the water on the far side. Instead of gasping for air, Yacov was laughing! He was no longer dependent on air for life, and – I was elated to see – he was young again! Just like he'd appeared when he'd first seen Yashua's beautiful face. Like all who are baptized in this 'living stream', he had regained his youth.

A table was set for two on the far shore. They reclined together to share a simple meal of matzos and wine. We remembered Yashua's words that He would not eat or drink of the Passover again until He did it anew in His Kingdom. Our eyes grew wide in anticipation and delight. *This must be His Kingdom come!*

After the meal, Yashua led Yacov to the top of the hill. A huge, lavishly bound book lay open upon a prominent pedestal, standing there before a closed door. On either side a tall hedge blocked our view beyond.

"There, see! This is the Book of Life, and that is your name, where it can never be erased." Yashua pointed into the book with obvious pride and joy to Yacov's name, the only name in the book. "You are the first of many whom I have bought back to My Father with the price of My own blood. And I have a white robe for you!" Here Yashua took off His own brilliant shining royal robe, and placed it upon Yacov, so now they both shone like the sun.

Yashua's 'keys of death and Hades' still lay beside the book. He took them, unlocked the door, flung it wide, and towed Yacov through. "The way to Father is complete!" He shouted in triumph. We were permitted to follow with our eyes, though our minds were blown away by the incredible expanse beyond the door. Yashua and Yacov were running now, over a sea of glass, clear as crystal. They reached a tall mountain. "This is the only mountain here," Yashua explained. "We shall build our Holy City here." They ran up it together, Yacov exulting in his boundless energy and strength. The mountaintop was spectacularly glorious. A rainbow of unsurpassed brilliance encircled the peak, with deeply saturated colors in every hue like a many-jeweled crown. In the center was a polished golden throne, with an intense fire blazing over it in dazzling splendor. Seven other flames danced around it, flashing like lightning and speaking in voices more powerful than thunder. Myriads of angels faced the throne, surrounding the mountaintop in rank after rank as far as our eyes could see. Yashua pointed to the flame on the throne. "That is the Shekina Glory. It represents Father YHWH only in My space-time realm, although He fills eternity." He then took Yacov's hand and ushered him right up to the flame. "Father! This is Yacov ben Levi, My intercessor. He has overcome and has joined Me in My Kingdom!"

A mighty shout of victory went up from the Glory Flame and from the angel chorus. Father YHWH spoke to Yacov, but we could not understand, for His voice was as the thunder of many waterfalls. But we caught the mood behind it! It was pure joy!

All the angels fell to their faces and worshiped. Yacov started to do the same, but Yashua hoisted him up and led him right to the throne, where He sat down just to the right of His Father, virtually within the Shekina Glory flame, and pulled Yacov up onto His lap. (Acts 2:31-39; Rev 3:21)

"Do you see all this?" Yashua hugged him close with one arm, pointing to the world beyond the adoring angels with His other. "This entire realm belongs to you and Me. This is the reality of which the earth was but a dim picture. We shall spend the ages exploring it together, you and I, rejoicing in our love for each other.

"But first, I have more presents for you!" Yashua picked up a small white stone from beside the throne and gave it to Yacov, explaining as he took it, "This stone is your guarantee of acquittal on Judgment Day. Look! It has your own personal name on it – the special name I gave you from the beginning of time. This is the endearing name I have always called you in My heart. It is a secret name, just between you and Me. No one else has ever heard it." (Rev 2:17) And He whispered it to him so we could not hear. "How do you like it?"

Yacov was delightedly surprised. "Why… it's me! It fits me perfectly. I would never have known…" He grinned at Yashua. He was finally really beginning to relax and enjoy this. "Of course You know me better than I know myself – You created me!"

"I have another secret here for you. We'll have to stand up to get it, because it's under the throne." They stood beside the throne, and a half-dozen adoring angels came, heads bowed respectfully at the brightness of the Shekina Glory. They lifted the entire top of the throne off. "The lost Ark of the Covenant!" Yacov exclaimed in surprise.

"No…" Yashua was almost giggly with delight. He was obviously enjoying this just as much as Yacov. "This is the real Ark of which the Ark that Moses made was just a copy. But I have here…" and He took a golden bowl from the Ark and held it out to Yacov. "…the manna that Moses put into the Ark. It has been hidden here ever since the time of King Saul. It is not a copy; it is the real thing! Go ahead. It is always perfectly fresh here. Eat as much as you want."

Yacov ate. Then he ate some more, and more. It was exquisitely delicious and satisfying. He thought he would finish the whole bowl, but when he looked again, the bowl was still full. He returned it, then looked at Yashua with a new recognition in his eyes, as if he suddenly understood many things that he had never known before. Yashua laughed delightedly. Explanations were no longer needed. The living Word and the power of Resurrection Life now resided inside of Yacov, too!

The angels put the bowl back in and returned the throne cover over the Ark. Yacov and Yashua sat back down on it. The brilliant Shekina Glory flame now seemed virtually one with them both.

They chatted happily about many things, pointing to places in that realm which were beyond our limited vision. When he had eaten the hidden manna, Yacov's vision as well as his understanding had dramatically increased.

Still enveloped in the Shekina Glory, they left the throne and sauntered partway down the mountain, where the trickle of the Water of Life flowing from under the throne had grown into a rushing, crystal-clear stream. It was the source for the river Jordan flowing through the Welcoming Park. Yacov drank deeply from the stream. He then reached up to pick a fruit that looked like a smooth, reddish peach from a tree growing beside the stream. "It's the Tree of Life from the Garden of Eden!" Yacov joyously cried. Yashua laughed out loud at his delighted expression when he tasted the juicy peach. They continued on down the mountain, totally engrossed in fellowship as they shared the peach. We could barely see them, because the Shekina Glory representing YHWH covered them both completely. It reminded me of Yashua's words, "When you have seen Me you have seen the Father." (Jn 14:9)

I thought the birthday party must be over, when Yashua directed Yacov's attention back to us. "My body in whom I shall forever live has just begun to form. It is My temple, in which I shall forever dwell. I already laid its foundation, and you, Yacov, are its first pillar – an appropriate first pillar, for you are the Pillar of Intercession! My name, YHWH's name, and the name of the Holy City we are building, the New Jerusalem, are engraved on you. You and I must never cease interceding for the rest of My body, My temple to be completed just as you are now completed. Look at them… so needy, so immature and ignorant, so foolishly double-minded, so frail of heart. Remember how you were when you circumcised Me and believed, but then doubted until you heard the testimony of Simeon and Anna? We cover their weakness with our intercession. My precious ones are still watching. Let's give them a tour of Hades. [See page 321.] It will help them along their way."

Yashua and Yacov left the throne and, now flying swiftly with their feet inches above the sea of glass, they came back through the open door (which they left open – Rev 3:8), past the Book of Life, across the river, and into the Welcoming Park (which is the entry into Hades). Yashua opened up the veil hiding the steep, narrow path, and drew our vision up the path with Him. It was a rugged climb past the flames of conscience, then down onto a lush green meadow filled with beautiful flowers, trees, streams, lakes, birds, and animals. But more importantly, this new realm was filled with millions of beautiful people. The first to greet them was Yacov's wife Yanet; without hesitation Yashua, in a flaming hug, joined her with Yacov. Together they faced the others. They were of every age from infant to ancient, though none were frail, crippled, or deformed. Some were crying, traumatized, and obviously still in pain. But most were happy, eagerly learning and growing in the wisdom and knowledge of God in this Paradise.

Yashua went in among them, comforting, listening, healing, wiping away tears, teaching, joking, bringing peace to troubled souls, laughing, seemingly everywhere at once. Yacov (now forever one with Yanet) answered our unspoken questions, "On earth Yashua was limited. But here He is with everyone who needs Him and loves His presence. For He is almighty God, and in this realm He is no longer limited by time and space. This realm is what you call Hades or Sheol, the abode of the dead. But we who dwell in highest heaven call it Paradise, and within it, the Nursery. Here are all the saints from ages past. There is old man Noah. Here is Father Abraham with his wife Sarah, and King David in joyful fellowship with his son Solomon. Gregory, the thief from the cross who died next to Yashua, is there sitting on His lap and learning from Him as Yashua wipes his tears and heals his pains and heartache.

"Also here are all those who have died in ignorance and blindness, including those who died in infancy and before birth. See how they are being cared for and instructed as they grow up? They, too, will learn to know and love Yashua, and will eventually place their faith in Him for their salvation. Everyone you see in this entire realm is incomplete. [Heb 11: 40] They have not rebelled against Yashua, yet their faith was limited by the time and place from which they came. Now that Yashua's victory is won, the door to perfect faith is opened for them."

Yacov joined Yashua in the Nursery for a time, lovingly hugging the eager people there – though he could only be with one at a time. While they each held several pre-born infants in their hands, they turned back to us. Yashua was crying, yet laughing through His tears. "The world was not worthy of these they have slain! They shall yet have the chance to learn of Me…" He paused to hug a frightened native African couple as He embraced a peasant woman from Asia. "Though these died in misery, pain, poverty, ignorance, and darkness, in their hearts they longed for the light. Now they shall find it, and they will believe in Me. Then they too will receive the power of My blood to cleanse them of their sin nature and accept Me as their Lord and King. On Judgment Day they shall be prepared to stand with Me. I shall see to it!"

Again Yacov answered our unspoken question: "Every human being, whether in your realm or this one, must have the opportunity to accept or reject the claim of Yashua on his or her life. All those who died before Yashua's perfect sacrifice and all since then who die in infancy or in ignorance and darkness, are invited to come here to the Nursery to learn of Yashua. The meek, the humble of the earth, accept, and gladly grow up here in this Paradise. But those whose hearts are hard, those who are proud, self-centered, stubborn, or rebellious, may refuse the invitation. They may choose instead to wait for Judgment Day in Tartarus or Gehenna. Yashua honors their choice to reject Him only after they're enlightened by the Spirit to fully comprehend their choice. [Matt 12:31]

"On Judgment Day every secret of their hearts will be exposed, and they will receive rewards or punishments according to their willful deeds, good or evil. YHWH the eternal Father already knows who will continue to harden his or her heart, and who will choose to believe, though their names in His Book of Life are not visible to us until after they are perfected in faith toward Yashua. No one can come out that exit…" he indicated a locked door from 2nd Hades, "…who has not personally believed and accepted Yashua haMashiach's perfect redemption."

An old man stood by the exit. Yashua unlocked it and brought him to the river. Yashua baptized him, and I saw him get young again! Then, as with Yacov, Yashua towed him through the river and up the other side to the pedestal on which lay the Book of Life. Yashua excitedly showed him his name (which must have just become visible). After sharing the matzos and wine, they went through the open door into the highest heaven and up to the throne.

"That's Enoch," Yacov explained. "He walked with God while he lived on earth and has done the same here in Paradise ever since. Now that Yashua's perfect sacrifice is complete, he accepted it without a moment's hesitation and with great joy. His longing for Redeemer has remained strong for 4000 years. He is the second to fully enter the Kingdom, but there are many more being perfected as we speak." Sure enough, we saw excitement in the crowd as Yashua explained the significance of His recent sacrifice.

"Now that they have seen its beginning, let's give them a glimpse of the future Paradise of God as it will be when it nears completion." Yashua clapped His hands, jumping up and down with glee.

Suddenly the wide open realm we had seen through the open door and across the crystal sea was replaced by an incredibly beautiful land filled with delightful people, sights, sounds, and smells. It all centered around a golden city fifteen hundred miles square at its base and fifteen hundred miles high, in pyramid shape. It glowed like the sun with the glory of Yashua Himself. His glory lit up the entire realm, streaming like sunshine from the throne at the top of the city. The little stream which we had seen coming from the throne was now a mighty river of the Water of Life. The people were drinking from it and eating freely the fruit from many Trees of Life that now grew prolifically along both sides of the river. I saw different kinds of fruit on each tree. Yacov answered my thoughts, "Yes, the Tree of Life bears twelve times a year, a different fruit each time, each more delicious than the last! Now you only see the vision, but when you come here to stay, these fruits will delight you as well."

Now I wondered about the Mountain of God that had been here. Yashua laughed as He answered my thoughts. "See the throne on top? It's in the same place as before. The entire mount you saw has now become the Holy City, the New Jerusalem!"

The people were busy, coming and going through the twelve gates of the great city. We became aware that the city was the center of government for this future realm, where the perfected sons of God ruled over all the nations of the earth. We saw Yacov-Yanet, wearing a golden crown of authority to rule over the nations, with Yashua by his side. The crown shone with the very Shekina Glory of YHWH on the throne, and we realized that it was Yashua's own authority, which He gladly shared. There were 24 smaller thrones surrounding YHWH's throne. The elders of Israel and saints of the Kingdom sat on them, each in perfect unity with his wife. We were delighted to discover that Yacov-Yanet and Enoch-Amy were among the elders, but we couldn't recognize any of the others.

"Yacov, we must show them one more thing in this city before we send them back to their own time and place." Yacov nodded his understanding, and beckoned us to shift our focus to a thin column of dark smoke ascending just to the left of the throne. Suddenly, terror filled us, horror beyond imagining. For there beside the throne, in the presence of the holy angels, seemed to be a deep pit, filled with people burning with fire and brimstone. (Rev 14:10)

"This is a viewport to Hades," Yashua explained. "Right now it is focused on Gehenna. Each one you see there has been enlightened by My Spirit but has rebelled against Me, refused My invitation to Life, and rejected My authority as King, thus joining Satan's kingdom. That is blasphemy against the call of My Holy Spirit." (Matt 12:31)

We stared, horrified, into the viewport. The poor souls down there were writhing in exquisite pain, screaming in agony, gnashing their teeth, or moaning in hopelessness. They couldn't comfort each other, for they each seemed to be held in a separate cell, unable to reach one another. Though many looked up, away from the flames blasting out of the Abyss below them, yet it was clear they could not see us or the glories of the heavenly realms. They seemed out of touch with anything good, doomed to a living death, with no rest, no joy, no peace, no love, no solace, no hope.

"Why, Lord?" I cried out, nearly vomiting in utter revulsion at the sight. "Can't we help them?!"

Yacov answered, his eyes misted with tears – the first tears I had seen in this city. "This is the second death. [Rev 20:14] It has no power over us who have received Yashua as our Life. But these refused to accept Yashua's payment for their sins, and have in pride chosen instead to pay the penalty of their sins for themselves. In full understanding, they chose to reject Yashua's gift of faith, so they must instead receive the Law's punishment of every evil deed they have ever done. They are discovering too late that the cost is very high. It's good that we in highest heaven can see them and their awful torment. This viewport not only reminds us of the appalling consequences of sin under God's Law, but also it helps us to appreciate the high price that Yashua our Savior paid for our redemption.

"More importantly, here is the perseverance of all you saints as you struggle to carry out the commandments of YHWH and to stand firm in your faith in Yashua. We have showed you this horror so you will think twice about falling to temptation, having seen the full cost of rebellion against…" at this point Yacov turned to gaze adoringly at Yashua, "…the true King of the Universe, our Savior and Lord, the most beautiful Person who has ever lived!" He paused, then looked back to me. "No, John, we cannot help them. God doesn't violate their freewill choice, and He won't permit anyone else to violate it either. There is an impassable chasm between us and them. Though we can see them and even smell the smoke of their burning, they cannot cross over to us, nor we to them." (Lk 16:26)

Almost against my will, my gaze was drawn back to the fiery pit. And there, right in the middle of the flames… "Oh God, NO! Not Judas! Our dear brother Judas! He is one of us! He should be here with us, not down there in that pit! He is a believer! He remained with us for three years… Lord Yashua! He loves You! He shared in Your ministry!"

Yashua, enveloped by the Shekina Glory, moved to stand in front of me, blocking my view of the pit. I saw in Him infinite love, but also infinite sadness. He spoke slowly, His voice deep and resonant, as if He and His Father were speaking in one voice. "Oh John My beloved. All power and authority in heaven and earth is granted unto Me. I can do anything in the universe that I wish – except violate My own nature and character or break My own Word. Don't forget that it was I who called Judas. It was I who healed him, loved him, and taught him of My Kingdom of love. I gave him every possible opportunity to avoid this place. But when it came to choices, he chose the kingdom of human rule and authority and power, the kingdom of lies, duplicity, and trickery, the kingdom of force, Satan's kingdom. In that choice, he also chose to reject Me as his Savior and King and to be his own lord and savior, by his own strength, and by his own goodness and wisdom. That self-centered pride is iniquity, the essence of sin. It cannot be forgiven, because in his pride he cannot humble himself to receive My salvation. My eternal Law must be satisfied. Every sin that is not atoned for by My blood must return upon his own head. He would not receive My atonement; therefore I have no choice but to allow him this place of torment to pay the full price for every sin he has ever committed."

"But Lord," and I suddenly realized I was starting to slip back into that old judging mode, but I couldn't stop it. "Judas didn't mean to betray You to Your death. He just wanted to trick You, to force You to wield Your power to defeat the Romans and take…" With horror I realized that Yashua had just called that kingdom of force and trickery Satan's kingdom. I bowed my eyes and heart before Him. "Forgive me, Yashua! Your ways are righteous and true. Forgive me for judging You. You are my Savior, my Master and Lord. Please give me grace to never do it again."

Yashua smiled and lifted me up. "There, My beloved disciple, is the difference between you and Judas. You are growing sensitive to My Spirit, eager to learn My ways, and quick to humble yourself and repent when you're wrong. But Judas was determined to do it his own way, and even when he realized his way was wrong, he would not come to Me to repent. Neither grieve nor fret for him. Instead be glad to have known him, for now you will always have a perfect personal example to show the difference between My Kingdom and Satan's kingdom. In the ages to come when the punishment for every sin is paid in full, when we have reconciled all things back to My Father and abolished all rule and authority and power [1 Cor 15:20-28], you will understand how everything, even the second death, works out for good and for My Father's glory."

"Reconciled all things… does that mean that dear Judas will… will be…" I hesitated. Yashua was crying! Not just a misting, but tears streaming down His face! He had just told me not to grieve or fret for Judas! Even the blazing fire of the Father's Shekina Glory had dimmed in sadness. "Lord?" I asked, bewildered.

For what seemed like a long time, weeping filled the heavenlies. Many people in the city below also stopped their labors and bowed in grief facing the smoky pit. It was inconceivable! How could a place of such incredible joy also be filled with sorrow?

Finally through the tears, Yashua and His Father began speaking again. "Judas right now wishes that he had never been born. His sin crushed Me with more suffering than any human could bear, yet he has chosen to bear it. He is right now reliving his entire life. Each sin that he ever committed, even in ignorance, is revealed to him, together with the suffering it caused. He is learning, experiencing, My crushing grief, My agony of heart, each time one of My precious ones falls into sin. This is the true consequences of sin: the suffering it causes to those around him, even to the Creation itself. It is all repeated here, falling back upon himself as the 'second death'. It is a living death. His own blood must be shed anew for each and every sin. He has no atonement – the price must be paid." (Heb 6:6; 10:26 ff)

He wiped away His tears, and the city came alive again. "But do not grieve or fret! All shall be reconciled! When he has paid his debt for every sin, the Judas that I created will bow to learn of Me." (Phil 2:10-11; Isa 45:21-25)

With that, the vision of the New Jerusalem with all its happy people faded. We again saw only the bare mount, with Yacov and Yashua on the throne, immersed in the Shekina Glory of Father YHWH. They looked at us with smiles of infinite love; love I could now see was filled with compassion, yearning, grief, wisdom, understanding, and sympathy. "Thank you for sharing this birthday party with us, the celebration that never ends!" They were speaking as one voice. "And remember, never doubt in the darkness what has been revealed to you in the light…"

Everything began to dim. I had grown used to the incredible brightness, the glorious music, the delicious fragrances, the spectacular beauty of this heavenly realm, so when it faded away, I felt lost, cold, alone, blind, as if I had been taken from a wonderful three-dimensional world and squashed down flat into a black-and-white sketch. It was so dark! Everything was dark! I struggled to see. With horror I realized that I had gone blind to that spirit realm, though now dark images of this shadow realm called earth were becoming visible.

I saw Yashua, standing in front of us, still holding that shell of Yacov's dead body. But where was Yashua's glory, His brightness? He looked like a charcoal drawing, a rough outline of what we had seen. I was bitterly disappointed, and longed to return to the reality of which this earthly realm is but a dingy, shadowy picture.

"I understand," Yashua was saying. "And though I thank you for joining Me in welcoming Yacov to our real Home, yet your work in this realm is not yet complete. So I will help you to forget…" and He waved His hand over us, "…so you can again live joyously in this realm until it is time for you to join Yacov." Suddenly the vision of that heavenly realm faded way back in our minds, causing the world around us to appear real, even bright and cheery.

Still, I desperately tried to remember bits and pieces of that fantastic vision. Yashua smiled at me and said, "John, fret not. You are young now, and have much living to do in this world. The time will come when you are old and ready to depart to My realm. When that time comes, I'll remind you of this vision and allow you to write it down, to be an encouragement to others who will follow you. But for now, just let it go and serve Me contentedly in this realm in which you dwell." That was many years ago. I have grown old, and Yashua has kept His promise. Now at the end of my life on earth He refreshed my memory of this glorious vision and of everything that happened so long ago. I trust you are blessed by what we saw.

Yashua went with us to bury old Yacov's body. His love and respect for the old man was obvious as we laid him in his tomb, yet fragmentary memories of what we had seen – Yacov young, healthy, strong, running and dancing with Yashua in glory – kept us from grieving very much. Even Barnabus and his sister Mary, who dearly loved their dad more than anything on earth, rejoiced through their tears as we laid his ancient, shriveled body to its rest.

Yashua spoke personally to Barnabus and Mary on our way back to the upper room. "Yacov was a great and wealthy man. He honored his father before him, and received both wealth and blessing from him. All his wealth and blessings now belong to you two, including this big home. It is right that it is so, for both of you honored and loved your parents as much as anyone who ever lived. What now do you intend to do with the wealth you have inherited?"

We had reached the house. Barnabus stopped at the doorstep and knelt in front of Yashua. "I have placed my faith in You, my King. When You first came, my doubts were restrained only my father's faith. But now I have seen the truth. You are Messiah, Redeemer of Israel! Having wealth and a big house means nothing to me. I choose to leave it all to Mary and her son. I will spend the rest of my life spreading the good news of redemption in You."

"Thank you Joseph… er… Barnabus," Mary responded quietly. "I accept, and will do my best to take care of this home and to raise old Yacov's grandson to be an honor to him. But Yashua, I too have put my faith in You as my Redeemer and King. I place everything I have and everything I am at Your disposal. It's all Yours, and I am Your servant. You tell me how I can serve You."

Yashua lifted Barnabus up and gave them both a hug. "You can continue to allow your upper room to be our ministry headquarters, Mary, at least until after Shavuot." He chuckled. "After Shavuot, I suspect that My disciples will be scattered far and wide, and won't have need of a room so large."

"Gladly! That's the least I can do! And I'll provide for them, feed them, support them… That's what I am, isn't it? I am a servant of Your servants!" Mary jumped in the air and flung her arms up in joy.

"That's what we both are, although in different ways," Barnabus put an arm around his sister's waist.

"And what about you, Marcus?" Yashua reached out to include the wide-eyed boy in the hug.

"I want to go with Joseph! Uh… Barnabus. I heard what You said about all authority in heaven and earth being granted unto You, that time You told us to go throughout the world preaching the good news of the Kingdom to all creation with all those miraculous signs accompanying us, speaking in other languages and having power over deadly serpents and healing the sick and doing greater works than You. [Mk 16:17-18; Jn 14:12] I may be young, but I felt like You were talking to me just as much as to the others." He was bouncing in eagerness. "I want to go with Barnabus!" He repeated, and then looked over at his mother.

"Well, John Marc!" Mary used his given name as if to chide him. "You're finally learning to submit to authority. Now you want to go out and wield all authority in heaven and earth over others?" She sighed and looked back to Yashua. "Ever since Heber died, Marcus has struggled with authority. The loss of his father crushed him. He responded by lashing out in anger against just about everything, including Joseph, er, Barnabus here, who has been trying to be like a father to him. But, since he first met You, I don't know what came over him. It's like he has a real father once again! He hangs on Your every word, and eagerly submits to everything he hears You say. But he is so young. I don't know… What do You think, Yashua?"

"He's growing up. Someday you'll have to let go, Mary. You will know when the time is right." Then turning back to Marcus. "I have one question for you, young man. If you go with Barnabus, you will have to submit to him just as you submitted to Me. Can you do that? Or will you lash out in anger at him the first time he crosses your will?"

Marcus and Barnabus stared at each other for a few moments. Finally Marcus spoke, "Dad, I'm really sorry I took out my anger at you after my father's death. I always knew it wasn't your fault, and that you really do love me. Will you forgive me?" Barnabus nodded, holding out his arms, and they embraced. Marcus turned back with a big smile. "Yes, Yashua, I can submit to him just as if he were You, if that is what You want."

"That is what I want, but your mother will still have the final say as to when you're ready to travel with him. Is your schooling complete?"

"I think so. I can read, write, and cipher. I know Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic. And I know much of Torah." He looked questioningly at his mother.

"Yes," Mary agreed. "He is a fast learner, though a bit mischievous! I had hoped to have him spend a few years yet at the feet of an esteemed Rabban…" Mary bowed respectfully to Yashua, obviously hinting.

Yashua laughed. "That is a great idea! But I'm afraid it can't be Me, as I am about to ascend to My Father. Peter! Can you come over here a minute?" The big fisherman stopped in the middle of a sentence with another disciple, and went right over.

"Peter, My friend. You have been with Me for three years, through thick and thin. You have heard Me preach, witnessed the miracles, and seen Me in My most intimate moments. I would like you to write it all down, so others can get to know Me from your perspective." Yashua was smiling broadly.

"Er… Yes, Master… I'd love to, but Lord, You know that I can't write. I never learned letters. I'm just a…"

"Marcus knows letters. And his mother wants him to sit at the feet of an esteemed Rabban for a few years. You are as esteemed as anyone!" Yashua gave him a warm smile that let him know He wasn't joking about the compliment. "Would you be willing to spend some time over the next few years telling Marcus all your experiences with Me? He could write them all down, and compose them into a book that would benefit many."

"I'll teach Peter to write, too!" Marcus liked this idea.

Peter put his big, hairy hands on John Marc's shoulders. They paused to search each other's eyes. For once, Peter's impulsiveness didn't overrule his deliberation.

"You followed us to the Garden of Gethsemane after our Pascal meal here, didn't you. Why did you do that?"

"I wanted him to follow us," Yashua interjected. "Spirit led Me to invite him. He saw things none of you disciples saw, since you all fell asleep while I wrestled with Father in prayer. I'm sure he'll be happy to tell you all about it."

"But I still need to know why he wanted to follow us. Marcus, surely it was past your bedtime."

"I followed because I wanted to be close to Yashua," Marcus stood tall, unintimidated by the big man. "Right from the first I recognized Him as Messiah, King of Israel. I know what Torah says about Him! And I've talked with Grandpa Yacov about Him, and joined Grandpa's prayers for Him. After our Pascal meal I sat on the stairs, listening to Him. I am His disciple, too!" He looked at Yashua. "I'm not too young to be Your disciple, am I?"

Yashua chuckled at his eagerness. He reminded us of an enthusiastic puppy dog. "No, of course not. No one is too young to be My disciple."

Peter was smiling at him, too. "That was a good answer, Marcus. I will be honored if you will spend time with me and write down my experiences with Yashua. And thank you for offering teach me letters as well."

"Well, Mary." Yashua gave her a broad smile. "You are still in charge of him, and you will have the final say in where he goes, when, and with whom. But it sounds to Me like young John Marc has some wonderful things ahead of him after I leave. You can be proud of him. I assure you that, whether it is a missionary journey with Barnabus or writing the good news of the Kingdom with Peter, Marcus will be a blessing to millions, now and in ages to come."

I was intrigued by what Yashua had told Peter about Marcus. I glanced around, and there they were, strolling off, chattering happily like they had always been the best of buddies. Big old Peter's arm was curled around John Marc's shoulders, and young Marcus was stretching to get his arm up to Peter's waist, rather like a teddy bear trying to hug a grizzly bear. I left Yashua and hurried over to hear what they were saying. Peter had just asked what it was that Marcus had seen that none of the disciples saw.

"You mean when we were at the Garden of Gethsemane and Yashua asked you to pray with Him, but you all fell asleep?" It came out almost like an accusation. I could tell that Marcus immediately regretted having said it that way. But Peter just hung his head a bit and nodded.

156 "Well," Marcus got serious with the memory. "Yashua never asked me to pray. He just said that I could follow and listen in. So I kept my eyes on Him. When He went farther into the garden, I followed Him and listened to His lengthy prayers. I was close enough to see His face in the moonlight. I heard it all – everything He prayed.

"He was…" Marcus shook his head in disbelief. "He was in agony! I never before saw such distress. It seemed like He suffered as much in that garden as on the cross!

"After He left you, James, and John, He went another twenty or thirty paces, His shoulders shaking with grief, then fell sobbing with His face in the dirt, groaning and wailing as if His heart were broken. He kept crying out, 'Father! O Father! Must I go through with this? I love You, Father! Ever since I discovered that You were My Father, We've never been separated. Must I bear sin's consequence and be cut off from Your presence? Is there no other way? O My dear Father! I cannot endure the thought of Your rejection! Turning Your back on Me, forsaking Me? O My dear Father! All things are possible with You. Can You not remove this bitter cup from Me? O My dear Father…'

"He said it over and over as if separation from His Father was a fate worse than death! I came close. The moon shone right on His face. At first I thought it was just dirt, but it was all over His face, running down onto the ground – His sweat, it was… it was…" Marcus paused at the sheer horror of it all. "It was blood, running down His face and falling onto the ground!" He stopped, head bowed, eyes squeezed tight, but his mouth still open.

"Well, Marcus, was that about it?" Peter prompted.

Marcus jumped. "Uh… no. Just when I thought His agony was more than any man could bear, He seemed to relax. His shoulders sagged in surrender. Still kneeling, He lifted up His face and hands to heaven, nodding as if He had just heard an answer from His Father. 'Not My will, My Father, but Your will be done. Even though You must turn Your back and cast Me into the depths of the Abyss, I will not fail You. I accept Your judgment, for My Bride's sake. I will not take the easy way out. I rest on Your prophetic promise to somehow bring Me back from the pit and restore Me to life after three days.'"

Again Marcus paused, hands over his face, replaying the horror in his mind. "He stayed like that for a long time, His arms stretched out toward the heavens, the sweat and blood still running down His face. I will never forget the sight!" Marcus gave a convulsive shudder, then dropped his hands and looked up to Peter. "Finally He stood and went back to wake you guys up. And you saw the rest."

Their stroll had come to a halt of its own accord, and they just stood there for a while, reliving the memories. Finally I butted in. "Marcus, that was very precious, what you just shared. I had no idea that separation from His Father was such an agony to Him. Would you be willing to share that story with Matthew? He also is planning to prepare an account of Yashua's life, so he needs to hear it.

"Of course, John. I'll be happy to."

"And Marcus," I smiled at him warmly. "Thank you for being willing to help Peter write his account. I can tell right now it's going to be awesome! You are very good with words for one so young. You make a great storyteller!" Marcus smiled at me, and then at Peter, who was nodding his agreement. I could see we had won a lifelong friend.

CHAPTER 32 – THE ASCENSION, Iyar 27 (W/Th)

192 On the fortieth day after His resurrection, Yashua led us out of Jerusalem toward Bethany, to Mount Olivet where it overlooks Lazarus' house. He went right up to the top. We all gathered around, expecting another rousing message on the coming Kingdom. We were really getting excited. Perhaps He had changed His mind about leaving. James and I remembered His talk about the twelve thrones and our judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Frankly, we were angling for an opportunity to ask Him about it.

"You are My eyewitnesses to testify of all that I've done during My ministry here. But don't forget what I said: You must remain in Jerusalem and wait for the One I asked the Father to send you. For John immersed you in water, but after a few days you will be immersed in the Holy Spirit – My Spirit, as the Father has promised. Thus I shall return to fill you and clothe you with power from on high…"

Hearing about the power from on high, I remembered the vision of old Yacov sharing the bread and wine with Yashua in the Kingdom. I could no longer resist butting in, "Please, Lord, is this the time when You are restoring the Kingdom of God to Israel?"

Yashua looked at me with a twinkle in His eye and smiled broadly. "Yes, beloved John! I am now restoring the Kingdom to Israel, and beyond! But it shall not yet be as you have imagined. You see, My Kingdom is not a political revolution, but a heart transformation. Later, the political governments of men will be thrown down, too, along with the entire established world order, but only at the time set by the Father. You and I are not given to know those times and seasons which He has fixed by His own authority.

"But that doesn't matter now. Focus on My Kingdom within. My Kingdom has already come, for it came in Me and has now been born as a tiny seed within each of you. When the Holy Spirit has come upon you…" and here He swept His arms up and around the whole group, "…you will be filled with power. You shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and beyond. Far beyond! Yes, even to the remotest parts of the earth!"

Again His arms swept around the assembly, stretched out in love and blessing. He began to laugh, His hearty, welcoming laughter that always draws us into His joy. His face beamed with joy indescribable, literally radiating joy. We joined in His laughter, as waves of His infinite joy flowed through each one of us. I felt as if any more joy would slay me, yet the joy continued to increase, as Yashua shouted the traditional Aaronic Blessing: "YHWH bless you, and keep you. YHWH make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you. YHWH lift up His countenance upon you and give you Our… joyous… peace!"

We fell to our knees, arms raised up to Him, laughing and shouting our Hallelujahs in the most joyful worship I've ever experienced, before or since.

Then we saw a beam of pure white light split a strange looking cloud and fall directly upon Yashua. It seemed to pick Him up and draw Him toward the cloud. In only a minute He was gone from our sight within the cloud. I have never seen a cloud like it. It cast no shadows! Instead, it seemed to radiate with an otherworldly Light from deep within. Yashua was welcomed by the Light. We knelt in worship for a long time, staring at that cloud. I think we would be there yet, if Gavriel and Raphael hadn't appeared beside us to prod us. "You men of Galilee, why are you just standing there gazing into the sky? Yashua has been taken away from you into heaven. We suggest you remember His last words to you and obey them! Only in that way will you be prepared for Him when He comes again, for He shall come, in the same way you saw Him leave: suddenly, from within YHWH's glory cloud, and with inescapable Light."

Strange. We should have been sad. Our beloved Master was gone – really gone this time. We should have been depressed and fearful. But we weren't! We returned to Jerusalem rejoicing, eager to receive His promised Holy Spirit and power, and eager to begin the ministry He had entrusted to us. He had left us filled with that joy. At least part of it was the reassurance that He would come back again. We determined that when He returned, He would find us doing exactly as He had commanded.

Just ten days later, in the true fulfillment of the Feast of Shavuot (Pentecost), we did receive the Holy Spirit and power, just as He had promised. And we received the Holy Spirit and fresh power again the next day, and again the next and the next, every time we prayed and opened up our hearts. With the Holy Spirit and power the church was born. With the Holy Spirit and power we resisted and overcame the persecution. With the Holy Spirit and power the church grew strong in love and fellowship. And with the Holy Spirit and power, we went out and turned the world upside down – or perhaps I should say, turned it right side up again. Anyway, it has never been the same since then. To this day, we are still eagerly obeying His commands to us, still praying for and receiving a fresh infilling of the Holy Spirit and power daily, still going out to all the tribes and nations that Yashua had won for His Kingdom, still teaching all His precious people how to know and love and serve Him with great joy, and even more eagerly looking for His return, joyfully longing to hear His words, "Well, done, good and faithful servant. Enter now into the joy of your Lord!"

Yes, on that first 'Christian' Pentecost (at what the Jews still call the Feast of Shavuot) the church was born. The church triumphant! Oh, there have been many times when it did not seem so. A baby must first learn to crawl, and talk, and walk before he can be of much use to society. A baby messes his diapers a lot, too. Sometimes I think we still have just a baby church. But she is alive! Growing and maturing! Let me go back now and retell the narrative of that first Pentecost to see how the church began.

CHAPTER 33 – THE CHURCH TRIUMPHANT

193 I'll begin this story on Sivan 6 (our Friday, June 15, 31 AD), two days before Shavuot. The marketplace was crowded and the inns overflowing. The fields around Jerusalem were alive with travelers setting up their tents in preparation for the Sabbath and the Shavuot festivities on the following day. The weather was fine. Spring was past with the full glory of summer upon us. The grain harvest had been brought in. Work in the fields was just complete. Everyone was ready for a well-earned celebration.

Day ended. I heard the shofar beginning the Sabbath (of Sivan 7) as the sun disappeared below the Western Sea. Up on the roof, I relaxed and enjoyed the sunset. The clouds faded and a few stars appeared in the Eastern sky. I walked downstairs to the upper room where all the believers had gathered for our Sabbath meal. My brother James gave me a welcoming smile as I came in, which I returned, grateful to Yashua for the way He had healed our relationship. How we used to fight! Now, there was only love between us.

The room was packed – over a hundred of us and more still coming. Our hosts, Barnabus of Cyprus and his sister Mary, had been so gracious in feeding us and supplying all our needs in their large, lovely mansion. I wondered if they could have foreseen so many joining 'The Way' so soon after Yashua's death and resurrection. It seemed like only yesterday that we had celebrated the Passover in this very room, just the twelve of us disciples and Yashua.

So much had happened since then – His cruel death, His rising from the grave and gathering the believers to teach and encourage us all, and His command nine days ago to wait until we were 'empowered from on high' – whatever that meant. Then His ascension into the strange cloud that cast no shadows. So here we were, waiting as He had commanded, quite certain that now was the time He would return to take over Israel and begin His reign.

What a Sabbath that was! What fellowship! What love! What sharing in the things of the Kingdom! Looking back on it, I can see now that we didn't really understand what YHWH was doing, but we were close. We spent the day discussing the words of Yashua and how they applied to Shavuot. He said He is the Bread of Life, like the two loaves of bread which would be waved to YHWH tomorrow. And He said He is the living Word of God, come down from heaven – an obvious reference to the Law which came down from heaven to Moses at the first Shavuot on Mount Sinai. How many times He had taken the Law of Moses and made it come alive to us, teaching us truths and principles hidden in the Mosaic law! Like in His great Sermon on the Mount near Capernaum – He taught us that being angry with our fellow man is breaking the sixth commandment and murdering him in our heart. Why, He actually taught us to love the Law instead of living in fear of breaking it! But we did not understand about His promise to return, or all He had said about sending the Holy Spirit to live in us.

When that Sabbath was over we felt like we had already had a feast – before the Feast of Shavuot had even begun! I glanced out the window and reflected on the glorious sunset now ending the Sabbath. Yes, the sunset marked the day's end, but also a new day beginning, a day full of fresh glory. The Kingdom of God come to earth! Things never before seen by man! Surely today was the day! The festal trumpets sounded, mighty blasts that sent thrills up and down my spine. They were calling us to follow the crowds to the temple and join in the Shavuot celebrations.

We looked to old Peter. Strange how even though the fisherman was the least educated among us, we looked to him as our leader now that Yashua was gone. I guess it was his simple faith. It cut through all our arguments and provided clear-cut direction for our new lives as brothers and sisters in 'The Way'.

"Yes," Peter was frowning slightly. "Yes, I know Yashua told us to wait in Jerusalem until He returned to empower us from on high. But He never said to just wait in this room. I believe we should follow the crowds to the temple and participate in the festivities. We won't be bringing a lamb – our Lamb of God has now been sacrificed once for all time! But Yashua never said to stop celebrating the Feasts…

"Yes, John," He saw my raised hand and repeated for all the others what we had discussed yesterday. "I too expect Him to return today. But I don't think He will return here, just for us. I believe He will return at the temple, in great power and glory, for every eye to see and every knee to bow to His Lordship! Besides, the angels said He would return the same way He ascended – to the top of Mount Olivet – or to one of Jerusalem's other hills, like the temple mount.

"I believe now is the time for fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy: 'According to their deeds, so He will repay, wrath to His adversaries and recompense to His enemies … So they will fear the name of YHWH from the west, and His glory from the rising of the sun, *for He will come like a rushing stream, driven by the Wind (Breath) of YHWH. And the Redeemer will come to Zion,* to those who turn away from their transgression in Jacob, declares YHWH. And as for Me, this is My covenant with them, says YHWH. My Spirit which is upon you, and My Words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth, nor the mouth of your offspring, nor the mouth of your offsprings' offspring from now on forever.'" (Isa 59:18-21)

Peter looked around. Most heads were nodding in agreement. "Today, everyone will gather on the temple mount. I think we should go there, too. Yashua always loved to be where the people were gathered." That settled it. There was no argument. It was not that we sensed YHWH's Spirit on us – not yet! It was Peter's simple faith that YHWH's Spirit was leading him that made us all want to follow. Besides, the excitement at seeing our Lord again had somehow canceled our fear of leaving the upper room and being captured by our religious rulers.

It felt good to get out of the house. We had hardly been out since our Lord's ascension. The evening weather was fine. A light balmy breeze carried the sweet fragrances of flowers and fruits as well as the warm, earthy smells of many animals, freshly washed, following families up to the temple. We figured that as long as we stayed in the background and blended in with the crowds, our religious rulers would not be able to do anything to us. They would not want to disrupt the Shavuot celebrations. So we joined the happy throng, trying to stay together, content among so many we knew and loved. Myriads of stars twinkled overhead. The moon rose, a bright half-crescent, giving us just enough light to recognize one another in the shadows. The press got tight as we approached the temple mount, reminding us that people from many other nations had come to join the festivities. These foreigners had come a long way and overcome many hardships to get here. Moses' law commands us to welcome the alien among us.

The priests were still cleansing the great bronze altar. The temple gates would not be opened to the crowds until midnight. But the lamps had already been lit. The glory of the temple, as always, took our breath away. Not a bit sleepy, I reflected on that well-known passage from Isaiah that Peter had quoted. How much would be fulfilled on this day? "Arise! Shine, for your Light has come, and the glory of YHWH has risen upon you. For behold, darkness will cover the earth, and deep darkness the peoples; but YHWH will rise upon you, and His glory will appear upon you. And nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising …" (60:1-3) The great prophecy went on and on. Perhaps today it would all be fulfilled!

At midnight, the temple gates were thrown open. Those with sacrificial animals to be inspected and First-fruits offerings to be donated streamed in. Every animal had to be certified free from blemish by morning – a big job for the priests. The rest jockeyed for position just to get a good view. As big as the temple courts were, there always seemed to be more people than room. The night passed in a delightful jumble of greeting old friends and meeting new ones; fellowship and reminiscing; and quoting Scriptures to each other in excited anticipation.

As the dawn approached, we found ourselves gathered together in the far southwest corner of YHWH's house near the stone stairs, on the second floor of the Royal Stoa. (It had been built by King Herod as a center of public and commercial activity and to accommodate the huge crowds at the Feasts.) It was a long way from the altar, but we still had a good view, and we were happy to be all together. The crowds, Jew and Gentile alike, were spread out before us, covering the entire court of the Gentiles, of which the Royal Stoa formed the southern border. As Jews, we could have gone much closer, at least into the court of women, but this seemed fine. We had no sacrifices to offer, and here we could stay in the background with the foreigners – no sense risking attention from our religious rulers!

So we sat on our grass mats and quoted passages from the Pentateuch and the book of Ruth to each other, lest drowsiness should overtake us and we break the ancient tradition of staying awake all Shavuot eve. The Midrash tells the story of the first day of Shavuot at Mount Sinai. It says the Children of Israel slept in until noon on the day Moses brought the Law of God down from the mountain. He had to go wake them in their tents to tell them about it. Ever since then, good Jews have kept each other awake all Shavuot eve, determined that never again would they have to be roused from slumber to receive the Word of God.

I realized for the first time how much the book of Ruth pointed to Messiah. We had quoted it on Shavuot eve all my life, yet now it came alive to me. By law Boaz, Ruth's kinsman redeemer, was required to meet three conditions to redeem her. He must be able to pay the redemption price; he must be willing to pay the redemption price; and he must be free himself. Yashua, our Kinsman Redeemer, met those three conditions to redeem us from the bondage of sin! Just like Boaz did for Ruth, Yashua redeemed our land and bought us back from slavery and poverty to be His Bride. An awesome thought!

At dawn the traditional cry rang out, "Behold! The sun shineth to Hebron!" Any drowsiness we may have had fled before the thrill of anticipation. This was the morning for Messiah to return! We just knew it!

The regular morning sacrifices were accomplished with a little more pomp and ceremony than usual due to the large crowd watching. Then the special sacrifices for Shavuot: first the sin offering, with laying-on of hands, confession of sin, and sprinkling of blood. Then the burnt offerings and other sacrifices from the people. We knew Messiah would not return during those. He had fulfilled that entire sacrificial system. He was our perfect sacrifice. With growing anticipation we knew – *He would return during the wave offering!* Yes, it had to be! Yashua had ascended to the Father during the Passover Firstfruits offering; He would descend to claim His Kingdom during the corresponding Shavuot Firstfruits wave offering.

The priests were chanting the Hallel accompanied by a single flute, adding a delicate sweetness to the music. The children of the priests, standing in front of their fathers, blended their sweet voices in a rich harmonious descant. At the proper places all the people responded in unison, sounding like mighty ocean waves crashing on the beach.

The ritual for the wave offering began. All was exactly as prescribed by the Mosaic law: the seven yearling lambs without blemish, one young bullock and two rams for a burnt offering, with their proper meat offerings. Then one kid of the goats for a sin offering, and finally two yearling lambs which were waved before YHWH, then sacrificed as peace offerings. This was all accomplished in exquisite precision, with the practiced perfection of accomplished performers, to the delight of the attentive audience.

Just as the omer for the Passover was of barley, being the first ripe grain in the land, so the two wave loaves were made from the first and finest of the wheat in the land, the last grain to ripen. And like the sheaves of barley, the wheat was harvested, threshed, milled, and sifted multiple times to make the finest of fine flours. However, the omer of barley had been waved as raw flour mixed with olive oil, whereas the wheat would be waved as baked bread.

[Historical note: Traditionally, priests would bake two omers (about ten pints – double the amount at Passover) of dough into two wave loaves. The flour for each loaf was taken from about 1/5 bushel of wheat, and kept separate throughout the process. The two lumps of dough were kneaded with warm water and leaven, allowed to rise, salted, and baked in two separate pans. This was completed by the end of the Day of Preparation, two evenings before Shavuot, to avoid being done on the Sabbath. Each loaf was a little over 5 pounds of bread, flat and long with the edges or corners turned up. Each was about 12 inches wide, 21 inches long, and 3 inches high.]

The rabbis maintained that the loaves were leavened to represent the common bread of the people. But we knew from Yashua's teaching that the leaven represented sin, showing that even our highest praises and best worship, even our thank offerings, were still tainted with sin. That is why the sin offering was required along with all the other offerings. Of course all these special offerings needed a lot of priests. Probably 500 priests were here today.

Oh! My mind had been wandering. Seeing the principle parts of the two sacrificial lambs being laid beside the two loaves brought me back to the present. This was it! They were about to be waved to YHWH, the high point of the Shavuot service, toward which all the prior activity pointed. *This should be the precise time that Yashua returns from the clouds to claim His Kingdom!*

I pondered how He might fit that into the rest of the day's traditions: after the wave offerings, the wave loaves and lambs would be divided among the priests to feast on this afternoon. That would start after the people's freewill offerings were received. I glanced around. Over 200,000 people filled the temple courtyards. That's a lot of freewill offerings! The feasting would go on the rest of the day and probably for several days to come, as their offerings were returned to eat and share with each other and with the Levites, the strangers, and the poor. The wave offerings had to be eaten by midnight, but celebrations and feasting would go on as long as the rest of the offerings lasted.

There it was! The final sacrifice. The climax of the entire Feast of Shavuot. The high priest had picked up the two wave loaves and turned toward the East. From our second floor vantage point where we were seated in the Royal Stoa, we had a great view above the heads of most of the crowd. With great pomp, the priest held the loaves high, then began to wave them forwards and backwards, up and down. The people all screamed their delight.

The excitement of our group of believers was also at its peak. A few eyes darted to and fro to try and spot Messiah among the crowd, but most were looking up. I glanced up, too, remembering what the angels had said about Yashua returning in the same way as He had ascended into the heavens, but the morning sky was absolutely cloudless. Peter, standing in front of me, also looked up.

"How will Yashua appear?" I wondered aloud.

"Well, John, I think…" He turned to answer, but I never heard his answer, for just at that instant the most awesome and incredible thing happened.

From high above the crowds we heard this loud noise, like the sound of a violent wind or of a mighty ocean roar. The noise shook the Royal Stoa to its foundations. Every head turned up to look. Where, moments before, I had seen no cloud, now hovered that same cloud which we had seen ten days earlier, when Yashua had ascended. It was a very strange cloud, for it cast no shadows. It seemed to be alive with an intense inner, otherworldly Light. In the moment it took us to recognize the cloud, it split open in the middle, and a beam of pure white light shone down upon us like a flame of fire. The cloud disappeared. It had only been visible for a few seconds, and I rubbed my eyes wondering if I had really seen it. But the pillar of fire remained above us – just us, the 120 believers in Yashua.

I kept expecting to see Yashua Himself appear from the flame. But instead, it slowly, deliberately separated into smaller flames or tongues of fire which descended right upon our heads. In a flash I remembered Yashua's words: "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, who will be with you forever, that is, the Spirit of Truth. You already know Him, because He dwells with you, but He will dwell in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. After a little while the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you also will live. In that day you shall know that I am in My Father, and you are in Me and I in you." (Jn 14:16-20) A brief question crossed my mind in surprise that I remembered His words so precisely. I'd never had a very good memory. Not nearly as good as old Peter's, which is why I always took notes.

As if in response a flood of other memories flitted across my mind. "The Helper, whom the Father will send in My name, will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you." (Jn 14:26) "When the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, that is, the Spirit of Truth who proceeds from the Father, He will bear witness of Me. Then you also will bear witness of Me because you've been with Me from the beginning." (Jn 15:26-27) "When He, the Spirit of Truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth. For He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears from Me He will speak, and He will disclose to you what is to come. He shall glorify Me, for He shall take of Mine, and shall disclose it to you." (Jn 16:13-14) And others from Yashua's teachings.

I was awed! This was the Spirit of Truth Yashua had promised! He was doing exactly what Yashua had said He would: reminding us of all that Yashua had told us. I was filled with an indescribable joy. *Yashua had returned in the tongues of fire to dwell within us by His Holy Spirit. He was speaking to my mind and I was hearing Him!* I glanced around at my brothers and sisters in the faith. I could easily see by the joy shining from their faces that I was not alone!

Impulsively I lifted up my hands toward the heavens and started to praise YHWH out loud. Many others from our group were doing the same. I was vaguely aware that a lot of Jews, even some of our elders, had been startled by the sound of the mighty rushing wind, had seen the tongues of fire settle on our heads, and were looking right at us. Though I certainly didn't want to attract attention from our rulers, I was so overcome by joy I couldn't stop shouting the high praises of YHWH.

At this point half of those in the huge courtyard just below us had turned to face us. Our religious rulers were trying to ignore us and finish up their few remaining tasks before the actual feasting could begin. But many in the crowd were no longer interested in them. The wind noise had ceased and the tongues of fire were no longer visible, but the people seemed intrigued by our praises, and stood listening with open mouths. "Why, Yashua?" I wondered.

The answer instantly came to me with the realization that I was praising YHWH in the Egyptian language! I had never learned Egyptian. It is such a difficult language I had been awed that their own children could even learn it. With no effort at all, I spoke and understood it perfectly now, just as if I had been speaking it all my life!

I glanced down into the courtyard, guessing there must be some reason for this miracle. I saw a young couple from Egypt staring at me with wide eyes. Though God knows how little I understood it myself, I yelled down trying to explain what had happened, and what great things God had done for us. Others among us were doing the same. I realized that all of us were speaking fluently in different languages – the native tongues of the foreigners below us!

Those listening to us were getting more numerous, and more perplexed! I saw them looking back and forth and shaking their heads. A shouted question came to my ears: "What's going on here? Those men are all Galileans! How is it that we're each hearing them speak in our own native languages?" And answering shouts: "They're all drunk! Tell 'em to be quiet! That is disgusting, interrupting the Feast with public drunkenness!" At that, I was silenced, asking in my heart, *Yashua, how do we answer that charge?* The others of our group also shut up, and again we looked to old Peter, who was in front on the rail. He grinned at me, then turned to the crowd and raised his hands for silence. When the crowd had quieted, he began to speak. Scared, timid old Peter, who had hardly been able to speak ten words in front of a crowd before, began to preach!

"Men of Israel and Judea and all you visitors from abroad, give heed to my words!" Peter shouted with an authority I had never heard from anyone but Yashua. "These men are not drunk; it's only 9 AM! What you are witnessing is the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy, 'In the last days, says God, I will pour out My Spirit upon all mankind. Your sons and daughters shall prophecy, your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams…'" (Joel 2:28; Acts 2:14 ff) Thus Peter proceeded to deliver a powerful sermon, as direct, compelling, and to the point as if it came from Yashua Himself! I was awed. Here was a man who had never even learned letters preaching like a learned scholar! Everyone listening (which was in the thousands) was convicted in his heart. It was obvious to me – Yashua had returned – His Spirit anyway – and He was now dwelling inside each of us and empowering us, just as He had promised. In a flash I understood what He had meant that He would come to us and the world would not see Him, but we would see Him. I saw Him in Peter!

The Shavuot sacrifices had concluded with the wave offering. So the time for feasting had begun. Many who had been convicted resisted the Spirit, and turned instead to the feast. I don't blame them; centuries of traditions die hard. And besides, they (like us) were hungry. Up all night, no breakfast, the sizzling smells of roast lamb; you try it sometime!

But many, over three thousand, were even hungrier to receive what God was doing. They went out of the temple court with the 120 of us down the great staircase to the Tyropoeon Valley, and then to the lower pool below the Pool of Siloam. There we baptized them – I and the other ten whom Yashua had appointed as apostles ('the twelve' minus Judas). As we preached, I saw many other disciples from the upper room also ministering by the Holy Spirit. All 120 of us had received that 'power from on high'!

That was awe inspiring – fearful in a good way. Yashua had empowered us beyond our wildest imaginings. His Spirit not only gave us the native languages of the people, but also took away our fear of our religious rulers, and even our fear of the people and their potential rejection and scoffing. But that was just the beginning. God put a fear of us on them, and gave us favor with the people, even our religious rulers! They looked up to us and wanted what we had! In the weeks to come, many who had resisted the message first preached by Peter at the temple, were pricked in their conscience and came to our gathering place at the lower pool to be baptized. They had heard the noise and seen the fire! I understood God's wisdom in not bringing them all the first day; we wouldn't have been able to handle the crowds. But day by day, more and more were being added to our number. Nearly everyone was healed or delivered from something. No wonder the people held us in such awe. Soon we were too many to gather around the pool, so we began meeting in Solomon's Portico. Even that became crowded at times.

Thus the church of Jesus Christ was born. The church triumphant, in awesome power and glory! Remember the pillar of fire that led the Israelites through the desert? The glory cloud over Mount Sinai when God gave the law? The Shekina Glory filling Solomon's temple, so awesome the priests could not stand to minister? It's all eclipsed in the surpassing glory of Yashua haMashiach [modern English: Jesus the Christ] in His church! (Eph 1:23; 3:21; Col 1:27)

We finally understood what Yashua had been trying to teach us all along about His Kingdom being the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven. He told Pilate, "My Kingdom is not of this world… not of this realm." (Jn 18:36) Now we knew where His Kingdom really is! He had said, "The Kingdom of God is within you" (Lk 17:21), and it is. He never did try to overthrow the Romans or take Caesar's throne. King Yashua had come to rule on the throne of my heart. And He still does! Praise God!

I'm old now; ready to wrap this up and go Home. But first I have a few loose ends to tie up for you. Yes, young Marcus did spend a lot of time with Peter, both writing down Peter's experiences with Yashua, and teaching him to write. The results we have to this day, first in the Gospel of Mark (which, but for old Peter's humility, should have been called the Gospel of Peter), and later in the two short Epistles which Peter penned with his own hand under the expert tutelage of Marcus. And just as Yashua predicted, these writings have blessed millions, including myself.

Marcus did get permission from his mother to go out on some missionary journeys with Barnabus, his cousin and adopted dad. In fact, in later years Marcus developed a better relationship with Barnabus than he'd ever had with his own father. The missionary journeys of Barnabus and John Marc need a whole 'nother book! However, they're summarized nicely in the Bible book called the Acts of the Apostles, which I'll leave for you to read on your own.

As you read, you'll discover the lead character is an evangelist with dual citizenship. His Hebrew name was Sha'ul and his Roman name was Paul. He became the leader of those missionary journeys. At first Marcus didn't trust him, for obvious reasons! They later reconciled, and Marcus became a big help and support to Rabbi Sha'ul.

Who is this Sha'ul? You've met him before. He is the wealthy Pharisee who knelt before Yashua to ask, "Good Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He claimed to have kept all God's commandments from his youth, but when Yashua told him to sell all that he had and give it to the poor, he turned away. He grew bitter. When Yashua died, he would not believe that He had risen. He became a zealous persecutor of us believers – until Yashua appeared to him on the Damascus road. Once again, I, John, was humbled, for I had judged Yashua's ministry to him as unfruitful. But he became God's choice as our twelfth apostle (replacing Matthias, who by then had been slain by the Jews), and Marcus and I agree, the best apostle of us all!

My character development continued in the book of the Acts of the Apostles. For example, do you remember my horrible attitude toward the Samaritans? That was a big blind spot in me and many others, due to the culture in which we were raised. When Philip, one of our early church elders, evangelized Samaria, the Holy Spirit sent Peter and me to follow up. Our eyes were opened to the preciousness of these people who had so gladly received water baptism from Philip into the name of Adonai Yashua haMashiach. God used our prayers to baptize them also with the Holy Spirit and fire. Thus the Samaritan believers became as dear to us, even to me, as our friends in Perea!

My time is now gone. My life on earth is over. Yashua, my Redeemer, my King, and my Friend, has come to take me Home. He is standing beside me, urging me to finish, for He says He cannot take me until my final words are recorded by my friends gathered around me. I am eager to return to that glorious place where we celebrated the birthday party of dear old Yacov ben Levi. I can hardly even dictate, because of my excitement! Today is my 100th birthday! I am very old, and frail, and blind, and hard of hearing, just like old Yacov was before his glorious birthday party. And like him, I do not want to be healed. I want to go Home, with a capital 'H'. I have seen reality. This sinful shadow-world holds nothing for me now.

So good-bye, my dear friends in the church of Ephesus. You have cared for me so well, with such love! My only regret in going, is leaving you all behind. My love for you is exceeded only by my love for the Savior Himself. Would that I could take you all with me! Except you still have work to do here. Please, get my manuscript copied and sent to all the precious churches in Asia Minor, as you did for my first Gospel, my three letters, and the Revelation of Yashua I wrote five years ago during the eighteen months I was imprisoned on Patmos by Emperor Domitian.

Oh! How I love those churches! Tell them of my love! Tell my precious ones at Smyrna, Thyatira, Pergamum, Mitylene, Assos, Troas, Lydia, Sardis, Laodicea, Colossae, Philadelphia, Hierapolis, Miletus, Zanthus, Patara, and… all the others. Tell them I miss them! Tell them… tell them that whatever it costs, they must follow me to that glorious realm of Light, where Yashua, His Father YHWH, and old Yacov reign in awesome splendor and majesty – that place where we will never again have to fight the sinful passions and temptations of the adversary. Tell them to give up the selfishness and humble themselves. Tell them to cease their bickering, arguing, fighting, judging – that is so hard, I know. I've been there! That's what I was best at, until He captured me with His love. To just love Yashua! That is the key. Like a child, to just love Him, trust Him, and believe Him, and simply do what He says by His Spirit within. That's not hard! You can do that! Remember old Yacov, the intercessor. He is with Yashua. They are interceding for each of you constantly, covering you with their prayers, as indeed I shall as well when I join them.

I'm not asking you to do anything you can't do. Oh, I know, none of us can by ourselves. But now, the Holy Spirit is pouring out His grace from above – Grace: the power and desire to love the eternal Father as He first loved you, and simply do His will. It flows to you in abundance on the wings of intercession. By His grace you can do all things, whatever He leads, for He will not lead you to do anything He does not give you the power to do.

Is not this very letter proof?! I'd forgotten everything! My memory had never been very good, and in my old age I had become almost senile, as you know. But I hung on to Yashua's promise that He would restore my memory before I died so I could write it all down (or dictate, as it has turned out), and He has now done that. Grace upon grace!

Yes, I have indeed been to you the Apostle of Love. I know that, now. You have all told me that many times. But now that you know my story, the real story behind the story in my first Gospel, you know why I never called myself that. Rather, I am the disciple whom Yashua loves. He has drawn me by His love, disciplined me by His love, trained me in His love, drenched me with His love, and baptized me into His love! How can I but return His love to Him, and to all of you, my precious little children?!

I am ready, my Lord, my King. Thank You for coming for me before my friends, so they also can catch a glimpse of Your beautiful, beautiful face. How can anyone who sees You not love You?! Oh, to You and You alone belongs all the glory! I worship You! I praise You! I bless Your holy name forever and ever, Adonai Yashua haMashiach!

So John the beloved Apostle of Love is taken to his reward. His body is honored and placed in a tomb. His scroll is copied for the churches as he asked. The original is stored and sealed in a stone case in a secret cave. That generation passes away.

CHAPTER 34 – THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

Allow me to introduce myself. I am Adam's oldest son, Cain, servant of Logos and His saints. I have lived in Hades for thousands of years, assisting all who came through the Welcoming Park into that many-splendored realm called Paradise, and within it, the Nursery. I would be content to serve my Lord there forever. But He recently assigned me a new task: to write out the history of the ends of the ages.

First, let me tell my story. Nearly two thousand years after the apostle John saw his awesome vision which you know as the *Revelation of Jesus Christ,* I heard Logos call, "Cain, Son of Dust! Come up here! I will also show you what must soon take place!"

As a disembodied spirit (my body not yet raised), His call swept me right through the locked exit from Hades back into the Welcoming Park, then across the river, past the pedestal with the Book of Life, and through that open door which no one can shut. [See diagram, page 321.]

His voice carried me like a mighty wind through the third heaven, across the glassy sea, and up the mountain of God, to the very throne of God Himself.

The scene before me was beyond description. I was overawed. I nearly fainted. But the One sitting upon the throne pointed with His finger, and seven flames of intense white light flashed toward me, strengthening me. Peace fell over me like a soft, warm blanket. So I relaxed, knelt respectfully and surveyed the throne room. I recognized the place from John's description. It was all there – the 24 thrones with the 24 elders sitting on them, the seven lamps representing the seven churches, with the seven Spirits of God burning fiercely upon them, the four unique angels, each with faces like a lion, a bull, a man, and an eagle, all worshiping and giving glory to the One seated in splendor on the throne. He blazed with all the colors of the rainbow. It reminded me of a big thunder and lightning storm.

In my blanket of peace, His thunder sounded like the belly laughter of a giant. It seemed like it would never stop, so I ventured to study the 24 elders. I'd always wanted to know who they were. His seven Spirits must have given me knowledge as well as strengthening, for I recognized them! The elders are Adam, Noah, Melchizedek, Job, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Daniel, Moses, David, Achaiah (Malachi), Yacov ben Levi, and the twelve apostles, with the apostle Paul in place of Judas the Betrayer. Each was joined in physical oneness with his wife – thus male with a blend of female as well. Indeed nearly everyone in this realm seemed to be dominantly male with a blend of female – except maybe the One resplendent on the throne, whom I finally recognized as Logos. On earth He was called Yashua haMashiach, Jesus the Christ.

The thunder and lightning from the throne grew, becoming almost overwhelming to my senses. I fell on my face in worship, fully content to spend the rest of my days there before my Lord and my God. But that thunder was indeed laughter! And now the 24 elders began laughing with Him. Then the four unique angels, and all the angel host. Good laughter is contagious, you know. I could no longer resist joining them.

My sides ached, and I was beginning to wonder if the laughter ever stopped in this realm. Then it was over, as if chopped off with a knife. Logos welcomed me with smile. "Son of Dust! I like your curiosity! You have to know all the details, don't you? Even the names of the 24 elders. Your prayers are heard." Grinning like a schoolkid, He gave me a huge scroll sealed with seven wax seals. "Here are all the details, from the beginning to the end of time."

I took it from His hand. It was an ancient scroll, very heavy. I nearly dropped it in my clumsiness. Yashua seemed ready to bust out in laughter once again, but I was terrified by the scroll! "No, my Lord! I am unworthy to open the scroll or to break its seals! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell among a people of unclean lips!"

He seemed in agreement with my assessment. "Okay. Take the scroll then. Go and find someone who is worthy. How else can we satisfy your curiosity?"

He pointed with His arm back toward the earth. At that moment my story takes a bizarre twist, for I was instantly transformed. I did not understand it at the time, though I do now. All I knew then was that time no longer flowed linearly for me. I was a bit confused when I found myself, with the heavy scroll, back beyond the door. It was not my location that confused me, not at all. I recognized the Book of Life, the pedestal, the River Jordan, and the Welcoming Park right off. It was my sense of time! Like you, time had bound me with an iron grip. Instant by instant my future became my present and flowed into my past. But no more. Logos had pointed me into a different realm entirely, in which I am freed from time – above it, so to speak. I can now view any moment of time in the present, as if I were watching from eternity. *I have become a time traveler.*

I return to earth, but not to join my body. I am now at the beginning of time. Driven by a passion I have not known before, my curiosity to open the scroll urges me on. I fly from age to age, from nation to nation, from tribe to tribe, searching for one who is worthy. I seem to have all the 'time' in the world. But throughout all time I find no one on earth who is worthy. They all, like me, turn away to their own selfish ways. There is no one who overcomes the serpent's lie that "You shall be as god!"; no one who resists his temptation to eat the forbidden fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In this realm I can see into people's hearts – even a heart covered by the atoning blood still appears black and hard inside!

Discouraged, I return to the door to gaze across the river. Ahh… those happy people celebrating in Paradise! Surely one of them is worthy to open the scroll! So I fly throughout Hades carrying the ancient scroll. From the Park into Paradise, to the tables where happy multitudes feast, to the Nursery where the infants are trained, even to the Dungeon – I search everywhere (except the Abyss, since I cannot cross the deep chasm). Not one is worthy.

Many show a great deal of interest, wanting to touch the scroll reverently, and eager for me to break the seals and read it to them. But when I ask even the greatest among them to open the seals, he bows his hoary head and weeps. "No. I cannot, for I failed my Master, many times. I am not worthy to open the scroll or break the seals."

Defeated, I return through the door to the throne room. Of course, the heavenly host! I fly with the heavy scroll, which has become a crushing burden to me, throughout the heavens. I interrogate the angelic host, including the archangels, warrior angels, and unique angels. Each one confesses to me, "No. I never overcame. I am not worthy." Finally, even the 24 elders admit, "I have overcome, but only by the grace of God, and then only after failing Him many times. I am not worthy to open the scroll."

So I carry the scroll back to Logos, but He will not take it from me! I fall on my face before Him weeping. *I have failed in my mission. My curiosity can never be satisfied.*

Yacov ben Levi comes to me and puts a hand on my shoulder. "Don't weep. The Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the prophesied Son of David, has overcome. He withstood every temptation in perfect sinlessness, though tested even to the death. He alone is worthy to open the scroll."

He points me back to Mariam and Yoseph and their miracle baby, Yashua. From Father YHWH's perspective I see Yashua's birth, His entire life on earth, His torment and cruel death, His resurrection, and His ascension to the heavenlies. Without doubt, He has overcome! He never accepts the serpent's lie to take control of His own life and be His own god. He refuses the forbidden fruit! He lives, and dies, only according to the eternal Father's Plan of the Ages. Now I see, and I know, that **He alone is worthy!**

Time seems to have little meaning in this realm of spirit, for I flip again back to the beginning of time. I see, right where the throne is / was / will be, a bronze sacrificial altar. On it lies Yashua Himself, except on the altar He looks like a Lamb, slain – the eternal sacrifice for the sins of the entire world. Time flows from beginning to end, and throughout the ages, the blood of the slain Lamb flows in perfect atonement for all the sins ever committed to the end of the ages. Then, at the very end of time, the Lamb is restored to life, whole, unblemished except for the wounds caused by sinful men. He leaps down off the altar to stand near the 24 elders, and the altar morphs into His heavenly throne as it was before.

In dizzying sequence, time flows back to the time of David, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, as he takes the throne as king over Israel. Now the Lamb also becomes a magnificent Lion, and King David, all in one glorious Ruler, majestic in such splendor as can only happen in heavenly visions. I fall at His feet as though dead, for fear and awe again overwhelm me.

But again I hear laughter, that great, thunderous belly laughter. I dare to look up. Time has returned to normal. There is Yashua, sitting on His throne as when I had first met Him, laughing as if He has just pulled the greatest of jokes on me. At first I think He is laughing at me, at my weakness, my fear, and my failed mission. "Son of Dust!" His eyes sparkle. "Why do you yet hold the scroll?"

"But my Lord! You refused to take it back…!"

"I could not take it back until I had proven to you and all the universe that I am worthy to open it and break its seals. Have I not now done so to your satisfaction?" His laughter continues, until I realize He is not laughing at me, but only in delight that I can finally see things from His 'present' perspective. John the apostle gives me a wink and a knowing nod, and I remember that he has been through all this before. He understands. I stand up before the King.

"Yes, Lord! You are worthy!" I give Him the scroll.

He takes it and holds it high in joyous triumph. The four unique angels and the 24 elders fall down in worship, singing again the new song from John's Revelation: "You alone are worthy to take the scroll and break its seals, for You were slain to purchase for God with Your blood from every tongue, tribe, people, and nation! You have raised them up and made them kings and priests to our God. And they will reign upon the earth…" Now they are joined by all the heavenly host in the chorus, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power and riches, wisdom and might, honor, glory, and blessing!"

And suddenly, in another dizzying display of the great power of the Master as Lord of time and space, I am at the edges of the universe at the very end of the ages. All of Creation lies spread out before me – every man, woman, and child to ever live; every animal, beast, bird, fish, insect; every galaxy, star, planet, moon, asteroid; every mountain, hill, valley, rock, river, lake, sea; every tree, bush, flower, weed; every angel and demon, even the adversary himself – it is all here, as in a wondrous tapestry with not a thread out of place. Nothing is missing.

And every knee is bowed! Every face shines with joy! Every created thing, yes even the very rocks themselves, cry out with a mighty voice in perfect unison, "To Him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb of God be blessing, and honor, and glory, and dominion, and power forever and ever! He alone is worthy! For He has created all things for Himself, upholds them by the Word of His Power, and has redeemed them by the majesty of His infinite Love. And now He presents all things back to the eternal Father in the holiness of the Truth, having satisfied the Father's righteous justice by sacrificing His own blood."

The grand vision fades. Time resumes. The four living creatures and the 24 elders fall down on their faces and worship, crying, "Amen and amen!" I am still gasping with the immensity of the vision, but Yashua doesn't loll about waiting for me to recover. Still laughing, He lifts the scroll high overhead and breaks open the **first of its seven seals.**

Nothing happens. Of course I am disappointed. I fully expect to see one of the four horsemen of the Apocalypse. Yashua chuckles at my ignorance (I'm still pretty new at this time-warp business) and beckons to the four unique angels. The first one turns his lion face to me and calls, "Come and see!" I fly with him back to earth. We view Kenan's empire shortly after his death, when it became so wicked and oppressive about 1200 years after Creation. There I see the white horse, exactly as I had read in John's Revelation, whose rider is sent out with weapons and a crown to conquer mankind. I realize to my horror that he has been at work ever since, all over the earth, stealthily building empires, ruling nations, and empowering his chosen ones to oppress and enslave all who refuse to be ruled by their Creator.

With that realization, I am back at the throne room, where Yashua is breaking the **second seal.** Now the second unique angel turns his bull face to me, saying, "Come and see!" I go with him to earth. We arrive just before the great wars between Athens and Atlantis. I see the red horse, whose rider has a sword and is sent out to take peace from the earth. I realize that he, too, has been at work ever since.

Again I return to the throne room, where Yashua is breaking the **third seal.** The third unique angel turns his human face to invite me, "Come and see!" We reach earth at the time of the terrible famine caused by the 78th flyby of Mars in 2220 BC, when Peleg and Heber are still alive. I see the black horse, whose rider with the scales is sent out to bring famine to the earth. He also remains hard at work.

I again return to the throne room, where Yashua is breaking the **fourth seal.** Now the fourth unique angel says to me, "Come and see!" with his fourth face, the one like an eagle. We fly to earth, arriving near the end of King Solomon's reign, as he turns to idolatry and immorality with his many princesses. There is the pale horse, ridden by the angel of death himself. He is authorized to bring plague, famine, war, catastrophe, and even wild beasts on the earth, to slay a quarter of mankind. I know that he, too, has continued his deadly task even to this very day.

I again zip back to the throne room. Yashua is opening the **fifth seal.** This time, Yashua Himself reaches out a hand to me, saying, "Come and see!" We go to Hades, where the bondservants of God are feasting in Paradise. He selects 144,000 from past ages who were martyred for their faithful testimony and obedience to the Word of God. "Come up higher!" He tells them, as He joyfully brings them to the very highest place – the throne of God. There He invites them to live in a special place of luxury and delight He prepared for their souls under the Mercy Seat. They ask Him, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You delay judgment to avenge our blood?" Logos replies, "Be patient for just a few more years. I shall comfort you here within My robe of peace until the total number of martyrs is complete." I am then granted a glimpse of the future, and am horrified to see another 144,000 such martyrs, both Jew and Gentile, yet to be slain in the great tribulation!

Finally time settles back down to normal, and I breathe a big sigh of relief. The apostle John winks at me again and laughs. "Welcome to our realm!"

So that's my story. Now for the task Logos assigned to me – writing my *History of the Future.* Not only the end of this age, but also the Millennial Age and the ages to come. Sound impossible? Well, now that I'm an experienced time traveler, it should be a piece of cake. I'll just walk through time and write it out as I see it. I'll see everything as past or present, so I won't need to use the future tense. When I'm done, I'll bring my book back into normal time for you, dear Reader. May it bless you and help prepare you to live through these exciting times. Here we go…

CHAPTER 35 – PROFESSOR ALAN BENSON

Another amazing day. Alan Benson looked at his watch. Three PM Friday. Tomorrow he'd have to mesh back into the normal day/night cycles of the outside world. He rubbed his eyes. He'd better get some sleep. He shut down his laptop computer and flicked off his gooseneck LED table lamp. He stood up in the total darkness, and felt with a foot for his sleeping bag. He still had a little food left – just a handful of raisins and nuts and a couple crackers. He decided to save them for breakfast. He pulled off his shoes and climbed directly into the sleeping bag.

After living for a week on only four to five hours of sleep a night, he expected to be asleep by the time his head hit the pillow. But this was his last night. He allowed himself the luxury of a little reflection. *He'd done it! He'd succeeded beyond his wildest dreams!* Even his preparations – he had brought all the right equipment, just enough food, just enough batteries, just enough memory for his low-light digital camera, and – just enough of everything he needed all week. He was awed. He was the right person, at the right time, with the right skills… surely that must have been the hand of God Himself upon him. *Jesus, You are so good! What a privilege it is to serve You!*

Alan tried not to fret about the monumental tragedy it would be if he were to lose this incredible treasure he had discovered. He trusted Jesus. But still, he took no chances. He reviewed his precautions. Everything he had already photographed was still on camera memory chips, as well as backed up on two hard drives in his laptop. In addition, he had brought two 32G flash memory thumb drives. All his pictures were already loaded on both of them, too. He had made a place behind his big belt buckle to hide one. The other he would give to his son. Tomorrow he would have just enough time and battery – and one last memory chip – to photograph one more scroll and back it up before he had to leave. He already knew which one to open.

Those scrolls! He smiled to himself. Especially the one he had just finished, a complete new Gospel of John the Apostle. He'd read a lot of it as he had downloaded it from his camera to his laptop. It had been in Aramaic (Syrian), so it was easy to read. Much easier than the earlier books from before the Flood, which had been in some ancient dialect of Hebrew that was such a struggle to read.

Tomorrow's task would be pretty easy, too. He had saved it for last because he knew it would be the best – if he had done it earlier he might not have gotten anything else done at all. It was in classical Greek, beautifully written. From his quick scan of the first few pages it was like a third Epistle of Peter, except it was not really a letter – it was all a grand prophecy, titled *Peter's Prophecy of the End Times*. As with John's massive work, it was written just before Peter's death. It was detailed, bold, masterfully penned, as if the Lord Himself had directly dictated it to Peter and granted him supernatural grace to write it.

Alan breathed a quiet chuckle, which sounded loud in the utter stillness of the cave. *Grace indeed! Talk about the leading of the Lord!* Here he was with the discovery of the century, because he had followed the quiet promptings of the Holy Spirit while he worshiped by his bed so long ago.

No. It wasn't only that. With a rush of adrenalin, Alan realized that his entire life had been preparing for this week! Alan had been baptized as an infant and dedicated to the Lord. All his life he had known he belonged to God. He had been immersed in the Scriptures and a Christian worldview. Though he had never gone to seminary, he had graduated from Catholic schools and gotten his two doctorates from Catholic universities. He had excelled in the ancient languages. He also loved ancient history and biblical archaeology. He had followed in the footsteps of his father, an honored professor in a prestigious Catholic university. Now he realized, his whole life was focused on this incredible week of discovery in Israel, behind the big stone sarcophagus of Zadok the high priest.

Even getting here was a miracle. The tomb had been discovered years ago, through a whole series of miracles. A bored goatherd and his cousin were throwing stones at some rocky cliffs near Qumran, and heard the shattering sound of clay pots. That led to the discovery in 1947 of the now famous Dead Sea Scrolls. In 1953, before Alan was born, Professor Gerald Harding and his archaeology team published the seven-foot Copper Scroll from Cave #3 at Qumran. It inventories and describes the hiding places of 67 priceless sacred treasures of ancient Israel, including the incense, the anointing oil, and the Kalal of the ashes of the red heifer, hidden near the tomb of Zadok the high priest. Their location, specified as, "inside the Cave of the Column by the River of the Dome, forty stones deep under the east side of the hill," was discovered in the 1980s by Vendyl Jones and 300 excited helpers. They found the holy anointing oil in 1988, and the sacred incense in 1992, beside Zadok's tomb exactly as the Copper Scroll directed.

But then they 'hit the wall'. The Israeli Minister of Antiquities realized the incredible significance of what they had found. He did his own research on the Copper Scroll and realized that with a little more digging, Vendyl would certainly find the Kalal of ashes beside Zadok's tomb. Islam's Quran asserts that, "He who holds the Kalal of the ashes of the red heifer shall rule the world." This was a political hot potato of the highest magnitude! What if Vendyl, a zealous Texan of the Noahide Cult, actually did get his hands on that Kalal?! The Noahides believe that the Jews' keeping of the Law of Moses is superseded by their adherence to the more-ancient law of Noah. So if Vendyl got that Kalal, the Noahides might get big ideas. Besides, the Copper Scroll claimed that just behind the tomb of Zadok was hidden the old tabernacle from Mount Sinai. *Could the Cave of the Column also hold the lost Ark of the Covenant or the other golden furnishings which the Levites had carried across the desert for forty years?*

So the Minister of Antiquities blocked further digging at the site. Vendyl's dig permit there was not renewed. The Israel Defense Force (IDF) cordoned off the site while Jews did their own secret digging. The site was later opened as Qumran National Park. But Zadok's sarcophagus and anything that might lie beyond it was expressly forbidden. The IDF even installed a laser beam and ground motion detector security system around Zadok's tomb to prevent overzealous archaeologists from violating their edict.

So that was that, for years. Alan, with his love of biblical archaeology, had read about Vendyl and his heartbreaking failure after getting so close. He had dreamed of what lay beyond Zadok's tomb, and had prayed, often, that the Lord would send 'somebody' to finish what Vendyl had started. It had strangely become like a passion within him. So that fateful night several years ago when he had knelt by his bed to pray, he should not have been surprised when his mind clearly heard from Spirit, "Why don't you go see what lies behind Zadok's tomb?"

"Me, Lord? I'm just an armchair archaeologist. I could never get the permit required. The greatest archaeologists of the world are not permitted to dig there. I'm just a Bible scholar, a portly, out-of-shape desk jockey who deciphers ancient languages and unravels historical discrepancies."

Alan paused to listen but heard no answer. The Lord must have accepted his excuses. But then again, "Why don't you go see what lies behind Zadok's tomb?"

Preparing to argue once again, Alan suddenly realized that this was what he had always wanted to do, all his life. God could certainly stop him if He had other plans for him. But if this really was His plan, nothing on earth could stop him. "Yes, Lord!" he said, aloud, startling his sleepy wife, Anna. That was the answer that had changed his life.

So Alan had gone on-line and signed up for a tour of the area. On the tour, he had met James VanderKam, a kindly Professor of Theology from the University of Notre Dame, and the world's foremost expert on the Dead Sea Scrolls. James had given their tour group a talk on the Scrolls. In passing, he had mentioned his curiosity in what lay behind that sarcophagus in the Cave of the Column. After the talk, Alan approached him about investigating it.

"Forget it," James shook his head. "It's not going to happen. I suspect that there is a large sealed chamber right behind the tomb, but the IDF will never let anyone else in. They don't want to start World War III! It'll take a miracle to get into that chamber." So Alan had dropped it.

But he continued to pray and believe for that miracle, for two more years. Then he had signed up his son Alan, Jr. (known as Big Al, since he was bigger than his dad) for a ten-day Israel tour. He had come separately, bringing all his high-tech equipment. Late that Sabbath eve they had met at the Cave of the Column to search for a way into the sealed chamber. It was now or never.

If he got caught, which was likely, so be it. He would simply know he hadn't heard the promptings of the Holy Spirit correctly. That part was God's job.

Alan had brought a tiny handheld low-frequency echo locator. They held it up to the walls listening for the sealed chamber. Yes, they could clearly hear the echo at the wall above Zadok's tomb, but all around the rest of the cave and the branches on each side – nothing. The walls were just too thick for the wimpy echo locator to penetrate. It was hopeless. They briefly considered digging through the wall above the tomb, but knew it was futile. Even if they could avoid the laser beam, the earth motion sensor would give them away. The IDF would be there in an hour. They wouldn't even break through the wall.

They had only a few hours left before Big Al had to get back to his tour group. They knelt together and prayed again. Alan was led back to the end of a long branch to the left. It was a long way from the tomb. He held the lamp high, searching the wall. And there it was! Obviously an airhole high in the wall, which had been carefully sealed up with rock and dirt to look like the rest of the wall.

They laid out a tarp on the ground and dug frantically, taking turns. In two hours, they were pushing the dirt out into the chamber beyond. Alan wiggled through, and Big Al slid his supplies in after him. Then he stuffed in the dirt and rock, packed it as tight as he could, shook out his tarp, and hurried back to join his tour group, which was just gathering for the morning's explore.

Alan relaxed and chuckled again at his thoughts. Their timing had sure been nip and tuck. *God is never late, but He's also rarely early*. Alan took a deep breath to force the tension from his shoulders. He really needed to get some sleep. Big Al was coming back to let him out at 2 AM on the Sabbath. He had better be done.

In what seemed like only seconds, Alan was stretching the kinks out of his back. Sleeping in this thin old bag on the hard ground was great. After about 4 or 5 hours his aching body would wake him up and he could get back to work. He glanced at his watch. The lighted dial said nearly 8 PM. He had six hours. Perfect. He put his LED lamp on low beam to save energy. Then he ate half of his remaining food for breakfast and rolled up his sleeping bag.

Finally he would get to read that third Epistle of Peter. He switched the lamp to its brightest and slid back the cover over the stone case where the scrolls were stored. He paused briefly, marveling at the priceless treasure within.

It was so strange how the scrolls in this case were still slightly moist and flexible. All the other Dead Sea Scrolls had hardened, to become brittle and crumbly in the dry desert air. But this one case – it must have a slight source of moisture from the ground under the chamber, to keep the humidity just right to preserve the ancient parchments. One more miracle, Alan decided, just for him.

He carefully removed the scroll, closed the cover, and began his painstaking photography, one column at a time. It was long. It took over three hours. Alan didn't stop to read it. He'd read it as he downloaded it into the computer and copied it to his thumb drives. When he finished the photography, he ate the last of his raisins and nuts and gathered up all his trash. He would leave no trace of his presence. He put the precious scroll back into the case and replaced the cover with meticulous precision. Someday others would find everything exactly as he had found it.

Now his last and most enjoyable task before Big Al came. He fired up his laptop and connected his camera cord to its USB port. Nuts. It was flashing low battery again. *Hadn't he just put in a fresh one?* He shut it down. It must not fail while downloading. He rummaged in his satchel for another battery. Five minutes later, Alan sat on his rolled up sleeping bag in a panic. There were no more fresh batteries. Had he come all this way to lose the last and best of the scrolls? "Help me, God!" he prayed.

"Peace. It's in your camera. Is that not enough?"

"But Lord! What if I lose the memory chip? I have no backups at all! What if…"

"Peace. It's in your camera. Is that not enough?"

Alan took a deep breath. Why is it that the Lord always seemed to have to tell him twice? You'd think after all these miracles he would learn to just trust and obey. "Okay, Lord. That is enough."

So he turned his laptop back on and put everything away. All his precious pictures from the previous week he placed in secure, password-protected, locked folders. Then he hid everything, so anyone casually turning on his computer would not even know he had secret folders. The battery died as he was tidying up his desktop, but that was okay. He was through, with two hours left to explore.

He'd been concentrating too fiercely. He got up and stretched. It was good to relax. This document case had been the first thing that he'd found when he entered the chamber. Knowing it was why he had come, he had never even explored the rest of the huge, black cave. Now was his chance. He switched his LED lamp back on high and began a clockwise tour along the wall.

Oh my God! There were other stone cases lining the back wall. At least a dozen, each one holding maybe fifty to eighty scrolls. But why were these separate, and poorer quality, from the one Alan had spent the week examining? He opened a few and peeked inside.

Ahh, these were not in such good shape as the ones he had photographed. Alan knew that the ancient Judeans never discarded anything having the name of God, the 'ineffable name'. These must be the scrolls of Scriptures that had been used by the priests until they became tattered, and then retired here so they wouldn't be destroyed.

That meant… The ones he had seen first must have been originals. Never used, except for a few copies the scribes had made from them.

Continuing around the wall, Alan found shelves carved into the wall, containing other treasures from the temple and the old tabernacle. On one of the shelves he saw the Kalal of the ashes of the red heifer. Next, he found the wall facing Zadok's tomb. He could see where the Israeli's had dug through the wall. He went back to examine the Kalal. *It had been moved. It must have been found by the Israelis! They deliberately left it behind when they resealed the wall.*

Alan picked it up. The temptation was strong. *What if the old legends were true? Could he rule the world with this?* He put it back down. No. He didn't want to rule the world. Jesus was coming back soon to rule the world. Alan was quite happy to simply serve Him. He continued around the wall to his starting point. There was no tabernacle of Moses. The Copper Scroll must have been mistaken.

Alan walked away from the wall and held his lamp high for one last scan of the huge cavern. He saw a thick pillar blocking his view of the rear scroll cases. He went over to investigate. It was a column in the center of the cavern. No wonder they called this the Cave of the Column. He had gone all around the outside wall without seeing it.

So now he walked around this inner wall, which so far, was featureless. But when he got to the back side, Alan was in for a shock. Bodies! They were dehydrated, shriveled, and mummified by the hot dry desert air. He counted eight of them. Obviously a few were IDF soldiers. Others looked like they had been priests. Certainly they had been here ever since 1992 after the IDF took control of the site. They were facing a hole in the wall of that inner column, which they had probably dug themselves. Alan held his lamp high to peek over the bodies into the hole.

He saw a glint of gold! *Could it be golden vestments or furnishings from the tabernacle made at Mount Sinai? Or the lost Ark of the Covenant?* Again, the temptation was strong. The urge to step over the bodies for a closer look! The thrill of discovery! *He still had some free memory in his camera. He must document this monumental find!*

No. He averted his eyes and completed his tour around the central island. He saw nothing else of interest. Alan knew he was not holy enough to stare into the face of God. If the IDF and the priests had died peeking in, he would, too. God would anoint someone for that task someday. Right now, he only had to finish what God had led him to do. He was ready when Big Al came to get him at 2 AM.

"Why couldn't I get him to look inside?" Satan whined to Logos about his failure. "How could anyone resist one little peek? One of the greatest treasures in history; surely he knows that. I see how he resisted the Kalal – he doesn't believe that old legend anyway. But not stopping at the tabernacle to search for the Ark! You must be cheating!"

"I do not cheat, Satan!" Logos was firm. "Alan has spent all his life developing that reverential fear of God. That is why I chose him. He doesn't always hear what I'm saying – I usually have to repeat things – but when he hears and confirms it, he does obey. Look at all the right choices he has made. Besides, those dead bodies were a pretty big clue. If you really want to tempt My chosen ones, you'll just have to clean up your act. And even according to your crude sense of justice, should I not be permitted chosen ones whom you cannot touch? I have allowed you chosen ones whom I did not touch. Adolph Hitler, for example. I kept My hands off, and you did with him as you pleased."

Satan could not deny it. He paused to chortle with glee at the memory of the bloodshed through his chosen one. *Oh for the opportunity to do that again! He had never had so much fun in his life as those years when he had gotten to squash the Bride like overripe grapes.* Logos smiled sadly. "You want to do it again." It was not a question. "You've read the prophecies – Daniel, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Zechariah, Joel, Malachi, John's Revelation, Peter's prophecy…"

"Of course. Studied them at length. That doesn't mean I believe them. Especially those last two."

"It is those prophecies which give you power to do your pleasure. You'd better believe them. Father says now begins the time for the final confrontation in the Great Controversy, the end of the age of sin, and the last battle – the seventieth week of Daniel. Even knowing how it all ends, are you willing to do your part, or shall I look for another adversary?"

Satan's pride was offended at the very suggestion of another adversary. "I'll do my part, all right, and more. You'll see. But it won't end the way You think. As long as You play fair and keep Your hands off my chosen ones!"

"It's a deal. Thank you. You have My permission to harm the earth, the entire earth, including My Bride, except for My covered chosen ones."

"Except this, except that. Your angels cover the entire Bride. I'm no fool! Give me permission to harm the Bride then take it away in the fine print!"

"At the proper time I will remove the covering of Michael and his angels. The Bride's only covering will then be according to the prayers of the saints, their faithfulness to follow My Spirit, and the word of My two prophets. I thought you said you'd read all those prophecies. It's all been right there for you to study for two thousand years, and I'm not about to change it now. So, as I allowed with Hitler, I now grant you free reign with My Bride."

"So I really will get to do another holocaust?"

Logos cringed and shuddered at Satan's obvious glee, and a tear trickled down His cheek. "Yes, Satan. Another holocaust. You now have My permission. Do your worst. Just as you did with Hitler."

"Just as with Hitler? What does that mean? You just gave me permission to harm the whole earth, but You never went that far before! Are You limiting me to only what I did with Hitler, or contradicting Yourself – taking it back?"

"I said what I said. I do not contradict Myself, nor do I take it back. You sort it out." Satan left in a huff. *Who cares what he has permission for, anyway? He is the adversary!*

Alan gave the thumb drive to Big Al. On a whim, he also gave him all his precious camera memory chips, including the one with no backup. In return he took one of Big Al's chips and put it in his own camera. It was good that he did. Leaving Israel for his native Seattle, he was searched at the airport. They found nothing of interest. His laptop only ran for a minute or so before dying of low battery again. His camera had only typical tourist stuff, and they missed that second thumb drive he had hidden under his belt buckle.

Satan was furious. He well knew the significance of these ancient scrolls to his Enemy's plan, and he threw everything he had against Alan and his son on their way home. He had his servants everywhere, on every plane, in security, at customs, in waiting areas, restrooms, their taxi home – every one eager to do his bidding. But it was just like when he had tried to destroy all Heber's descendants. His slaves somehow seemed confused or blocked. Alan and his son got home safely, and immediately got to work organizing and documenting their precious photos.

Satan considered complaining to Logos again, but he is not as stupid as he appeared in his little tirade. Logos had warned him about 'chosen ones' that he could not touch, and had praised Alan for his 'reverential fear of God'. That he couldn't deny.

So instead of Logos, he complained to me as I reviewed Alan's notes to write my story as you see it above. "Cain, it's just not fair! Here you are, with total access to him and all he has, and I am blocked, shut out. How does Logos expect me to do my work? You're a sinner – a murderer! And Alan is a Roman Catholic, for heaven's sake! You know how much they persecuted Logos' people! And Alan still believes most of that religious nonsense I snuck into their creeds and liturgy. He oughta have holes as big as a barn door in his covering! Yet here you are, while I…"

"Satan!" I interrupted. "Your whining about it won't change it. You can rage all you want, but the fact is that I am here by direct commission. Spirit sent me. That's why I have total access. And it doesn't matter what Alan believes – he could believe the moon is green cheese and he'd still be covered as long as he is submitted to Spirit and doing YHWH's will. Logos will correct his beliefs whenever…"

Satan was giving me this aggrieved 'I've got my rights' look. "I know, Satan. You are the adversary. So you think you're exempt from YHWH's plan. But you're wrong. The Father's perfect will, will be done. Now if you'll excuse me, I have an important appointment with Steve Saxon."

CHAPTER 36 – STEVE SAXON & MIKE MASON

I'm right on time. Time travel does have advantages. Steve, just turned eighteen, is bewildered and scared. His family had been wealthy, owning big properties in New York and Newark, New Jersey. But one by one his family members have all died. As the last survivor, Steve inherited all that wealth. Now he doesn't feel so good himself. He needs to get to the hospital. But he's afraid. That's where his parents died. That's where his brother Sam recently died, leaving his half of the family estate to Steve. Both his brother and his sister had died of some antibiotic-resistant 'superbug' which doctors had found untreatable. Steve is wondering if maybe that bug had been picked up at the very hospital they went to be helped! He doesn't know where to turn. Sam had been perfectly healthy until he spent so much time at the hospital with their dying dad.

So instead of checking himself into the hospital, Steve decides to try a church. Maybe a preacher can help him sort out what to do.

The first one he picks, a big, beautiful cathedral in the center of the city, utterly depresses him. It's mournful and creepy! There are flickering candles in front of a gory, bloody statue of some dude nailed to a cross, a bunch of sad, solemn ceremonies and alien religious rituals, the people all bowing and crossing themselves, and a fierce-looking priest in lavish robes high up in a special throne and totally unapproachable, at least by the likes of him. Steve can hardly wait to hustle his buns out of there.

So the next week, he tries a different church. It is smaller and not nearly so lavish, but almost nobody shows up for the service. "Good," Steve thinks. "Maybe I'll get to talk to the preacher afterwards."

But when he gets to the sermon, Steve finds out why the sanctuary is nearly empty. The preacher spends an hour rehearsing America's sins, many of which Steve recognizes in his own life. He then proceeds to scare Steve spitless by calling down God's fiery judgment and damning him and everyone he knows to hell for all eternity. He describes hell so vividly, it seems to Steve like he's personally been there, quite recently. Steve keeps expecting the preacher to say that you might not have to go to hell if you join his church, but I guess he forgot that part. It's no wonder not many come here. Again, Steve can hardly wait to get out. The preacher spots him and attempts to collar him before he escapes, but Steve is young and fast.

Steve almost gives up. He's not looking for religion. He just wants to find someone to give him some counsel. He doesn't know what to do about the growing ache in his gut. So he screws up his courage to try one more church.

He finds one, out near the edge of the metropolis, that claims in small letters to be 'Southern Baptist'. He's not sure what it's doing so far up north, but he hopes maybe they'll be different since they're from out of town.

There are lots of people in this one. In fact, the modest sanctuary is full. But Steve is startled when he walks in to see that nearly half of them are Black. He wasn't expecting that. He thought Blacks always had their own church, especially in a church from the south! Steve hates Blacks. They're always making babies out of wedlock, living on welfare, and whining about how badly their distant slave ancestors were treated. Steve's dad had said that half his income went to the government just to pay all the lazy Blacks to stay home, watch TV, and make more babies. Steve starts to turn around and walk out.

But then he spots something so startling, he freezes in place, his mouth hanging open in shock. This big Black momma with a passel of pickaninnies in tow smiles and waves at a White family! The White mother breaks into a squeal of delight and runs, not walks, over to give that Black momma an enthusiastic hug! And her children are right behind her, greeting those snot-nosed rug rats with equal enthusiasm! As Steve stands there gaping, it gets even stranger. The big Black momma appears to have a husband. Steve didn't expect that. Black mommas never have husbands, since the government pays 'em not to. And the White lady's husband is greeting the Black husband with a hug and backslapping. Steve rubs his eyes. This cannot be happening! He looks around. He sees scads of other Blacks mingling with Whites. They're all smiling, laughing, and greeting each other with obvious love and respect. "God damn!" Steve says, a little too loudly.

Some heads turn. "Oops!" Steve recognizes his faux pas and backs toward the entrance. "Sorry! I forgot, this is a church!" He grins like the cat caught stalking the canary, and turns to run.

"Wait! You don't need to go!" Steve hears from behind him. "This is a church where 'God damn' is the proper thing to say sometimes." Steve turns around again. He sees this friendly looking fellow in an open collar white shirt. He's holding out a hand, and has a welcoming smile on his face. Steve is torn. The only 'God damns' he's ever heard in church before were aimed squarely at him!

"I'm Mike Mason. I can see you're new here. I'm really curious as to what it is you feel God ought to damn here. Even the best of churches sometimes needs reproof. Or was that just your expression of surprise at our church? Care to talk about it?"

"I, well… uh… it was just surprise. I've never seen a church before where Blacks and Whites like each… er… meet together." Steve doesn't return the handshake or the smile, so Mike drops his outstretched arm.

"Ah, that's it!" Mike laughs. "I thought it might be something like that. Yes, we're pretty unusual. Do the Blacks here bother you?"

"Well, yeah… duh! They're a lower race – not as evolved, you know. Why do you let 'em come?"

"That's a great question. One of the best questions I've had all month. I'd love to answer you. But the answer is not easy. It's going to take some time. Do you mind if we do it in my office after the worship service? I'll treat for lunch."

"Your office?"

"Yeah. It's right behind the piano." He points. "And my family lives in a manse behind the church, so it will be no problem for my wife to bring over some sandwiches for us while we talk."

"You've gotta be kidding! You're the preacher?!"

Steve is staring at his open collar shirt, so Mike glances down, too. "Yeah, we're not very formal here. Sometimes I do wear a tie, but it's a pretty warm day. Would you feel better about me if I wore a tie?"

"Hell… er… Heck no. I've just never seen a preacher without a tie or a backwards collar or somesuch."

Mike laughs heartily at that. "In our church we believe the beauty comes from the inside, not what people are wearing. You see…" He waves his arm around the church. "They love each other, they take care of each other, help each other. That's the real beauty. Beauty of the soul. We're a big happy family. Nobody will come down on you here if you aren't wearing a tie. Do you have a family?"

Mike sees a look of deep sadness descend over Steve. Sam's death was too recent. He can't talk about it. He just shakes his head.

"Well, you've got a family now! I've got to go up. We always try to be punctual around here, and everyone's waiting for me to start the service. You can go in and sit with any of the families, or stay here and watch from the foyer, or even wait outside if you wish. But if you want me to answer your questions, any questions, I'll be up there after the service is over." And with that, Mike hurries up to the front to welcome everyone to the worship service.

Steve is glad for the options. He doesn't want to leave. That ache in his gut is getting unbearable and this is the first preacher he's seen who seems to care enough to talk to him. But he certainly can't demean himself by going in to sit with a bunch of Blacks. The foyer seems like a good compromise. There's a chair beside the door, facing away from the sanctuary so he doesn't have to see the Blacks. Steve sits in it, staring outside and waiting for the service to be over. He actually enjoys the music. He usually listens to hard rock. A few years ago he swore his hatred for anything without a bone-crushing beat. But nowadays that bone-crushing beat just seems to churn the ache in his gut. So he hasn't listened to much music since his mother died. But this music! It's the very kind of music he has always hated! Sickeningly sweet and syrupy, with hardly any cool jarring or clashing chords. But still, it's cheery and exuberant, and the soft, gentle beat somehow seems to soothe his stomach and relax his troubled mind.

Then Mike gets to preaching. Steve knows it's Mike without looking, but boy is he different from when he chatted with him in the foyer. His sermon seems like a totally different language! Poor Steve doesn't understand a word of it. But at least it isn't a 'damn everyone to hell unless you join our church' kind of sermon, so he just tunes it out and waits for the service to end. Steve is almost asleep when he hears something he understands.

"Well saints, it seems we've finished a little early. We've got ten or fifteen minutes for some input from you all. Who's got something to share? What's God been doing in your life recently? Or tell us how you got saved, or how God is leading you."

Ha. Nobody's going to fall for that! Steve thinks. But before he even finishes thinking it, someone has already jumped up to give a testimony. Steve whirls around to peek in through the glass, his mouth open. For almost the next half hour, one after another in the congregation pops up and shares an encouragement, a praise for something God has done, a request for prayer, or even a thanks for something someone else in the congregation did for them. It is incredible. These people are like a happy family. But what really boggles Steve's mind is, half of 'em are Black! And everyone claps for the Blacks just as heartily as they do for the Whites!

Then Steve sees that big Black momma stand up. Her husband jumps right up beside her and puts his arm around her as she talks. "We all are from the deep South," she says, in a rich Southern drawl that could not possibly be faked. "Sam, my husband, graduated from Tuskegee University with a double degree in applied physics and horticulture. But everywhere we went we were still hated and scorned. He couldn't get a job in his field. So he took janitorial jobs and worked nights, and I worked days, just to feed our family. Then one evening as we were having our family devotions, God spoke to us. He said, 'Shake the dust off your feet against them, and flee to the next city.' We wound up here. From the first day y'all made us feel welcome. Especially Sally and her family here have made us feel right at home! And now my husband has a good job in his field, and just last week we bought our first real house! God is so good! For the first time in our lives, we feel loved, really loved, by Him, by Sally and her family, and by y'all, too. Thank you! And God bless y'all."

Everyone claps and cheers. *It's disgusting. They are so uppity! Like they think they're White!* Steve is so stunned that he doesn't hear any more. *Bought their own house? Who would ever let Blacks buy their own house? They're always supposed to live in government subsidized rentals.*

After the service Steve heads for that front office. Big mistake. The people streaming out all smile at him, greet him, welcome him, try to shake his hand. *Hell, even those Blacks want to shake his hand! Yuk. It gives him the willies. It's like running the gauntlet!*

He finally makes it to the front. The preacher is talking to some others, but he waves Steve into his office. "Make yourself at home. I'll be right there."

So Steve escapes behind the side door marked 'Pastor' and finds a nice comfy chair to wait. The office is bigger than he expected. It has an imposing desk and tons of books in shelves all around. There are nice flowers by the window and some easy chairs around a friendly oval rug in the center. *Good. Looks like he does a lot of counseling.*

"Hi there! Welcome! I'm glad you came! Did you hear any of my sermon? How did you like it?" Mike comes in with a jovial warmth that brightens the room even more.

"Uh… Yeah, I heard it. It was good. Real good."

"Oh, come on," Mike laughs. "You can tell the truth around here. I won't be offended one bit if you tell me what you really think. I wasn't born yesterday, you know."

"Well, actually, uh… I… I didn't understand it."

"Good. Good. Now you're talking truth. That's where every conversation ought to start. I suspected you couldn't understand it, because I was preaching words of Spirit, words of Life, and your spirit has not yet come alive. The Scripture affirms that my words will be foolishness to you, because they are spiritually discerned. But we can easily fix that. So let's start at the beginning. Do you want to give me your name, or shall I invent one for you?"

"Yeah. I'm Steve. Steve Saxon."

Mike thrusts out his hand again. "Good to meet you, Steve! I'm Pastor Mike Mason. But please just call me Mike. Welcome! I hope we can become friends." This time Steve accepts the handshake. "My wife knows you're here. She'll bring some sandwiches in a bit. Is this a good time to answer your first question?" Steve just nods.

"As I go, you can ask all the other questions you like. I've got all afternoon. You wanted to know why we let Blacks in here? Well, anyone is welcome, but all the Blacks you saw here today are Christians, members of the family of God, just like the rest of us here, and just like you will be, I hope, before you leave today. In Christ there is no spiritual difference between Black or White, slave or free, rich or poor, man or woman – we're all one in Christ. He saved us from all our petty bickering and hating one another. From our strife, prejudices, and charades…"

Steve is just sitting there with a blank look on his face. Mike realizes he's getting preachy again. He's already lost him. He'd better start simpler. "Besides, many of the finest, most faithful people in our church are Blacks. Did you hear that testimony by Suzy Salizar? What did you think?"

"Yeah. I couldn't believe it. I mean, I know how her husband got his college degree, by affirmative action laws. But to own their own house? That's got to be really rare. Blacks are usually on welfare. Who gave it to him?"

Mike laughs again. He seems to be always laughing at something. Steve decides he likes that. He can use some cheering up. He's starting to relax.

"That's very perceptive, Steve. You're obviously well educated. Many Blacks are indeed on welfare. And many of the benefits they get are due to the affirmative action laws. They've bought the lie that 'the world owes them a living'. That lie was fed them by politicians to buy their votes. And by some of their own people who are lazy and dishonest and who are making a lot of money propagating that lie. But it's not true. We do have a few Blacks in broken homes and failed marriages that still use welfare – Whites, too. But all our two-parent families have jobs and own their own homes. Sam and Suzy Salizar are pretty new here, and they were the only family that didn't. Sam may be quiet, but he's brilliant. He didn't get through the university on affirmative action laws! All the Blacks in this church work hard, take care of their families, and contribute to the church. And if anybody has special needs, the Blacks help out just as much as the Whites help out the Blacks."

Leaning back in his chair, Steve allows himself a smile and a soft chuckle, his first in quite a while. "Pastor Mike, I'm afraid that does not compute. Everything you just said sounds like a fairy tale. You've obviously got your own special little slice of heaven here. It sure isn't like that anywhere else in the world!"

Mike shares his laughter. "I know it seems that way, but our church is affiliated with thousands of other Southern Baptist churches around the world. Blacks are welcome in any of them. Even in the deep South where they haven't completely gotten over the racial prejudice of the past yet. You know, you were lied to in school. Did they really tell you Blacks are a lower race, not as evolved as Whites?"

"No… They never came right out and said it. But it's pretty obvious! They've been isolated in Africa for over a million years and hardly evolved at all, while look at us! Besides, if they were as evolved as us, they wouldn't need all those affirmative action laws and special protections."

"Well, I guess that's the obvious conclusion to reach from what you've been taught. But like I said, you were lied to. That whole 'evolution' nonsense… actually, the races all originated from the same father, Noah, after the Flood, about 5500 years ago. Everyone was very smart back then – smarter than we are today. They created an incredible civilization. But they built the tower of Babel in rebellion against God's command to spread out and repopulate the earth. So to separate the families, God let their language get confused. The various racial groups are the result. Mankind has been 'devolving' ever since. People are not as smart now, or as strong or long-lived, as before the Flood. Noah had a perfect and complete gene set. Any 'racial' characteristic could have come directly from him. After the Flood, cosmic radiation began to damage our genes. That's why racial differences are now so prominent."

Mike's wife Mary brings in the sandwiches – a welcome interruption giving Steve time to think. After munching a few minutes, he asks. "How did Noah get to be so perfect? How could he possibly be smarter than us?"

"God made him that way! When God created the world about 10,000 years ago, everything was perfect. A high vapor barrier surrounded the earth, like a big greenhouse, making it evenly warm all over the earth and blocking all harmful cosmic radiation. People lived nearly a thousand years. You could marry your sister and it would never be a problem because the gene pool was perfect. It gave almost infinite variety. There were no faulty genes. It's the faulty genes that can cause inbreeding problems if siblings marry today, as Darwin found out after he married his cousin – his own children suffered serious inbreeding defects."

"But do you have any proof? We've never been told any of this! I was told that the greenhouse effect was dangerous and could flood the earth!"

"You've been lied to, big time. Every historical record from ancient times tells of this perfect world, and of the longevity of its people – some even say tens of thousands of years – and of the great Flood, and the eight people who were saved by building an ark or a big boat. It is consistent all over the world. Except your leaders don't want you to believe that, so they've rewritten the history to take it out. They talk about evolving by 'good' mutations, but there are no good mutations. At best, a mutation isn't harmful, but it's silly to think you can improve the gene pool by damage to the genes! Hitler believed that evolution lie – that's why he tried to 'cleanse' the world of Jews and others who didn't fit his pure Aryan ideals."

Steve knows about genes and mutations. But he's never heard it told like this before. Mike really has his interest. They talk all afternoon. Steve is invited to eat dinner with the family so they can continue their talk. He gratefully accepts. As they walk back to the manse, he confides, "You know, Pastor Mike, I only came to get some advice about my stomachache. I didn't expect you to spend your entire day with me. Are you sure you have time?"

"Steve, you didn't tell me about your stomachache. I'm sorry. I'd like to help you. As for having the time, this is my job, my whole life purpose, to help people like you. If I can answer your questions and help you find the truth, I will consider my time well-spent if it takes all year. That's why I took this job. I love helping people." He opens the door for Steve, and introduces him to the rest of his family.

"Do you have a family, Steve?" Mary asks right off.

This time Steve takes a slow breath and answers. "My parents both died of cancer, two years apart. My sister died shortly after Mom, of some untreatable 'superbug'. I think she caught it at the hospital visiting Mom. Then my older brother, Sam… he died just last fall. I think he caught the bug visiting Dad. The doctors won't admit it though."

Mike nods sympathetically. "We're sorry, Steve. That must be tough. I'll bet that stomachache started about the same time your brother died. And I think I know why."

Steve looks at him sharply. "Yeah, it did. Do you think I caught something there too? I was afraid of that, but I don't want to go see a doctor about it. With that untreatable bug going around, I don't even want to go near a hospital!"

"I don't know, Steve. I'm no doctor. But I have a feeling that you don't have any bug at all. If you did, God wouldn't have sent you here. I think you've got a broken heart."

Mary gets up and comes around the table to give Steve a motherly hug. "I'm sorry about your brother Sam, and all your family. If there's anything we can do…"

"Thanks. No. If that's all it is, I'm relieved. I just didn't want to go to the hospital and get whatever Sam got."

"I didn't say that's all it is." Mike pauses. He has Steve's attention. "Everyone needs a family, Steve. God made the human heart to ache and long for a family. But there is more than one way to fill that need – more than one kind of family. Do you have friends? Good ones, to help see you through, who sympathize and understand your loss?"

Steve does not want to tell this family about his 'friends'. He does not want to tell how they tried to get him drunk, or seduce him, or pulled some other scam to get his money. He doesn't want anybody to know he has so much money! He's suspicious of the eager 'friendship' of anyone who knows he's rich. "Uh, no. I have no friends like that."

"May we be your family? At least until you recover?"

Steve is awed. That response is so quick, so sincere, and these people don't know he has a dime to his name! He looks back and forth between Mike and Mary. They're in agreement. He looks around the table. Their kids are all younger but they look like loads of fun. "You mean it? You'd really do that? You don't even know me!"

"Well, Steve, as I said, there are different kinds of family and it goes both ways. We're willing to accept you into our family if you are willing to join our family. But you've got to know right up front that our family is much bigger than the ones you see here."

Steve nods and smiles. "Yeah. The family of God. Your church family. You said you hoped I'd join before I left today. I wondered when you'd get back to that."

Mike beams. "You're sharp! You caught it right away! But it's even bigger than my church family. The family of God is everyone all over the world who've been restored to a right relationship, a love relationship, with our Creator."

Steve just sits there. Mike lets him think it over.

Finally, "I have to admit, I don't know what that is. But it sounds like it's a whole lot more than just joining your church and learning to like your Blacks."

Mike laughs uproariously, startling Steve. Then he puts down his fork and turns to face him. "You and Blacks have had some tough times between you I think. It's all good. Forget it. I promise you, I will never, ever, try to pressure you to like our Blacks. That's not my job. My job is to teach you how you can love your Creator, whom we call Jesus Christ, the Messiah. Once you fall in love with Him, you won't have any trouble loving His precious saints – of any color, in our church or any church. Deal? Do you want to join God's family? I know that Jesus Christ is really the only one who can heal that ache in your heart."

Steve looks at Mike, then at Mary, then down at his half-eaten dinner. Mike lets it rest. He doesn't want to be pushy. Mary goes back to eating. So Mike takes another bite, too. "Why did you laugh?" Steve asks, a tad sharply.

"I'm sorry. I shouldn't have, not about something so serious. I'd better not say. At least not 'til later."

"It's about my learning to like your Blacks, isn't it!"

"Well, uh… not exactly…"

"I want to know. I'm getting the feeling that this is the most important decision that I've ever made in my life, and I want to know… well, everything."

Mike swallows, twice, then takes a deep breath. "Okay. You've been up front with me. I'll tell you the truth. But please don't take offense if you don't understand it. I laughed at the thought that, well, God has a great sense of humor. He loves playing jokes on us – good jokes. He knows how sad you are at the loss of your brother Sam. Once you join His family, I'll bet He'll give you another brother named Sam. And I'll bet I know who it'll be!"

"God no! Not Sam Salizar!" Poor Steve is aghast.

"I swore I wouldn't push you to like Blacks! But if God does it – if He makes Sam and Suzy to be your closest brother and sister here – wouldn't that be a good joke? Only God could actually pull that off, you've got to admit. Only a very big and very powerful God!"

Steve nods. He hadn't thought about it like that. "You're right. It will take a pretty powerful God to get me to ever have a… a Black b-brother." It's even hard for him to push the words out. But in this house, with angels all around and Satan's demons not permitted on the premises by order of Pastor Mike's prayers, God's grace is abundantly available. Steve bows his head and closes his eyes for a moment, then, looks again at his half-eaten dinner.

"Go ahead, we can finish eating first. We've got all night." Mike reads his thoughts. Steve nods.

Pastor Mike persists gently, until about midnight Steve understands the good news of forgiveness and salvation from sin. He receives it gratefully. Thus Steve is born anew into the family of God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. That dull ache in his gut is finally healed.

CHAPTER 37 – JOE & CHRIS JOHNSON

I zip over to Spokane, Washington, where Joe has just shut down his computer and gone to bed. His research is done; his decision is made. Now it's only a matter of tying up the loose ends so he can get it over with. It's late. Chris is sleeping peacefully. He gazes briefly at her face, lovely and serene in the moonlight. She has been like an angel to him through it all. That will be his one regret. He knows this will hurt her, terribly. He loves his wife and family, and doesn't want to hurt them. But he's already hurt them way too much. He is determined to put an end to it, once and for all. With him gone they can get on with their lives.

Joe climbs in on his side of the bed and tries to relax. Spirit has me record his troubled thoughts. *He has a week to get his papers and finances in order to make sure his family will be taken care of. A week before he must appear in court for a trial he knows he cannot win. A trial accusing him of hate crimes against a homosexual couple who had been attending his church, just because he preached the clear words of Scripture. He knows now that it had been a trap. Those sodomites had never wanted to hear the truth. They had wanted to record all his teaching on the matter so they could destroy him, and destroy his church. His is not the first church they've destroyed, nor will it be the last.*

But if he 'admits his guilt' and ends the hate crimes trial by committing suicide, maybe his church can recover. Maybe the sodomites will be satisfied at killing him, and move on to other churches. Then maybe his family and his church will be spared further persecution. Everything they have is against him, personally, not against his family or his church.

The sodomites had been so smooth, so sly. Pretending to want deliverance indeed! He had been totally snookered. He had bent over backwards to love them. Joe had opened up his home, invited them to meals, spent many hours with them counseling, encouraging, teaching them the Scriptures – and all the time they were recording it until they were able to piece together an airtight case against him. They had picked a judge who was originally from Seattle, where he had become an advocate of homosexual marriage. Joe knows he doesn't stand a chance at the trial. The judge hates preachers like him, who teach deliverance rather than affirmation of their perverted, dangerous lifestyle. They'll throw the book at him. All because he tried to help.

Ever since America had turned socialist, his beloved nation has gone insane. It seems only a decade ago when America had free speech, freedom of conscience, freedom to worship God as he chose, freedom for preachers to speak their mind on issues of morality, if not on issues of politics. But no more. Joe knows that change began with a shirttail relative of his, Lyndon B. Johnson. It had started innocently enough. Back in 1954 when Johnson was still a senator, he had sponsored an amendment to the US Tax Code to prevent non-profit organizations from using their tax-exempt status to give them an unfair advantage in political campaigns.

The IRS took this to mean they could yank the tax-exempt status of any church even speaking out on political issues. Surprisingly, most churches accepted that unconstitutional limitation. Fearful of losing their tax exemption, they foolishly got out of politics entirely, leaving the government free of moral accountability. The result was predictable – the wicked took over. Now evil is encouraged and good is outlawed. Almost overnight, it seems, the American government has become an enemy of the people, an enemy of justice and freedom and truth, an enemy of the church and of those who still believe in the old-fashioned morality of the Scriptures. Now anyone who speaks out against the godless humanistic socialistic amoralistic 'non-judgmental' society that our country has become, anyone who still believes in a world created by God rather than all that evolutionary nonsense preached so passionately in government schools, is judged as an intolerant hater, a fundamentalist bigot.

God knows he tried. He stood up for the unborn when laws were passed creating a 'right' for a young mother to kill her babies. He was handcuffed and thrown in prison for standing within a hundred feet of an abortionist's clinic with a sign – just holding a sign! – urging mothers to at least consider other alternatives. He never threatened violence. He just wanted to help. Like with these sodomites.

Yes, the days are past when a preacher can just speak the truth in love. Joe doesn't want to live anymore in a nation where hate, bigotry, violence, intolerance, and immorality are redefined to apply only to Christians who believe the Bible, while people like these sodomites can hate, lie, steal, cheat, twist his words however they like, and they're just defending their 'God-given right' to force everyone to accept and affirm their moral perversions.

The week goes by fast. Too fast. Joe puts his paperwork to bed and ties up the loose ends. He has so much more he wants to tell his family, so much more to teach them! But he doesn't dare. They mustn't know what he is doing or they'll surely stop him. And he cannot wait until his trial Monday morning. He simply can't face those sneering sodomites who have so successfully snookered him.

So Sunday night after the evening service, Joe gives Chris one last passionate kiss, tells her he'll be working late and not to wait up for him, and retires to his office. There he writes his suicide note and puts it with his will and insurance papers. "I'm sorry, God. I have failed You. Please forgive me. Take care of Chris, and our kids and grandkids, and my church. They don't deserve this! I plead the blood of Jesus Christ over us all…" Joe's prayer goes on and on, in the agony of his soul. Yes, Joe has been foolish and presumptuous, but his repentance is sure genuine! I chuckle, knowing God loves to hear humble prayers like that, and glad to be here to witness this historic night.

Joe half expects God to say something to him, to tell him no, to offer him some way out. He waits in silence for a bit. But nothing. The sun has set. The time for tears is past.

On his way to the bridge, Joe realizes he still has some money in his wallet. No sense wasting it when he jumps. Good. Joe sees a filthy beggar lounging behind the bus stop. He gives him all his money and heads for the ramp to the Monroe Street Bridge. The beggar jumps up and begins to follow. "No sense following me, buddy. Here, take my watch, too. There now, I've given you everything I have."

"I'm grateful. I have a gift for you in return."

"Thanks, buddy, but no thanks. I don't need anything that you could give me. Not anymore."

"What I give, you need."

Joe is trying not to be rude, but he's getting exasperated. "Lookit, buddy. In a couple minutes I'll be dead. Then whatever you gave me would be wasted!"

"Life is never wasted. I give you Life instead of death. And I offer you a commission in my army."

Joe looks closely at the dirty beggar. He wants to believe, but there's just no way. "Oh, I get it. You're angling for a dinner out of this, too. Well I…"

"I accept your generous offer. Come with me back to your house. We can plan there."

Again Joe starts to argue. He doesn't remember making any 'generous offer'. But the bold beggar is already striding off down the street, as if he were in command. And as if he knows the way. "Hey! Wait a minute, buddy! Where you going so fast! I didn't…"

"I'm going to your house for dinner, Joseph. Now step lively there. Soldiers in my army don't dawdle."

Thoughts flit through Joe's mind in rapid succession. *This poor beggar really thinks he has an army? He must be insane. Should I humor him? He might be dangerous. Who does he think he is, ordering me around like this! How can he lead me to my house? He couldn't possibly know the way. Could he? Maybe I should follow, just to make sure he doesn't! He might be a danger to my family! Hey! He called me Joseph! I hate that name. It reminds me of my persecuted Israeli ancestors. But wait. How could he know my name, anyway? I didn't give him anything but the money out of my wallet, did I?* Joe checks his wallet. His driver's license and ID cards are still there. He almost has to run to keep up. *How did a poor beggar get all this energy, anyway? If he's this strong, why is he a beggar?*

Joe lags behind. It's well over a mile to his house and he's not going to give the beggar any clues. Besides, he hasn't walked this fast in years! But the beggar seems to know the way. When Joe turns the last corner to his house, there he is, striding up on his front porch and ringing his doorbell. Joe runs hard to catch up. He's getting a sharp side-ache as he comes into his yard. He had no idea he was this badly out of shape. *And this joker wants him in his army? He must be really hard up!*

Oh no! Chris is still up. She's opening the door! She sees the beggar, takes a glance at Joe puffing up behind, and invites the dude right in. Joe follows. As he closes the door behind him, he hears Chris saying, "Oh, you poor man! I'm so glad my husband found you. Go ahead and use our bathroom, right there down the hall. I'll get some clean towels. Take as long as you want in the tub. We'll have something for you to eat when you come out. Do you like lamb stew? I've got leftovers from tonight's dinner."

Stepping into the bathroom, the beggar smiles and nods. Chris smiles back, then calls after him, "Throw your clothes out the door. I'll have them laundered by the time you've finished your bath."

Chris turns to give her husband a big warm hug. "He came to your office needing help? The poor man looks like he hasn't had a decent meal in a week. I'm glad you brought him over. I'd better get busy."

Well, this sure changes things. Joe goes back out to his office, runs his suicide note through the shredder, and re-files all the papers. "God? What in heaven's name are You doing here? Who is that filthy beggar? I don't understand. But I trust You. Just show me what to do, and I'll follow."

When he gets back into the kitchen, Chris has finished washing the clothes, and the stew is hot. The beggar comes out of the bathroom, looking a whole lot better. His beard is now clean and neatly trimmed. He must have used Joe's shaver. He accepts the stew with a nod, eating without a word. Joe begins to regret shredding his suicide note. This beggar is obviously a pro at finagling dinner and a bath.

When the meal is over, he seems to be in no hurry to leave, but he's unwilling to talk about himself. Chris tries to strike up a conversation with him, but he just looks at Joe, waiting for him to talk. Finally, Joe cannot avoid it. "Why did you call me Joseph?"

"You don't like that name." It is not a question.

"No, I don't. I hate it." The beggar just waits, as if he's not going to speak until Joe tells him why. "It just reminds me that I'm part Jew. I did a lot of research on my ancestors. Everywhere they went, they were hated and persecuted just for being Jews. My family name used to be Ben John, meaning John's Son. They were taken from Israel in 710 BC, the first dispersion, by the Assyrian King Sargon II. We were first taken to Assyria, then north to Urartu, and farther north to Cimmeria. Everywhere we went, we were hated and oppressed. We wound up in Germania. When we were driven away, we went to England…" Joe stops. *Why is he telling the beggar all that? He can't possibly care!*

"And you still feel like you're being persecuted."

"Well, yeah! The Jews hate me because I try to show them how to be Christians. Godless Americans hate me because I try to teach true wisdom and godly morality from the Scriptures. It seems like everyone hates me!"

Chris indignantly protests, "We don't hate you…" but the beggar interrupts. "And you have a holy book that says everyone ought to love you and speak well of you?"

Joe suddenly has a sneaking suspicion that this beggar knows more about the Scriptures than he's letting on. "You're right. The Bible doesn't say that. What do you know about it? Are you a Christian?"

"No. And you're not a Jew, either, Joseph."

"Huh?" *For a beggar, he sounds awfully sure of himself.* "How do you know what I am?"

"I know all My soldiers. I would never have chosen you had I not first known you. I am your Commander-in-Chief. I offered you a commission in My army and you accepted."

"All right. If I'm not a Jew, then what am I?"

"You, Joseph, are of Ephraim. Jews are of Judah."

The blood drains from Joe's face. Suddenly he knows who this man is. But still he has to ask. "So if You're not a Christian, then who are You?"

The man smiles. "I already answered that. Now, shall we plan our strategy for tomorrow? Or would you rather walk into that courtroom by yourself?"

Chris is already on her knees before Him. She was quick to comprehend His claim to be the Commander-in-Chief, and she knows just who that must be. For many years she has faithfully served the riffraff who came to their church, daydreaming of the exhortation in Hebrews 13:2 about entertaining angels unaware. But Joe is still hung up on the beggar's denial of being a Christian. "I have a policy of not letting anyone help me on this case who is not a Christian."

The beggar laughs, loud and long. At first, Joe is miffed, then curious. Finally, after Chris begins laughing too, Joe gets caught up in the hilarity. Between guffaws, the beggar finally gets it out: "I am Logos, whom you know as Jesus. Do you really think I need to be led in the sinner's prayer?"

Now Joe understands. So they plan their strategy.

After only a few hours of rest they're up early Monday morning, sharing their plans with Joe's attorney. As an earnest believer, he readily agrees to go along with them.

The trial goes about as figured. The sodomites' case is airtight and the judge and jury are totally unsympathetic. In two hours it seems pretty much all over for Joe. Finally, the judge invites Joe's attorney, "If you have no further witnesses, please present your closing arguments."

"Your Honor, I do have one more witness. He just showed up late last night. His name is Jesus Christ, but if that makes you uncomfortable He said to just call Him Logos. He saw the whole thing. From beginning to end."

"Yeah, right. This ought to be good. Bring Him up to the witness stand so we can swear Him in."

There are some snickers among the jury when Jesus corrects the bailiff from the traditional "…so help me God" to "…so help Me Me." And some more when the judge comments sarcastically on His long hair and heavy beard. "Nice disguise! At least You look the part." But there are no snickers after Joe's attorney asks Logos what He saw. He looks and speaks directly to the judge. "I saw everything, Your Honor. In a sense, I am Joe's guardian angel, for I was with him all his life, every moment of every day. There is nothing that escaped My attention. Nothing at all. Not even his deepest thoughts and motivations."

"Now that is ridiculous and impossible. I'll have no lies in this courtroom! I hereby declare You in contempt of court! Bailiff! Throw Him out."

As the bailiff comes up to obey the order, Joe's attorney asks politely. "Your Honor, He has proof of His claims. Do you deny Him the right to present it? Everything He just said can be backed up with hard evidence. I believe it is important for the jury to weigh all the evidence."

The judge realizes his integrity is being called into question. "Huh! Bailiff, belay that for now. Okay sport. He claimed to know Joe's thoughts. That's easy to disprove. Have Joe write down exactly what he was thinking at, say… 8:30 last night. When he finishes, hand it to me. Then ask your witness what Joe was thinking then."

Joe thinks carefully, writes it out, and passes it up to the judge. His attorney then asks Logos. "Please tell the court what Joe was thinking at 8:30 last night."

Logos quotes, "This poor beggar really thinks he has an army? He must be insane. Should I humor him? He might be dangerous. Who does he think he is, ordering me around like this? Wait, how did he know my name?"

The judge is reading Joe's note as Logos speaks it, word for word. He crumples the paper angrily and throws it in the waste basket. He was snookered and he knows it. They had prepared this one in advance. Well, he will not be snookered again. "Okay. I'll let your witness present His 'hard evidence' of what He saw regarding this case."

"Thank you, Your Honor," Logos answers the judge without waiting for a query from Joe's attorney. He steps down to the bailiff and gives him a computer joystick, cable dangling. "This is My evidence. Would you please give it to His Honor the judge?"

The judge peers over his podium, sniffs disdainfully, and says, "That's Your evidence? It's rather missing the computer that goes with it, don't You think?"

"It doesn't need a computer, Your Honor. It is plugged into the Universal Data Banks. However, I have taken the precaution of blocking anything not relating to this case. There is no need at this time to pry into other people's secret affairs. But everything relating to this case is there. I grant you total control. Go ahead. Try it, Your Honor."

The judge reaches down for the joystick, then holds it up with one hand and lifts up the cord with the other. It clearly is not plugged into anything. "So help me God… You take me to be a fool?! Never in my life have I seen such contempt of court! I hereby sentence You to a week in the hoosegow! Bailiff, take Him…"

"Oh, I should have told you. Pull the red trigger on the handle to start the projection, Your Honor."

Spotting the red trigger on the hand grip, the judge freezes. Every eye is on him. *Such a simple thing… just pull the red trigger to prove this Guy is an utter fraud.* He becomes aware that the bored news reporter has gotten interested and is filming this. *Probably zoomed in to his nose hairs, to show the slightest expression of his face. If he refuses to pull the trigger, it'll be all over the news tonight that he was unjust to the witness. And if he does pull it, everyone will laugh at him for being snookered, again, by this bearded Joker. He's caught.* He sets the joystick on his podium, dropping the cord to dangle over the edge in full view of everyone in the courtroom. "Okay, wise Guy. I'll pull the red trigger. Then when nothing happens, do You promise to go away and never appear in my courtroom again?"

"Yes, Your Honor, if nothing happens. I promise."

This is too easy. The judge is suspicious. "Wait. You've probably put some kind of a bomb or poison in it!"

"If you wish, I'll pull it for you first, Your Honor."

So it goes back to Logos. He pulls the trigger repeatedly, holding it high so everyone can see. Of course, nothing happens. He gives it back to the bailiff. "I pulled it, Your Honor. But it would not start the projector for Me, because I gave you control. The projection will only start for you."

Now a little more confident, the judge sets the joystick in front of him and pulls the red trigger. Instantly the room lights dim and a beautiful full color full size 3-dimensional holographic projection of Pastor Johnson's church office appears in front of them, nearly filling the courtroom. The judge shrieks and throws back his arms. The joystick falls with a loud clunk in front of the bench. The projection disappears. The lights come back to full brightness.

"Please, Your Honor, you don't need to be afraid of it. It's just a projector. It will only do what you tell it to. I set it to start when the plaintiffs first met Paster Johnson in his office. But you can easily go forward or backward in time, or move your perspective anywhere around the area, by just moving the joystick or the trim tabs."

"This is insane! I will not be made a mockery by cheap theater tricks! Bailiff…" The judge hesitates. He looks at the news reporters. They're eating it up. *If he backs out now, he will never live it down, as they surely have it all on tape.* He holds out his hand. "Give me the joystick." The bailiff dutifully picks it up and returns it. Again he puts it in front of him, cord dangling. He pulls the red trigger.

Paster Johnson's office reappears, in such stunning brilliance and detail that it is hard to conceive of such fine technology even being invented yet. The judge tentatively pushes the hand grip forward just a bit. The view zooms in on the pastor at his desk. He pulls it back. It zooms out. He moves the grip sideways. His view circles around the room. "Does it have sound or motion?" he asks tentatively.

"Yes, of course, Your Honor. But first you must get time moving. The trim tab left of the hand grip controls time, forward or backward, as fast or slow as you want. Sound is automatic, in sync with time, like any recording system. Thoughts are more complex, as there are many levels of thoughts and motivations, even for simple decisions. But they are all there, controlled by that trim tab below the grip. Center the tab to hear all the normal sounds audible to anyone. Put any person in the center of the projection, and push the tab left to hear his thoughts. A small change lets you hear his surface thinking at that precise time. As you push it further left, you hear deeper thoughts. Pulling the tab right reveals his emotions. Pulling it all the way right allows you to penetrate to the deepest motivations of the heart, of which most people are unaware themselves."

The judge is utterly fascinated. He has been a computer geek for years, but has never experienced an animation this slick. Even knowing it will totally blow his secret commitment to the plaintiffs to throw the book at this Christian bigot, he has got to try it out. In short order he has forgotten everything but this amazing new 'computer game' he has been given. He explores the 'world' seemingly stored within the joystick. He (along with everyone in the courtroom) sees the sodomites approaching, hears their plea, and sees the pastor's kind, helpful response. The judge continues through all their encounters. Then he goes back and does it again, listening this time to Pastor Joe's thoughts. He does it a third time, going back to hear the thoughts of the sodomites, even from before their first encounter. Finally he listens to everyone's motivations. Through it all, there is nothing remotely resembling the hate and bigotry the sodomites were claiming, but their malicious plotting against the pastor and his church are fully revealed. In addition, other plots against churches, schools, and libraries come out. No one in the courtroom, even the rather biased jury, can avoid the implications.

Finally the judge releases the red trigger and puts the joystick down on the bench. The holographic projection disappears. The courtroom lights return to their normal brightness. The judge looks at Joe's attorney, who simply nods politely and says, "I rest my case, Your Honor."

He looks down at the plaintiffs' attorney. "Do you care to cross-examine the witness?" he asks dryly, not really expecting him to dare to question Logos.

"Of course I do, Your Honor!" He jumps up suddenly. His chair falls backwards in a loud clatter. "This is such an obvious hoax! Clever, but totally fraudulent…"

"Are you questioning me, or the witness?!"

The attorney gulps and turns toward Logos. "Aw'right. Tell us how You did it! How did You find actors so closely resembling my clients? How did You get it to project into the room like that, when the joystick isn't even plugged in? Who's controlling it? Who are You, anyway? Remember, You're under oath. You will be prosecuted for every lie!"

"I am Truth. I cannot lie. I already told you how I did it. I plugged the joystick into the Universal Data Banks. They are spirit and cannot be seen in the physical realm. They record everything about everyone all the time. The judge was just replaying the recording. I know it's accurate because I am an eyewitness to everything you saw. Surely you must understand that as God, I am omnipresent. That means I am everywhere at all times. Would you care for Me to demonstrate? I was with you as well. I can easily unlock a portion of your own life – let's say, from nine to twelve last night. Shall I ask the judge to display for the court…"

"No! No, I'm not on trial here." The attorney's face gets very red. "You didn't answer my question. Who did You get for actors? My clients certainly never did any of what that slick movie showed!"

"Oh?" Logos grins. "Why don't you ask them?"

After some whispered consultations, the sodomites' attorney stands up again. "Your Honor, my clients have decided to withdraw their complaint without prejudice. The jurors have clearly been so biased by this… this movie that nothing further can be accomplished by proceed…"

"Case dismissed!" The judge's gavel bangs down with stunning suddenness. "Logos. Thank You for Your… uh… testimony. You may step down. You may have your, er… hard evidence back if You wish."

"Keep it, Your Honor. You need a new joystick."

"You mean it will… will work on my…"

"Of course. But you'll have to plug it in."

The judge looks at the joystick, almost as if he's afraid of it, then looks back at Logos, an obvious question mark on his face. Logos laughs, "I'm sorry, Your Honor, but now that the case is dismissed, the joystick is no longer tapped into the Universal Data Banks. All that information is locked up until the Day of Judgment, when, as you well know…" here He looks pointedly at the two sodomites, "all shall be revealed!" He looks back to the judge. "It's just a normal joystick now. Have fun with it, Your Honor."

The ride back to Pastor Johnson's home is quiet. Joe is too awed by the day's events to speak. Logos is enjoying the ride as if He doesn't get to ride in nice cars very often. But that changes after they get back to Joe's living room. Joe and Chris fall on their knees, overflowing with praise and thankfulness to their Lord. "I really thought I'd be dead by now, but just as You promised, You gave me life!"

After a pause Logos responds, "Yes, I am Life. And to answer your unspoken questions, Yes for both. What you see is just an angel in human form. But I actually am Logos, whom you call Jesus the Christ, anointed of the Father. But neither of those is important now. From this day on, Joseph, address Me as Yashua, your Commander-in-Chief. You are My deputy. I've come to take charge."

"Yes, Lord. You have always ruled in this home."

"How I wish that were true, but it is not. You've allowed your human passions to rule, your passion for the lost, the homeless, the persecuted, the poor, minorities, Blacks, for sending out missionaries, reaching the Jews, halting the moral decline of the nation, and against evolution and abortions. You have worked very hard for Me, Joseph. I do not condemn you for that. But you have rarely worked with Me, nor obeyed Me, nor followed My Spirit."

"But Lord! I've always tried to follow the leading of your Holy Spirit… as best as I'm able."

"Oh? Do you really think it was My Spirit that led you to the bridge? Or to blindly give those sodomites everything they needed to hang you? Or to immerse 'your' church into all the good activities that has turned it into a whirlwind of social issues devoid of Spirit? **I want My church back!**"

Joe is shocked at the sternness of the rebuke. He had always thought he was a pretty good pastor. "Yes, Lord!" Another pause. "Yashua!" Another pause even longer. "Just tell me what You want. I will obey even if I don't understand it." Finally, pressing his face into the carpet, "I'm sorry, Lord Yashua. Please forgive my presumption."

Joe is weeping and Chris is looking on in horror. But now Yashua starts to laugh. At first that is disconcerting, but good laughter is catching, and soon Joe and Chris have joined Him. For a while, nothing but great belly guffaws can be heard. Finally Logos wipes His eyes and comments, "…the expression on that judge's face when he first pulled the trigger!" and bursts out laughing again.

Now Joe is in the same jovial mood. "And the terrified expressions on the faces of the sodomites when You reminded them about Judgment Day!"

"But can you imagine the shock of those news reporters when they look at their hours of recordings and discover that My projection doesn't register on their cameras! Just think how strange our proceedings will look to them, when the judge throws the joystick on the floor! And then plays with it for over three hours! Their cameras will show everyone intently studying the empty air in the center of the room!" Now Yashua rolls on the carpet with laughter. "Oh, how I love a good joke!" He rubs His eyes with His sleeve and looks up. "Now that we've had a good laugh together, you shall not soon forget My voice."

"No, Lord Yashua, I will not. I shall obey You instantly, as soon as…" But Logos has disappeared.

CHAPTER 38 – SHARON YODER

The day's work is finally done. The stars are out. The rest of her big family has retired. But Sharon Yoder sneaks out of the house to the barn. She makes not a sound until after she has shut the door. Then she falls to her knees among the wood chips and pours out her heart to God. Here, she knows she cannot be heard, except by the angels above. So now her silent burden of grief finds voice.

The angels are gathered all around. I join them, right on time, as always. *I'm getting pretty good at this time travel stuff.* It's not the first time Sharon has been here, nor will it be the last. This is a holy time. I watch in awe. The unseen guardian angels thicken their ranks, waving her prayers directly on up to the throne of God on high. The Dance grinds to a halt. Heaven's joyous laughter freezes as the King of the Universe bears the sad burden of His beloved.

"O my Father God, You know I love You, and worship You, and trust You. I realize that all things are in Your hands, and You are in perfect control. And I don't presume to tell You how to do things, or when. But still I call upon Your holy name, YHWH, at Your invitation. And Jesus, You are the Savior! We desperately need saving! We've always struggled, but our crops failed again last fall. We're way behind on our property taxes. I fear the government will take away our land! You know they want it, Father, as it borders the town, and they would just love to expand their town out into our community. But Father, we've worked so hard! We've tried to make our land productive enough to pay our taxes. But we're just girls! We haven't the strength to run behind the plow!"

Sharon pauses to consider, then continues. "I've been asking You for brothers. And I've tried not to complain when all You've sent is sisters. I dearly love my sisters, each one. But Father, I'm afraid it is too late now for a brother! By the time he grows old enough to work the fields, we'll be out on the street! So Father, would You mind if I change my request? I'm almost old enough now. I ask that You send me a husband. Make him strong enough to help Papa in the fields. He doesn't have to be smart or good looking. He doesn't even have to have a beard! But it would be nice if he is kind and gentle. I swear I'll work hard for him, too. But Father, he's got to be from outside our community, from… *from the city!* So he won't have a farm to take me away to. I want him to stay here and help us save this farm for my parents and my sisters. And Father, please make him rich, to help us pay our taxes. It's almost too late!"

Logos' tears slowly turn to a grin. He starts to laugh again. "I like that. Rich city-boy, eh? She'll even marry someone without a beard, just to save her parent's farm." His laughter grows, for the sheer joy of answering the heartfelt prayer of His beloved. "I believe I will send her a rich city-boy. But her prayer delights Me so – I'll make him smart and handsome as well as kind and gentle. Michael! This home – this community – is Mine! Cover them!"

The angel's departure was so sudden; so unexpected! Joe and Chris are left gasping for air. They both had so many questions they still wanted to ask Him and so many assurances and praises to give Him! Joe cries out, "But Lord! Yashua! I can recognize Your voice when Your angel is here with us, but how can I know Your voice when…"

I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me, and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God… My Sheep hear My voice. I know them and call them by name. They follow Me. All who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God! For the Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit… I go to prepare a place for you. I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father but through Me. Greater works than these shall you do, because I go to the Father. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it. If you love Me, you will do what I commanded you. I will not leave you as orphans. I will come to you. You will behold Me; because I live, you shall live also; you in Me and I in you. But the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you.

Joe knows these Scriptures. They come flitting through his mind, thick and fast, all run together. His sense of panic wanes. He prays out loud, "Okay, Lord. I hear You. But I've known and believed those Scriptures most of my adult life, yet You just said I wasn't really following You, just my own passions! So how can I hear Your voice, I mean, on specific things You want me to do? How do I know when…"

Chris interrupts him, "Joe! Just listen! Shut up and just listen for a change! You've always been the preacher! Always had the last word! Always had the answers! Always the expert on the Scriptures. Even when you pray! Always telling God how He ought to do it! Just shut up and listen for God's sake!" She stops, horrified at what just came from her lips. "I'm sorry, dear. I don't mean to criticize…"

Joe stares at her, his mouth hanging open. For a long time they just look at each other as the verses keep coming.

Trust in YHWH with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths. Delight yourself in YHWH, and He will give you His desires for your heart. Commit your way to YHWH, trust also in Him, and He will do it.

By watching his wife's face, Joe can see that Chris is hearing the same verses. This has got to be the Holy Spirit. *Abide in Me, and I in you; He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing. Then you shall ask whatever you wish and it shall be done for you. When He, the Holy Spirit of Truth, comes, He will guide you into all Truth… and He will disclose to you what is to come. In that day, you will ask Me no question; for truly I say to you, if you ask the Father for anything, He will give it to you in My name. For the just shall live by faith…*

Joe starts to laugh. Soon Chris is joining in, and finding forgiveness in his hug. "You are absolutely right, my love!" he whispers in her ear. "I do listen when I'm counseling, I listen to my church members, and I even listen to you sometimes. I read the Scriptures every day. But I never just listen for the Lord to speak to my heart. I've always been too busy for that. There are always so many urgent things; sermons to prepare; people to help; programs to plan; my Bible studies… I guess I got the feeling that Jesus never spoke except through the Scriptures. That doesn't help when I'm deciding to protest an abortion clinic or…"

"Just listen, dear! Why does that seem to be so difficult for you?" Chris is still snickering.

Joe shuts up, his last sentence still dangling. His smile freezes on his face. He drops to his knees beside the couch. "Speak, Lord, for Your servant is listening!" he breathes. Then he waits. In silence.

"Move to the other couch."

That's pretty stupid. That couldn't be the voice of the Lord. What possible purpose would He have for asking me to move to the other couch? Surely He can speak to me on this couch as well as any other. With Joe's thoughts comes a heaviness.

"Move to the other couch."

Well, I guess it doesn't hurt to just do it. Joe moves. The heaviness lifts. Joe hears laughter, but a quick glance at Chris assures him it isn't her. "Go outside. Sit in your car."

"Chris? I think I'm hearing something from the Lord. I don't understand it, but I think He wants me to go out and sit in the car. He didn't say why, but if I'm ever going to learn to know Jesus' voice, I'd better obey."

"Good choice! I'll be praying for you. Here's your coat and the car keys. Don't forget your wallet. And remember, He said to call Him Yashua now." Joe takes them. He goes out, wondering, *How did Chris get so far ahead of me in this 'hearing the Holy Spirit' exercise?*

"Go ahead. Drive. I'll direct."

Joe starts the car and pulls away from the curb. "Okay, Yashua. I'm all Yours. Where to?"

"In that day you will ask Me no question."

No question? This is insane! How can I get anywhere if I ask no question? The heaviness again falls, and all is silent except for the normal car sounds. "Okay Yashua. I will ask You no question. I will simply continue until You say to do something else. Or 'til I run out of gas! Oh, my tank is pretty low. God, shall I… No. I will trust You for that, too."

The joy returns, and a peace that Joe has not felt before in all the activities of his busy church. With a thrill, Joe realizes he's on a treasure hunt. He doesn't know where it will lead, except that at the end is the treasure of knowing the Lord's voice by His Spirit!

For five hours Joe drives, listening intently. He gets on the freeway heading toward Seattle. He looks at his gas gauge again. It now shows empty, but the car keeps going, so he decides to ignore it. Near Seattle he exits the freeway to head south. The voice directs him to Renton, to a quiet housing development all darkened for the night. "Stop!"

"Yes, Yashua." Joe pulls over and stops, waiting, the engine still running. After idling a few seconds, the engine dies. It must be out of gas. "Good. I am pleased. You have arrived. Go ring the doorbell."

"But, Lord! Everyone's sleeping! It's three o'clock in the morning for heaven's sake! They'll think I'm a nut, ringing their doorbell at three in the morning!"

"Go ring the doorbell."

Joe listens, his thoughts spinning. *This is crazy! It's one thing to go driving around all hours of the night, but to wake up another family… what in heaven's name will he tell them? "God said to ring your doorbell. I haven't a clue why!" Nuts!*

"Go ring the doorbell."

Joe takes a deep breath and gets out of the car. This is the hardest thing he's ever done. Harder even than getting his doctorate at seminary. In all his extensive Greek and Hebrew studies, they sure never taught this! He walks up onto the porch, trying to be very quiet. Maybe he should just say he ran out of gas. He slowly reaches out his finger. Just as it touches the button, the door opens.

"Hi there. Your timing couldn't be better. I was just coming out to look for you. Welcome! Come right on in and make yourself at home." A pleasant looking man stands there, probably in his sixties, graying hair, tousled clothes, but not looking the slightest bit sleepy. Joe enters and the man shuts the door softly behind him. "We'll have to be quiet. My wife is sleeping. Come into my office."

This man's office is nothing like his own. Joseph prides himself in always keeping it neat, "ready at all times" to welcome those who need counseling. But this office is all books and papers by the ton, stacked high on every flat level surface. Even the window, if there is one, is covered. "Sorry for the mess. I've made an exciting discovery, and have just printed out my translation. Oh, I'm Professor Alan Benson, Ancient Languages and Historical Research at Seattle University." He extends his hand.

"Good to meet you, Professor Benson. I'm… I'm… I'm not even sure who I am anymore! I used to be Joe Johnson, senior pastor of *God's Love Non-Denominational Church* in Spokane."

"All the way from Spokane! You've had quite a night. I'll bet you're out of gas. I've got a can in the garage. What led you to drive clear across the state?"

"I don't really know. I'm just trying to learn to know the voice of the Lord. Er… of Yashua."

CHAPTER 40 – PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Spirit says nothing about other appointments, so for a while I just remain with Pastor Johnson, watching his struggles. He's used to being in charge. He was a planner, an organizer. He prided himself in running a tight ship. Everything had to be done his way and on schedule. Now all that has to change. It's tough, listening and submitting to the leading of the Holy Spirit. But Joseph is determined. Jesus wants His church back and He's in charge! Joseph will never forget that lesson as long as he lives.

He struggles with his name change, too. He has always hated 'Joseph'. He liked to imagine that he was not part Jew. He's a Christian, and though he has a ministry to Jews, it's only to teach them to leave their Jewishness behind to become Christians. But Jesus seemed to enjoy identifying him with the Jews, or rather with Ephraim. Well, if Jesus wants to call him 'Joseph' he'd better learn to like it. So he tells his congregation about the encounter and urges them to use his new name in memory of it. It sounds strange to hear 'Pastor Joseph' instead of the familiar 'Pastor Joe', but he'll eventually get used to it, I'm sure.

He's going through his mail one afternoon at the big desk in his lavish office. He has developed the habit of keeping his desk clean and well-organized. He deals with his mail every day. He barely glances at the letter that starts, "To all those brothers in America who are faithful supporters of Israel…" *It's just another plea for money*. It goes in his wastebasket along with all the other junk mail.

It's nearly time for dinner. 'Pastor Joseph' is pleased. All the day's tasks are done, his Sunday sermon is prepared, and his busy office is neat and tidy once again. But just as he's standing to close up for the evening, his phone rings.

"Hello. This is Pastor Joe Johnson of God's Love Non-Denominational Church. How may I help You?" he says instinctively, then grimaces. *Think Joseph.*

"Joe, my friend! So good to hear your voice! This is Mike Mason from Newark. It's been a while! We need to talk more often. I'm probably interrupting your dinner time, so I'll be brief. Did you get a letter from *Friends of Israel Ministries* in the last day or two? I'm sure you're on their mailing list."

"Probably, Mike. I don't remember. I go through a lot of junk mail every day. But yeah, I do know about them and support them. They're a pretty good outfit."

"That's not an issue here. Find that letter. Read it. It's not a plea for money. If you didn't get it, call me back. I'll email you a copy. Every pastor needs to read that letter. And tell your church. It could be the start of something big. Really big! I'll let you go. Keep in touch!"

Joseph rifles through his now full wastebasket. He can't find it. He ends up dumping it all over his floor and scrounging through every piece of paper.

Isn't it true. You never find it until the last place you look. Joe holds it up triumphantly, just as his wife calls the second time for dinner. He'll just glance at the first few paragraphs to make sure before locking up here.

He reads: "To all those brothers in America who are faithful supporters of Israel. Greetings in the precious name of Yashua our Messiah!

"Some important things have been happening in Israel which have not been well reported in the American news. I'm not sure why. Possibly because for the first time the Americans have not been involved in the peace process here in Israel. Your government has been too involved in troubles at home and wars around the rest of the world.

"So you probably are not aware of what we believe may be the most significant development in the peace process in the Middle East since Israel first became a nation. I'll start at the beginning, and tell you all that I've been able to put together so far.

"It seems that a certain smart, handsome young Polish Catholic has been rather busy. He calls himself Dr. Relt. He got his law degree and his doctorate in political science at the University of Prague in 2016. We believe from there he went east and spent several years in the Ukraine, Belarus, St. Petersburg, Moscow, and other parts of the old USSR.

"Somehow he succeeded in making some very high-level contacts in Russia. He evidently had some influence with the military and political leaders there. We don't know the details, but the result was a revised policy toward the Middle East. Russia had been secretly supplying many Arab states with advanced weapons and military expertise to use in their so-called 'jihad' (holy war) against Israel. They were using Muslim religious hatred against Jews to deliberately foment war. Dr. Relt convinced them that this policy was counterproductive and a waste of resources.

"But it doesn't end there. We didn't even know of Dr. Relt's successes in Russia and the Ukraine until we started hearing from various Arab states around Israel. First we renewed our treaty with Egypt. But then Israel was approached by Libya, the Sudan, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and even Iraq and Iran with offers of substantial peace treaties. We didn't put it together, though, until Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan joined in. It was Dr. Relt! With amazing persistence and insight, he convinced Israel's nearest ten Arab nations to come to us with offers of peace!

"These are real peace treaties, guaranteeing Israel the right to exist in peace, free from harassment by its Arab neighbors. We believe young Dr. Relt may be a Christian, or at least partial toward the Jews, for he certainly has a grasp of the concept of 'those who bless Israel will be blessed' and vice versa. He managed to convince the Arab heads of state that their own freedom, prosperity, and peace is actually dependent upon peace with Israel. They demanded peace! And with amazingly generous terms!

"For example, Jordan signed away her rights to the West Bank, permanently. That was incredible! The only contingency was that Israel must promise to respect the rights of Jordanian settlements there, which of course Israel wants to do anyway. And the new 'Palestinian State' on the Gaza Strip that failed so miserably? It is back under the rule of Israel! The Palestinians overwhelmingly voted out the terrorist leaders who had so horribly abused them, and voted to come under the umbrella of Israeli rule!

"But the best news of all is in Jerusalem. Dr. Relt came here himself. He's a kind and gentle man. He was given a standing ovation in the Knesset. He swore he wouldn't rest until he'd brought the Arab and Jewish brothers together – get this – on the temple mount! As I write, he is working with Muslim leaders in Jerusalem on a plan to divide the temple mount, giving Israel the north half as long as they don't block Muslim access to the south half.

"We in *Friends of Israel Ministries* are holding our breath to see if these peace treaties hold. So far, so good. Not a single rocket or suicide bomber has hit Israel since Dr. Relt's treaties. Time will tell. Pray for the peace of God's chosen people! Pray for the peace of Jerusalem!

"Your Brothers at *Friends of Israel Ministries.*"

Pastor Joseph finally hears the knocking on his door. "Come in! Come in! Sorry, I was concentrating."

It is his wife. "Honey! Dinner is getting cold… What in heaven's name…?"

There in the middle of the floor of his immaculate office sits Pastor Johnson, with his wastebasket on its side and crumpled papers scattered all around. "Chris! You've got to read this! It's a miracle! An answer to our prayers for Israel!" He shoves it in her face, then kneels back down to clean up the mess.

No-nonsense Chris skips right to the bottom line. "PS. Just as we were ready to mail this letter, we got news that Israel's Muslim leaders have agreed to Dr. Relt's proposal. This is a preliminary treaty granting us the north half of the temple mount. To finalize it will require a lot of Muslim signatures all around the globe, but if everyone ratifies it, Israel will be free to rebuild her temple!"

"Hmmph," Chris sniffs. "This sounds to me like the 'firm covenant with the many' by the 'prince who makes desolate' – the antichrist of Daniel 9."

Joseph freezes, his arms wrapped around a pile of junk mail. "Oh my God! How could I have missed it?! That could be the start of the seventieth week of Daniel!"

The pile cascades back to the floor as he looks at his watch. "What time is it on the East Coast? I've got to call Mike back! I wonder if he caught it."

Pastor Mason had caught it. They talk about it for two hours. Joseph's dinner gets very cold.

CHAPTER 41 – STEVE SAXON & THE YODERS

Spirit now leads me back to Pastor Mike Mason. Even a time traveler can't be two places at once. Mike spends the year discipling young Steve. Mike's home is always open to him. Steve is surprised to find that he can now understand some of Pastor Mike's sermons. The people of his church welcome him with open arms, literally. He has a family again. A big family! At first he's rather hesitant about all the Blacks, but there are so many and nobody even seems to notice whether they're Black or White so he starts to let his walls down. I view their year together – between brief bounces back to Spokane or Renton.

Sam and Suzy Salizar take an interest in Steve right off. Suzy gushes, "We're glad you're here! Now you get to be the new guy! We understand. It wasn't so long ago that we were the new guys here. Isn't it wonderful! Everyone is so loving and understanding! Tell us your story, so we will know how to pray for you. And let us know when will be a good time to have you over for diner. My husband Sam here grills an incredible beef ribs barbecue!"

"Thanks, but I'd rather not. I don't get along very well with Blacks," he blurts out, backing away. He instantly regrets his rudeness, but his words can't be unsaid.

Now Sam, who's usually pretty quiet, speaks up. "I understand, Steve. I don't get along very well with Blacks either. I can't stand their shuckin' and jivin', their proud 'Black Power' handshakes, their arrogantly despising everything 'White' even if it's good, and their abominable 'music'. You know, that rap crap. It's an assault on the soul. And the way they treat their women, as if a girl were a thing to conquer, and after the conquest you just toss her aside to raise her own babies. No, I don't like Blacks, either. Aren't you glad that in our church, we don't have Blacks or Whites, just brothers and sisters in Christ?"

Steve just stands there, his mouth slightly open. Suzy laughs, then she looks at her hand in mock horror. "Oh my God, Sam, how did my hand get this dark?" She grabs Sam's hand. "Yours too! We'all musta hung out too long in the sun!" They stare wide-eyed at each other, pearly white eyeballs nearly poking out of their coal black faces. Then they both start to laugh.

Steve tries, but there's just no way. Good friendly laughter is catching. He puts his face down and tries to cover it, but the snickers get out. He had thought all Blacks looked alike, but Sam and Suzy's faces are so incredibly – delightfully – expressive! In no time, they are laughing together like old friends. Suddenly Steve stops. "God!" He exclaims, so loudly that heads turn all over the sanctuary.

"God what? God damn?" Sam had heard Steve's curse when he'd first seen all the Blacks. Suzy repeats what she'd heard pastor respond, "It's okay to say that in our church. Sometimes it may be appropriate." The hubbub all over the church dies down and everybody turns their way.

"No. Praise God," Steve replies. "God did it! I thought it was impossible, but God did it!" Everyone is listening, but he doesn't care. He speaks even louder. "When I first came here, I hated Blacks. I wouldn't believe Pastor Mike when he suggested that God might play a joke on me and give me a Black brother. We agreed that would take a mighty big God! My brother Sam had just died when I first came here, so Pastor Mike guessed God might give me a new Black brother named Sam. I thought he was crazy. But here he is! My new Black brother named Sam! God really is a mighty big God! And I… honestly… I don't hate Blacks anymore. For the first time in my life, I see them as… just… people, like me…" He stops. He had not intended to preach.

Everyone starts to clap. Pastor Mike comes over and puts his arms around both Sam and Steve. "Praise God indeed! That was a fine sermon, Steve, as good as some of my own. That's what this church family is all about, isn't it! I only have one thing to add. God answers prayer! This is His answer to mine. He's a mighty big God indeed!"

Thus for a year Steve soaks up the love and training with his new church family. But he is still a little sickly. When his parents had died, he had picked up some bad habits – sitting around playing video games, living on junk food, and drinking beer and soda pop. Mike and Mary help him improve his health, with regular exercise and better eating habits. He loves working in their garden. Steve is young. He bounces back quickly. By his 19th birthday, his body has filled out nicely and his muscles have hardened.

Steve is now best friends with Sam and Suzy and their family. He spends almost as much time at their new home as at Pastor Mike's. It was a starter home, and needed lots of repairs. Steve and Sam work together fixing it up. Steve helps them pay for a much-needed additional bedroom for the kids. Now it gives him great joy to see this happy family finally begin to prosper after so much prejudice and abuse. Steve never wants to leave this 'slice of heaven on earth'.

But times change. Pastor Mike stands up one Sunday morning to announce that their battle with the state is over, and they have lost. "Even though the row of homes across the street is a much better place for widening their highway, the state has ruled that they will put it here, right across our sanctuary. Our land has been condemned, taken away by law of eminent domain. The state hated us, anyway, because we don't pay property taxes and the homes across the street do. They've paid us a pittance for our land, and almost nothing for our sanctuary because it's so old. It doesn't leave us with nearly enough for a new building, and I refuse to go into debt. So we'll go back to renting the high school auditorium, as you did when you started thirty years ago, before I came here. We'll save our pennies – maybe we can afford another building someday.

"But praise God! His church is a family, not a building! He is doing something here with His church family. Let's all worship together and find out what it is!"

That night after the evening service, Steve meets alone with Pastor Mike in his office. He closes the door and sits down on the counseling couch. Mike speaks first, quietly. "I knew this would hit you rather hard, Steve. I'm sorry. I kept hoping our appeals would succeed so I wouldn't have to trouble you with it. But surely you knew that the government hates us. They've wanted to get rid of us for years, and it's not just because we don't pay taxes! We stand against everything they're trying to do as they work to turn America against God and His moral laws. It's okay. Don't be sad. God commands us to rejoice in all things, giving thanks. The world hates us, but God is in control. He's got a plan in it all…"

"Yes, Pastor Mike, I know. But that's not why I'm here. You see, I, uh… I have some money. You decide where you'd like the church to move to. I'll pay for it."

For the first time in his life, Mike is speechless, totally, utterly speechless. After a long pause, Steve continues. "I'll have to leave, though. I've prayed about it. If I stayed, for sure I'd give it away, or you would, or the treasurer would. I don't want anyone to know that I have money. You've been such a help to me! I've grown tremendously. Now it's time for me to move on. I think God is leading me to move out in the country, to buy a farm or something. My health is still fragile. I think it's the smog. I need to get away from the big city. Working on a farm for a few years will be good for me, don't you think? Like your garden, only bigger."

Mike is still stuck in his first paragraph. "You have money? That much money? Do you know how much a church facility of this size costs?"

"Uh, yeah. Don't worry about it, Pastor. You all have been really good to me. I want to do it. Pick out a nice one. Bigger than this. You need room to grow. Lots of churches are trying to sell out right now. But how am I going to say good-bye to Sam and Suzy? They've been closer to me than my brother ever was. If I find a farm close enough, I'll visit you all sometimes – if you promise not to tell what I did."

So the next month Pastor Mike is announcing to his congregation the incredible and miraculous purchase, debt free, of a large and lovely almost new sanctuary ten miles west of the Newark metropolis. Steve has said his good-byes, and is at that moment driving west on Highway 78 through Allentown toward Harrisburg, looking for a farm to buy. Spirit leads me to go with him. He doesn't want to go too far, but he has got to get out of the big city. The rolling green farmland he's driving by is calling out to him in a way he's never known before, like a primal urge. The filth and skyscrapers Steve used to love have become abhorrent to him. He's never experienced the 'simple life', but he longs for it anyway. He left his flashy new car and all his high-tech gadgets with Sam and Pastor Mike. Now it's only him, an old car he just bought, some work clothes, a sleeping bag, and the farm he's looking to buy. He'll settle down in the country, find himself a wife, and start a family.

Steve gets off the main highway onto a quiet country road somewhere between Allentown and Harrisburg. There are lovely farms all around. He sees horse-drawn plows working the fields, instead of smelly tractors. He had picked out a common, cheap car, but these people don't seem to use cars at all. They're still in the horse and buggy era. And the men all have beards and funny hats, while the women wear plain long dresses and bonnets. They're obviously not trying to keep pace with the latest fashions of the big city! The more Steve sees, the more excited he gets. *What if he could buy a farm near some of these good, hard-working, simple folk?*

Steve comes to a sleepy little town. Surprisingly, it has a Realty. He pulls open the weathered door. It creaks loudly, and an older gentleman jumps up, spilling his coffee. "Welcome! Come in! What can I do for you, young man?"

"I'd like to buy a farm. One right around here."

"Oh! Ahem. And about what is your price range?"

Steve looks sharply, frowning. He's young, but not foolish. His parents taught him the value of money. "Just find me a nice, big farm for sale. 50 or 100 acres. With good water and a farmhouse. And a sturdy barn. Old is fine if it's well kept up. Then I'll tell you if I can afford it."

"Yes, sir." The old gentleman is skeptical, but willing to try. He skims through the listings on his computer. "Well, I'll be… Here's a new one, just hit the market today. You wanted one around here? This one's right next to town, over there." He walks to the back of the office and points out the window, drawing his finger across everything in view. "It's over 100 acres. 148.7 to be exact. But it's selling at an incredibly low price! It was condemned, not because anything is wrong with it, but just that it's being sold for back taxes. That's why it's so cheap. It's got your basic farmhouse, good water, a beautiful big barn…"

"How much?" Steve asks dryly. He knows the pitch. His dad used to wheel and deal for properties all the time. That's how he made his millions.

"Two point eight million. But it's a steal. That's under nineteen thousand an acre. You'll never find land this good for that price any more. And you…"

"That's a lot of back taxes!" Steve mutters, not totally believing the salesman. "Let's go for a drive."

For the next hour they drive around the most beautiful countryside Steve has ever imagined. His only regret is not getting to meet the folks living in the old farmhouse. "They'll be moving out. I didn't made an appointment, and I don't want to trouble them. They're being evicted for not paying their taxes, so they're probably in a sour mood right now. Before we close the deal, I'll get you a tour of the house. It's old, but sturdy. These Amish build their houses well!" Steve listens to his chatter, believing about half of it. He saw someone plowing, looking quite contented!

They get back to the Realty. "What do you think? Is that what you had in mind? Any questions?"

"Yes. Have they been given their eviction notice? That guy behind the plow looked happy to me. I sure wouldn't work my land like that if I knew I was being evicted."

"Er…" The Realtor is embarrassed at getting caught in his little fib. "Uh… I coulda been wrong. Le'me check." He plays with his computer for a bit. "Well, well. Being as how it just hit the market, it looks like the evictions have not yet been served. The state has taken over the property. I guess they are planning to wait on the evictions until there is some interest in the sale. No sense troubling them until someone wants to buy 'em out, eh?"

"That's what I thought. I'll pay all the back taxes. That is probably about $180,000, at the most. I'll also pay all the land condemnation and eviction costs to date, as well as a healthy fee for the land commissioner's time and effort. That all should total about $240,000, max. Plus, I'll give you a $50,000 commission to handle the details. Deal?"

The Realtor looks shocked. "Young man, you just don't understand. I can sell this property for ten times that much, any day of the year."

"Not yet, you can't. You don't own it yet. The owners have rights too, you know. You don't like my deal? Then forget your $50,000. I'll go talk to the landowners themselves. I'm sure we can work out a deal whereby I pay all their back taxes and buy a portion of the land directly from them. Have a good day, sir." Steve heads for the door.

"Wait!" The $50,000 commission is what got him. "Let me see what I can do. If the evictions haven't been served and the condemnation is not recorded, I may be able to work something out with the land commissioner. Do you have any earnest money?"

"Trust me, the condemnation is not completed, or they would already be evicted. I know the law. I'm surprised you're so foggy on it." Steve writes out a check for $290,000, and slaps it on the counter in front of the stunned Realtor. "I pay cash. It's in the bank right now. Write up the deal and I'll sign it. If you can't get me that farm for this price, the deal is off and I go work out my own deal with the landowners. If you can get it for less, you keep the change. I'll be staying in the area, so I can check back with you every few days to get the status."

Steve waits, a little angry that the Realtor had tried to fool him, but thankful that he had learned from his dad how to handle these guys. The Realtor is busy writing up his offer. Suddenly Steve thinks of the poor farmers. *They'll be evicted, while he takes over their distressed farm for a song. It just isn't right. He can't take advantage of their misfortune like this.* On impulse he orders the Realtor, "Write into the contract that the present owners also get to stay. Permanently. Joint ownership. No evictions."

Steve drives away with mixed feelings. His signed offer is in his pocket. *But did he do right? That all happened so fast, that part about joint ownership, letting the poor farmers stay on his new farm. Where did that idea come from? What if they are slobs? Or lazy, good for nothing B…* he catches himself, reminding himself that he likes Blacks now. Maybe he'd better go meet them. He has three days to back out of the deal, according to the law.

Gunter Yoder. That was the name of the current owner. He wasn't supposed to see it yet, but he had peeked over the Realtor's shoulder at his computer. He must pay this Gunter Yoder a call. He came out here to work on a farm. Maybe he should just offer to help Mister Yoder for a while. It's early spring – the plowing and planting season. *Surely anyone will welcome a little help during spring planting.*

Steve knocks on the Yoders' door, then looks down at his clothes. *Oh rats!* He still looks like a city-boy! Though he had picked an old work car to hide his 'rich' status, his work clothes are still in the trunk. He forgot to change. He's still in his flashy polo shirt and sport slacks.

Too late. The door opens. "Ya? Vhat can ve do fer you?" It's a kindly looking gentleman, in his early forties, big, strong, tall, dressed in old-fashioned farmer's working gear darkened by dust from the field. His hair and beard are almost blonde. His accent is thickly German.

"Mister Yoder? Gunter Yoder?"

"Ya. Ya. I know. You'ff come to take avay my farm. But I'm prepared to make a deal. I'll sell the lower fifty, the part nearest ye town. Then yer taxes ye vill get. I'm sorry so long it hath taken me. I keep hoping fer a better year. But please my family don't ye tell. They verk so hard here. They…"

It's his clothes! He looks like a city slicker. "Sir?" Steve interrupts. "I'm sorry about my city clothes. They must be confusing you to think I'm some kind of city official. I'm not. I just came to help you with your spring planting."

"Then yer not… yer not the tax man?"

"No sir. I'm just a city-boy who's sick and tired of the city. I need fresh air and some good, hard work. I've got a sleeping bag and some work clothes in the car. I don't even need a bed – just a place to throw my sleeping bag. Please sir, I beg you. I've never done it before, but I'd love to learn to plow with you… I've got some money. I swear to God, I'll pay you $20 a day for food. And if I don't work hard enough to keep up with you, I'll double it to $40. Can I stay with you until you get your crops planted?"

"Oh. Sorry." Gunter is embarrassed. "Ve don't svear around here. I vill go ask Momma." He leaves. Steve hears some excited talking, then he returns with her. "Vell, Momma, vhat do ye think? Is he the vun ve prayed fer?"

She takes one look at Steve, bursts into a big smile, and throws her arms around him.

Steve starts to pull back. He's not ready for this invasion of his private space. He doesn't know these people! What right does this woman have to hug him as if she were his mother? But he rejects the temptation. He even puts his arms around her and leans into her motherly hug. She reminds him of his own dear mother, God rest her soul.

Finally she backs off, a bit surprised at herself. "Please come in! You came just in time. Dinner is on the table. Did you know we have been praying for you to come? Now God has blessed us with a son, just in time! His blessings on you! Praise His name forever! What is your name?"

"Thank you. My name is Steve. Steve Saxon. And thank you for the hug! May I call you Momma? You remind me of my own mother. She died four years ago. My family is all dead now, so I guess that makes me an orphan. But I would love to join your family for the spring planting. I will be like a son to you, I promise."

So in short order Steve finds himself seated around a large table, laden with good, home-grown foods. Gunter announces his name and introduces the family. There are titters, giggles, and a chorus of welcomes from seven girls around the table, ranging in age from a few years younger than himself, down to a baby barely out of diapers. Papa Yoder reaches out his hands, taking his wife's and one of Steve's. "The grace ve haff already said, but ve must pause to thank the good Lord fer answering our prayers."

And he does. A beautiful prayer, by a man who clearly has a close relationship with the Almighty. During the meal, Steve tries to learn all their names. Gunter's wife is Momma Yolanda. The seven daughters are Sharon (17), Sue (15), Samantha (14), Sarah (12), Sabrina (10), Salome (8), and baby Sylvia, now an energetic two-year-old.

"You have no sons, Momma? Is that what you meant when you said, 'a son, just in time'?"

She nods. "At spring planting, we always long for a son to help Papa. My daughters work hard, but a woman just doesn't have the strength of a man, you know. So we've had some bad years, when we couldn't get the crops planted in time. That stunts the harvest. The last three years, we didn't have much of a harvest, so we couldn't pay our…" Yolanda stops abruptly and looks at Gunter.

"It's okay, Momma. The taxes he already knows about. Vhen he first came I thought he vas the tax man. Just look at his clothes!" There are more snickers and giggles among the girls. It's pretty easy to see Steve is just a city-boy. "Fer his food he svore to pay us $20 a day. And he svore he'd double that if he couldn't verk yust as hard as me!"

"Papa! We don't allow swearing in this home!"

"Ya, that I told him. But too late I vas. He had already svorn it. Ve better feed him vell. If he keeps his oath, ve might be able to pay our taxes. Ye know keep up vith me this city-boy vill never!"

Steve laughs with them. He likes Gunter's dry humor. This is going to be a fun family to stay with. They keep loading up his plate. "Wait!" he protests. "If you feed me too much, then I really won't be able to keep up with Papa! I came here to work, not just eat! I'm stronger than I look!"

After the meal, Gunter takes Steve around to meet the animals. He introduces each one by name: four beautiful, well-fed horses, a cow and her calf, a beef steer, five goats, eight sheep, and some ducks, chickens, geese, and rabbits. There is also a frisky big black lab named Sunshine and a scruffy old blue merle border collie named Moonshine, who work together to keep the animals from straying.

Steve is amazed. "Papa, I thought you were poor! If you can't afford to pay your taxes, how can you afford to keep these animals so well fed and so well cared for? And your barn is so clean – it looks like a million dollars!"

"Thank ye, Steve. Ye forget, I haff daughters, and they do verk hard! But the spring plowing they yust can't do. And as fer keeping my horses vell-fed – if I had a tractor, do ye think I vould giff it good gas and oil? Vell, my tractors these are! If I am to haff any hope of paying off our taxes this year, healthy and happy I must keep them. All it vill take is vun good year I think, vith the crops all planted and harvested in time. Vith your help, that ve vill do!"

The next morning, Steve finds out what it means to work on a farm. Up at four AM, by five it's light enough to plow, and Gunter has the two teams already hitched up. At first he plows with Steve, but Steve is a quick study, and after once around, Gunter gets his own team and follows behind Steve in the next row over. By lunchtime, they're working together like any father/son team in the county.

"Ach du lieber!" Gunter calls out to his wife when they finally come in for supper. "Kept up vith me Steve has! Today I guess ve only get $20 fer food!"

"Gunter! Don't be joking so! He has pulled his weight today. We cannot charge him for his food!"

"Momma Yolanda! I've got to keep my vows to the Lord. Besides, this was one of the best days of my life! I'm a little sore, because I'm not used to it. But I love working behind the plow! I really do! Now, where's your cookie jar?" They all know what that means.

Gunter and Yolanda look at each other. *Can they trust him after only one day of work?* "Thank you, Steve." Momma gives him another hug. "I hate to admit, but we really are running out of money." Our cookie jar is right up there. You won't find much in it, I'm afraid."

Steve reaches up and pulls down the big clay jar. It is indeed nearly empty. He pulls the $80 he'd hid in his pocket and pokes it in. "That's for today and yesterday. Papa fibbed when he said I kept up with him. He slowed down to stay behind me. But tomorrow I'll do better. Now, I'm paid up. What's for dinner? It sure smells good!"

CHAPTER 42 – PETER'S PROPHECY

I join Pastor Johnson as he returns to Renton to visit Professor Benson. They tell each other their stories, to find out that they're both learning to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit – after He repeats Himself two or three times! "Joseph, I'm amazed that you made it all the way over here, with your tank on empty, just by following the Spirit!"

"Huh. That's nothing compared to your being led all the way to the Cave of the Column in Israel to find all those scrolls! Now that's exciting!"

"Yeah, it is, Joseph. But it's even more exciting that you've come. I know why you're here. I read the scroll that has Peter's prophecies of the end times."

"So why am I here, Alan? You never told me how you managed to open the door just as I was about to punch your doorbell. How did you know I was coming? Don't tell me Peter prophesied my coming!"

"Actually, I think he did. However, it's not that simple. I mustn't prejudice you. You've got to read it for yourself and decide if it's you or not. But I don't see how it could be anyone else, after your miraculous arrival, just when the Lord told me to open the door. I'd read the prophecy, so I knew you were coming. But my window is blocked by that bookcase. So I just prayed, 'Lord, send me to the door when it's the right time, so he doesn't awaken my wife.'"

Alan bows his head briefly before continuing. "I figured you'd have to be a preacher or somesuch. So, how well do you know the Scriptures, Joseph?"

Joseph smiles. "Pretty well. I do have my doctorate in theology, you know. I don't know the ancient languages as well as you, but I do have a thorough knowledge of Hebrew and Greek, and a pretty good understanding of Aramaic. I love reading the Scriptures in their original languages!"

Alan shakes his head. "It's not the original languages that are the problem. It's the translations that we've got all wrong. I've been a Catholic all my life. I work for a good Catholic University. I thought I knew the Scriptures, too. But we've got it all wrong. Nearly every doctrine of the church is wrong. I've been translating these scrolls for two years. If they're right, much of what I was taught is wrong! The Sabbath, the nature of God, the Millennium, heaven, hell, Judgment Day… It has me shaken to the core."

"Well, Alan," Joseph laughs. "That's what you get for being Roman Catholic. Welcome to the Protestant camp!"

"Huh! I know Protestant doctrine. The scrolls seem to contradict that, too. I don't think you'd better read Peter's prophecy 'til you finish reading these scrolls of the Old Testament and the apostle John's second Gospel story."

"Whatever you say, Alan. I'm looking forward to it. Let's make photocopies of the translations you've finished so far. I'll take 'em home and plow through 'em."

CHAPTER 43 – IT ALL COMES TOGETHER

It takes Joe four months and two more trips to Renton to finish reading the older scrolls (which I translated for you in volumes II through IV of *God's Plan of the Ages)*. By the time he finishes John's second Gospel story (the first thirty-three chapters of this volume), Joe's theology has dramatically changed. He and Alan have matured greatly, and have come to be fast friends. Now, finally, it's time to study that last scroll, *Peter's Prophecy of the End Times*.

I bounce back to the Yoder's farm. Steve Saxon has prospered, living among the Pennsylvania Amish. Even with all the hard work, he's having the time of his life. His new family is a constant delight to him. Such love and fun they share with each other, and with him! His original family was always too busy to have fun together, or even eat at the same dinner table. He had thought his church family west of Newark was unique. Now he discovers that God's love is shared among the Amish, as well.

Steve didn't tell Gunter what he'd done with the land purchase. He figures that it will come out soon enough. The last thing he wants is to be loved for his money.

It takes three months for the Realtor to close the deal. As it turned out, he had overpaid them. The taxes owed weren't that much, and the land commissioner had barely begun the condemnation proceedings. But they sure loved getting their bonuses, and since Steve had specified that the Yoders would stay as co-owners, they decided they didn't need Gunter's permission. They rammed through a modified condemnation, took Steve's money to pay off all the back taxes, and rewrote the title deed to include Steve as a co-owner with the Yoders. (I know, it sounds shady, but the city hated dealing with those weird Amish!)

Spring planting has gone well. Steve has learned to keep up with Gunter, and surpass him. The fresh country air and good home-grown cooking has filled him out to where he can keep up with any young man in the community. He is accepted and loved by all. They officially adopt him as 'Amish' at their big summer hoedown the month after spring planting is done. He's asked to give a speech.

"I just want you to know I'm grateful to be accepted by you. I was a city-boy, but believe me, I like it much better out here! I still like to visit my old church once in a while, but I hope to stay and live with you as long as Gunter and Yolanda let me. They're so good to me! My own family all died, but now I have a family again! Thank you all."

Everyone cheers. Gunter says a few words about always wanting a son. Then the leading elder of the community, Brother Philip, stands up. "Gunter, we know you've been struggling to get your taxes paid up because of your crop failures the last three years. It's been tough for us all. But this year it looks like everything is going to work out. We've all pledged to pitch in a tenth of our increase to help you with your back taxes, so you don't lose your farm."

Steve almost jumps up and shouts, "No! They're already paid!" But who is he to deprive these good people of the joy of helping one another? He holds his peace, trusting that God will work that out, too.

That fall the harvest is indeed very good. Their produce is sold, giving Gunter more than enough for the current year's taxes. But when he goes to the land commissioner's office with his neighbors' tithes to pay off all his back taxes, he's told they're already paid. He returns home, with more cash in his briefcase than he's ever owned before in his life.

This has become a very big deal in the Yoder family. Every year they approached the tax issue with fear and trepidation. Every year Gunter came back from the land office with his family gathered around the kitchen table in earnest prayer. Every year he laid out their situation and showed them how little money they had to last through the next year. Then they committed it to God in prayer. This year, when he returns from the land office, they're gathered around the table as always, praying that he will finally have enough money to cover it all. Gunter comes in the door, trying to look stern. Momma Yolanda calls out, "Papa! Was it enough for all our back taxes? Or are we still in debt to the English?"

"Is there enough to live on next year?" Sue chimes in.

"I need a new dress!" adds Samantha.

"And I need new shoes!" calls Salome.

"We can make you a new dress, Samantha!" Sarah glares at her barely older sister.

"And you don't need new shoes, Salome!" sniffs Sabrina. "You can have mine. I've outgrown them. I'm the one who needs new shoes, and a new dress, too!"

"We gonna lose our farm!" wails baby Sylvia.

"Hush! Hush! We're gonna make it! Steve helped us! God sent him to save us just in time! God is never late!" Sharon is trying to be strong for her sisters.

Gunter holds his big briefcase above the kitchen table. The room grows quiet. Every eye is on him. He relishes his moment of triumph. "Fer the coming year this is all ve haff left. Make it last!" Still trying to look solemn, he opens the briefcase wide and dumps. Over fifty thousand dollars spills out to flow clear across the table and onto the floor.

There are squeals, gasps, and cries of, "Thank you God! Praise God! God is good!" Amid it all, Samantha is saying, "Now we'll have enough for a new dress for everyone, and new shoes, too!" and Sue is calming her sisters with, "Now we will have enough for all our needs. Aren't you ashamed that you fretted so much?" Then I see little Sylvia run over to Steve and hug his knees. I hear her soft, sweet voice say, "Thank you, Steve, for saving us just in time!" This is a sacred moment. I gape in awe. As a time traveler I've seen a lot. But I must admit this little scene moves me deeply.

"Momma! Papa! Did you hear baby Sylvia?" It is Sharon, the only one who noticed what Sylvia had done. "It is fine to thank God for His goodness. But God sent Steve! Don't you think we ought to thank Steve, too?" She gets up from her chair and goes to stand in front of Steve. He jumps up awkwardly. His chair tips over backwards.

"Steve, I don't know how much of this was your doing, and how much was a miracle from God, but I thank you, from the bottom of my heart!" Before anyone can stop her, Sharon grabs Steve by both shoulders and reaches up to plant a big kiss on his cheek. Everyone, including Steve, is too surprised to even respond. Sharon quickly decides that this is too good an opportunity to pass up. "And this one is for all my sisters who are too busy arguing about new dresses and shoes to thank you!" She leans up and kisses him again, on the other cheek, even longer. Then, face flaming red, she drops back in her chair.

Now the other sisters are crowding around Steve with their curtsies and thank you's. Momma comes over to give him a warm motherly hug. Papa looks quizzically at him. "A big help you vere this year, Steve. Much bigger than I effer expected vhen I saw you in those city slicker clothes. And yer $20 a day fed us all vhen our money ran out. Thank ye I do too, from the bottom of my heart. I apologize that my eldest vas so forverd vith ye. Discipline her I vill. But Steve, this extra [he waves at the loaded table] vas going to pay our back taxes. Then they told me already paid they are. Do ye know about that anything?"

Steve doesn't want to answer, so he skirts the issue. "Please, Papa Gunter, don't punish Sharon. People have different ways of saying thanks. I liked Sharon's the best! God must have worked a miracle to pay the back taxes. Since this is from the tithe that all the community gathered to help us, it might be good to take some of it and use it to… use it to bless them all somehow. Maybe set up a rainy-day fund to help them with emergencies, or something."

Gunter is still suspicious, but he lets it drop. Sue likes Steve's plan. "That's a great idea, Papa! We've got way more than enough!"

"Sure, dear. I agree." Momma stoops to pick up some that had fallen on the floor. "There must be… thousands here. We've never had this much before."

"I agree, too. That's vhat I'm thinking all the vay home. I'd luff to find out who paid our back taxes. But ya sure, pass it on ve vill. Take down the cookie jar and fill it fer the coming year. Then each of ye take five hundred dollars fer yer own savings, fer vhen ye grow up and start yer own family. The rest I'll use fer others who need help."

As you may guess, each girl has her five hundred dollars and is running for her piggy bank before the cookie jar is even off the shelf, except Sylvia, who is wailing, "How much is five hun… hun red dollars?" They celebrate that night with homemade ice cream.

It's been a busy year. I'm now used to bouncing back and forth around the country. Time travel is fun! I'm glad it's instant, because from here on out things are moving so fast I'm really wishing I could be two places at once.

Peter's prophecy is now all translated into English. It is stunning in its revelation and in its detailed descriptions of the end times. It clearly is not a forgery or a hoax. No one could possibly have predicted, back when the scroll was written, so exactly the situation that faced them now. Alan and Joseph have both studied it at length. They agree – there is no longer any question of doubt – that they both have been called, chosen by God, to be the two witnesses of the Apocalypse. Many others have been chosen for other tasks as well. The time is terribly short. Alan and Joseph make lists of the other pastors and people involved. They pray intensely over each one, trying to match the name and city from the prophecy to actual people. They spend hours on the phone and in their computer directory, checking names and addresses. Then they mail out a copy of *Peter's Prophecy of the End Times* to each person for whom the Holy Spirit gives His leading. Of the hundreds of pastors, one is Mike Mason, now in the big manse behind his lovely new sanctuary west of Newark, New Jersey.

Pastor Mike sees the package when he comes home Saturday night from visiting one of his church members. It's on the table where his wife threw it. His youngest, little two-year-old Billy, is afraid of it. "Daddy! It's smoking! And it wobbles! It scares me!"

"Now Billy. It's not smoking. See, it's not even warm!" But Billy just turns to flee into his bedroom. Pastor Mike doesn't have time to deal with it. He still has to finish his sermon for tomorrow. He'll open the package later.

Much later, Monday night, Mike finally relaxes in his study to open the strange package. In it is a three-ring binder filled with pages of a manuscript and a letter in front. "Dear Pastor Mason," the letter reads. "I hope I've found the right Pastor Mason in Newark, New Jersey. Did you disciple a young man named Steve who recently left your church and went to an Amish farm? If so, then this document is for you and him. We don't have his address; hope you do. We believe God is calling you both to special tasks in these end times. But if not, then I have the wrong Pastor Mason – please return it. I'll pay postage. Label it, 'Return to Sender. Postage guaranteed'. Love in Christ, Professor Alan Benson and Pastor Joseph Johnson."

Mike recognizes his friend Joe from his seminary days. He leans over to read the manuscript title, *Peter's Prophecy of the End Times*. Suddenly the book wobbles before his eyes and appears to be smoking. *Hmm. My young son is more sensitive in the spirit than I.* Pastor Mike pleads the blood of Jesus over the book, binds any demonic activity, and spends time in prayer, just waiting on Jesus to see if He will tell him what to do about it. He is fully prepared to simply burn it, if Jesus doesn't answer.

Logos laughs. "Look at that. No nonsense from him! He knows how to wait on Me and listen for My voice. Do you think he'll need to be told twice?"

Satan has been watching, too. "He's been a preacher for a long time. Of course he hears You when it's the same old stuff. But give him something beyond his understanding, totally new, and even the second time he won't hear You!"

Logos is in a jovial mood. "Okay, Satan, how's this for something totally new and beyond his understanding?" He whispers in Pastor Mike's ear. "Eat the book."

Michael groans. "But Master! No one on earth could hear that! It is too foreign to his thinking!" However, even before Michael finishes talking, to the utter amazement of the watching angels and devils, Pastor Mike takes the manuscript out of the three-ring binder, rolls it up, and begins to stuff it into his mouth.

"He did it! Score one for the last Adam! I have my man. Satan, you lose. Go do your adversary job or you'll lose your badge. I gave you permission to harm the earth, and you've been piddling around! But this one is Mine!" Logos slips through the veil and into Pastor Mike's office.

"Are you hungry, My friend?" Logos, comfortably seated, materializes on the pastor's counseling couch.

Pastor Mike is sitting at his desk, a roll of papers stuffed into his mouth like a humongous cigar. He takes it out to answer. "No sir. Just thinking about the scroll that Ezekiel ate. Chapter three tells us it was like honey in his mouth, but this just tastes like a wad of paper. Can I help you?"

"Don't you wonder how I got here? It's late, and the church building is all locked up."

"Well, if it's really locked up, then you've come through the walls, and you're either an angel come to bless me, or a devil come to tempt me. Either way, I win. I've already committed my ways to the Lord, and He's protecting me here. So I receive any blessings you may have, and reject any temptations. Fair enough? What can I do for you?"

Logos nods, then begins to chuckle. "I like that. No nonsense indeed. So tell Me already, are you the right man? Or do I have to search for another?"

"What 'right man'? I'm afraid I'm not up with you yet." Suddenly Mike makes the connection with the letter he just read. "Oh. You mean the Pastor Mason who discipled the Steve who bought the Amish farm? Yes. I am the right man. Why do you ask?"

"Because you and Steve Saxon are My chosen ones. Read the book. Yes, eat it. Digest it. Let Steve read it, too. You can trust it. It will become a part of you. It will bring life as death falls all around you. The ones who mailed it to you are My two witnesses of the Apocalypse. It is time. For great tribulation. Be at peace. I am with you always." With a breath of fresh air, the angel vanishes from his sight.

"Wait, Lord!" It all happened too suddenly, and Mike is left gasping for air. "But Lord!" He tries again. "What about the rapture? If… if it's time for the great tribulation, then why should I waste my time reading this book? Haven't You come to snatch up Your Bride? We're ready, Lord Jesus! Your church is ready for You at any moment, just like Your Word says. I've been faithful to preach the Word. We're all alert, ready, watching and waiting for the rapture as You promised…" Mike continues like that for some time, crying out to Jesus. But the night grows dark and his office gets cold. He finally realizes that Jesus isn't answering, and goes to bed.

Mike Mason rarely sleeps in. He is a busy pastor of a thriving, now rather large, congregation. He is always up by 6 AM. But on Tuesday morning he has sunk into a deep sleep and fails to wake up for his alarm. Mary decides that he needs the extra sleep. She shuts off his alarm.

Steve Saxon, who was up by 4 AM as always, knocks on their door at seven. He has the day off. He asks to see Pastor Mike. Mary invites him to breakfast, but he's already eaten. He prefers to just wait in the office until Mike is ready.

Steve doesn't even sit down. He's pleased with the new sanctuary they picked out. It is plenty big – big enough for a lot of growth. Their congregation is certainly growing. There is something about unconditional love, regardless of status or racial barriers, that attracts people together. Many are driving in from Massachusetts, Maryland, and eastern Pennsylvania. Their new location has turned out to be a big boost. The state's theft of their previous land has become a blessing. It's so easy to get to, from all around. And the pastor's lavish new office! Steve thought he'd had a big office before, but this is something else!

Now, Steve doesn't mean to pry. It's just not right to rifle through the papers on someone's desk. But Steve appreciates the meticulous order that Pastor Mike always maintains, and he spots something out of order. There is a binder, open on his desk, with the three rings unlocked and all the pages missing. Then there is a crumpled roll of papers nearby. Steve matches them up and arrives at the logical conclusion. The papers clearly ought to be in the empty binder. He carefully flattens them out, lines them up, and puts them back where they belong.

Wait, there is one more page over there. It wasn't rolled up with the others, but it is punched with the same three holes. Steve picks it up. Does it go in the binder, too? He glances at the writing to see if it matches. It's the letter, and he can't help but notice his own name and the 'Amish farm'. Now he reads the title of the book: *Peter's Prophecy of the End Times.* The letter says this document is for him as well as for Pastor Mike. Immediately interested, Steve sits at the desk to read. He is lost in it when Mike arrives an hour later. Steve jumps when Mike opens the door, "Hi, Steve! Mary said you were here. Welcome! Sorry I slept in. What'cha reading?"

"Peter's prophecy! The letter says it's for me to read, too. It's incredible! It starts out as if it was written back at the time of ancient Rome, the time of Nero, but it reads as if Peter knew everything that would happen up 'til now!"

Now it all comes back to Mike. His smile fades, and he bows his head, remembering. "Go ahead, Steve, take it over to the couch and keep reading. I've got to do some work at my computer for a bit."

After twenty minutes, Mike looks up. "Okay, Steve, I'm done. Are you at a stopping place? We need to talk."

"This book! It tells the future! You and I are in it! It tells about me buying the farm, and it even tells what I'm going to be using it for! And it's got a whole bunch of terrible things happening right afterwards. I haven't finished yet – but I guess I'm at a stopping place, because I, uh… well… I don't understand it anymore. I think I understood it up 'til that, but now it's talking about scary stuff that, well… that doesn't really agree with… well anyway, it's scary."

"That doesn't agree with my preaching, you mean?" Pastor Mike laughs. "It's okay to say it. Jesus was here last night. Here, physically, just like a man. He said some things that don't agree with my preaching either. Here, I wrote it all out. This is what He said, word for word, as near as I can remember. Right after He said it, He vanished. Poof. Just like that." He prints out a copy for Steve.

Steve reads, "You and Steve Saxon are My chosen ones. Read the book. Eat it and digest it. You can trust it. It will become part of you. It will bring life, as death falls all around you. Those who sent it are My two witnesses of the Apocalypse. It is time. For great tribulation. Be at peace. I'm with you always."

Steve goes over it three times. Mike waits, rereading it himself. Steve looks up. "You said Jesus was here? Right here where I'm sitting?"

"Yes. Or His angel. Wait. He also said that you were supposed to read it, too. I forgot that part. But I guess you figured it out. So tell me. I haven't read it yet. What does the book say about the rapture?"

"Uh. Well… I haven't gotten to that yet."

"Then what is all that 'scary stuff' you just mentioned?"

Steve looks at the page Mike just gave him. He points. "Jesus says it's time for great tribulation. I think that's the scary stuff in the book, too."

Pastor Mike begins to take it seriously. More seriously than anything in his life. He cancels all his appointments for the day. He reads the first part of the book while Steve struggles on bravely to the end. Next they trade parts and Steve rereads the first half while Mike is finishing. Then they spend the rest of the day through supper time and on into the evening discussing what they read and planning what they need to do about it.

CHAPTER 44 – PREPARING FOR TRIBULATION

"Pastor Mike, it's impossible! I'll never get all that done in time! And you're not going to have time to help me!"

"Steve, one thing I've learned in all my years as pastor. Never say impossible. With God, all things are possible, and if He is directing, they're certain. Remember when you first came here, you thought it was impossible to ever have a Black brother. So just take this step-by-step. I'll help when I can, but I know others will help, too.

"I'll get ahold of Professor Benson and Pastor Johnson. We've got to coordinate with them before they have to leave for Israel. It's funny how I never even considered those to be Jewish names – Ben's son and John's son. But now we know that all of us are actually Jews, or rather, from Ephraim. No wonder I've had such a burden for reaching the Jews! I wish I knew my Hebrew better. I've never spoken it, only read it. I guess Alan and Joe must be pretty good at it, if they're going to preach in Jerusalem!

"So you'd better get back to your farm. You are going to be one very busy boy! I'll make a copy of this book and send it to you for reference, but don't wait for it. You've got to get married first, before anything else. At least that's the way I read it. Do you have anyone in mind to marry?"

"Yeah, I do – an Amish girl named Sharon. But frankly, I'm terrified. I'm still really new among the Amish. They've been around for hundreds of years and I've only been there six months. I'm still scared of what they'll do when they find out I've already bought their farm. Sharon… all of them… might hate me for that!"

Mike laughs. "Pulled a sneaky on 'em, eh? Don't worry, Steve. Haven't you already followed the book to the letter, even though you'd never read it? God is obviously leading you whether you knew it or not, and you've got to trust He will continue, even if He's got to renew her mind to fall in love with you. I'll bet you're married within six months."

"That might not be soon enough!" Steve stands. It's nearly midnight. He has to be up at 4 AM again tomorrow. He'd better get moving. "Thank you, Pastor. You are a true friend. You're going to be awfully busy, too. You've got a bunch of sermons to prepare, brand new ones you've never preached before. A lot of churches are depending on you – 33, the prophecy says. It all sounds overwhelming!"

So they part with a hug and a prayer. Pastor Mike gets right to bed. It's Wednesday already, and he's got to have his first mini-sermon prepared in time for the Wednesday night prayer meeting. But first, he is utterly exhausted, mentally drained. He'll get up early and start preparing.

Steve crawls into his sleeping bag on the living room floor just before 2 AM. This will be a very short night. He is asleep by the time he hits the pillow, but it seems like only an instant before he awakes to the heavy thud of Papa Gunter tromping down the stairs.

"Rise 'n shine, my favorite son!" Gunter calls cheerily, He always gets up this early, even on the Sabbath or on days when there is nothing to do in the fields. By breakfast time, he and the girls always have all the chores done, the animals watered and fed, the barn cleaned up, and the day's activities planned. Steve has gotten used to it, and no longer minds. It does make for a very efficient day… when he's gotten to bed at a decent hour!

But this day of all days, Gunter wants to stand there and chat. "A good sleep did ye haff, Steve? Y' know, ye sleeping there on the rug bothers me it does. Yer such a blessing to us all. You saved our farm! Momma 'n me, ve pray about this. Yer own bedroom is the least we can do fer ye."

Steve tries to rub the sleep out of his eyes. "But Papa Gunter, I like it here. It's easy to just throw my sleeping bag behind the couch. And there is just no way you're going to cram all seven girls into one bedroom, or take half of them in with you to give me their room. It wouldn't be right!"

"Ya, ya. I know. But I'ff been thinking. Ve got some extra money now. Today I go in to town to buy lumber. Yer own bedroom ve shall build ye, right over there beyond the pantry." He heads out.

Steve quickly pulls on his pants, then sits down to tie on his work boots. *It's now or never. I knew I would have to move fast, but after only two hours of sleep?! God help me!* He runs outside after Gunter. He finds him mucking out the stalls already. "Papa Gunter! We need to talk!"

"Okay. Talk." Gunter just keeps working.

"I don't want you to build a bedroom here for me. Your daughters are growing up – build it for them if you want. But I need to build my own house. With your permission, I'd like to build it down there in the middle fifty. It's… it's time I start my own family. I'll still keep working on your farm, of course. And you can help me on mine. I should get started right away. Uh… with your permission…"

Gunter stops working. He looks at Steve. Not a hint of a smile cracks his lips. He just stares in silence. Steve tries again. "I know that seems awfully presumptive, sir. But you see…" he gulps. He hates to push things this fast but he has no choice. "I, uh… want to marry your daughter."

For a moment Gunter's face remains frozen in stony passivity. Then his pitchfork thumps to the ground and he breaks into a broad smile. "Vell, vhy didn't ye say so! Momma and I, ve haff been praying fer this. Ye vant to marry our daughter and verk on our farm. Ya sure! You haff my permission right away! Today into town I go, a subdivision to apply fer. Ye shall haff the middle fifty. Haff ye already asked… Sharon! Sharon it is, ya?"

"Yes, sir. No sir, I haven't asked her yet. I need to make sure it's okay with you and Momma first. And you don't need to subdivide the middle fifty for me. You see, I can take care of the platting and permitting myself because…"

But Steve is loudly interrupted by Sharon, who has just come in to milk the cow and the goats, and hears her name mentioned.

"Haven't asked her what? Are you talking about me? Steve Saxon! What's this about the middle fifty?"

Oh my God. Could things possibly move any faster? Sharon looks angry. Maybe she hates me! Maybe she'll throw her milking pail at me when she finds out I'm already co-owner of the land. God! Help me, God! What do I tell her?

"Just tell her the truth."

What an unromantic place to propose! In a barn, for heaven's sake! And couldn't You have given me a little more time to prepare my pitch, Lord?

"Just tell her the truth."

"Yes, Sharon, we were talking about you. I had hoped to surprise you in a nicer place than this, but privacy is a bit hard to come by in a big family, eh?"

Sharon sets her lantern by the door and comes closer. The expression on her face softens. *Perhaps she won't hit me with her milking pail after all.* "Our barn is a fine place to talk, Steve. I like it here. What did you have in mind?"

"Well, I was just talking to papa…" Steve glances at Gunter, who is grinning like a Cheshire Cat. He recognizes Steve's discomfort and backs out of the stall, leaving his pitchfork where it fell. "To Sharon you talk. Me I go tell Momma. She vill be pleased!" There is an awkward silence while Gunter grabs his lantern and scurries past.

Steve takes a deep breath. Finally, some privacy. He thinks about getting down on one knee, but it would look corny in this barn. "Sharon, I love you! I want to marry you!" he blurts out, adding, "You caught me unprepared here. I don't even have an engagement ring yet. But your papa just gave us his permission. Will you marry me?"

Sharon stands firm, waiting, the expression on her face unchanged except for a slight quiver of her chin. So Steve continues, "Sorry to hit you with this so suddenly. I had wanted more time to court you first. But you surprised me just as I was asking your papa. Would you like more time?"

Ignoring his question, Sharon demands, "What did I hear about the middle fifty?" It came out sounding a bit more harsh than she intended.

"Well, I want to build you, us, a home there, so we can continue working on Papa's farm. God showed me that…"

"I accept your proposal!" Sharon interrupts, leaping forward, throwing her arms around his waist, and burying her face in his shirt next to his heart. Steve is flummoxed by her sudden closeness, and utterly at a loss for words. Right at that moment, Momma Yolanda opens the door and hurries in, almost bumping into them in the pre-dawn light. "Ach du lieber! Is that you, Sharon? Steve?"

"Yes, Momma. It's us. We're engaged! Did Papa tell you? We're going to be married!"

Now Steve is really embarrassed. "Momma Yolanda? Uh… m-m-may we have your permission? I meant to ask you first but Sharon caught me asking Papa."

"Of course you have my permission Steve. We've been praying for this! Papa says you want to build a house on the middle fifty? We're so pleased! Do you have a ring?" Yolanda grabs Sharon's hand to look.

"No, Momma. He didn't have time to get me one yet."

"You must have a promise ring! Here, I'll show you how my parents did it in the old country." She stoops to pick up three stalks of alfalfa and deftly weaves them into a ring around a peg on the barn door. Then she gives it to Steve. "Here. Put this on her finger. It's your promise to her."

Steve does. It fits. Yolanda puts her arms around both of them and blesses them. During her prayer, Gunter comes up behind. When she finishes, he puts his big arms around them and blesses them again. Then Sharon's sisters start streaming in, some still rubbing sleep out of their eyes, some still pulling on their clothes. Gunter must have told them. They hold hands and dance around Steve and Sharon singing the German blessing song. Now the big old barn doesn't seem like such an unromantic place after all.

"Tonight ve celebrate! A special dinner Momma vill fix. Ice cream ve shall have, and all about his plans Steve vill tell us. Now, off to yer chores. Already sunrise has broke!"

"Wait! Papa Gunter… I'm sorry. I have one more thing I need to say, and it can't wait. When you hear it, you might decide you don't want me to marry your daughter after all." Everyone freezes. "I'm sorry. I should have told you, but I wasn't sure if you'd be angry with me. I tried… I…"

"Just spit it out, son. Spit it out. Ve von't luff ye less fer it. I think ve all know vhat it is, anyvay."

"You do?"

"Ya sure. You ver not yust a poor boy vanting a job. You ver a rich city-boy pretending to be poor. And you ver the vun who paid our back taxes, didn't ye. I knew it by yer city-slicker clothes, and by the vay ye kept fillin' our cookie jar. That much money no vun else had, fer sure."

"Yes sir. But there's more. Before I came here the state had already condemned your farm. They were selling it for back taxes. I was at the Realtor's in town the same day it went on the market. I didn't even know you then. I bought the farm. I'd already paid for it before I met you."

Gunter's face falls and he turns a bit pale. "Ye… ye… already bought my farm? Vhere shall ve go?"

"No, Papa. Before we finalized the contract I made them put you back on. As a permanent co-owner. No evictions. If I had not done that you would already be evicted."

A smile comes back into Gunter's face. "Vell, vhy didn't ye yust say so! Sounds like ye haff saved the farm again! And angry mit ye ve should be?"

"Papa Gunter, I just wanted you all to know the truth, now. I love it here, and I really do want to marry Sharon. But I can't carry deception into our marriage. In a way, I've been living a lie, the whole time, until now. You're right. I'm really very wealthy. I inherited it from my folks. But I didn't want you to know I was rich, or that I owned the land, or that I paid the taxes. Three girls already tried to marry me for my money! I just want to be loved for who I am. I'm sorry I deceived you. I should have just told the truth. Can you all still love me now that you know I'm rich?"

Of course they love him all the more. After the day's work is done Steve sneaks off to town, returning just in time for the engagement celebration Papa promised. As they are dishing out the homemade ice cream, Steve takes Sharon's trembling hand and holds it up so the rest of the family can see. He removes the alfalfa ring and slips on a modest gold ring with a small, sparkling diamond. Gunter asks him to give a speech and share his plans for the future.

"We haven't talked over our plans yet. This happened so fast, we haven't had much time to plan. As I said, I hope to build a home on the middle fifty for Sharon and I. Then we can build a barn there, and develop a farm. But we'll still be helping to work this one, too. Beyond that, I have plenty of money. I, uh… also want to build homes for each of our sisters, down on the lower fifty. Big homes, with lots of bedrooms so when they get married they can have big families. I'm hoping God will send each of you sisters a good husband, and they will fall in love with this beautiful place and want to stay here, just like I did!"

Sue (16) and Samantha (almost 15) glance at each other in delight. They've been thinking about that. Sarah and Sabrina just laugh, but you could tell they're starting to think, too. Not yet 9, Salome isn't interested. "I don't want another house. I want to stay here with Momma and Papa." Little Sylvia, a precocious 3, lets it fly right over her head. She is still back with Gunter's, "Steve saved the farm again!" She comes up to hug Steve's knees. "Thank you, Steve, for saving our farm again. I wuv you!"

Steve bends down to return her hug. "And I love you too, Sylvia. I love all of you. Just because I'm going to marry your big sister doesn't mean I'll love the rest of you any less. Now, I gave my speech. Sharon, are you going to give a speech, too?"

Everybody looks at Sharon. The women don't usually give the speeches among the Amish. "No, I… I'm just happy that you came, Steve. Just at the right time. In answer to my prayer. I prayed for…"

She hesitates. Steve is catching on. "Go ahead, Sharon," he encourages her. "Tell us what you prayed for. I'd like to know why you could accept my proposal so quickly."

Gazing adoringly up at Steve, Sharon nods. "I prayed for a rich city-boy who didn't have another farm to take me away to. I knew you were the one – I knew I would marry you from the moment you first walked in the door in your city clothes. I'd been praying for you for almost two years! With no beard, you looked just like the one in my prayers. That's why I kissed you after Papa said the taxes were paid."

Gunter is glad to hear it. "God does answer prayer! Yer momma and me, ve prayed fer a younger fellow to help mit spring planting. I knew ve ver late on the taxes, but evict us I didn't know they vas. God sent just the right vun!"

Momma Yolanda is already plotting their lives. "When do you plan to get married, Sharon? You know we don't like long engagements. Too much opportunity for the devil. It's Wednesday. We can be ready for the wedding in a week, don't you think? All the ladies will love to help. How about next Tuesday night? Would that be okay?"

Steve is still focused on Sharon. "You've been praying for me all along, haven't you. I knew it. I knew somebody had to be praying for me. I just didn't know it was you until after you kissed me. But I fit into this family so easily, so quickly, I knew this was a 'God thing'." He turns to face the family. "I'd like to make another speech. This one is a lot more serious." He pauses to collect his thoughts.

"God brought me here for a reason. It's bigger than us or this farm. It's bigger than this whole community. I know you all have kept pretty much separate from national events, politics, and all. But God is bigger than that. He follows what goes on in America, and He's upset that our nation has turned against Him and His laws. Terrible judgments are going to fall on America, in fact, on the whole world. Deadly judgments, to make everyone repent and fear God! However, God has chosen this community to be a safe place, a refuge. Peter calls it a 'Green Pasture'. Not for everyone, but just for His special chosen people. Those He wants to protect. He'll send husbands for your sisters. He'll send godly families who are being persecuted by those who hate God. We've got to be ready to help them. God chose me to come and help prepare for them."

Gunter is with him. He is not as unaware of American politics as Steve thinks. "Ya, Steve. I agree mit ye. Thank ye fer the reminder to help our brothers in need. But vill seven houses be enough fer all God vill send? And who are these 'chosen people'? How vill ve know them?"

"It will be enough. God has many of these safe places all around the country. He showed me that we'll need seven big homes on this farm. Other homes, or added bedrooms, will be built on other farms. There'll be enough for all God will send. I don't know who they are. But God knows. He's leading us, all of us. He'll bring them at the right time."

"Then it's settled. Tuesday night." Yolanda hasn't really been listening. She's still plotting. "Okay girls. Let's get busy. We've got a wedding to prepare for!"

Pastor Mike has decided to give his sermon first rather than after prayer. He stands at the pulpit and looks over the congregation. For a Wednesday night, a lot of people are here. Some he doesn't even recognize. "Thank you all for coming to our prayer meeting. We'll go to prayer in a few minutes, but I need to say a few things first. As most of you know, this has been a happy, loving, prosperous church. We've actively engaged our culture with the truth about God's laws. We've stood firm for biblical morality, and against wickedness like abortion and the brainwashing going on in public schools – teaching kids to hate God. We've had an impact in our community for righteousness. I'm proud of you all. God has richly blessed us for it.

"But as of this moment, all that has changed. Our focus was outward. I always taught you that we didn't need to focus on ourselves because we'd be raptured before God judges the world for rejecting the church's message. I'm very sorry. I was wrong. Please forgive me. I know now, beyond any shadow of doubt, that the great tribulation has already begun. God is now judging the world for rejecting Him and His laws. We are not going to be raptured out of it. God plans to use us, right here, right in the middle of it.

"But He can't use us if we are hiding secret sins. It starts with repentance, and letting Him clean out our own lives. So from now on, our focus will be inward. 'It is time for judgment to begin with the House of God…' (1 Pet 4:17) So this prayer meeting will be confessing, repenting, and vowing to forsake our own sins, and preparing our hearts and our church family to be used of God in the coming judgments. Fearful judgments will fall on America. And on the whole world, too. But if we have first been cleansed from within by the blood of Jesus, God will hide us in the secret place of His presence from the wrath to come.

"'He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to YHWH, "My refuge! My fortress! My God, in whom I trust!" For it is He who delivers you from the trap and from the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with His pinions, and under His wings you may seek refuge. His faithfulness is a shield. You will not need to fear the terror by night, or the arrow that flies by day, or the pestilence that stalks in darkness, or the destruction that lays waste at noon. A thousand may fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand. But it will not approach you. You will only look with your eyes and see the wages of the wicked…'" (Ps 91)

"I notice some of you have come from surrounding churches. Thank you! Please convey this message back to your churches as well, so more of God's people will be prepared to stand firm in His righteousness and love His judgments as the onslaught of evil sweeps over America.

"So let's go to prayer. When God's judgments fall, the Most High will be our dwelling place, our refuge. God will use this church to protect many who otherwise would be lost in the coming judgments."

CHAPTER 45 – TREATY WITH DEATH

I zip ahead in time two years. Pastor Joseph gets another letter from the *Friends of Israel Ministries*. He doesn't toss them anymore. For three years he has been following the news of the preliminary treaty that Muslim leaders in Israel signed, ceding control of the north half of the temple mount and promising peace with Israel while she builds her temple there. This latest letter confirms what Joseph expected. After three years of bickering, every Muslim nation in the world has actually ratified Dr. Relt's treaty! It is no longer preliminary. It's now a done deal. It is truly a miracle! Everyone has genuinely agreed to a lasting peace all over the Middle East! Dr. Relt has achieved the impossible! He's more than merely a brilliant negotiator. Now he is hailed as a national hero and savior of the Jews.

Israel has spent this time drafting plans and preparing materials. Before the last signature dries, construction has begun on the new temple. It will be greater than Solomon's.

But Pastor Joseph knows that Israel has made her 'firm covenant' (Dan 9:27) with death itself (Isa 28:15) and that in truth, this begins the **seventieth week of Daniel.**

"Cain! Come up here!" I gladly obey, but when I reach the throne I'm met with weeping rather than the normal joy and laughter. "Logos, are You upset with me?"

"Not at all, Cain. And I am pleased with your writing," Logos begins, wiping His tears and rewarding me with a studied smile. I bow in grateful acknowledgement. "I love the way you've focused on a few key individuals like Steve and Pastor Mike, who are typical of the many things I will do all over the globe. You are wise to keep the story simple like that, or My precious ones might not understand."

"O my Lord! I am only following the leading of Your Spirit. To you belongs all the glory…"

Now Logos' joy bursts forth. "But it's your choice to follow so closely. I am pleased with your choice. I hear your desire to be in two places at once. I grant your desire."

"O Lord! I never asked for that. I thought several times it might be nice, but I know it is impossible. Only You are omnipresent. Only You are omnipotent and omniscient! I will not steal Your glory!"

Now Logos' laughter shakes the heavenlies. I wonder that He so easily switches from tears to joy. Finally He answers. "You speak of My omnipotence in the same breath as telling Me what's impossible?" Now I realize the joke. "The only impossibility is for My Word to fail or My nature to be compromised. Putting you two places at once is a piece of cake. You are still thinking linearly. You're a time traveler! Try thinking more globally. After viewing one scene, just step back in time to view something else during that same time. You'll need to, because after Israel's 'Treaty with Death' things will move so fast you'll have to be in two places at once to cover it all!"

"Yes, my Lord." It seems so obvious. Traveling in time requires a whole new mindset. As I'm considering it, the laughter ceases and the weeping begins again.

"My Bride has made her choice!" Logos wails. "How many times has she turned away! Instead of trusting Me, she has chosen to place her trust in signatures on a piece of paper - signatures of those sworn to destroy her!"

Now I understand His agony. He feels the pain of His Bride's wrong choice, knowing the suffering it will cost her. Spirit returns me to earth, sharing some of His grief. For the earth has now gone mad.

It's a subtle change. Ever since Adam's Fall there have been terrible storms, earthquakes, and natural calamities in the earth. And ever since the empire of Kenan there have been dictators and tyrants lording it over their oppressed and downtrodden people, promising help and delivering only tighter bondage. That part didn't change. But always before, those catastrophes and power plays by wicked men were generously mixed with God's mercy. The loss of life was always less than it could have been. The suffering of the enslaved was always mitigated by some who helped, and by some who escaped. Even within those with no knowledge of God, sparks of the divine nature remained.

But now it seems like that spark of the divine nature, that grace and mercy, is removed, and the world has gone mad. Satan has taken advantage of Logos' permission to 'harm the entire earth' and it has become his playground. For a year and a half I travel all over the globe, to see nation after nation descend into chaos. As I said, persecution and tribulation have been the lot of God's people since the first seal was broken and the first rider of the Apocalypse rode out to conquer on his white horse after the death of Kenan. But now, the **great tribulation** has begun. The righteous try to hide themselves while the wicked take control.

However, there are exceptions. Satan loves to torment his own, but now I see he has changed his tactics. Israel and the Arab nations who signed Dr. Relt's peace treaty are exempt from the calamities. Indeed, they are prospering like never before! Also I'm astounded (and very pleased) to discover that the righteous often succeed in hiding themselves. Or perhaps it's that angelic covering that Michael has gotten so good at over the years. Logos did promise to leave the covering over His chosen ones for a time until He removed Michael. Like in Egypt when the plagues wiped out the land but Goshen was spared, so now there are many little 'Green Pastures' where God's chosen ones still flourish, although Satan's attacks are aimed directly at them. America is another exception, at first. It's amazing how long she has been protected by her founder's character in making this a Christian nation. But in truth, she is Christian no more. She has elected evil leaders in the past, though most of them wore veneers of Christianity. But two months after Dr. Relt's treaty, America makes her choice, electing the most godless president in her history.

CHAPTER 46 – PERSECUTION

Professor Alan Benson has now officially retired from Seattle University, effective at the end of spring quarter. Peter's prophecies are all mailed out – that was a big job! All told, over the last 3 ½ years he has sent out more than 10,000. Now Alan is trying to schedule a presentation with the new president, Will Wildemann.

Pastor Johnson, who likes being called Joseph now, has finished preaching through the books of Revelation and Daniel. His preaching at God's Love Non-Denominational Church has been transformed. Now he tries to follow the Holy Spirit's lead in every sermon, even every word. It's amazing the turnaround in the church. A large church, it had been busy with the activities that a good social gospel requires. But instead, now there are regular confessions and repentance, encouragement toward holiness, and real worship, like he'd never known before! Many people are gone, but even more have come. It will be tough for him to leave. He wishes he had done this years ago, but he didn't know. At least Jesus has His church back!

He's resigning as senior pastor. He hates to, and he's tempted to worry about his young and inexperienced replacement. But it's Jesus' church. He raises up one and brings another down. All Joseph can do is follow, and trust God to keep a tight rein on this wild and zealous prophet He sent to take his place.

One more trip over to Renton. It will be his last. The drive seems to have gotten shorter, probably because he has driven it so often. Alan greets him enthusiastically. "Joseph! Welcome! Next time, I drive to your place. From there, to the White House, then off to Israel! The last five years since we met have passed too quickly. Now it's time! Come to my office. I'll show you what I've charted."

Joseph is always shocked when first stepping into the professor's office. Each time, he thinks it couldn't possibly be any messier. But each time, it is. How can anyone keep track of all the stuff stacked on every flat level place? Alan plucks a pile off the only remaining chair and blithely plops it on another precarious pile. "Sit, my friend! Look at this! It's the four horsemen of the Apocalypse!" He spreads a big chart on top of the clutter on his desk. It plots the false messiahs and demonically inspired rulers, and the worldwide wars, famines, plagues, deadly storms, and earthquakes that have covered the globe for so many years. "I believe the first five seals are past. If so, it's about time for the antichrist to be revealed. I'll bet it's that Dr. Relt we read about from the *Friends of Israel Ministries* letter, but we don't know. We've got to give our president his chance to repent. Then on to our Jerusalem Campaign!"

"Have you heard from many of those pastors on our mailing list? Did they acknowledge Peter's prophecies? Is the church in America ready for persecution?"

"What do you think? What about your church?"

Joseph leans back in the chair and takes a deep breath, shaking his head. "God knows I've tried. They've come a long way. At least most of them have stopped putting their faith in a pre-trib rapture. We've had enough troubles here already to convince them of that! But no. They're not ready. They have no clue how bad it will be. Most of them still hope that if they lay low, things will pretty much go on as before. Some have merely stocked up on survival stuff, hoping to wait out the tribulation in their homes. I've tried to get them in contact with some of God's 'Green Pastures', but they don't like the idea of being dependent on others."

"Yeah, it's human nature. I suspect most of America's churches are in the same boat. However, I just got a nice letter from your friend Pastor Mike Mason. He's the one Peter prophesied would finance our trip to Israel. Mike said he'd do it! He's got a wealthy church now, with lots of tithers and no debts. He promised to meet us at your place in Spokane with the money. His church is doing really well. They're preparing like crazy! He's had visitors from over thirty other churches in the area. They took Mike's message back to prepare their own people. It's incredible what God is doing! We needn't worry if they aren't ready. God is at work, and He's using these tribulations to help purify His church. Few other pastors responded to me, but if they respond to Him, that's all that counts."

Steve and Sharon Saxon have finally managed to get away from the busyness of the farm for a trip to visit Pastor Mike. Steve is eager for him to meet Sharon and their two babies, Matthew (nearly 2) and Mark (the newborn). After introductions and a pleasant lunch, they all sit around Mike and Mary's table to reminisce. "When you told me you thought I'd be married in six months, I didn't believe it was possible, much less those houses the prophecy said I would build in four years. It was a hopeless dream. But can you believe, I was married in six days! Six days! It makes my head spin just to think about it!" He looks lovingly at his wife. "Sharon accepted my proposal within three hours of the time I got home and went to bed that Tuesday – well, Wednesday morning. Three hours! Two of those I slept, from two to four AM, and she accepted my proposal before five. God had already prepared her heart for me."

Steve laughs. "I proposed in the barn! I didn't mean to, but Sharon came in just as I was asking permission from her papa. I was caught! It seemed so unromantic. But even that was a miracle. Sharon told me that she accepted my proposal on the same spot where she had been praying for two years for a rich city-boy to come marry her to save the farm. And the seven houses! I thought I'd have big trouble getting permits, getting materials, getting good workers. But you know, the county pushed everything through in record time! I had my permits within two months. They figured I was a big land developer like my dad, and that I was taking all that land away from the Amish to be part of their city. Everyone looked at my city clothes and clean shave and concluded I wasn't part of the Amish culture.

"That was strange. I hadn't intended to bring those clothes at all. I wanted to appear like I was poor. But I had 'em on at the Realty and when I went to the Yoders I forgot to change. Sharon said the reason she recognized me as the one she had prayed for, was because of my clean shave and 'city slicker' clothes. She had me wear 'em whenever I went to town, and the officials jumped through hoops for me!"

"So all seven houses are being built already?"

"Being built? They're finished! I hired Gunter's cousin as my general contractor, and he employed a lot of the Amish in his crew. They are huge! Same basic plan. Five bedrooms, den, bonus over the garage, and a big basement and food cellar. Ours is on the middle fifty next to Papa's. The other six are stretched out in a neat row along the lower fifty next to town. I have one big barn for the farming stuff. And I bought a tractor, a nice big one, the first in the entire community. We're now working on furnishing and landscaping the homes and plowing gardens for them. We're all ready for the refugees Peter prophesied about."

"My sisters are getting eager, too," Sharon confides. "Especially Sue and Samantha, who are of marriageable age now. They've each claimed one of the houses as their own and are praying for God to send their husband so they can start their families. Except Sylvia, who's only six. She doesn't want her house. She'd rather stay with Papa and Momma. God may have someone else in mind for it."

"Indeed," Mike laughs. "According to the prophecy there will be over a hundred coming to live with you. That includes your papa's house and others in the community." Mike leans forward to look into Sharon's face. "Do you realize, those are God's precious saints who would all be slaughtered if you hadn't prepared a place for them?"

Sharon nods seriously. "Yes I know. Steve and I read the whole prophecy together. I think God has prepared our community to accept them all, love them, and provide for them. Our last three harvests have been good. We have plenty of food stored up in those new food cellars."

"You've been spending an awful lot of money, Steve. How is it holding out?"

"Funny you should ask." Steve grins. "I thought I had infinite resources. But just recently I noticed it has almost run out, now that I'm done! All my dad's properties are sold and nearly all the money is spent or given away."

"Given away? You mean for our new sanctuary."

"Oh, that was just a small thing. I've invested in twelve other sanctuaries and six other 'Green Pastures' around the area – most of them managed by people who came right here and listened to you preach."

"Invested? You hope to make money on 'em?"

"You bet. Treasures in heaven! God's people are doing this all over. All I did is help them get out of debt."

Alan Benson is with Joseph Johnson in his tiny rental flat in Spokane. They plan to leave for the White House in under an hour – if they have the money! Joseph is chafing. "If we're such great prophets, how come we're so broke? We shouldn't have quit our jobs so soon!"

"Have faith, my friend. When God directs, He provides. He's teaching us to be dependent on Him. With the great things He has called us to do, He knows we'd get proud if we had our own resources. We're learning to wait on Him."

Joseph bows his head. "I'm sorry, Yashua. Forgive me for being impatient. I guess I'm a little scared. It all seems overwhelming. When I was the senior pastor, I thought I was hot stuff, but it was just arrogance. Now I feel very small. Fill me with Your Holy Spirit, Your strength, Your wisdom. Restore my faith, to be at peace and trust You."

"Yes. Amen!" Alan agrees. "And after a humble prayer like that, I suspect that the money must have just arrived." He gets up and goes to the door.

Sure enough, Mike and Mary Mason are not only on the front stoop, Mike is just pushing the doorbell when Alan opens the door. He laughs. "It's cool when God does that! Welcome, Mike and Mary! You are precisely on time, even though you think you're half a day late. I'm Alan Benson. Joseph and Chris Johnson and my wife Anna are inside."

So, financed by the generosity of the good people at Mike and Mary's church, Alan and Joseph head for the White House. The trip is tense. It seems like every demon in hell is on them, trying to prevent them from reaching the White House on time. Again and again, Alan has to prophesy against them, bind them, plead the blood of Yashua, and loose the situation to get moving again.

Joseph is worried. "Alan, why is this trip so difficult? I've been on lots of cross-country trips, and I've never had this many things go wrong before!"

"Practice, my friend. Yashua wants to prophesy great things through us. We need to get in practice. How can we prophesy great things if we can't even prophesy our way through an airport terminal?!"

Their wives, Chris and Anna, leave the rental flat and drive back with Mike and Mary to Newark. They abandon most of their stuff, except for clothes. God promises them safety under the protection of Mike's church family. It's a good thing they're gone, for that evening demonically driven drug addicts break in and trash the rental. If anyone had still been there, she probably would have been killed.

Satan gnashes his teeth. His timing was off. He couldn't get near Joe's church, but he was sure he could get him after he left the ministry and moved to this seedy housing development. By the time his demons notify him of Joe's reaching the airport terminal, he and Alan have escaped again. *Is Joe another 'chosen one' that he can't touch?* He has got to stop them somehow, before they get to Israel!

Miraculously, Alan and Joseph arrive at the White House just on time. They are expected. They are ushered right in to talk to President Wildemann. He is reminded of the purpose of their visit, and he greets them cordially. Perhaps he will even listen.

They sit around a large oval table, with various other staff and heads of state around. Alan pulls out copies of *Peter's Prophecy of the End Times* and slides them over. "This is the book I sent, Mr. President. Here are copies of some of the original scroll photos I took. Go ahead, pass them around. There were many other scrolls, too. My field of expertise is ancient languages. I read and translated them all. I can vouch that they are genuine, dating to shortly after the death of Christ, about 80 AD. The reason I've come is that I wanted to discuss our options.

"Peter's prophecy has proven accurate so far. It clearly describes the last sixty years, including the miraculous peace Dr. Relt negotiated between Israel and the Arabs. It details major troubles that have fallen on America, and tells of worse catastrophes to come, resulting in the near total destruction of our country. We're not blaming you, Mr. President. This is a result of America officially turning against God and His laws, which began back in the 1960s. He's been warning us ever since, but we haven't listened.

"Well, it's almost too late. But we have one more chance to turn it around. That's why we're here. Joseph, that list we made – would you please pass around the copies?"

Joseph passes them out while Alan continues. "I listed the things we need to do. In summary, first, we need to stop being an **enemy of God.** There's no need to make laws requiring the worship of God or imposing a state religion. But all the laws 'prohibiting free exercise of religion' must be thrown out – such as laws prohibiting churches from speaking out on sociopolitical issues, or laws mandating that schools teach the godless theory of evolution while prohibiting the more-logical theory of intelligent design. Such laws block Christians from being society's influence for morality and righteousness that they are called to be. 'Congress shall make no law…' – so why did Congress make laws protecting false religions like Islam at the expense of the true God of Christians and Jews? Or laws hostile to biblical morality, like those which oppress Christians who speak out against sodomy and abortions?

"Second, we need to stop being an **enemy of the truth.** Sure, we've had our problems, but we were founded as a Christian nation. We have a Judaeo-Christian heritage. Our laws are based on the Bible. We used to see evidence of that everywhere, monuments, the Ten Commandments, crosses, creches, the national anthem, public prayer and acknowledgment of our trust in God and dependence on Him. Now even our history books have been rewritten to take God out, and our children are being taught to be ashamed of America's godly heritage. If we can't even tell our kids the truth, we will not long remain a great nation.

"And third, we need to stop being an **enemy of what God is doing in Israel.** That doesn't mean we need to give them foreign aid or arms, or anything. God is quite capable of supplying His chosen people with everything they need, with or without our help. It does mean we must stop giving Israel's enemies the means and the legitimacy to fulfill their goal of annihilating Israel. It will be great if Dr. Relt's treaty holds up, but Scripture implies that it's just a sham. It will be broken in about two years. The Arabs don't want a peaceful state next to Israel – they never will. The Arabs want the entire Middle East for themselves, and they want Israel crushed and pushed into the sea. In helping the Arabs achieve their diabolical goals we are fighting God, and He will keep disciplining America until we stop.

"So there it is, Mr. President. Read the prophecy. Study it. Be forewarned. It will come to pass. But it doesn't have to come to pass on your watch! Today is your moment of decision, your last chance to turn it around. I swear to God that if you do these three things, as we detailed on that list Joseph passed out, the judgments will be postponed and God's blessings will return on America, our economy will recover, the plagues and storms will cease, and we will again be the great nation, indivisible, under God, that we are called to be. Even our wars will cease, because our enemies will fear us and plead for peace with us. But, Mr. President, if we do not do those three things, I swear to God that all these things in this book will come upon us – yes, even beginning this very year – and within four years the America we know will be destroyed. Thank you for your time. May God bless you with wisdom."

Alan and Joseph rise to leave. They get halfway to the door before President Wildemann responds, "I've already made my decision. You two are clearly religious fanatics, fundamentalist bigots! Your so-called 'prophecies' are a bunch of hocus pocus superstition, voodoo witchcraft. We live in the scientific age now, and that stuff will not be tolerated, not in my administration. Guards, these two men have made direct threats to the president of the United States, and to our great nation. I've read the book they sent, and it is filled with threats. They probably don't have the power to fulfill them, but we cannot afford to take chances with religious extremists. The secret service has been investigating them. We discovered that they've been organizing for over three years now. They have thousands of followers who read their books, most of them ignorant church-goers. It is rather likely that they are planning an insurrection – possibly an overthrow of the government by force. A lot of them have guns. It could get ugly.

"So toss these two in prison and throw away the key. Get their mailing lists. Track down everyone they've sent books to, and incarcerate them, too. Burn all their books. If that doesn't stop it, we'll have to confiscate all the guns. If Christians don't quiet down then, round 'em all up and dispose of them. But at the least, we need to incarcerate all the ringleaders, right now, before this gets out of hand."

"That was interesting," Alan mentions to Joseph as they are being led off in handcuffs. "He said he had read Peter's prophecy; he did exactly what it said he would do; yet he doesn't expect the consequences Peter prophesied would follow? Well, he still has the rest of today to reverse his decision. Maybe he will wake up after the stroke."

As they are being locked up, Alan asks the jailor, "Please sir. I am concerned for our president. He's under too much stress. Would you let me know if he has a stroke tonight about six o'clock, paralyzing his right side?"

The jailor just looks at him strangely, but he later returns with a squad of secret service men. They haul Alan off to the interrogation room, where they question him on how he knew so much about the president's stroke before it even happened. He returns several hours later, dazed, bruised, and bleeding. Joseph cares for him in their cell.

Alan can't sleep. Just after midnight he gets up from his bunk and wakes Joseph. "Time to go catch our plane. It looks like President Wildemann didn't heed our warning. I'm really sorry. America was a great nation – one of the greatest ever. It's too bad we forgot our history."

They get dressed and stand at the steel door to their cell. "Angel of the Most High, go before us!" Alan orders, and then takes a step forward into the door. It clicks and swings open, just in time. Other doors similarly open just in front of them. The officers on duty are asleep. Alan spots his things, bagged up on a table. The money and plane tickets are all there. They walk out to the street and hail a cab.

President Wildemann is furious when he hears of the jailbreak – doubly so because half his face is paralyzed from the stroke and he can only talk out of one side of his mouth, just as the prophecy had warned. He orders the commercial jet they're on to be brought back to the states at any cost, even if it has to be fired upon. But his order gets misconstrued before it reaches the Air Force, and by the time it gets straightened out, the jet has landed in Israel.

They can't find Alan's mailing lists. So they go after all Christian leaders, with a vengeance. They're rounded up for questioning about the insurrection Alan started. Then they're taken to secret military camps and 'disposed of'. Over the next six weeks over 50,000 Christian pastors and Jewish rabbis are slain. They had no clue it was anything but a routine investigation. Their families are each told that their husband / father had an unfortunate 'accident'. The complicit media of course never reports the story.

Congress quickly passes a law requiring all guns to be registered with the state. It isn't long before house-to-house searches are made for unregistered weapons, with violators incarcerated. And not long after that, registered weapons are also confiscated, due to the catastrophes now hitting with increasing regularity. America is disarmed, except for criminals and patriots who were wise and bold enough to hide their weapons from their lawless leaders.

CHAPTER 47 – GREEN PASTURES

Pastor Mike Mason introduces Chris Johnson and Anna Benson to the congregation. "They'll be living with us at the manse. Please welcome them into the church family. They are lonely and sad for all their husbands will have to go through. Their husbands, Joseph and Alan, are the two witnesses of Revelation 11, so they'll be living in Israel until the rapture. They really need our prayers, because all the demons of hell are out to destroy them. Let's lift them up in prayer right now." And he does.

"This is really a most deadly time for the saints. Many will be murdered, yes, even here in America. Already the pastors and Christian leaders are secretly being rounded up and slain. Right now it's just the leaders, but within a year or two, they'll be going after all Christians and Jews. We must be wise as serpents yet harmless as doves. There is no need to mourn those who are slain. They will have an easier time than we who are alive and remain! And we will meet them all again at the rapture, at the sounding of the seventh trumpet of Revelation 11:15.

"Remember. You are covered, protected, only as long as you are pure. If the devil has nothing on you, he cannot touch you. We have spent four years purifying this church, the 33 other churches we are mentoring, and the seven 'Green Pastures' Steve and Sharon Saxon helped establish. You will be safe in any of these, as the Lord leads you.

"You may also be safe in your own homes as long as your phone, TV, and internet links are cut off. If they are still on, your government will be spying on you through them. But you will no longer be safe going to the store or to a movie! You dare not use a credit card or a cell phone. And while cash purchases between your Christian brothers are fine, even now our rulers are ordering people, especially banks, to be suspicious and report anyone who uses cash. We'll soon have to shift to a barter system. God will supply.

"But the most important thing of all is, follow the Holy Spirit. You've learned to know His voice, or you wouldn't be here. Don't think you have to understand it. If He tells you to get out of your house, go. Don't argue, or you may find yourself staring down the barrel of a SWAT team rifle. Only God knows when they will come. Even in the middle of the night. You know where the 'Green Pastures' are. If you need to flee your home, be prepared at a moment's notice to move to one of them. Leave your stuff behind. God will protect you and provide for you, as long as you are sensitive to His Holy Spirit."

"Pastor? This big sanctuary is very visible! They can see us for miles! Are we safe here?"

"Yes, Juli, we are. We have our own well and septic system. We're off the tax rolls, out of the phone book, off the internet, and now off the power grid. With no lines in or out, they can't see us. As far as the building, let's just say that a zillion angels keep us invisible to God's enemies!"

Steve and Sharon are enjoying their family and farm. Life is a paradise on earth at the Amish community. The construction is all finished; the gardens are all planted. The expected crowds haven't arrived yet, but a pair of brothers came to help with the fall harvest – Ben and Dan from one of the churches affiliated with Pastor Mike. They've been a great help. They're young, strong, and enthusiastic about preparing for the refugees. They have taken over Sylvia's house, but from the looks of things, it won't be long before they are properly matched up with sisters Sue and Samantha. Sharon is very pleased, though she does fret a bit about which one is meant for whom.

Steve is tempted to be anxious about why so few have come to share their facilities. Ben warns him about pastors being taken for questioning and never returning, so he doesn't dare go out to visit Pastor Mike again. He might lead the secret police to him! Nor can he phone him. He can't trust the news, or rather, he does trust it – to cover up the truth as usual. It's tough not knowing what's going on. Sharon encourages him by saying, "God brought you here at precisely the right time. Is He not capable of bringing others here at the right time? Be grateful that He gives us this special time for ourselves and our two boys. I think He wants us to just trust Him and enjoy each other. Besides, though the crops are growing well, the harvest isn't in yet. If a lot of people came, we might not be able to feed them."

Satan is totally frustrated. He was sure he had all these Christians identified and located, each with a personal tempter demon assigned. But now they're gone. Dropped off the radar. It's been many years now since he started the rumor about the pre-tribulation rapture, and he's had a lot of fun with it, getting people to trust more in the rapture than in his Enemy. But now… well, maybe he was right! Many of them seemed to have been raptured right off the face of the earth. In his eagle, he flies above the land at higher elevation, searching. They're nowhere to be found!

He's suspicious. Even with the eagle's sharp eyesight, there are patches here and there where he can't see very well. Is it angels covering them? No. He comes down for a closer look. No angels, just normal, forested landscape. Satan has long been banned from the throne room of the Almighty, so he seeks out Michael. "Why can't I find the Christians? They seem to have vanished!"

"Why do you care? You've got plenty to torment. What do you think happened to the Christians?"

"Well… could they have been raptured already?"

Michael chuckles. "That's what happens when you begin believing your own lies. But I'll never tell. For sure they are where you can't touch them!"

So Satan spends his time working with President Wildemann and others of his slaves, urging them to find and kill as many Christians and Jews as he can, "just to rid the land of the insurrection threat," of course.

CHAPTER 48 – THE BEAST OF ANTICHRIST

Chris receives a letter. Amazingly enough, it managed to get through the censors put in place by the government to locate Christians. It's from her husband Joseph, from Israel. She excitedly opens it. News from Israel, honest news, is almost impossible to get nowadays. The American Press has held an anti-God bias for seventy years, but these last four years it has become total – nothing reported in the press can be trusted. So Chris calls Anna and together they read Joe and Alan's adventures of the last year and a half since they left Spokane. That Sabbath, they get Pastor Mike's permission to read it to the church.

Skipping the personal stuff, Chris reads, "The good news is, the new temple is built. Never have we seen such a magnificent structure go up so fast! The Jews all had a mind to work! I believe it is greater than King Solomon's temple! As I write, the priests are performing the rites of purification according to the law. They have the Kalal of the sacred ashes of the red heifer, though it hasn't been announced publicly for fear of the Muslims. They found it years ago, before Alan went into the Cave of the Column, but they left it hidden there 'til now. They know all about the Ark of the Covenant and the other furnishings from Solomon's temple still hidden in Jeremiah's grotto. They will bring them out as soon as the temple is purified.

"But the bad news is, as we expected, no one here has believed our prophecies. We can't even get on the news networks. We've tried to tell them that Dr. Relt's treaties would not last – that in the end it was only preparation for the terrible 'abomination of desolation' of Daniel 9. But to them that implied that Dr. Relt could be the 'prince who is to come, who will destroy the city and the sanctuary'. That, of course, is nonsense to any sane person who has seen or worked with Dr. Relt. He clearly has a heart for Israel! He's wonderful! He has literally worked miracles to change the hearts of the surrounding Arabs in Israel's favor. Everyone loves him! I don't think anyone here even suspects that he might be the antichrist. Except us.

"So we get laughed at, ridiculed, and… ignored. Alan and I believe that our warnings may be the final ones for Israel as a nation. It's been three years now since Dr. Relt finalized that treaty with all the Muslims allowing us the north half of the temple mount. All that time, the Arabs and the Muslims in the surrounding nations have kept their part of the treaty. There have been no bombings, rockets, or terrorist activities of any kind! Israel has gotten complacent, thinking this peace will last forever.

"You in America don't realize what this time of peace has meant to the Jews. They lived with war for so long, to finally have peace here is like heaven on earth. Such a peace does not make the news in America, where the press is fixated on the wars and troubles between Americans and Muslims all over the globe. But here, this peace is a very big deal. They simply cannot believe it will be gone so soon.

"Tell all the churches that the time for waffling is past. Within a few months, all hell will be loosed, literally. The antichrist, whoever he turns out to be, will be revealed. Spiritually dead churches will join him. Compromising churches will be persecuted, and many will be slain. Only churches which are spiritually alive, pure, and led by the Holy Spirit will be protected during these dreadful days."

Chris looks up. Every eye in the large church (and it is packed) is fixed on her. "The rest of the stuff is personal. Thank you for praying for Joseph, for both our husbands." She bites her lip, trying not to cry. "I know we won't see them again, short of heaven. And we may never get another letter. I'm surprised this one got through. But God is doing great things through them. We're proud of them!"

"Thank you, Chris, and Anna. Let's all pray for them right now." Pastor Mike leads the church in prayer. After him others join in, too. Along with them are more prayers of confession, repentance, recommitment, and heartfelt worship, as they've done ever since Pastor Mike first read Peter's prophecies. It's all so beautiful it makes me weep.

"Michael, it is time! First empower My two witnesses. Then…" Logos' face is stern, "**withdraw your covering over Israel.** My brothers have been warned in full." Michael hesitates, hoping for some amendment to make the command less severe – perhaps only partial covering, or only part of Israel. But the amendment does not come. Michael looks into Logos' face. It is as stern as before, but now tears are streaming down His cheeks. Michael turns to obey, tears now trickling down his own face, too.

Their day of fruitless prophesying over, Alan and Joseph return to their tiny rental apartment in uptown Jerusalem, paid for by the generosity of Pastor Mason's congregation. They look forward to a good night's sleep. But a man is standing beside the door to the apartment. "Before you enter," he says kindly, "I must warn you. A squad of thugs awaits inside. They plan to kill you."

"Oh! Thank you for the warning, kind sir! We'll go call for the police."

The man chuckles. "Don't bother. They are the police. The head of the Mossad has ordered you secretly slain for prophesying against Israel. You're on your own."

"Who are you?" Joseph is suspicious.

"Michael," the man responds with a friendly grin.

"Michael? The angel? You don't look like an angel."

Again the man chuckles. "I'll give you the secret. Just look at my feet. No angel's feet ever quite touch the ground. I'm surprised you haven't figured that out by now. We've been around thousands of years."

They quickly glance down. Sure enough, his feet don't quite touch the ground. "Well, if you are Michael, then please help us deal with the thugs inside."

"You don't need my help. Not any more. God grants you the power. Go in and deal with them." He reaches out both hands to touch each of them briefly on the shoulder. A bright spark flicks between them. "Now, **I must arise.** I have covered Israel, but no longer. She is in your hands. Do with her as you will." With that, Michael disappears.

Alan and Joseph stare at each other. "What did he mean, 'Israel is in our hands'?" Joseph asks. "God has granted us the power? Do I look empowered? I don't feel empowered." They kneel on the step and bow together.

"Yashua!" Alan prays. "Michael said we're empowered to deal with the thugs. Is it time for Revelation 11? Make it so, we pray. Give us wisdom and love, but hatred of evil, and power to resist it as You Yourself resist it. Amen."

They stand and enter their apartment. They both stride confidently – well, with slightly shaky knees – toward the bedroom. Three uniformed men rush out with automatic rifles pointed at them. One shouts, "Police! Palms out!"

"Don't fire those weapons. They'll jam or misfire, and they could cause you terrible injury," Alan warns.

"Go," Joseph adds. "Tell your boss he should listen to us, rather than attacking us. You can't stop what is coming. But by repenting and receiving your Messiah you could be protected in the coming catastrophes. Either way, you cannot harm us. If you try, you will be sorry."

"Don't try to bluff us! We were not sent to negotiate with you. We were sent to kill you. Do you have any last words?" Karl, the middle one, asks sternly.

"Yes. Please move out to the kitchen before you pull the trigger. I'd rather not have your blood on our carpet."

"Kill 'em!" the leader commands. All three pull their triggers simultaneously. One just jams up, with a bullet stuck in the chamber. Karl's explodes in his face, critically injuring him and splattering his blood on the carpet. The leader's gun hangs fire, waiting until he points it up to look at the chamber before it blasts a big hole through the roof.

"We'll forgive you for the blood on the carpet," Alan says pleasantly. "But that last shot will cost you. I'll have to tell the rains to cease, so we won't get wet through the hole you just made in our roof. Now my friends, rush your wounded buddy to the hospital. If you hurry, I promise you will save his life."

They go to bed that night with new eyes. Indeed it is time for Revelation 11! Now they know. "So Dr. Relt must be the antichrist, in spite of his seeming love for Israel. Incredible. I can see how 'if it were possible, even the elect will be deceived.' [Matt 24:24] Everyone loves him!"

"Yes! And Joseph, don't forget Daniel 12:1. The time Michael arises is the time of distress such as never hit Israel until now. He said, 'I must arise!' So Michael has got to be 'the one who restrains the lawless one'!" (2 Thes 2:7)

CHAPTER 49 – TRIBULATION BEGINS

The entire Amish community turns out for the happy double wedding of Sue and Samantha, now 19 and 18, to Ben and Dan, in that order, just as Sharon had hoped. Incredible peace and joy floods the community, like never before. After it's all over, Brother Philip, the leading elder, makes a speech. It is short, but profound, reflecting the deepest beliefs of the Amish for many generations.

"We have separated ourselves from the English, and from their corruption. We keep ourselves pure unto God. Now God will judge between us and them. For in this, America's time of terrible distress, we shall not go to them for help; they shall come to us. God will send them. All He wants to save. We will receive them and welcome them in Jesus' name. We will teach them the ways of holiness. Not just Gunter Yoder's family, but every one of us will open up our homes to the ones God sends. You will know why so many of you have been led to build spare bedrooms recently. God will send them. As America is judged and ruined in its wickedness, we shall prosper and flourish. For we have made the Lord our Shepherd. We shall not want. He makes us to lie down in 'Green Pastures'. He leads us beside quiet waters. He restores our soul. He guides us in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake."

Prosper they do, with bountiful harvests and a covering of peace that the devil cannot penetrate, even though the very fabric of the culture around them has been shredded by the calamities falling upon America. The desperate news from the English mostly passes them by. Steve is the only one who still goes into town. He keeps himself clean-shaven and wears his 'city-boy' clothes. They know him. He can still buy needed materials for the community. He buys a newspaper sometimes. In it, Christians are blamed for the economic collapse and breakdown of society. They've all been slain or gone into hiding. Horrific storms, fires, plagues, earthquakes, and other 'natural' disasters wrack the land. Most of the big cities are under mob rule.

Now officially at peace with Israel, the Muslims have turned their perennial rage upon America, which they call 'the Great Satan'. They already defeated and exorcised American forces throughout the Arab world. Now they are rising up in cities all over America, where they had been congregating and growing strong, biding their time until they could take over the country. Law and order breaks down entirely. So President Wildemann cancels the next year's elections and takes dictatorial emergency powers.

As Muslim mobs begin taking over local governments, Americans prove too afraid of offending them to try to stop them. Instead, 'intolerant, fundamentalist' Christians and Jews are blamed for the violence erupting in the cities. President Wildemann tries to appease the Muslims by loudly praising Islam as a 'great world religion' and 'the religion of peace'. Of course he and the news media are blind to the utter intolerance of fundamentalist Islam.

The big influx of refugees Steve is expecting has still not come. However, one more family shows up right after the wedding. A family with four strong young sons! They've come to help with the harvest, which has been abundant. The Yoders are grateful. The eight farms and gardens they now maintain have become a chore with no one living in four of the seven houses Steve built. Ben and Dan and their new brides are gone celebrating their honeymoons in 'Never Never Land'. So the new family moves into the fourth house and takes over upkeep of the six gardens on the lower fifty until Ben and Dan return to planet Earth.

Of course Sharon is busy calculating which of the four new young men has come to marry which of her remaining sisters, but Steve just laughs. "Don't you think God has got that all figured out? Relax and enjoy the ride!" Sharon is now pregnant with their third. Their two young sons are old enough to help with the chores. It's a wonderful life.

Pastor Mason is very thankful for the huge sanctuary they purchased. Many families of his congregation have already lost their homes and all they had, and are living at the church. He has had no contact with Steve and Sharon for over a year. Now he realizes he'd better send these poor families to Steve's farm before his own resources run out.

But when? President Wildemann's secret police are everywhere! They have demonized Christians in the press to the point that all the ignorant, brainwashed citizens are quick to report suspicious activities. The whole country has become spies for him and his demonic attempts to kill the Christians and Jews. It would be suicide to send any families out toward the farm. They stay put.

One benefit to all this – there is now no question in any Christian's mind that the great tribulation is upon them. The pre-tribulation rapture heresy has been thoroughly put to bed. All who insisted on hanging on to it are already slain by the growing police state. Every Christian still alive is now dead serious about holiness. The purity of the faith in all the remaining congregations has reached an all-time high. Worship services, which often last for hours and have spontaneously multiplied from weekly to daily, are now joyous times of meeting with the King of kings. Pastor Mike now sees how woefully unprepared his congregation was to meet the Lord, and how important it was for the tribulation to lift their focus higher, ever higher.

Chris and Anna get another letter from their husbands. The envelope is torn and the address is barely legible. The letter is short and hurriedly scribbled. "We just learned that Dr. Relt is the antichrist after all. Tell the church. The angel Michael came and gave us special powers from God. He said that he was removing the covering from Israel, and she is in our hands. Now people will start to hear us. I think it's nearly time for the sixth seal. Don't worry about us. We have perfect peace that God has fully prepared us for this task. We no longer fear death or failure. He will see us through! We love you! Keep the faith! Joe and Alan."

Michael has recalled his angelic host, every one, from their job of covering and protecting God's chosen people Israel. It was the hardest, saddest thing he has ever done. From the Creation he's been in charge of ministering to Logos' Bride, protecting her, disciplining her, guiding her, always near to guard her and restrain the adversary. *Now he must relinquish that task to those two greenhorn prophets from America who hardly even know they are of Ephraim? Two who are hated and despised by their own brothers? Two who have no clue of the terrible battle going on the heavenlies all around them? Two who recently had trouble prophesying their way through the airport terminal?*

Michael shakes his head to clear his focus. Logos has spoken. He must trust. Somehow, these foolish, ignorant, frail humans are called and empowered to do God's will. Michael dares not argue with the King of the Universe. He has a battle to fight. He calls his host up to the heavens to give them their instructions.

"Our task of covering Israel is finished, for now at least. That is left for those two witnesses from America. God help them! But we have another task. By using his stooge Wildemann, the adversary has been attacking and slaying God's covered ones in America, in direct violation of the permission Logos gave him. Therefore, we have occasion. Just as he was barred from the throne room, now we shall cast him out of the heavenlies entirely, until the day he can bow before the Lord of Hosts. Follow my lead!"

Satan meets Michael in the air above Jerusalem, where he is in the habit of coming to taunt, or to try to spy on the secret councils of the Most High. "Ah! Michael!" He calls. "You've been demoted, I see. Did you fail your Master? No problem. I'll just take up where you left off. You know how much I love to 'cover and protect' all His precious ones!"

Michael rejects the taunt. Drawing his sword, he says, "In the name of Logos, begone, Satan! Your freedom to dwell in the heavenlies is revoked, effective immediately. Go down to earth, where you shall have a little time to repent before you are bound and cast into the Abyss!"

"What do you mean, revoked? You can't do that! I live here! I'm a being of spirit, just like you, just like Logos Himself! Heaven is where spirit beings dwell, you dodo! You can't revoke my rights here!"

"Your rights are forfeit. Your permission to harm the Bride was limited to those not covered. But in America you've slaughtered them, starting with their shepherds. We have occasion against you!" He charges, sword held high. His angels follow him into the demon ranks.

I won't try to sugarcoat this battle. It's all-out war. Satan always imagined himself a 'god' of the heavenlies and now to be driven out is unthinkable. He tries every trick in the book and some that aren't to retain a toehold in the heavenlies. But in the end he again discovers that he is not strong enough. He and his demons are cast out of heaven.

CHAPTER 50 – THE TWO WITNESSES

Satan is livid with rage. His 'rights' have been totally abrogated. In trying to defend them, he has lost a large number of his best demons. Worse, his mightiest prince, the one assigned over Israel in direct opposition to Michael, the one who stood by his side when Michael charged, has been slain! It is an unmitigated disaster of the highest magnitude. Satan has barely escaped with his own life, and then only because he fled to earth when he saw his chief demon prince beside him go down.

He gathers his remaining demons around him. "They can't do this! Logos shall rue this day! We shall possess every human, every foul beast, on the planet! We shall have them fighting and slaying each other, screaming in terror, writhing in torment! We shall devastate the land until not a soul remains alive, and drink their blood until we grow strong enough to take back the heavenlies!"

Alan and Joseph are up early. They had a good night's sleep, but they suspect some backlash from their little escapade yesterday. Perhaps today they'll be treated with more respect, but they expect to be hauled off before the city governor. "Well, AMB! What do you think? Will they try to gun us down again? Or will they be more subtle?"

"Why did you call me AMB? How did you know those were my initials?"

"Wooo… Ahhhh… It's this great prophetic gift I have! Would you like me to foretell your future?"

"Gimme a break, you joker. How did you know?"

Joseph points to the initials inscribed on his briefcase, and snickers. "So, what does it stand for?"

"Oh. Alan Moses Benson. How 'bout yours?"

"JEJ. Joseph Elijah Johns…" he stops short, and they stare at each other for a long moment. "Moses and Elijah!" they both shout simultaneously. "Could it be? I never even thought… I always felt so unworthy for this task. Could we really have the spirit of Moses and Elijah? Do you remember any of your past life?"

They're still excitedly arguing about it when they hear pounding on their door, and a loud, "Police! Open up!"

Oops. They're still in their pajamas. And they haven't had breakfast yet. Nuts! They grab their white terry-cloth bathrobes just as the door is smashed open. They never even have time to put on their shoes. They are whisked off in a patrol car, sirens screaming, with a dozen other patrol cars and armored SWAT vehicles in front and behind.

"Well, so much for being treated respectfully," Joseph Elijah chuckles. "Shall we just go along for the ride and see where it ends up?"

"You bet," Alan Moses responds. "I wouldn't miss this for the world."

The next week is a whirlwind as Alan Moses and Joseph Elijah are led from place to place. Though they give their full names to the police, they are deliberately using their middle names now when they talk to each other or to the press. They make no resistance. The accusations against them – prophesying against Israel and anti-Israel activity – don't hold water. Their accusers contradict themselves, while 'Moses and Elijah' consistently affirm their love for Israel and desire only that Israel forsake her national sins and return to her God. Finally when the formal charges are levied against them – preaching without a license – they laugh. "For not having a preaching license already, you send a police SWAT team to gun us down in cold blood?"

Of course they deny it, but the press is there, filming the whole thing. These weird old dudes in white bathrobes, white hair, and bare feet, made headlines from the first day they were captured. Moses looks directly into their camera as he responds, "Then why is one of your policemen in the hospital with his face half blasted off, and why is that hole in the ceiling of our apartment?! I'll tell you why. They tried to kill us and their guns misfired. Ask 'em!"

The IDF tries to extradite them for visa violation, but 'Moses and Elijah' are ready for them. Joseph shows them his detailed research of his heritage, in which he traced his ancestry to the exile in 710 BC when King Sargon II had deported them from Samaria to Assyria. He proves that they both are of Ephraim. They claim legal right of return.

Now the tables are turned. The police beg them to just go home quietly, but Moses and Elijah demand to be brought before the entire Knesset and the prime minister.

When they are refused, Moses declares, "The Egyptians didn't prevent me from coming before the Pharaoh, even when their land was being destroyed by the ten plagues! Shall I start with the first plague right here? Right now?"

"Sure!" they sneer. "There's some water. Go ahead, you joker. Prophesy to it. Turn it to blood. And when you fail, just admit you are a deluded old fool, and go quietly back where you came from."

Moses sniffs. "As I recall, it was the entire Nile I turned into blood, not some itty bitty cup of water. In the name of YHWH King of heaven, I declare that the entire Jordan River shall become blood, but just until we are permitted to address the Knesset. Then it can turn to water again."

"What?! You really are unhinged!"

"Go check."

They are led back to their cells while phone calls are made. Elijah looks at Moses. "You can do that?"

"Right in Revelation 11. If I can't do it, then we're not the two witnesses and we're wasting our time."

"But I thought that was just symbolic. The entire Jordan River? Well, I guess it will wake them up."

Needless to say, in short order they are brought before the Knesset. Prime Minister David Davison is presiding. Dr. Relt happens to be there, too, as he has now become an esteemed though unofficial chief ambassador between Israel and the surrounding Arab nations.

"Now, what is this nonsense about turning the Jordan to blood? Every indication we have is that it began from natural causes and is dissipating even now, as we speak. So, you seem to think you started it from your cell?"

"It's not nonsense, sir, This is dead serious. It is just as serious as the Ten Plagues were in Egypt…"

"Hold it! We can't understand you. If you are going to speak in front of this body, you will have to speak proper Hebrew or we'll have to get you an interpreter. Your accent is atrocious. I can't make out many of your words."

Moses and Elijah stare at each other. *What is going on?* They clearly understand everyone else. Elijah looks back to David Davison, and speaks very slowly and carefully. "Sir, we are speaking proper Hebrew. It is yours that has become perverted. We speak the Hebrew of Daniel and the ancient Magi. We speak the pure Hebrew of Noah, and of Adam himself. We'll try to speak slower…"

Moses catches on. "Hebrew was never intended to be just a spoken language. The words convey pictures to the mind, but that is a small part of communication. From the beginning, the spoken part of the language was only intended to build a bridge between the spirits of those speaking. Then the real communication becomes spirit to spirit. How do you think Adam spoke with the animals? You will understand our words when you open up your spirits to the communication from our spirits."

Now, that is a new and startling concept to these people who have spoken Hebrew all their lives. It takes a bit, but in time most members of the Knesset are beginning to understand the two witnesses. Still Moses keeps it slow and simple, as if he is teaching his first-year students back at the university. Again he realizes how valuable has been all his training in the ancient languages. Instead of being upset at his poor spoken Hebrew, they're now eating out of his hand in the original pure Hebrew.

Moses starts with a history lesson. The 'Blessings and Cursings' of Deuteronomy 28. Israel's Apostasy and Exile by Assyria and Babylon. Their restoration under Ezra and Nehemiah. Their Apostasy following the Maccabees. The Jew's rejection and crucifixion of Yashua haMashiach. The Roman conquest. The destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 AD under Vespasian. More persecutions under Titus, Domitian, and Trajan. And the Diaspora that left them vacant from the Promised Land for almost 1400 years. As Moses tells the story, Elijah ties it to the Blessings and Cursings, showing how YHWH was fulfilling His promises to His people. Moses may be a better storyteller, but the preacher in Elijah can hammer the points home!

They can hardly believe they've gotten this far. These secular politicians are listening with rapt attention. They've never heard their history before, at least not like this. Their own history books twist it to become a dead, earthy thing. For the first time in their lives it comes alive with color and meaning. Moses and Elijah are speaking soul to soul, spirit to spirit, and they're drinking it in!

Now comes the kicker. "Though you of Judah only received the curses that YHWH promised you when you turned away from Him, yet He heard your cries of anguish during the Holocaust. It is He who has drawn you back here and restored you as a nation in the Promised Land. Not for your sakes did YHWH restore you, but for the sake of His own holy name, that His mighty name be honored among the nations. Since your return He has miraculously protected you against bigger nations all around you who hate you and want to annihilate you. Not just once, but in seven battles against ten nations, each stronger than you. But have you responded to Him? Have you obeyed Him? Have you finally forsaken your idolatry and returned to Him as your one and only God? No, you have not. That is why I turned the Jordan to blood. And unless you repent, all these plagues will fall on you until you are destroyed."

"Wait a minute. That was a nice history lesson, but we're really not that bad. We keep the Sabbath. We keep kosher, mostly. We've just finished up the new temple and hope to begin the sacrifices again according to the law within a week or two. I'd say we're doing pretty well! So what's your problem?"

Moses bows his head, shaking it sadly from side to side. So Elijah takes over. "YHWH doesn't want you to keep the old sacrificial laws any more. They've been superseded by the new covenant in the blood of Yashua haMashiach. Now it's not enough to just obey the Law. YHWH wants to be your King! He wants to rule Israel like He did during the Exodus. Instead of blindly following the Law of Moses, YHWH wants you to love and follow Him directly!"

"But YHWH is Spirit! We need a prophet like Moses to interpret His voice for us…" As soon as it comes out of his mouth David realizes he picked the wrong example, but it's too late. Moses grins and jumps on it.

"Exactly. That is why we're here. We are commissioned to interpret YHWH's voice for you now. If you heed us, you will be restored into right relationship with YHWH and protected and blessed in the coming calamities."

There is a long pause. Prime Minister Davison is a sharp statesman and a consummate patriot. He was impressed with the ancient Hebrew lesson and with their history made alive. He rather likes these brash old professors of ancient languages in their rough bathrobes and bare feet.

"Okay, gentlemen. We'll give it a try. Prophesy to us what YHWH wants us to do right now. As a test case. Only the one most important thing."

Moses and Elijah briefly bow their heads to wait on the Holy Spirit. They look up at each other and nod. Elijah points directly at Dr. Relt and says, "Dr. Relt may seem like a friend to Israel, but in reality he is your deadliest enemy. Put him under maximum security until you learn his true intentions. I swear that if you don't restrain him before midnight you won't get another chance. He is inspired and empowered by Satan, who wants to destroy you."

There is a collective gasp of shock and surprise from everyone in the big hall. No one makes a move. Dr. Relt is loved and respected by all as Israel's great hero and savior, as the miracle deliverer from the hatred of the surrounding Arab nations. He just sits there next to the prime minister, looking a little hurt and woefully misunderstood.

Moses continues, "We can prove this directly from Scripture…" and he proceeds to go over many Scriptures relating to the antichrist: the "prince who is to come" who "makes desolate" of Daniel 9; the "Covenant with Death" of Isaiah 28:15; the "false messiahs and false prophets who will arise and show great signs and wonders to deceive if possible even the elect" from Matthew 24:24; the "man of lawlessness, the son of destruction, who exalts himself above every god" of 2 Thessalonians 2; and the "beast coming up out of the sea… speaking arrogant words" of Revelation 13. He concludes saying, "This Dr. Relt has deceived you. He has already seduced and conquered all the Russian and Arabian nations who have made peace treaties with you – how else do you think he succeeded in what everyone agreed was utterly impossible? Now he is about to conquer Israel. Today he is still undefended. If you put him under full-time guard today, right now, you will succeed. But if you wait even one more day, I swear he will grow so powerful you will not be able to restrain him."

Moses pauses for a deep breath. Amazingly, he has been given time to finish his argument. They have all heard. Now it is decision time. The fate of the nation of Israel hangs in the balance.

David Davison chuckles. "Nice try, Moses. You have certainly tied together an interesting string of Scriptures. But no cigar. In the first case, your logic is flawed. Just because Dr. Relt succeeded at what we all thought was impossible doesn't make him an antichrist. He's just a very gifted negotiator. In the second place, I personally have worked with him for years, and have always found in him a deep love for Israel. He would never turn against us. But thirdly, YHWH is blessing us. Right now we have more peace and safety, more prosperity, than we've ever had in our nation's history! So you see, this is the wrong time for your little doomsday scenario. You are the ones who are deceived. It's that influence from the Christians and their New Testament that has twisted your thinking.

"Officers! Release them. They are just two harmless old coots who have let their imaginations run wild. But keep an eye on 'em. Bring 'em in if they cause more trouble."

Elijah takes a step forward. "Sir. What is the primary sign of YHWH's blessing on the land of Israel?"

David knows that one. "The rains falling in their proper time, which they have been doing ever since our return from the Diaspora." He smiles smugly.

"Correct. Good. So to prove that your peace, security, and prosperity is from Satan rather than YHWH – As YHWH lives before whom I stand, there shall be neither rain nor dew in Israel except by my word."

David laughs outright. "That's a pretty bold prophecy – with our rainy season now starting! The weather report is for rain this afternoon. It's probably sprinkling already."

"Actually, no. I already told the police who blasted the hole in our roof that I'd stop the rain." Everybody crowds to the windows and peers down. The streets are bone dry.

"Well, that's no proof of anything. The rains will come. That was an interesting diversion, but now we've got work to do. You're free to go. Just don't cause any more trouble. No more public prophecies! I'm going to tell the police chief to haul you in and book you for disturbing the peace if you insist on making these outrageous claims." David looks over at Dr. Relt, who just smiles and shakes his head. "Be thankful Dr. Relt is so understanding and forgiving. He could sue you for libel! But he knows we all love him. Now, tone down the rhetoric, or we'll have you deported no matter what your claims to be descendants of Ephraim. You're free to go. This interview is over."

"We must give you fair warning, sir," Elijah retorts. "According to our prophetic commission, which is stated in Revelation 11, if anyone attempts to stop or harm us, they will be slain by fire from our mouths."

Moses adds, "We cannot stop prophesying, so you may just as well try to imprison us right now."

"Okay, wise guys. This I'd like to see. You've had your chance. Officers, arrest 'em and toss 'em in the clink. Keep 'em locked up until after the rains. A good heavy rain ought to discredit them enough so they'll go home quietly."

Two officers advance. Elijah warns, "Don't come any closer! You'll be slain!" They stop, a bit frightened. Their sergeant (who has begun to hate these two troublemakers) yells angrily at them, "Just do your jobs, you <expletives deleted>. And rough 'em up a bit, for threatening us!"

Moses calls to him over the heads of the two timid officers, "Sergeant! For desiring to harm us, may fire come out of my mouth and slay you!"

No fire, though everyone in the Knesset is frozen in anticipation. But Moses' words do have their effect, for the sergeant hesitates, then crumples to the floor stone dead. Frankly, Moses and Elijah are as shocked as everyone else. They've never killed anyone before. They meekly submit to the police, at least until the investigation is over.

Satan is furious. Being cast out of the heavenlies is the ultimate indignity. But the last straw is those two elusive American prophets blowing the cover of his chosen one in front of the entire Knesset. Satan wasn't ready for that. *How could they have known?* "We dare delay no longer," he tells Wormwood (his mightiest surviving demon prince). "We've got to cash in our chips on Hitler. Tell him who he is, and possess him fully. I'll go get the dragon."

The great red-scaled dragon has nearly given up hope. He is the last of his kind. Ever since the time of Noah after the Flood, the thin air and cold weather have made it a frantic battle to stay alive. The dragons only survived the Ice Age by finding a warm steam cave deep in the heart of the mountains of Ararat. But though they could hibernate, they eventually had to eat. Whenever they came out to find food, people would freak out and try to kill them. They grew to hate the humans, and burned their villages in retaliation. Human flesh became their food of choice. After their feast they would steal whatever treasures they found, to line their den with gold.

But their anger backfired on them. The humans came against them in force, with ingenious weapons of warfare, and hunted them to the very brink of extinction. The last dragon realized with regret he should have attempted some kind of truce with the humans, just so they could survive. He had heard that the original pair had made a truce with Noah, and had both saved Noah and been saved by him. Now he is lonely. His long life is filled with regret.

So when a human meets him at the entrance to his den, the great red dragon decides to chance it. "Do you come in friendship? Or do you only wish to slay me and take my gold?" He is almost resigned to his fate.

"I come to make a deal."

"A deal? Impossible. What do you have that I could want? I already have the wealth of a thousand kings in my den!" The dragon stops. This human knows how to talk. The ancient language, the language of the heart, soul to soul. (We call it telepathy.) "How did you learn to talk?"

"Never mind that. I offer you a deal. I will give you whatever you want. In exchange, I want to use your body, just your physical form, for one year."

"You can't give me what I want. All I want is to have my strength and my mate restored to me once again, as it was before the Flood."

"Done. Shake on it." The human fearlessly comes close and holds out his tiny hand. Startled at his boldness, the dragon responds, "Okay. If you restore my mate and my strength, you can use my physical form for one year." He holds out a great paw. The human grasps a claw and feebly shakes it. "Now, I'll climb on your back. Fly me to where your mate was slain, and you'll see what I can do."

"I'm barely strong enough to fly at all. I certainly cannot fly with your dead weight on my back."

"I just strengthened you. That is what you asked, is it not?" he says, climbing nimbly on his back.

So, beginning to wonder what he's gotten himself into, the great red-scaled dragon spreads his wings and leaps for the sky. Amazingly, he doesn't get tired. He gets stronger. He flies the human to where his mate was slain. Nothing is left but a few big dry bones, well-scavenged by carnivores. "This is your mate?" the human asks, climbing off.

"Well, it was, many years ago…"

The human recites an incantation in a weird ceremony. Soon the dragon's mate is sitting there looking at him, grown right out of the bones. The human has disappeared.

Wormwood, the new demon prince over Israel, comes to Dr. Relt's penthouse apartment that night. He sits in the window seat, looking down over the city. When Dr. Relt enters and goes to the kitchen to fix a snack before bed, Wormwood doesn't even look up. So it is with surprise that Dr. Relt sits down on his couch with his snack and a satisfied sigh, and hears, "It's a lovely view from here."

"Hey! Who are you, and what are you doing in my apartment?!" Dr. Relt demands.

"A friend from your past, your long ago past, just come to enjoy the view and renew acquaintances."

"How long ago past? I don't recognize you at all."

"Well, let's see. The last time we saw each other was on April 30, 1945. You were fifty-six at the time, if you recall. We had a deal, you know."

"Not a chance, joker. I'm only thirty-six right now."

"Oh? Tell me a little about your parents."

"I'm an orphan, raised by Polish Catholics. I've no idea where I was born or who my parents are."

"Your parents both died in a horrible traffic accident just before you were born. The doctors cut you from your mother's dead body. You were not expected to live. I was there. I helped keep you alive. And I even named you." The stranger smiles smugly. "That was all part of our deal."

"Does not compute. You are totally not making sense. What does any of that have to do with 1945?"

"You really don't remember, do you. Huh. These frail humans… I'll start back at the beginning. With my help you had risen to power, in control of a quarter of the earth. And you would have taken it all if you had just obeyed me! I told you to cleanse the earth of Jews. That was so easy because of my help, that you got proud. You decided to cleanse the earth of Slavic peoples, too! I warned you, but you insisted that your 'Master Race' was invincible. You invaded the Soviet Union before you were strong enough!

"Of course the Russians overwhelmed you. Then with Soviet troops advancing within blocks of your hideout in the Reichstag Chancellery, I knew it was over. You knew it was over. April 30, 1945. It's when we made the deal."

"Are you accusing me of being Hitler?! That's so utterly preposterous… it's unworthy of a response."

"Our deal was this. You agreed to kill yourself. I agreed to take your human essence and preserve it until the time was right. Then we would try again."

"Get out of here. You've got the wrong guy. Whatever it was you may have done in 1945 has nothing to do with me. I'm no Hitler. I'm the good guy here."

"Oh? Then what's your name – your full name?"

"Relt is my first name. I hate my last name, and never use it. My foster parents said it was my birth parents' name, but I've never heard of anybody else with it. I've searched."

"Of course nobody else has it. I invented it. So humor me this once. What's your full name?"

"Relt Ihploda. What d'you mean, you invented…"

"Now, spell it backwards. All run together."

"A-D-O-L-P-H-I T-L-E-R." Dr. Relt's face turns ashen. "Oh my god!" is all he can say.

"There's more. But it's all locked up in your own mind. Has been ever since you were an infant. You know, surely, that a baby's memory is locked out until he reaches two or three? Well, yours stayed locked out. Perhaps deliberately suppressed. Would you permit me to unlock it?"

"Who are you… you can do that?"

"Sure. But only if you invite me. I wouldn't want to pry. I'm the angel Wormwood, you see." He smiles sweetly.

Dr. Relt has always wanted to find out more about his mysterious past. "Okay. You won't hurt me or anything? I mean, twist my mind or plant stuff there?"

"Of course not. Trust me. I've been your guardian angel from the beginning of time. Would I try to hurt you now?"

So Dr. Relt gives his permission. He relaxes back in his couch and closes his eyes while Wormwood enters his mind and possesses him. Once he has access to his mind, Wormwood plays back pictures of all that Hitler had done, up to that fateful April 30, 1945. Dr. Relt sees himself ordering the arrest of Göring for plotting to take over after his death. He sees himself ordering Himmler's arrest for trying to discuss surrender terms with the Allies. He sees himself marrying his longtime mistress, Eva Braun, and signing his last will and testament. He sees his own ugly reaction when he first learns of Mussolini's violent death. Then he sees himself negotiating with Wormwood – it's the very same guy sitting now on his window seat! *There is no question he has told the truth about being an angel.*

"Your cause here is lost," Wormwood had said. "The Third Reich is no more. Surely you can see that by now. But I can extend your life. I can restore your power, even greater than before. I can make you young and strong again – no one will be able to oppose you! But you must trust me and do exactly as I say."

"Who are you? How can you do this?" He sees himself questioning. The angel's answers were good, encouraging, convincing. "I'm Wormwood, your guardian angel. I am with you always. You meet me in your seances. I give you your power. You followed me well, until you ordered that pigheaded advance to Moscow in winter after I urged you to retreat. You would have succeeded if you had followed me exactly. But now I'm offering you a second chance."

So he had made the deal. He sees himself pulling out his pistol to shoot himself in the mouth while eating a cyanide capsule. He sees Wormwood carrying his essence into the future and planting it into a baby still in the womb of the dead woman right after the car accident. The baby was dead, too, but he sees it come alive – *with his soul!* Doctors delivered him by C-section. He was taken to an orphanage, and then given to that Polish couple. Dr. Relt sees it all. Finally he knows who he is – where he came from.

The angel concludes, "Now do you believe me? So, I'm here to keep my end of our bargain. I'll empower you as never before, just as I promised. Agreed?"

"But I don't want to be Hitler! I'm a good guy! I'm well-liked, everywhere I go. Everyone respects me, trusts me! You can't hold me to some deal we made in a previous life."

"Okay. Your choice. But make it carefully. All that you have gained so far has only been because of my help, you know. I kept my part of the deal. I gave you favor in Russia and the Arab world – you don't really think you could have gotten them to cease their hostilities by yourself, do you? I promised you fame and power, greater than ever! I have kept my promise. Do you really want to give all that up?"

"What do you mean, give it all up?"

"Well, if you're not going to fulfill your half of the deal, the whole deal is off. Everything I've done for you – it's as if it never happened. You cease to exist. You died in the Reich Chancellery. That's it. Done."

"And if I accept your deal?"

"I just told you. I'll make you a great world ruler. The greatest that ever lived. You'll be the savior of the world. Everyone will worship you. They'll adore you! They'll willingly submit… Well, nearly everyone."

"Huh. What does that mean?"

"Oh, there are a few who've already joined forces with our Enemy, mostly fundamentalist Jews and Christians. Intolerant bigots! But you'll be able to just annihilate them if they cause you trouble. I'll give you power like a god!"

The temptation to become a god, versus the alternative of ceasing to exist, is simply too great. Dr. Relt accepts Wormwood's offer, and Satan's lie. Satan no longer needs Logos' permission. He has Dr. Relt's willing invitation.

His new master's first command is to start growing that characteristic 'Hitler' mustache. Then he says. "I am spirit. I'll usually remain invisible, like this." He disappears. "But I'll always be with you. I'll inspire you, prophesy through you, empower you, direct you. Just learn to recognize my voice, like you hear now. You'll love having my direction from within. Just think, I'll be unseen, so you'll get all the glory! Let's try a little exercise to make sure you've got it. I know it's late, but get your coat and go outside."

The dragon pair is back in their den, rejoicing in their love for one another just as when they were young. But at midnight, just before they fall asleep, that human is back. "Are you satisfied with my work?" he asks. "I've come to claim my part of our deal."

Mr. Dragon laughs at him. He is indeed feeling much stronger. "How do you know you can collect your part of the deal, you foolish human? I'm much stronger now. You have no weapons to do battle!"

"Oh? Do you really think I cannot take away that which I gave? A deal is a deal, even if it is with the devil." At that he walks straight toward the dragon, appearing to walk right into him and disappear. Mr. Dragon, without a backward glance at his mate, rises into the sky and heads southwest. He has an appointment with Wormwood and Dr. Relt.

Wormwood directs Dr. Relt out of the city to the Mount of Olives. "Now, you shall meet the source of my power." In the pre-dawn darkness they hear the flap of giant wings and a monstrous dragon suddenly lands right in front of them. After the initial scare, Wormwood introduces them. "This is Lucifer, my master. Everything I tell you is only what I learn from him. He's all-powerful. You can pray directly to him. He will send me to answer. Together, we make an unbeatable team! He is the father, you are his beloved son, and I'm the prophetic spirit communicating between you. Whenever people worship you, their praise is automatically passed on to me. I pass it on to Lucifer."

Dr. Relt nods. Now he understands how badly he's been deceived, but it's too late. His deal is with the devil himself! There's no backing out of it now. Suddenly he realizes why those weird guys in the white bathrobes had told the prime minister to put him under heavy guard before midnight. That was just when he'd allowed the 'angel' to enter his mind! *Well. Maybe he should just commit suicide again…*

Pain. Terrible, screaming pain. His body dangling over the fires of hell itself, in tortured agony. It passes quickly. "I do have control of your mind, you know, my son. Let's not entertain any thoughts of doing anything that might displease our father, shall we? I wouldn't want to have to punish our precious son!"

CHAPTER 52 – THE NEW TEMPLE

Prime Minister Davison wakes up in a sweat. His wife, Danelle, is shaking him gently, but that is not what woke him. "Oh, honey! I was having this terrible nightmare!"

"I know. I've been watching you struggle."

David lies back in bed and tries to stop shaking. The night is warm, but the sweat feels cold on his quivering body. "I'm not sure I want to tell you…"

"Honey! We share everything. I can handle it."

"Well, it was about Dr. Relt. He…" David pauses. Dr. Relt has become his friend and most trusted advisor. *How can he even voice such a dream?!*

"He…?" Danelle snuggles up and relaxes on his chest. David knows she will not just let it go.

"He declared he is our Messiah! He came into our new temple and offered a sacrifice. Nobody even tried to stop him. They were mesmerized by his speech. Then he went into the most holy place. He left the veil open for everyone to see. He sat right on the Mercy Seat of the Ark! I was sure he would be slain for such sacrilege, for he not only is not a Levite, he's not even of Israel. But he wasn't slain. Instead, the entire temple began to glow with the Shekina Glory! A cloud descended over the temple, and a voice came from the cloud, saying, 'This is my beloved son! Obey him!'"

"Honey, that's a fantastic dream! How do you know that Dr. Relt is not an Israelite? So many records were lost in the Diaspora. Maybe he is our Messiah!" She smiles.

"I'm just telling you my dream, honey. In my dream… It was not a happy dream! I was terrified! Maybe he is from Levi, or Judah, but in my dream he was not, and I knew it! I knew he is an impostor! There was no doubt at all. That's why I woke up when the voice came from the cloud."

It's barely light, but David gets up and dresses. He can't sleep anymore anyway. It's just as well he's up early. He has a lot to do today. He's giving a speech at the dedication of the new temple, and he still has some polishing to do.

Those two crazy prophets calling themselves Moses and Elijah are threatening that God wants them released from prison to attend the ceremony. It will be televised all over the world, and he cannot afford for anything to go wrong. And what about his dream? Dr. Relt is not going to give a speech at the dedication, is he? He'd better verify that. Maybe he should have someone check Dr. Relt's background. He always just said he was an orphan raised by a poor Polish couple. But if there is any chance he might be of one of the lost tribes of Israel, David would sure like to know. Now that he's awake, the thought that Dr. Relt might be Israel's Messiah seems perfectly logical. He had certainly delivered them from the antagonism of both the Arab world and the Russians! He decides to assign Marjah, his private secretary, the task of finding out once for all.

Everything is in place. Miraculously, no one was slain when the priests broke into Jeremiah's grotto and brought out the Ark of the Covenant. The other furnishings from Solomon's temple were there, too. The holy incense and the holy oil for the lamps had been found in the Cave of the Column behind Zadok's tomb, along with furnishings from the old tabernacle. The Kalal of ashes of the red heifer was still right where they had left it thirty-five years before. The priests had mixed them with ashes from another red heifer, recently bred just for this purpose. Now the new temple and the priests are properly purified according to the law. As proof: nobody died when they installed the Ark into the most holy place. *God has accepted them!*

Marjah has failed. She spent the day searching, on-line, contacting people from all over. Nothing. Nobody has any inkling of the heritage of Dr. Relt. He was raised nominal Catholic. But he could be descended from a Jew, or any of the lost tribes of Israel. There had been Jews in Poland. With his brown hair, tall, chiseled features, and muscular build he doesn't look very Jewish. He looks more German. But lots of Jews intermarried with Germans in Europe. Who knows? Marjah is fascinated with him.

No matter. The priests have not invited Dr. Relt to speak at the dedication. He'll be there, of course. How could he miss it? But David's dream must have been just the product of an overactive imagination. David's own speech is ready. He relaxes beside his friend Dr. Relt to enjoy the ceremonies.

The two weird prophets are there, too. But David has successfully reached an agreement with them. He released them from prison and let them attend the ceremonies on their promise to keep quiet as long as Dr. Relt does. David glances quickly at Dr. Relt, sitting happily beside him. *Looks like a sure bet. Dr. Relt is just glad to watch and cheer them on.* David doesn't trust those two prophets. But he has to admit they've only done what they said they'd do. Even to the death of that police sergeant – they'd warned him! Besides, the police investigation could find no link between their death threat and his sudden heart failure.

It's odd that the rains have delayed this week, but even that is a good thing. They have a lovely cloudless sunny day for the ceremonies. That crazy 'Elijah' had promised no rain. So far, he is right. David had tried to get them to schedule this whole thing a month earlier, but no, those picky priests had to schedule it for Tabernacles. With their ancient lunar calendar that put it into the rainy season.

The day goes exactly as planned, which is a good thing, as it is being televised all over the world. Now it's time to wrap it up. The sacrifices have all been offered. The new temple is ready for use. David's speech was excellent. He's pleased with how it went over. The two peculiar prophets have behaved themselves as promised. David relaxes in his seat next to Dr. Relt as the traditional Aaronic Benediction is intoned by the high priest to close the ceremony.

Wait! Where is Dr. Relt? His seat is empty. When did he leave? Doesn't he want to receive the Aaronic Benediction? Oh, no! There he is! On the podium, just behind the high priest. David has this sinking feeling of deja vu. This was where his dream began. He knows what will happen next. And there is not a single blessed thing he can do about it.

The benediction is finished, to the thunderous roar of the crowd. Everyone is standing, yelling, arms waving, cheering, clapping – the applause goes on and on. Dr. Relt steps up beside the newly-ordained high priest and puts an arm around him in a brotherly hug. Now he's nodding to the crowd, as if the applause belongs to him. They all know him, and love him. He is their savior, the one who finally brought them peace, indeed, the one who negotiated the division of the temple mount in the first place, so they could build their temple. The applause grows.

Now Dr. Relt is standing in the center of the podium, arms raised high to the people. The high priest has been pushed off to one side. David looks again at his program. This definitely was not on the schedule. The people are going wild! David looks around frantically for the two crazy prophets. He can't find them. They promised to keep quiet only if Dr. Relt does, but now it looks like Dr. Relt is about to speak! David fears the worst!

Suddenly, as if by some signal, the crowd quiets. Dr. Relt begins to speak, in deep, soothing tones. "Thank you, thank you, my beloved children! I am honored by your worship, but it all belongs to our heavenly father… yes! Your spiritual father and mine. For I am your messiah! I've come to save you, to purify you, and lead you to a higher realm. A realm free of persecution, prejudice, and hatred. A realm of peace and the brotherhood of all mankind. A realm of true freedom and justice. A kingdom of love, where all that is good is cherished and all evil is banished. But… I perceive that some of you have doubts?"

He pauses, looking at the crowd. There are those two prophets, trying to get on the stage. Four security officers are blocking them. They're ordering the prophets to freeze and be searched. The prophets are refusing. Weapons are drawn. A growing feeling of dread arises in David's soul. Every news camera in the square is focused in tightly upon the scene. Shouts are heard, then a burst of gunfire and screams. The officers are down! All four of 'em at the same time! The prophets are climbing the stairs to the stage.

Dr. Relt takes charge. "No need to fear or panic! Our two doubters there just need to be convinced, that's all. It's all okay. Let them come to me. And bring our overzealous officers to me as well. They should not have opened fire. This is a joyous moment. Let it not be spoiled by violence. I will teach you of our father's kingdom, where there is no violence or pain." He keeps talking like that while the four dead policemen are brought to him. He faces the two prophets. "Now, my beloved skeptics, you doubt my claim to be your messiah? Behold these four dead bodies…"

And they are indeed dead. David is not sure how that happened, as they were the ones firing the guns, but it almost looked like their bullets just bounced off the two prophets right back upon themselves. The cameras are zoomed in close. The bullet holes and bloodstains are clearly visible in the monitors across the square. Dr. Relt is laying his hands on each of them in turn. He's chanting, or is it a prayer? Within a minute, all four security officers are back up. Healed! They return to their duties.

A mighty cheer erupts from the crowd. But Dr. Relt waves his hands for silence. "You can't hear my skeptical friends here because they aren't amplified, but you need to know what they're saying. They are accusing me of being a fraud, a deceiver, an anti-messiah! Now, that's a serious accusation. Come on up here, you two. Say it into the microphones for everyone to hear. Then I'll respond."

Moses and Elijah are allowed to step up to the podium. "Just read the Scriptures!" Elijah begins. "The seventieth week of Daniel, chapter 9! The prince who is prophesied to destroy the city and the temple! He makes a covenant of peace with Israel for seven years, but breaks his covenant in the middle to become the Abomination of Desolation! Dr. Relt is lying to you! He is only pretending peace and safety, pretending to be Israel's friend, but he will turn against you! Don't follow him! Don't believe him!"

Now Moses picks it up. "Read Ezekiel 38! Dr. Relt has a secret agreement with Russia and with the Arab world to lull you to sleep with his treaty. When you are disarmed, believing all danger past, Russia will come to destroy the land! How many of you know where Dr. Relt is from, or what his real name is? He won't tell! He's no Israelite! I believe he is the Gog of the land of Magog of Ezekiel 38:2. YHWH has sent us here to testify against him!"

Now Dr. Relt moves up to stand between the two. He puts one arm out around the shoulders of each, and says kindly. "Now you've heard their claims. Do by all means check out the Scriptures they cited. Here is my response. They are sent by that Christian God, Jesus, who claimed to be your Messiah but, as you all know, never followed through. But I am sent by your true God, YHWH! And I will now prove it. You all know your history… YHWH protected the sanctity of His temple, His most holy place, and His Ark of the Covenant… anyone who profaned them was slain, right? Even Jesus wasn't holy enough to enter the most holy place. And you know the prophecy that your Messiah will enter through the Eastern Gate, even though it's walled off. Jesus never did that, either."

He paused dramatically, a smug smile on his face. "Your true messiah will fulfill every prophecy, for it all points to me. Your true messiah will enter the most holy place and sit on the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant, messiah's throne on earth. Our spiritual father will shout approval for his son. He will send fire from heaven, and fill his temple with Shekina glory. Behold the Eastern Gate!"

Instantly, Dr. Relt disappears, leaving satisfying gasps of awe from the crowd. They all look to the Eastern Gate. There he is! Stepping right through the bricks as if they aren't there. He carries a lamb.

Dr. Relt lifts the lamb high for all to inspect. Surely the most beautiful looking lamb anyone has ever seen. All the cameras focus in close. Dr. Relt is beaming. His face shines like a tiny sun. He strides purposefully toward the big bronze altar and lays the lamb down. Then he lifts up his arms toward heaven. Instantly, fire falls down from a small low cloud, consuming the lamb in a bloodless sacrifice. More satisfying gasps of awe from the crowd.

David knows what's coming next. He saw it in his dream. There's a knot in the pit of his stomach that won't go away, even though he, too, is awed by the performance. Dr. Relt moves to face the great doors to the holy place. He lifts his hands as if he is praying, but of course nobody can hear him, since he was never given a wireless mic. The great doors open of their own accord. Dr. Relt strides in.

The camera view follows his progress as Dr. Relt moves right through the room. Everyone is holding his breath. Will he be slain? No! He reaches the thick veil separating the holy place from the most holy place. He separates it, hauling one half to the right and the other to the left, which exposes the Ark of the Covenant to full view of the camera. The gasps of awe and screams from the crowd increase.

Without hesitation, Dr. Relt steps right up to the Ark and turns to face the camera. He is standing before the Mercy Seat, his arms lifted high as if in blessing. Then, regally, deliberately, he sits on the Mercy Seat, hands still upraised. He smiles broadly, appearing like a king on his throne. The glow on his face grows, and grows! Soon it fills the temple, like the Shekina glory of God Himself!

Now the moment that David dreads, the moment that woke him up in a sweat. That low cloud moves directly over the temple and a great voice booms out from the cloud, "This is my beloved son! Obey him!"

Of course the crowd goes absolutely wild. Who could possibly disbelieve such miracles? Moses and Elijah, still at the microphones, try to offer their explanations, but there's just no way. The crowd is totally captivated. They have their messiah. He remains on the Mercy Seat, while the heavy veil slowly draws back to hide him, and the great doors close once again. The ceremony is over.

The microphones are turned off. Anti-messiah has won this round. Of that, Moses and Elijah are certain. They knew that he was supposed to be able to perform miracles, but they were totally unprepared for a display like this. "Let's give 'em a big rain and thunderstorm!" Moses says.

"No, we can't. I promised it wouldn't rain."

"Well… well… uh… Let's… what can we do? They're eating out of his hand! Nuts. Let's go home."

CHAPTER 53 – THE REIGN OF THE ANTICHRIST

It is uncanny how easily the reins of power in Israel slide into the kind, capable hands of Dr. Relt. It's not that they make him an official dictator or anything. No, they simply begin consulting him on every decision and doing what he suggests. And it all turns out good. The people are enthralled. Even Marjah, Prime Minister Davison's private secretary, is now spending more time with Dr. Relt than with her boss. There's hardly a conversation in all the land that doesn't include Dr. Relt in it somewhere.

Wormwood and the dragon regularly meet with Dr. Relt. He's learned to love them, and now fully accepts his role in the coming new world order. Those incredible miracles that Wormwood worked… Dr. Relt is beginning to believe that he is the chosen messiah, the anointed one. The way Wormwood snatched him into the spirit realm, gave him the lamb, and rematerialized him at the Eastern Gate! And the way the dragon prepared that cloud, blew down flames from it at the lamb, and shouted out as if he were God… Frankly, it awed Dr. Relt as much as anyone!

The two prophets who interrupted the ceremony are now universally recognized as crazy loons – as anti-Semite Christian fundamentalist bigots. They are laughed at and scorned. Moses keeps upping the ante as he cycles through the ten plagues: the frogs, the lice, the swarms of insects, the diseased animals, the boils… but they never seem to make the mental connection between his prophecy and the resulting pestilence. They just treat it with chemicals, insecticides, or drugs and go their way.

"Okay!" Elijah says. "They want to play hardball – we'll play their game. Eventually they have to listen to us, if for no other reason than to see the hand of God on us. We've got to do the storm. A big one!"

"But as you so succinctly said, you promised it wouldn't rain. How do you do a storm without rain? The lack of rain is just now beginning to have an impact!"

"I said, '…neither rain nor dew, except by my word.' I've just got to tell 'em that it will rain at the same time as you prophesy the storm of the seventh plague."

So that Sabbath at the temple square, Moses says, "You still haven't listened to us. So now it's time for the seventh plague. But that involves rain, and my partner here said it would not rain, except by his word. Well, Elijah…?"

"I hereby declare it will rain. Just tomorrow. At noon. And you're going to wish it hadn't! Prepare for a big storm, with an abundance of rain! But only for one day."

"So that's it, folks. The seventh plague is loosed. All who still believe in YHWH, bring your livestock inside! Rain, hail, thunder, lightning – this is going to be a doozy! Eventually you'll realize that your 'peace and security' is just a façade. YHWH's hand is against you for accepting the wrong messiah!"

Sunday dawns clear and fair. Weather reports are for continued sunny. Everyone is out enjoying their lovely weekend. The local news media heap scorn upon those 'lunatic prophets from America' and their silly one-day storm. *But at least they made the news!*

Right at noon, clouds suddenly spring up, turn black, and boil over. The rain comes down as in a monsoon, and all the picnickers scatter. At first the people shout joyfully, "YHWH's blessings are on us! The rains have returned!"

Soon nobody is talking about God's blessing anymore. The rains become floods, washing away precious topsoil. Then they turn to hail, big hail, big enough to crush plants, break limbs off trees, and smash windows. Now people are trying to round up their animals and bring them in, but the hail gets even bigger, injuring or even killing people and animals alike. Lightning flashes continuously across the sky, as if the hail has caught fire, along with terrifying claps of thunder. "Well, Moses. I guess we finally put the fear of God into them!" Elijah says.

"Do you think they'll come to us and ask for it to stop? At least Pharaoh knew enough to call for Moses!" They are walking the streets of Jerusalem, hoping to see some repentance. There is none. Those who see them, curse and shake their fists at them in anger. "Well at least now they realize that we're behind it!"

The two prophets walk down to the Christian Quarter in Old Jerusalem. They weren't surprised that the rain and hail avoided them, wherever they went. They weren't even surprised to find their apartment undamaged and their floor still dry, even though the hole remains in the roof. But they are surprised to find the entire Christian Quarter still dry. The deadly storm totally bypassed the Christians, just like the seventh plague bypassed the land of Goshen before the Exodus. But others, too, notice the Christians.

There could be a backlash. Moses and Elijah spend the rest of the afternoon warning Christians, "Flee Jerusalem. This could be your last warning. Just as God singled you out for protection, the anti-messiah will single you out for persecution. We believe that all who remain here will be slain." A few listen. But most, especially religious leaders who have their lavish cathedrals to protect, remain.

As expected, Jews turn their rage against the Christians for causing such terrible damage and loss of life. Thus Dr. Relt is able to convince the Knesset to order a purge of the Christian Quarter. Prime Minister David Davison is appalled. With growing anxiety for his friend, he doesn't agree to it. But he's shouted down. Finally David realizes that he has no more power in the Knesset. Dr. Relt is now pulling the strings. He goes home early that day.

Danelle is concerned to see David home so soon. "They've ordered a purge of the Christian Quarter!" David cries. "Come on! We've got to go warn them!" He explains the situation as they drive.

But when they get over to the Christian Quarter, they discover the Christian leaders have already been warned – by those two prophets! David drives to their apartment.

David hesitates on their doorstep. He fears them. He saw the police sergeant die in the Knesset. He visited Karl, the policeman whose face was blown off when his gun misfired. He watched the four officers go down after firing at the prophets. But now, David is beginning to fear his own friend Dr. Relt even more. He touches the doorbell.

The door opens instantly. "Come in! Welcome! We've been expecting you. We prayed for you. You treated us kindly in the Knesset. We are grateful. We believe God has a special ministry for you now." Dinner is prepared. The table is already set for four. After a pleasant meal, Elijah explains, "Dr. Relt is about to reveal his true colors, against Israel. I'm sure you suspect that or you wouldn't be here. You are Israel's true leader. Yes, your people have been deceived by their anti-messiah, but they still respect you. God wants you to lead to safety all who are willing to go."

"You mean… evacuate Israel? Where? How? Why?"

"'Those who have insight will shine brightly like the heavens, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever.' Daniel 12:3. You 'have insight', or you wouldn't be here now. I believe God is calling you to 'lead the many to righteousness'. They are like sheep, thoughtlessly following this one who claims to be their messiah. But you know better. The Scripture says some will flee to Egypt. Others will flee to Assyria (Kurdistan), probably to stay with the Kurds in northern Iraq or south-eastern Turkey. But many will flee to Petra, and you must lead them. Now is the time. You dare not delay."

"How do you know this?" Danelle is skeptical.

"I know you don't believe it, but let's assume for the sake of the argument that Yashua is your genuine Messiah. If so, He certainly would have warned of this time, don't you think? Well, He did, in Matthew 24. 'When you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the Prophet, standing in the most holy place of the temple, then let those who are in Judea flee to the hills… then there will be terrible tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall again.' We're assuming the hills you flee to are Petra, because of a few obscure hints in Isaiah and Ezekiel, but God may lead you anywhere in what was ancient Edom, now southwest Jordan. Trust YHWH to lead you.

"Edom was cursed for how they treated Israel. Their people are no more. Now their land is yours. Isaiah says, 'Who comes from Edom, with garments of glowing colors from Bozrah [north from Petra]? Who is this One majestic in apparel, marching in the greatness of his strength? It is I who speak in righteousness, mighty to save.' (63:1) That 'I' is Yashua, leading you and all you've rescued, returning victoriously from Edom to restore Israel!

"However, the main Scriptures are in the book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ by the apostle John. In chapter 14 he speaks of 144,000, 12,000 from each tribe of Israel, who are 'celibate' – they have not 'prostituted' themselves to the anti-messiah. They will be the Firstfruits to God. It says (verse 9), that all who remain behind will 'worship the beast [anti-messiah] and his image [the false prophet, the demon who inspires him], and receive a mark on his forehead or upon his hand; he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, mixed in the full strength of His anger…'

"In chapter 12 the 'woman clothed with the sun' (true, faithful Israel) gives birth to the true Messiah (Yashua) who is 'caught up to God and to His throne' (where He rules today). Then the great red dragon (who gives power to the anti-messiah) pursues the woman to persecute her. But 'two wings of a great eagle were given to the woman, so she can fly into the wilderness [of Edom] to her place,' where she will be 'nourished for 3 ½ years and protected from the dragon.' (vs 14). She represents that Firstfruits to God, who are the faithful remnant of Judah who rejects the anti-messiah, Dr. Relt." Elijah grins triumphantly.

"So, as near as I can figure it, you've got to get yourself eagle's wings and fly 12,000 Jews down to the wilderness of Edom before they're forced to bow to Dr. Relt."

David and Danelle are rather blown away. They were not ready for this. David had only wanted to ask the two prophets how he could stop Dr. Relt from purging the Christian Quarter. "I'm not sure I'm the right man. Do you really think Dr. Relt is that bad? I mean, he has really helped us and brought us long-lasting peace and safety…"

"Search your heart, David. Can you really put your faith in a man who so casually orders a purge of Christians? What will he do next? How do you feel about Christians?"

Danelle speaks up. "We aren't Christians ourselves of course, but we do appreciate all the help that Americans, mostly American Christians, have given us. They've been good friends of Israel. Everyone knows that! I was utterly shocked at Dr. Relt for ordering the purge!"

David nods. "You're right, Danelle. We can't trust him again, after that. But Dr. Relt has no official status in Israel. He claims to be our messiah, but Israel is a democracy. He's never been elected or anything. How much damage can he do? If he turns against us, we just throw him out!"

Moses takes over. "David and Danelle, I have sad news. Dr. Relt is more dangerous than you know. He is inspired by a mighty demon prince, called the false prophet in the Revelation. And he's empowered by the red dragon, Satan himself. You know Israel has been protected by God. Your existence is a miracle! Israel has been covered by God's archangel Michael. With his help, you've won battles against nations fifty times stronger than you. You've almost come to think you're invincible. But the really bad news is – Michael has withdrawn. You're on your own!"

"What! Withdrawn? Why? How do you know?"

"Michael came to us and told us. His exact words as I recall were, 'Now, I must arise. I have covered Israel, but no longer. She is in your hands. Do with her what you will.' We don't want to harm Israel, but we've got to wake her up to her danger. Some are ready to heed. You will lead them out. Most of those who do not escape now will be slain."

"Dr. Relt won't kill Israelis! Nobody would obey him if he ordered that! He has no official power here…"

"David, you're just believing what you see around you. You've got to look beyond that to believe what the Word of God says. Read Revelation chapter 13. It tells, in figurative language, of a beast rising out of the sea – that's Dr. Relt, coming from a nondescript, unknown 'sea' of people. He was slain and then brought back to life. The dragon, that's Satan, gives him power and authority. Everyone worships him. Verse 7 says he will wage war with the saints and even overcome them! Ultimately, he will gain authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation.

"It also tells of another beast, out of the earth. That is the false prophet, the demon prince who ultimately becomes a man in the image of the first beast. He performs great signs and wonders. It says he can even bring fire down from heaven, like Dr. Relt did when he sacrificed the lamb. My guess is that Dr. Relt will have a big golden statue of himself. The demon prince will then possess it, making it come alive, causing everyone to worship Dr. Relt. In the end everyone on earth will have to submit to him and take his mark, and even worship him, or be slain."

It's too much. David just can't do it. He's not sure he can accept the Christians' New Testament anyway. But after several more hours of discussion, he promises to read the Revelation, and Daniel 7 - 12. It's getting late. They give him a Bible and say their good-byes. At the door, Elijah offers to pray for them. "Sure. We can always use prayer!"

They turn to leave. But Elijah means right now. He puts his hands on their heads from behind and begins, "YHWH, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Father God of Israel. Open the eyes of these Your chosen ones, we pray. Give them Your wisdom. Send Your mighty angels to protect them. And now, we commission them to do Your perfect will, and to protect Your chosen people. Grant them grace to receive Your commission, we pray."

David and Danelle crawl into bed very late that night. They have read together all those passages in Daniel and the book of Revelation. Frightened by it all, they also pray, "Please O God, give us wisdom. Open our eyes to whatever You want us to see." The next morning they awaken late, to the news that the Christians have been successfully purged from the Christian Quarter. It is now being called Messiah's Quarter and Dr. Relt has claimed it for himself and his heavenly father's coming kingdom. He has ordered a huge new statue of himself to be built there!

CHAPTER 54 – ESCAPING THE ANTICHRIST

Now David and Danelle's eyes are opened. It's the statue that does it. Moses had guessed there would be a big golden statue, and that the demon prince would make it come alive. The next morning plans for the statue are all over the news. The fools in the Knesset vote to authorize it at Israel's expense, in honor of Dr. Relt's contributions to the peace of Israel. Heartsick, David stays home that day.

By midday, another one of Moses' guesses is confirmed. Everyone in Israel wants to move into the now vacant Messiah's Quarter, but Dr. Relt insists that only those loyal to him will be allowed. They will receive a microchip implanted in their palm to verify their loyalty, encoded with a unique ID number which includes the messiah's ID, 616, tacked on before and after it. No one is forced to take it. But those who do are given housing and good jobs in Messiah's Quarter. Those who refuse the microchip are prohibited from even entering Messiah's Quarter. There's a mad scramble for the microchip and the free housing!

"We've got to go. We can't go along with this! Moses and Elijah are right. We've got to get out, before he takes over the government entirely."

"But how? If Dr. Relt finds out you've turned against him, or if you try to take people with you… He's got nearly everyone on his side!"

"I dunno. I'll think of something. I've got to go back and face the Knesset tomorrow. Maybe I'll just announce I'm taking a vacation. Ahh, I got it… an election. We'll hold a vote-of-confidence election. I'll bow out, and they'll all vote him in." David smiles at Danelle.

"Do you want to just… give him more power?"

"Nuts. You're right. I shouldn't give up so easily. I'll think of something. Pray for me tomorrow."

David doesn't need to propose a special election. After he had not shown up the day before, some in the Knesset found out the reason. They immediately propose a vote of no-confidence, citing collaboration with Christians and fraternizing with those crazy American prophets. But he is allowed a defense. "As you all well know," David begins, praying for wisdom, "my first loyalty is to Israel, the land I love. I am happy that our benefactor and my own personal friend Dr. Relt has gained such influence here, but I'm a cautious man. We don't know where he comes from or if he is descended from Father Abraham. Resolve that, and I'll be happy to consider him for the job of prime minister. But let us exercise a little cautious restraint before giving him such power over us! We need to…"

At this point, he is shouted down. Nearly everyone has accepted Dr. Relt as messiah, and David is being a wet blanket. In a whirlwind vote, he is out, and Dr. Relt is in. But at least it's not unanimous. A few others have begun to have reservations, too.

That evening, he finds himself in front of half-a-dozen cameras. A reporter asks. "Do you have anything against Dr. Relt for taking your place in the Knesset?"

"Not at all. This is a democracy. It was a valid vote of no-confidence. If it is confirmed in the upcoming election, I'll happily go off with my wife and take a long vacation! Heaven knows I need one." David grins into the cameras. "Any of you dear friends out there who want to go with us, meet us at the airport the morning after the election."

David heads for home, wondering where that came from. By the time he reaches his front door, he knows. "Danelle, did you see the news?"

"I sure did. I can't believe it! After all you've done for them, to throw you out like a dirty dishrag…"

"No, I mean about the vacation."

"Huh? Oh… You mean after you're voted out." She knows there is no possibility her husband can withstand Dr. Relt's challenge. He's way too popular.

"Yeah. I invited our 'friends' to join us." David just gets a blank look. "Don't you see it? Moses and Elijah thought we'd take 12,000 from Judah. That was their invitation. We've got to have our 'Eagle's Wings' at the airport right after the election. We've got a month to plan our vacation."

Dr. Relt is taking no chances. He pushes hard, behind the scenes, to get his golden statue ready for its dedication ceremony on the very day of the election. David doesn't think that's very fair. Talk about electioneering! But Dr. Relt claims that god himself commanded it be on that day – in the late afternoon after most people have already voted. As their 'messiah' he has that right.

On election day, he holds a big celebration to unveil his statue. Those who don't have the encoded microchip, of course, can't go in to the Messiah's Quarter to participate, but it is televised worldwide. David and Danelle glumly watch the ceremony on TV. They've already voted, but as Daniel suspected, most of the country chose to wait 'til the last minute so they could see the statue unveiled first.

So they just snuggle together in front of the TV. David was invited to come give a speech, too, but, not wanting to have the microchip implanted, he had excused himself, "just so he wouldn't bias the election results" of course. The speeches seem to go on interminably. Everyone in the Knesset wants to top each other in praising Dr. Relt's many contributions to Israel's peace, security, and prosperity. It gets rather sickening after a while, so David and Danelle concentrate more on the snuggling than the show. They are due a little relaxation. They had spent the previous month answering the phone from literally thousands of people who wanted to 'meet them at the airport'. So David had found a small Christian-owned commuter airline. Not surprisingly, it was already named 'Eagle's Wings'. He had chartered the entire airline for the evacuation.

It had been a nightmare trying to schedule thousands of people from eighteen airports all over Israel, into that one tiny airport across the border from Petra in Jordan. And they were still nowhere near the 12,000 Jews that Moses had mentioned. David figures that at most he has half that. But the task became overwhelming. So they just gave it all to YHWH. It feels good to 'veg out' in front of the TV.

"Hitler!" David abruptly sits bolt upright, evoking a shriek from Danelle. "Moses told us he'd be someone who was dead and then came back to life. Look! He's growing a Hitler mustache! And he combed his hair sloped off to the right. He's trying to make himself look like Hitler!"

"His mustache is hardly more than peach fuzz." Danelle is skeptical. She knows him too well.

"But why is he doing it? Surely he knows the Jews all hate Hitler because of the Holocaust. I don't get it."

"No, David… it's just your imagination. Dr. Relt would never do that. It would be insane! If he unveils a statue making him look even a little bit like Hitler, he's lost the election right there! Most of the people haven't voted yet."

Now the show has their undivided attention. The time for the unveiling arrives. A profound silence descends all over the world, as five billion people hold their breath, eyes glued to their TV sets. The veil drops. David's worst fears are staring him in the face. It is a golden statue of… Hitler himself! Fully mature, though dressed in flowing golden robes rather than his Nazi Führer uniform.

Everyone in the square at the Messiah's Quarter is standing, hands already lifted for the first clap. But the applause dies before it is born. All you can hear is gasps of astonishment and dismay. To make it worse, Dr. Relt stands close and strikes a pose exactly like the statue, emphasizing the similarities. He pauses long enough that no one can mistake his intentions, then strides over to the podium. "Yes, my dear children, my brothers and sisters. I am Adolph Hitler. My full given name is Relt Ihploda which is just Adolph Hitler spelled backwards. I was responsible for the Holocaust back before 1945. And you have every right to hate me and execute me for my terrible crimes. I had to reveal this to you before the election is over, in the interest of full disclosure.

"But before you all take me out and crucify me, please allow me to explain. Real life rarely has that mythical 'undo' button. But mine did. After I died, in the Reichstag Chancellery on April 30, 1945, I went to hell to pay for my crimes. I suffered more than any man has, before or since. Hell is a terrible place. You do not want to go there! Every crime, every dark deed, every pain I'd ever caused, came back upon me a hundredfold. I knew I deserved it all. For the first time in my life, I clearly saw how wrong I had been, about you, the war, about everything I had done all my life. Pain has a purifying effect, you know. Infinite pain, like mine, becomes redemptive.

"So after fifty years of infinite pain, YHWH our Father came to me and asked me if I was ready to repent. I was. He restored me to Himself, healed my wounds, erased the scars, mental and physical, and comforted me. Like a little child I sat in His lap, soaking in His incredible forgiveness and love! It was the most awesome experience anyone can ever have! I've been there! I've beaten hell and achieved the highest heaven. I can show you how to get there, too!

"Anyway, YHWH sat me down and asked me if I would like to try again. It was a challenge, really. He smiled at me and asked if, knowing what I know now, I thought I might be able to do any better. Of course I assured Him I could! He said He would give me a second chance, if I promised this time to live my entire life helping the Jews instead of trying to destroy them. I vowed to Him I would. So He placed me inside the womb of a new mother and I was born. I had my second chance, my 'undo' button.

"I have kept my vow to YHWH. Every moment of every day I am pouring out my life blood for you, my precious people whom I have learned to love. I was successful in turning the hearts of the Russians and the Arabs toward you, the greatest achievement of my life! YHWH is pleased with my success and with how fervently I have kept my vow to Him. That is why, right during the dedication of the temple, YHWH honored me by choosing me to become your messiah, as you all saw and heard. I didn't ask for that. YHWH put His mark of approval on me, and made me your protector, your benefactor, your friend, your savior!

"So now that you know who I am, you can cast your vote with full confidence. I am satisfied either way, for I have kept my vow. It is all in YHWH's hands now. But I know there will be some, like those two prophets at the temple ceremony, who will doubt. I understand. We don't want to leave any skeptics angry with me. So I will give you proof of who I am and the changed heart I now have."

Dr. Relt turns and points to the golden statue on his left. "This statue is not an exact likeness of me in my maturity, nor is it an exact likeness of the evil me, Hitler, in 1945. Instead, it is the likeness of my personal guardian angel, dressed in robes of gold from the heavens. He really is twelve feet tall. His name is Astrapte, meaning 'shining one'. He's much stronger than I, but he serves me and lets me order him around. Astrapte! Possess your image here. Make it come alive. Tell them all who I really am."

Instantly, the golden statue 'unfreezes', to the startled gasps of thousands in the square. It, or he, bows gracefully, robes flowing, and then stands tall. "Yes Master Hitler. All that you just said is precisely correct. I swear it. You are Hitler himself, slain yet returned to life a much better and kinder man. Our heavenly father is very pleased with you. He is honored that you accepted his call to be messiah to his people. Let everyone here join me in bowing to our savior, thus giving worship to our father who sent him." Astrapte holds his hands out to Dr. Relt and bows.

At this point David is shocked to see Marjah, his own private secretary, not only bow to Dr. Relt, but then sweep up before him with a big hug and plant a kiss on his cheek! That breaks the spell. Soon everyone has bowed and the applause is thunderous, all over the world. Needless to say, Dr. Relt wins the election in a landslide.

David and Danelle are appalled to think that Adolph Hitler could win a democratic election of the Jews in Israel. Can't they tell a snow job when they see it? It's insane! Early the next morning they're at the airport. The 'Eagle's Wings' planes they chartered are there to pick them up. As they had hoped, the planes fill with others who are also shocked at the outcome of the election. Dr. Relt is too busy gloating about his victory to stop their escape. By nightfall, they and over 2,000 others from all over Israel have landed at the tiny airport at En Yahav and are in the hills on their way to Petra by bus. More keep streaming in the whole night through. They overwhelm the startled Jordanians and commandeer the site for themselves.

They all look to David as their natural leader. Well, someone has to take charge. Soon David is ordering them all around, gathering bedding and food, and trying to find drinking water. Though now a World Heritage Site, Petra had been a fortress of the idolatrous Nabataeans during the time of the Maccabees. When the refugees clean out all their old caverns and temples they discover underground cisterns and water-channels to catch rainwater. They also find immense stocks of supplies: tools, blankets, bottled water, and tons of still-edible military rations.

David and Danelle read and reread the Revelation, and then start in Matthew and read the entire New Testament. It's a real eye-opener. They began to trust that maybe God will "nourish them for 3 ½ years, and protect them from the dragon" as Revelation 12 says. They had not expected to find all this food here. Now David remembers military contingency plans from the cold war, to use this as an emergency fallout shelter in the event of a nuclear attack.

The dragon (still possessed by Satan) is furious that Dr. Relt let them escape so easily. He's so busy solidifying his government that he hardly knows anybody is gone. The dragon flies down to Petra. Ha! They're trapped down there in caves and caverns below the ground. Elijah's prophecy stopping the rain does not extend out here, since he specified all of Israel and this is Jordan. So the dragon blows up a storm in the mountains above them, sending monstrous flash floods down upon them in his fury.

But Moses and Elijah know all about Prime Minister Davison's flight to Petra and what the dragon will do about it, right from Scripture. (Rev 12:15) So they prophesy. "Earth! Open up your mouth to receive the flood!" Then for good measure, "All you mighty angels, do whatever is needed to protect YHWH's people there!" Michael, who is impressed and pleased at how well these two greenhorn prophets have matured, is empowered to respond.

CHAPTER 55 – THE WRATH OF SATAN

The dragon is furious that his flood failed to drown the refugees. All it really did was fill the ancient subterranean cisterns, giving them an instant five-year water supply. He is flying over them wondering what to try next, when he is met by Michael. "Satan! You are cast out of the heavenlies, by order of Logos. So what are you doing up here?"

"Ha!" Satan laughs bitterly. "I'm not in the heavenlies. I'm merely in this dragon. My dragon is in the heavenlies. Go back and ask your Master. I'm still permitted to possess physical creatures, even flying ones!"

Michael leaves. Soon, he is back. "Satan, you're correct, on a technicality. However, if that dragon you're in is slain, you are also at risk. As you well know, when you enter a creature you enter into his weaknesses. I suggest you leave here at once, for I and my host have just been empowered to cover all these in Petra. Elijah just ordered it!"

"At risk?! This dragon is the strongest creature on earth! What could possibly kill or injure me?"

"I will, if you violate Moses and Elijah's prayer!"

"You can't cover the people here! You were demoted, remember? And besides, not a one of the people here even knows your Master! Not a one! They all still belong to me! I can do whatever I…"

"In the name of Logos, begone!" Michael yells, swiping at the dragon with his sword in warning.

And you think Satan was furious before. Now he is absolutely livid. Cast out of heaven, now he can't even fly his dragon around over the heads of his own people! He'll get even! Michael can't guard the entire earth. The dragon rages at Wormwood, who in turn rages at Dr. Relt. "You <expletive deleted> pansy! Stop playing games with 'em! It's time to take the <expletive deleted> gloves off! I didn't get you here just so everyone would love you! You've got a <multiple expletives deleted> world to rule!"

But Dr. Relt did not get his doctorate in poli-sci at the University of Prague for nothing. He chuckles at the demon's rage. "Temper, temper, mon ami! I know how to do this. I've already been successful in ten nations! It's a basic principle. It's easy to hang someone if he is eager to be hanged and loves you for it. I already have a cadre of software engineers designing a computer game to control everyone. They'll love it! So don't worry. I'm doing my job.

"It's you I'm concerned about. You're not doing your job! Remember what you promised me, back when we first made the deal? You said I could annihilate any who oppose me. Those two prophets are opposing everything I do. But I can't touch 'em! You've got to deal with 'em."

"Huh. I can't touch them either. I've tried. They've got angelic protection. They are your problem now. Here's your chance to try out your 'basic principle' on them."

By Hanukkah Dr. Relt's new software is ready. He stages a big speech in front of the Knesset, again televised worldwide. "My precious children, all over the earth! Our peace and prosperity in the Middle East is now beginning to overflow to the rest of the world! Every nation aligned with us is reaping the benefits, which are growing every day! But such great prosperity is not ours to hoard. We want to share it with everyone, even in nations not aligned with us here in the Middle East. There is no need to bother with messy treaties or laws. I've made it easy for you. I've set up a computerized international economic exchange on the World Wide Web. Any individual, any head of a corporation, anyone who wants, may freely buy and sell on our exchange, at significant discounts from anywhere else in the world. It will soon become the most prosperous, most complete, and most used network in history. You can gain access from your business or home. All you need is my free software on your computer, and a tiny identification microchip inserted into your palm or forehead. It's so small you won't even know it's there! My software will use it to identify you, so there'll be no possibility of anyone stealing your identity or hacking into your account. If a would-be thief tries anything sinister, it will automatically summon the police to your location to protect you.

"Of course nothing is forcing anyone to join, but I can assure you, the benefits will be huge! Ultimately, I hope everyone will choose to subscribe. Just think! Worldwide economic stability! Everyone will be trading on a level playing field. Anyone can get the best prices. And for the first few years I'll share our great prosperity here in Israel by lowering all prices with a twenty percent subsidy into the system." He goes on describing his new network in such glowing terms that Moses and Elijah begin to wonder if he had ever been a used-car salesman in his first life. They make their way to the front to await their turn.

Of course Dr. Relt notices them right away. He has come to hate them, but by now he realizes he cannot stop them. All his guards and police force are terrified of them, because anyone who tries to hinder them mysteriously dies. But he always was pretty glib. *Maybe he can talk his way past this.* "Ah! I see our two resident pessimists are with us again. Good to have you with us! It's important to hear the skeptics and cynics before we make up our minds. So come up to the mic and tell us, what's not to like about my new economic network?"

"Thank you for asking. It's actually a very good system – for you! But that microchip imbedded into the body ought to raise a red flag for the rest of us. That constitutes a permanent 'mark' as we are warned about in Revelation 13:16! Any system that can read a person's microchip for a purchase can spy on him in other ways as well. You said it broadcasts its location to the police – so now your secret servicemen can track everyone's movements in real time? You've just developed a perfect system for people control. What will you do to them after you enslave them?"

Dr. Relt expresses hurt and dismay. "What? How cruel! When have I ever had anything but the best of intentions for those I serve? All the good that…"

"It is God Himself who says your intentions are less than benign! Why did you purge the Christians from the Christian Quarter? And what happened to them?"

"As you well know, every government has to deal with dissidents. Those Christians had turned against us. You noticed that terrible killer storm they conjured up hurt everyone but them? I had to re-locate them. I must first protect my own precious people, here." He had most of the Jews on his side on that one.

"Conjured up? Ha. God sent the storm, exactly as we prophesied! And He protected the Christians! He is the one who has the contention against you! To prove it, let's see… we're up to the eighth plague, aren't we. By nightfall, we'll see locusts eating your plants all across the land. And since your fall rains failed at the word of my sidekick Elijah here, you don't have any to spare. Then what will happen to your highly touted 'peace and prosperity'?"

Now Dr. Relt is indignant. He points a finger at the two and thunders, "May god judge between me and you! I have done nothing but try to help his precious ones, and once again, you are prophesying disasters and calamities, and stirring up trouble! For shame! Have you no love at all?"

So Dr. Relt wins another round. Even when the locusts come, the people continue to love and trust him. Before that day is done, everyone is falling over each other to get the microchip imbedded and the free computer software installed. But they have grown to hate those two prophets!

Surprisingly, Chris and Anna get another letter from their husbands in Israel. Again Pastor Mike lets them read the public parts to the whole church. "Dr. Relt is so sly! He's charismatic and sounds so sincere and loving. He has everyone eating out of his hand. But for sure he's now got a system set up to enforce the 'mark of the beast'. It's an implanted microchip, together with computer software to let you buy or sell on his international economic network. But don't install his 'free' software! It allows him to spy on you! If you still have any TVs, I think he can spy on you through them, too. I suggest getting news through those old-fashioned things called radios. Our guess is, as soon as the majority of the people join his new network, he'll start persecuting all who don't 'take the mark'. He's still laying low, pretending to be Mr. Nice Guy, but things are moving pretty fast. We're already up to the eighth plague here! I'd give him no more than six months to take off the mask."

Pastor Mike thanks them. "It seems strange that they still have peace and prosperity, while we've been having such economic chaos and persecution under President Wildemann here. But you know, other nations have already persecuted Christians – China, Turkey, Muslim nations in Africa – America was overdue for persecution."

Sam stands up beside Pastor Mike, and Suzy quickly stands up beside him. "Pastor, we've been praying about this. I think God is leading me to take action. From what I hear, it's not just America that is an economic basket case. Virtually every nation except those supporting Dr. Relt have been hit by disaster after disaster, but have you noticed? None of the countries who support Dr. Relt have had a single war, earthquake, famine, or plague, except for the small local plagues in Israel prophesied by Alan and Joseph. I think Satan is protecting them! And all the while he is pouring out his wrath on the rest of the earth!

"I think I see his plan. Everyone in America and in all the other nations hit by repeated catastrophes is going to look at the peace and prosperity under Dr. Relt and see him as their savior. And since he made allegiance to him an individual choice, not requiring any government treaty or anything, it can happen very fast. When nearly everyone in America rushes to join his economic system, what can our government do but follow? I don't think it will take six months. I think it will be more like six weeks!

"But the scary part is, nobody has any reason not to join – except Christians who read their Bible and recognize Dr. Relt as the beast of antichrist. At first I was mystified that his own ID number on his microchips is not 666. It is 616. But I did a little research and discovered that some ancient Bible manuscripts do have 616 – the original may have been mistranscribed somewhere along the line. Dr. Relt knows better than to use 666. It's too famous. Everyone would suspect. As it is, they're oblivious.

"After everyone who wants to has joined, Dr. Relt will know that all who have not joined are the Christians, and the real persecution will begin! And we think we've seen persecution…! At that time, I can see all the Christians remaining in the big cities fleeing out here for refuge. We are in a perfect location, just outside the largest metropolis in the nation. We should get ready for them."

"Thank you, Sam. I believe your analysis is spot on. But you said God was leading you to take action. What specific actions has He asked of you?"

"Well, I'm not a pastor or anything…"

"Whoever said you had to be a trained pastor to lead God's people in obedience to the Holy Spirit? You just gave a wonderful sermon! Tell us! If we also sense the leading of the Holy Spirit, we'll follow you!"

"Thank you, Pastor. It just seems… a lot of people are going to be coming here. Most of them are going to be scared and ignorant of what God is doing, so you'll have to stay here to train them. But the church is already packed!

"I think I'm being led to take some families here out to Steve and Sharon's farm – if anybody wants to go with me."

Pastor Mike nods. "I witness to that. Anybody have any problem with Sam leading it?" Nobody does.

Steve and Sharon have been living in heaven, or so it would seem. The terrible calamities, economic collapse, riots, military takeover, and persecution of Christians in America have totally passed them by. Their third child is also a boy, Luke. With three active little boys now, they've got their hands full, anyway. Life is a wondrous adventure.

Papa Yoder has finished his spare bedroom. Ben and Sue, and Dan and Samantha, have settled into their big homes, working their farms. And the new family with the four sons has done a great job with the rest. With the help of Steve's tractor, the harvest that fall is the best ever in the history of the Amish. After four months of harvesting and putting up foods for the winter, they now have more food than their large pantries and food cellars can even hold. But still there are no refugees, and no word from Pastor Mike, either. Sharon insists there is nothing to fret about. God will send His chosen ones when He's good and ready. But Steve is not so sure. "Now with all this food, we are really ready. And still nobody has showed up!"

"What do you mean, nobody! In case you haven't noticed, six fine young men have arrived for my…"

"I know, I know. They had to come early so your sisters could get married and discover what God wants to do in their lives. I knew before I started…"

"You said you built those six extra houses for my sisters and their husbands-to-be. So give 'em all time to finish growing up, marry, and settle in before you fill their homes with refugees! Sylvia is only seven, for heaven's sake. And Salome's only thirteen!"

Steve pauses, then says hesitantly. "Uh… that's not it… I don't think they have to be married before the refugees come. It's probably better if they're still living at home with Papa Gunter. He and Momma will need their help when the refugees come. There's something else. Why does my brother Sam keep popping into my mind? I'd sure like to hear how he's doing. I wonder if he will come here?"

Sharon gasps, "Oh! Pray, Steve! Pray!"

"Huh? I've been praying for them. All the time."

"No! He's in trouble!" Suddenly Sharon is sure of it. "He's been trying to come, but he's in trouble. We need to stop right now and pray for his protection!"

Indeed Sam is in trouble. Many of the church families had wanted to join him – 48 families! He had decided to make one grand run for it, rather than split up into little groups, some of which were sure to be caught. So he had organized them like the twelve tribes of Israel after the Exodus. He assigned four families to each 'tribe', each with some leaders and some good prayer warriors. They had spent weeks organizing, packing, plotting, preparing to leave on the night of the darkest moon, and praying for spiritual protection. But somebody had spotted them. And now they're surrounded with police cars!

Sam almost regrets traveling in one big group. Maybe they wouldn't have gotten spotted in smaller groups. Or maybe only some would have been caught, and the rest might have gotten through. "No!" he tells himself. "I am not willing to settle for half a victory. If God is for us, who can be against us! Of all that He has chosen to send with me, I will not lose one! God, give me great wisdom here…"

"A'right! So who's in charge of this unruly mob?" It's the police chief, Captain Pepper. He looks angry at having been awakened in the middle of the night.

"God! What do I tell him?"

"Just tell the truth…"

"I'm the leader, sir. My name is Sam Salizar. This is my wife, Suzy. We're all Christians here, from all over greater Newark. We've been getting too much persecution in the city, so we're migrating to the country to try to find a better place to live. But I don't believe we've broken any laws, sir. We're just moving at night to avoid more persecution."

"You're admitting you're Christians? You must be really stupid. Just being a Christian is against the law nowadays. We'll see what the judge says… Do you have any guns or other weapons among you?"

"No, sir. But even if we did, we wouldn't use them in our defense. I've already told my group that if we are met by police, we are not to resist in any way."

"Good! Maybe you're not as stupid as you look. Sarge! They admitted they're Christians! Book 'em!"

For a month they're shuffled back and forth between the police, the courthouse, and the prison. Nobody wants to deal with them. There are just too many to handle. Perhaps going in one large group wasn't such a bad choice, after all. All their worldly possessions are taken, even their clothes and wedding rings. Sam is tempted to despair. Then one day he tells Suzy, "Somebody is praying for us! I feel it! We're going to be freed soon! All of us!"

"But how are we going to get anywhere in these horrid fluorescent orange prison clothes?!"

"Y'know Suzy, I never prayed for God to get all our stuff to Steve and Sharon's. If we all get there safely, even in prison clothes, I'll praise the Lord for answered prayer. We can always get other clothes, you know."

So Sam, at least, falls right to sleep that night, confident that God is still in control. But he has barely dropped off, when he hears his cell door click and creak open. It is that police chief, Captain Pepper! "I may be a fool for this, but here's a copy of my master key. It fits all the cell doors. Destroy it after you all get out. I don't want any evidence linking your jail break to me. Be gone within the next hour. I've arranged for all the guards to be… ah… 'preoccupied'. I'm sorry that I can't get your stuff back. It's already been stolen by the officers here. You'll have to go without it."

He hands the key over and starts to leave, but Sam needs to know. "Thank you! But sir, what was it that changed your mind about us?"

Captain Pepper looks at them absently, like he doesn't really understand it himself. Then he shakes his head, "You told me the truth. Even at the risk of your life. You're all on the docket for the execution tomorrow morning, you know. You never deserved that!" Then he is gone.

Sam works fast getting them all out of their cells. The master key works for the women's side, too. They take the dark prison blankets to wrap around their orange clothes. The night is cold, but a thick fog encourages them. By 1:00 AM they are out on the streets, leaving Newark on foot.

They connect up with Highway 78, heading out toward their church. Sam is sorely tempted to go there, get some food and clothes, and start over. In fact, nearly everyone assumes he will. So when he passes the exit to their church there are complaints. "No!" he tells them. "We're almost surely being watched. He may be using us as bait to find the rest of the church. I can't risk leading them to Pastor Mike. We must continue into Pennsylvania."

As the fog dissipates the next morning they've covered only 25 miles. 100 miles to go. They have no food or water. Their feet are sore and blistering. They'd had no sleep. And they're sure to be spotted soon. They need a hiding place. But how do you hide 220 people in busy New Jersey?

Sam feels almost like Moses, leading the Exodus. What would Moses do? Well, for one thing, they traveled day and night, not even stopping to let their dough rise. And for another, they had a covering – a cloud by day and pillar of fire to lead them by night. Sam prays with Suzy, "God, increase our strength! Cover us with Your cloud today. Send us some unleavened bread to sustain us on our way."

A police car sidles up, lights flashing. Right behind it is a road maintenance truck. A very young policeman steps out of the car. "We've come to help. Our dad is the police chief. Get your children in the back of the truck. And some mothers to take care of 'em. Throw your blankets in there, too. You won't need 'em during the day. I brought twelve police uniforms for you. Whoever wants, pretend to be a policeman today. The rest of you, wear these safety vests over your prison clothes and pretend you're being forced to pick up trash along the shoulder. You can have the big truck. Keep the lights flashing. My brother and I have to get back. We'll take the car. There are trash bags in the truck. We've also got water bottles for you all, and food. Sorry I couldn't get much – apples, crackers, peanuts, cheese, raisins… It'll get you away from the city. When you're done with the truck, leave it beside the highway. We'll find it." Without waiting for an answer, he shoos his brother into the police car with him and they drive off.

So, day and night for the next two days, Sam leads his 'chain gang' west cleaning up Highway 78.

Steve Saxon is sowing peas on his fields as a winter cover crop. He idly notices a large group of convicts doing road cleanup, but doesn't really see them until they turn up his road coming from the town. Now he looks closer. The state never sends road cleanup crews into the Amish community, because there's never any trash to pick up. Something's fishy. And that huge Black policeman leading the group looks familiar… Sam! It's brother Sam!

Steve runs for the house to alert the others. By the time the weary and hungry 'chain gang' has reached their house, they're ready for them. Everyone in the community is eager to help the refugees with food, hot baths, fresh clothes… Within two hours all 48 families are parceled out among the Amish, with the 21 families with the most kids going into the seven big homes that Steve and Sharon built. By that night, everyone has a place to sleep, and every spare bedroom has two or three in it.

Sharon gets a big kick out of teasing Steve. "And you were worried that no one would come!"

"Well, at least my worries got us to praying for them! It sounds like they really needed it!"

At dawn the next morning Sam comes out to find Steve already at his chores. "Wow, brother Steve! This place is incredible. We all fit in here, like you made it just for us! But before I can relax and enjoy it, I've got to move that truck – far away. If they find it here, we're all in trouble."

"I've got an old car I bought when I first came here. It still runs, though I don't use it much anymore. You drive the truck, and I'll follow you and bring you home."

So they pack all the prison clothes and blankets, vests, and police uniforms into the back of the truck. As they go, Sam suddenly decides he ought to thank Captain Pepper, so he leads Steve all the way into town to the police station. Steve (in his 'city-boy' clothes) walks in with him. When they're alone in Captain Pepper's office, Sam expresses his gratefulness. "Here's your key, sir. And the key to the truck your sons brought us. We made it. You saved our lives!"

"What? My sons left you a truck?"

"Yes, sir. It's the only way we made it. We thought you sent them. They had us pretend to be a road cleanup crew. The blankets we took and the uniforms your sons loaned us are all in the truck. Please thank your sons for us, too."

"My sons did that? I didn't think they knew. All I told them was that a big bunch of Christians were about to be executed. They must be sympathetic to the Christians, too. A lot of us are, you know. But don't tell anyone or we'll all be hung. Where's the truck?"

"It's out in front, sir."

"I'll have my boys take care of it. Now, get out of here. Don't get caught again." They return home rejoicing that even some in high levels of government are on their side.

Sam and Suzy and their family settle into two of Steve and Sharon's bedrooms. Sharon is delighted with them, especially after Steve tells his story of his hatred of Blacks before coming to Pastor Mike's church. "Now, my brother Sam is closer to me than my blood-brother Sam ever was!"

Sam's guess turns out to be correct. Within six weeks nearly everyone in America has joined what is now called SeeNet, the acronym for *Secure Economic Exchange Network,* Dr. Relt's internet shopping system. Christians promptly dub it, 'Satan's Evil Entrapment Net'. The vast majority of them are not fooled by the 616 prefix on the microchip. But President Wildemann is all for it from the start. Satan never had a more willing stooge. Dr. Relt has taken control of America without firing a shot.

Now Satan infiltrates Dr. Relt's new computer system. He had named it 'SeeNet' because his demons use it to 'see' into people's homes. (Satan can't read thoughts like Logos can.) He begins persecuting Christians, Jews, and others around the world who oppose the system. Officially it's still voluntary, but those who won't join SeeNet are harassed and ridiculed. They are soon fleeing the cities looking for places to hide – as they have already been doing in America ever since President Wildemann took over. The great tribulation slowly spreads all around the globe.

Among hundreds who come to Mike's Southern Baptist church is the police chief, Captain Pepper, and his two sons. "Our government has gone insane with the killing!" he says. "But the people they're killing are better than any running the government. At least Christians tell the truth! I was the police chief in Newark, but I don't want any part of it any more. As we fled the city, we spotted this church. Will you help us? We want to become Christians."

Mike uses his scanner to check for microchips. He can't endanger his flock by allowing spies to get in. But the three policemen are clean. He welcomes them into the church, leads them to saving faith, and disciples them. One night after church he discovers that among many set free and helped by the policemen are Sam and Suzy's big group.

In fact, it was Sam's thoughtfulness in bringing the truck back to the police station that had caused the police chief to talk to his sons about the matter. When he found his sons had helped them, too, he realized that they all held secret reservations about killing the Christians. So they worked together to free as many Christians as they could. They were quite successful for a while, until they began to be harassed for refusing to get the microchip implants. When Captain Pepper learned he was under investigation, he knew their days were numbered, so they fled the city.

"So," the police chief concludes, "if Sam had just left the truck on the highway instead of returning it, I might never have found out about my sons helping them, and we might never have become Christians."

Many others come besides Captain Pepper. Again the big Southern Baptist church is crammed full of families, as are the 33 affiliated churches Mike had helped to prepare.

Of course all the families in the church want to hear the news from Captain Pepper. "You don't get the news here?" He's amazed. "Everyone gets his TV news broadcast on the internet nowadays. Aren't you on the internet? It's free! The government pays for it to be broadcast everywhere. Every TV and computer comes with the internet built in!"

Pastor Mike laughs. "Ha! Free government-controlled news? And you trust it? It's all brainwashing, propaganda, lies to enslave the people. We have no TVs at all. We use old computers with the internet card yanked out. Three years ago I got a copy of *Peter's Prophecy of the End Times.* It's from the apostle Peter, written just before his death shortly after the time of Christ. He warns us about the internet. He says that the government will use it to spy on us. He also warns us about TVs, phones, and the electric power grid. We don't have any of that stuff. We use solar power. We have our own water and septic, and recycle our own garbage. We don't even have a phone line to the church anymore. The church has had plenty of warning."

Captain Pepper's eyes get big. "Peter prophesied about the internet from way back then? So, that's why we were unable to find you. We ran multiple searches for churches. We searched utility bills, phone directories, cell phone use… Now I understand why this church didn't come up. And I know why Peter warned you about the internet…"

He pauses, shaking his head. He has the full attention of everyone there. "It happened so fast. Less than five months ago Dr. Relt came on the news with his big golden statue – surely you heard of that?" Some people nod. "Even I could see he was lying about going to hell for fifty years and then getting a second chance. He had that horrid statue of Hitler – he said it was Astrapte, his guardian angel. It came to life and told everyone to worship Dr. Relt.

"In five months, Dr. Relt's internet buying network – he calls it SeeNet – has gone from the fun game he promised would be voluntary, to…" Captain Pepper shudders. "…to a monster! His 'free' software replicated itself onto every computer on the internet. It pops up tempting ads, but you can't buy or sell until you get his microchip. Most everyone has by now. But it gets worse. When you start, you get a glossy color photo of Hitler beside his silly Astrapte statue. Then as you advance, you get tiny statues of him or Astrapte. There's wood, stone, silver, and gold. Solid gold is the highest level, but nobody's reached it yet. Some people are already up to silver or gold plated. You're supposed to bow to it as you type in a trite little prayer, something like, 'I worship you with all my heart and soul,' and you get more bonus points, free stuff, and even power over the system. It's lots of fun – like a huge network game. Guys love the slick and sexy graphics. It's even more addicting than the WarCraft game we used to play."

Mike is appalled. "Did you ever play his game?"

"No. It installs itself, but it won't let you actually start playing without the microchip imbedded, and I refused that. It wasn't 'til later I found out about the little Hitler statues, and then I was very glad I did. Can you imagine…"

"…imagine bowing to a little gold or silver idol of Hitler himself? No! It gives me goose bumps to think of it."

"Well, so far it's all voluntary, and in fun. And it really is the cheapest way to shop. My guess is that there'll come a time when Dr. Relt will use his fancy software to bring the whole world into economic bondage if they refuse to go along with his agenda. He obviously has an agenda here!"

"You bet he does, Captain. Listen to this. 'And power was given to him [the antichrist] to give breath to the image of the beast [of antichrist], that his image might even speak, and cause any who do not worship the image of the beast [that's his Astrapte or Hitler statues] to be killed. And he causes all, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to be given a mark [the microchip] on their right hand or forehead, so no one is able to buy or sell unless he has the mark…' (Rev 13:15-16) The Prophet Ezekiel also says of these end times: 'They shall fling their silver idols into the streets. And their gold idols will not be able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of YHWH.' (Ezek 7:19) Isaiah says the same thing: 'You will defile your graven images overlaid with silver, and your molten images plated with gold. You will scatter them as an impure thing, and say to them, "Begone!"' (Isa 30:22)

"Then there's that famous passage from Isaiah 2. It starts out, 'In the last days the mountain of the temple of YHWH will be established as chief of the mountains. …all the nations will stream toward it. Many will come and say, "Let us go up to the mountain of God, to the temple of the God of Jacob [Israel], that He might teach us His ways, that we might walk in His paths." For the Law will go forth from Zion, and the Word of YHWH from Jerusalem. And He will judge between the nations… And then they will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, and never again will they learn war… The proud look of man will be humbled… and YHWH alone will be exalted in that day.' Right after that Isaiah says, 'But their idols will completely vanish. And men will flee into the caves of the rocks and into holes in the ground, before the terror of YHWH and before the splendor of His majesty, when He arises to make the earth tremble! In that day, men will cast away to the moles and the bats their idols of gold and silver which they made for themselves to worship.' It's amazing! Modern man has gotten away from gold and silver idols, so we always considered that passage to be just figurative speech, meaning they loved making money. But with Dr. Relt's little 'computer game', as you called it, they are actually making themselves gold and silver idols now – Hitler's Astrapte statues – and bowing to them!"

Captain Pepper is stunned. "I came so close to joining them! What hope do people have? They don't know any better! No one has warned them!"

"They have this, and it's quite clear." Pastor Mike holds up a big well-marked Bible. "But you're sure right – they need to be warned. Let's pray for them right now. O Father God in heaven, thank You for bringing Captain Pepper and his sons. And thank You for all the others You have protected and led to the churches and 'Green Pastures' that You prepared for these times. But there are many more. Many precious souls who haven't heard, and have no idea what's coming. We pray, we agree together in the mighty name of Yashua our Savior, that You send Your angels to give everyone another warning now before it's too late."

"Wow! Amen! But, He can do that? I mean, send angels to warn them?" Captain Pepper is amazed.

"He sure can. And in fact, the Bible promises He will, in Revelation 14:6 and following. We just don't know when. Maybe He's been waiting for our prayers."

"That's it!" Logos shouts triumphantly, "We have our prayer agreement! Loose the three angels who have been prepared for this hour. Put time on pause, and retune the senses of every living soul so they can see and hear them."

As heaven's historian, I will attempt to describe the indescribable to you, dear Reader, just in case you have never seen angels before. Imagine being in a room, even, say, in the basement of a tall building. You hear beautiful music above your head and look up to the ceiling. It seems solid enough, and you know there are other floors above it. But the music grows louder, and now the ceiling dissolves. The walls fade, too, and you find yourself staring up into another realm. It's not sky. It's a different realm entirely, brighter, more colorful and beautiful than the realm in which you dwell. This new realm always surrounds you, but your senses are usually detuned from it, so all you see are the physical things you're used to, like the ceiling. Now your senses are retuned, to pierce through the physical realm into the second heaven where angels dwell.

For the first time in history, every living soul on earth experiences that, no matter what they were doing or where they had been looking before. The first angel lets loose a mighty battle cry. With that, all physical sights dim and physical sounds can no longer be heard; activities cease; time itself slows and stops. Heaven's brightness becomes compelling. Everyone, yes everyone, looks up. The angel then calls out in Kasdan, the pure language of heaven which Adam and Eve spoke with God in the garden. Every mind is awakened to comprehend every word he speaks.

I will translate the angel's message into English for you, dear Reader, although so much is lost in the translation. He calls out, "Fear God and give Him glory, for the hour of His judgment has come. Worship Him who created the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is within them."

That's it. Just those few words. But in the pure language of the angels each word carries with it a picture vast and colorful, packed with meaning. For instance, 'fear' is not fright – it is a holy reverence and awe. The word 'God' carries with it a picture of immense power, sovereignty, authority, showing one who fills the universe and has all things in the palm of His hand. The word 'glory' – oh my! The greatest splendor of the greatest earthly monarch pales in comparison! It conveys the picture that all the honor, all the worship, all the love and adoration ever given to any being must be rolled together into one and presented to this sovereign God, and even then it will not be enough. His word 'hour' carries with it an urgency, as if everything that ever happened in all of history is focused toward this moment, and the universe can hardly wait for it to be accomplished. The angel also said 'judgment'. This simple word portrays a supreme righteous Judge who has all authority and power, who knows the minutest details of every life, and who metes out rewards and punishments precisely fitting every deed, good or evil. It is actually a huge word, bespeaking unimaginably rich rewards for those who have chosen His wisdom and His ways, as well as terrifying, overwhelming pain and suffering for those who hate Him and His Law.

Then the angel used the simple word 'worship'. It is obviously a command. But it carries with it far more than our poor English word. It pictures love, obedience, and reverence – it implies an enjoyment, a desire to please, an acceptance, a trust, a faith that is far more than believing He exists, but rather a faith that knows Him intimately, closer than a human lover ever was to his beloved. The angel's word 'created' is just as big. It instantly puts the lie to all this foolish nonsense of spontaneous generation and evolution of life from nothing through time and chance. Instead, it portrays an infinitely wise and loving God who delights in forming each detail of the universe in perfect patience, designing everything to function with exquisite precision like a Master Craftsman, delighting in each thing that He makes, and continuing to protect and preserve it by His infinite love as He weaves all He has made into a wondrous tapestry to be revealed at the end of the ages.

Glory! Unsurpassed glory! In short, the angel's two brief sentences proclaim the entire gospel, the good news of all that God is and all that He's done to create us, care for us, and redeem us back to Himself. And everyone – every living soul on earth – hears him! It is incredible!

But it isn't over. A second angel follows, crying: "Fallen, fallen, is Babylon the Great – she who has made the nations drink of the wine of the passion of her immorality." Only one short sentence, but the pictures conveyed can fill a sermon. For example, the Kasdan word for 'immorality' portrays much more than sexual sins! In it is every lust, greed, self-centered dissipation, covetousness, jealousy, deceit – every anger, quarrel, war, battle for fame or power – every selfish, heartless, proud passion known to man.

But it was the angel's use of the term 'Babylon the Great' that stuns the world. In it is carried vivid pictures of all the false religious systems of the world, starting way back in ancient Shinar with the first false religion – the solar and planetary worship and the Madonna and Child cult begun by Nimrod, Ishtar, and Dumuzi. For the first time, people's eyes are opened to see religion as God sees it – all of man's futile efforts striving after God, *man's way!* Putting up created things, the stars, the planets, idols, images, people, saints of the past, even creeds and doctrines, anything at all, in place of God Himself to worship. The veil is ripped off. It isn't just Hindu, Islam, Buddhist, Taoist, or the other cults. It isn't just Roman Catholics with their pope, priests, bishops, icons, and saints keeping people from God, nor its equivalent, the Eastern Orthodox church. It is every religion that retains any traces of Ishtar's vile perversions! It is all laid bare in that one term, 'Babylon the Great'. The Protestants are no exception. Now they see how they had worshiped the liberal social gospel of good works and the traditional canons and dogma of their denomination, rather than simply bowing to the Lordship of Yashua in His church and following the leading of His Holy Spirit.

But the angel also said, 'Fallen!' He said it twice, with a finality that spoke of inescapable doom for the world's religious systems. He said it as if the fall of Babylon is already doubled and set, accomplished in heaven, though still destined to move inexorably toward its fulfillment on earth. In an instant every living soul on earth knows, beyond any shadow of doubt, the end result of all his or her religious efforts. The lies are blown away. All false religion is exposed, including the desire of Hitler and Astrapte for worship through their gold and silver statue idols.

Hot on the heels of the second angel is a third angel. He also speaks clearly, precisely, as if anyone could possibly misunderstand the first two. "If anyone worships Dr. Relt or his statues, and receives his microchip in his forehead or hand, he also will drink the bitter wine of the wrath of God, mixed in full strength in the cup of God's anger. He will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy ones, and in the presence of the Lamb of God. The smoke of his torment will rise to the age of the ages and he will have no rest day and night…" Here he pauses and repeats, "…anyone who worships Dr. Relt or his statues and receives the brand-mark of his name into his body."

Finally the heavenly music fades out and time restarts. The ceiling solidifies, and the physical realm is restored. Sights and sounds return to normal. Activities resume. Still the Southern Baptist congregation west of Newark sits in stunned silence. For a solid hour no one speaks, as the immense pictures from those few words of the three angels replay through everyone's mind. Everyone has fallen to his or her knees, including Pastor Mike. Grateful prayers begin to flow upward. Almighty God has answered their brief request spectacularly, unequivocally. The warning has been given. *Now, what would He have them do about it?*

The dragon's rage is indescribable, at least in a family book like this. The air for miles around him is blue with cursing. Wormwood, Satan's mightiest surviving demon prince, is completely cowed by it all. I will not even try to repeat their conversation; so few words in it are repeatable. Wormwood flees to Dr. Relt with significantly increased incentive. I'll relate their conversation, at least those parts for which I can remove most of the (ugh) vile expletives.

"You've played games long enough! I didn't give you such immense power so you could play games! Pull the plug! Now! The Enemy has made His move and caught you with your pants down! If you don't take control now, absolute control, we could lose all we've gained!"

"My dear friend!" Dr. Relt always tries to butter up the demon prince as if he were a friend rather than a fearsome master. "I have everything under control. Nearly everyone has my microchip and is bound into SeeNet. There are still a few groups, a small number of Egyptians, Jews, Kurds, and Koreans, all your Muslims, and those fundamentalist Christians who have a hesitation about the microchip. But for the most part, they love me. They're eating out of my hand. Would you spoil all that and turn them against me? Would you make them hate me? Rebel against me? I've done all you asked and taught them to worship your little statuettes of gold and silver. You are getting what you wanted out of this. So back off, and let human nature take its course. Just as I said, they're enslaving themselves, and loving every minute of it. It's a basic principle!"

The next few minutes are mostly vile oaths and cruel curses, so we'll skip to the conclusion. The demon prince shouts, "If you won't do it, by heaven I'll do it myself!"

"No, you can't do that. You've got to have a human agent. You need me. We're in this together."

"Whoever said I needed a human agent? Did I need a human agent to speak through your golden statue? You fool! Don't you think I can possess your little idols all over the world just as easily? I have a billion demons under my command. I shall send one of them into each one of your little idols. They shall report back to me whether their owners are properly worshiping me or not. Then I shall order the torture of those who will not give me worship!"

"No! It's too soon! You need me and my armies! I've been working with the armies of eastern Europe but they're not strong enough yet. You've got to wait. There could be a big battle. We'll lose if we make our move too soon. You promised me that I would rule the world. I say we've got to minimize the bloodshed until the last minute. If we don't, they'll all hate me and rise up against me."

For one long minute Dr. Relt finds himself dangling over the fires of hell in stark terror and screaming agony. And he thought he was in charge? The demon prince is gone by the time he recovers his composure back in his lavish office in Jerusalem.

Finally Pastor Mike stands up. He knows what he has to do. It's tough entrusting his precious flock to such new Christians, but this is what the Lord is leading now. All he can do is try to follow. "Captain Pepper, Steve and Sam know you and your two sons. If I send you there, I'm sure they'll trust you. Would you pray about escorting a large group of families from the church here to their farm in the Amish community? You still have your police uniforms, and could make it look legal. I sense that we are about to get a huge influx of new families. We're totally full right now. But I'm hoping the community there still has room."

Captain Pepper and his two sons agree. Within three days they have a group ready to go. But just before they leave, I must mention one touching little scene. Captain Pepper's wife Pam had left him ten years earlier, shortly after their twin daughters had been born. Pam had become a Christian, so they'd had a big family fight about taking the kids to church. Captain Pepper had forbade it, so Pam had taken the girls and left in a huff. That was fine with Captain Pepper! His boys were following his footsteps in the police force, and that was all he cared about.

But now as they're ready to leave, who should show up at the church door but Pam and the twins. Theirs is a fairy tale reunion, filled with all the mush you expect after being so badly separated for so long and then discovering that they both want the same things after all. Pam apologizes for her arrogance and anger. Captain Pepper apologizes for his blindness and insensitivity. They renew their vows in front of the church, and travel to Steve and Sharon's farm as a restored family.

Steve and Sam do indeed recognize the police chief and his sons. But they are shocked at how many they have with them. The community is full! Or so they thought. But they have plenty of food. *They will find room.* They pack 'em in, put four or five in bedrooms that had held two, and put whole families in rooms that had held three. By nightfall, everyone has a compassionate sponsor and little place to call home. Finally they can relax and soak up the love. They begin to feel treasured and oh so blessed to be alive.

Logos looks down and sighs with pure delight. "See how they love one another!" He calls to his archangels. "Cover them! Not a hair of their heads shall be lost! These shall be Mine when I make up My Jewels!" He reaches out His arm to them. "Behold the splendor of My crown!"

All the while, the dragon rants and rages as Wormwood and his demons go through the earth possessing all those miniature Hitler / Astrapte statue idols. Worshiping them is no longer merely an option to gain points and power in Dr. Relt's computer game. Now Satan demands it. Those who balk are disciplined. Any who resist are tormented. The Hitler statues come alive, working miracles for those who submit to them, but choking those who try to free themselves from their power. The warnings of the three angels were perfectly clear! No one remains undecided.

David and Danelle Davison are now the leaders of a growing band of dissidents. Many Israelis were properly horrified at the statue of Hitler that came alive and spoke. Even though he had pacified them by his tale of torment in hell for fifty years, yet a large number are hesitant about getting Dr. Relt's microchip imbedded in their bodies. It just seems to violate the Mosaic law, which clearly states, "You shall make no cuts in your body for the dead, nor make tattoo marks upon yourselves." (Lev 19:28) The microchip requires a tiny cut to insert it, and it sure is a permanent mark, like a tattoo. Besides, Adolph Hitler is certainly 'the dead' – come back to life!

The result is, many more flee Israel to join David's group in SW Jordan. More than the anticipated 12,000 have now arrived. David expects a battle, and tries to get ready. Many have weapons, as every Jew is trained to use a gun. But so far they haven't had to use them. There is no crime, surprisingly for liberals who believe guns cause crime. Christians are sending them donated supplies and food. It's amazing! The growing group seems to be covered in a pocket of peaceful protection in a world gone mad.

For the world has indeed gone mad. The wrath of the dragon has finally spilled over from Wormwood to Dr. Relt. Everyone heard the angels! So Dr. Relt agrees to do a little damage control. He calls everyone together in the big square next to his golden statue. There he gives a speech denouncing the angels as demons who somehow got loose and spewed lies about him.

It comes across as pretty lame, and he knows it. So he counters with a plan to move his big golden statue out of Messiah's Quarter over to the temple itself. "You know that if god is not pleased with me, he will slay me. But he loves me! He has called me to be your messiah! He will shower me, all of us, with his blessing as I move my statue to the door of his temple. Then you shall see that all those things the three ang … er, devils said about me were false!"

By the next week he has implemented his plan. With the huge statue right beside the temple doors facing the bronze altar of sacrifice, Dr. Relt stands for another speech, rather like the last. Except he ends this one with an order to offer a lamb sacrifice *to the golden statue!* As before, the fire comes down 'from heaven' to consume the lamb. (And as before, nobody notices that the flames are from the mouth of the dragon, as he is hidden by a cloud.) Again the statue comes alive and makes incredible boasts of godhood for Dr. Relt. And again the dragon speaks from the cloud in a voice like rumbling thunder, assuring the people that Dr. Relt is god's messiah. Pretty much a repeat.

But in his wrath, Satan just can't leave it at that. He just has to add, "From now on there will be no more sacrifices in this temple except to Dr. Relt and his statue, for he is my representative on earth. And all who refuse to worship him or the miniature images of his statue, or who refuse to take into their bodies the mark of his name, must be slain!"

CHAPTER 57 – THE SIXTH SEAL

The Jewish priests are stunned. They have a written agreement! They have a signed treaty with Dr. Relt that their temple and their half of the temple mount was theirs to control, theirs to offer sacrifices to YHWH their God. Offering a sacrifice to that Hitler statue was bad enough, but now to prohibit any other sacrifices?! But as they are wondering what to do about this arrogant violation of their treaty and abrogation of their authority, they see the two prophets of doom making their way to the podium.

Dr. Relt is furious to see them show up at his moment of triumph, but he maintains his plastic smile. "Ahh! Our two notorious prophets, come to give us a little madcap entertainment! What judgments are you hoping to put on these people today? Don't you know everyone hates you?"

"We didn't come to be loved. We came to speak the Word of YHWH. Anyone who reads the book of Daniel ought to realize by now that you are 'the one who makes desolate' in Daniel 9:27, for you made a firm covenant with Israel, and now, 3 ½ years later, you've broken it and put a stop to their sacrifices. However, YHWH will not show His disapproval by killing you for defiling this temple. He abandoned temples made with hands long ago. Its only purpose here is so you can fulfill the ancient prophecy, proving to the universe that you are anti-messiah – as you have now irrefutably done. He will show his disapproval by casting you into the lake of fire at His return. That will be very soon, for the day of YHWH's wrath has begun!"

Moses looks to his sidekick to continue. Elijah steps forward. "The fall rains have failed according to my word. But now, I hear the sound of abundance of rain – the spring rains, gentle rains, falling in mercy as YHWH returns for His people. The wicked shall be crushed in a monstrous earthquake and consumed in the fires of His wrath, but as Elijah during the famine fled and was fed by the raven, so shall you who fear YHWH flee and be fed. I urge you, do not stay here, beloved of YHWH! Flee to the wilderness of Edom and the ancient deserts of the Arabah. There I will care for you. There I will protect the meek and humble from the wrath to come. I will cover you with my feathers, as a hen covers her chicks. But the Holy Land is holy no more. You must flee! Now! This is your final warning."

Moses jumps in. "We've been through eight of the ten plagues and still you've failed to heed. So I loose the ninth plague. We'll start with the shaking of the heavenlies and the stars falling from the sky for a month, to get you going. That will allow time for those who heed Elijah's warning to reach safety in Edom. Then the sun will be extinguished, the moon will turn to blood, and the entire earth will quake for a week! Thus I generously grant you one month before the earth is plunged into darkness. Be thankful. It will prevent your anti-messiah from exterminating you. Afterward, no wind shall blow over the entire earth. Then your true Messiah, the Light of the World, will return."

A gentle rain begins as the crowd disperses. It is the spring rain. The 'latter rain'. By the time they reach home, it's raining in earnest. Those who heed Elijah's warning leave immediately for Edom. The rain darkens the skies and becomes their covering as they escape.

They need it. For now Satan's wrath explodes. And you think he was angry before! This is blind, irrational rage, that anyone else should presume to prophesy against his domain! *As god of this world he has authority over the earth. Now this pathetic pipsqueak pair of prophets is plotting to put out Sol? He is the only being in the universe qualified to do that. And what's this drivel about shaking the heavenlies or causing the stars to fall? He has the adversary badge. That's his job!* Except he can't! He's stuck! Earthbound! And there's not a single curséd thing he can do about it.

Now Satan discovers that people have figured out ways to elude those demon-possessed idols. Demons can't read minds, so if someone pretends to be cool with it all, then suddenly gets rid of his idols by throwing them down to the street, into the furnace, or into the ocean or a cave or chasm, he can escape punishment. That's tough for those with the gold or silver idols. They're really quite valuable. It's hard to give 'em up. But it has become a matter of life or death. Satan is worse than furious. He's insane with rage.

Satan goes screaming to Wormwood. Most of his tirade isn't repeatable, but the gist is: "No more delay! Hitler is too soft! Except for my Muslims, kill everyone who rejects his microchip! Especially Jews and Christians! Now!"

Wormwood first passes on the dread command to the Muslims and communists. They are quick to obey. They're already quite adept at slaughtering Christians and Jews. Entire nations, entire continents are thus darkened.

Still shaking from his master's savage rage, Wormwood next carries Satan's orders to Dr. Relt. "Our father says that everyone who refused your mark (except Muslims) is a rebel against him and must be slain. And cash in your chips on those ten Arab nations already. Get their armies here as fast as possible. We only have one month to take control of the Middle East and stop those two prophets and their blasphemous plan to usurp our father's rightful domain."

Dr. Relt doesn't want to do it. He is at the peak of his popularity here in Israel! But Wormwood gives him no choice. "I promised you awesome power and glory, but you must obey. We've been planning this for a long time. We know what we're doing. Obey me now and rule the world. Balk, and you'll fail like you did before. You always loved killing Jews. Remember? So just do it!"

For some reason, Dr. Relt is having a tough time with this. He doesn't remember loving to kill Jews. In fact, he rather likes them, those who support him. More are taking his microchip every day. He enjoys the worship from the billions who play his 'computer game'. He fears they will turn against him if he makes his microchip mandatory.

So now Wormwood explains the rest of the plan. "The Middle East is the key. Our Enemy plans to use the Jews to rule the world. If He succeeds, you and I, and even our master Lucifer, will be tossed into eternal torment in hell. Cruelly tortured forever! You heard the angel's warning!" He punctuates his point with another few moments in which Dr. Relt is falling in never-ending flames, screaming in torture and stark terror as before. It is quickly past.

"But if we defeat His power base, our Enemy will fail; His Word will be broken; His power will be shattered. It all depends on annihilating the Jews! Killing the rebels who refuse your mark is just the first step. Ultimately, every Jew on Earth must be slain. The Arabs will help. They only agreed to your peace treaty to lull Israel to sleep, to buy time for them to grow strong enough to destroy Israel like they've always wanted to do. Russia will secretly supply them with arms as before. But Russia has a secret agenda, too. Russia will in turn rise up to conquer the Arab nations to gain control over the oil in the Middle East. Ultimately, the foolish Arabs will all be slain, too. In the end, they all get exactly what they want. Russia gets all the wealth. The Arabs get rid of Israel; then they all get martyred for the '72 virgins' they were promised. You then use Russia and her great wealth to gain control of the rest of the world. Just as I promised. So Russia becomes your real power base. See?"

Now Satan's true goals in empowering him to make his miraculous 'peace treaty' become evident. All his super-human efforts to convince the Arabs and Russians to make peace with Israel – the Jews should have guessed it was too good to be true! Frankly, it's remarkable that he was able to maintain the charade for this long.

But Dr. Relt never realized that ruling the world would involve all that killing. *All the Jews? And after that all the Arabs, too? Where will it all end?* "Calm down, my friend. You're being a bit extreme. It's a lot easier to rule people if they like you. It's a basic principle. Sure, we will eliminate all who resist, eventually. But give 'em time. Many Jews took my mark, and more every day. They gladly support my rule. There's no need to annihilate…"

Wormwood has barely controlled his temper up 'til now, but at that, he explodes. "You <expletives deleted> pansy! You namby-pamby wuss! You're too cowardly to rule the world. I'm just this far from returning your dead body to the Reich Chancellery and choosing another. So you've got one minute to decide, once and for all. Shall I ditch you and let you face Judgment Day as Adolph Hitler? Or do you swear to obey me and rule the world with me?"

Dr. Relt hesitates, but having made this decision once before makes it easier. Besides, after all he's accomplished so far he's proud of himself, and he just hates being called a wuss. Thus his fateful decision is doubled and set. There is no further doubt who is really in charge. "Okay. I'll obey. We'll start by killing all the Jews who rejected my mark. I swear it by almighty God."

"No, no! Not by Him! By Lucifer, by Lucifer!"

"Oops. Sorry. Yes. I swear by… uh… by Lucifer."

Thus under Wormwood's direction, Dr. Relt orders the full massed armies of his ten allied Arab nations to Israel. He commands them to assemble quietly in the Valley of Beracah, where Jehoshaphat defeated the Ammonites, Moabites, Edomites, and Meunites. When the proper time comes, Hitler will use them to take control of the entire Middle East and do what Wormwood insists he has always wanted to do – *annihilate the Jews, every last one.*

Even as he gives the orders, Dr. Relt finds his resolve hardening. *Yes, Wormwood was right. He's been too soft, too compassionate. If he's really going to rule the world, he's got to be tough as nails. Who cares how many people he has to eliminate? Too many people flood the earth. Exterminating a few inferior races is trivial in the grand scheme of things.* Thus his demon-possession is complete.

Logos' white robe of peace still comforts the souls under the Mercy Seat, those slain throughout the ages for maintaining their testimony as God's bondservants. Their number has greatly increased of late! They see the terrors falling on the earth and hear Satan's frightful command. "How long, O YHWH, holy and true?" they repeat. "How much longer will You refrain from avenging our blood?"

Logos reassures them, "I see what anti-messiah is doing. Now I shall arise, to fulfill every prophecy in accord with My Word. Be patient, My beloved! You martyrs are not just bondservants. You're members of My Bride! A few more martyrs are yet to be slain to complete My Bride, then I shall resurrect you and join you into one glorious Person. Therefore rejoice, My Bride! Prepare for our wedding!"

Logos now calls four destroying angel commanders, to commission them. "You heard the word of My prophets. Now you shall loose all the plagues of the sixth seal at their command. But don't harm the earth or the sea until we seal My Father's bondservants on their foreheads!"

Next Logos calls to six other angels, "O executioners of the Holy City, draw near! Bring your weapons!" Logos is crying. With loud, wracking sobs He rips the **sixth seal** from the ancient scroll. "My Holy City is profaned!" He cries. "My Bride has prostituted herself – again!"

The six warrior angels draw near, to kneel before Him who sits on the throne. Among them comes a seventh angel, tiny by comparison, wearing a simple linen robe and bearing a scribe's writing case at his side. To him Logos cries through His tears, "Go through the Holy City! Put My mark on the foreheads of all who, like Myself, groan and sigh over the abominations being committed in it!"

Then to the six warrior angels, "Follow him! Rip off My protective covering of grace from all who do not have My mark. Let not your eye pity nor your arm spare. But do not touch any with My mark. Start from the temple!"

Dr. Relt knows it will take almost a month for his ten super-armies to reach Israel. Long before that the Israel Defense Force (IDF) will surely discern his intentions and mobilize against him. But he has an ace or two up his sleeve. His peace treaties allowed free trade between Israel and his ten allied Muslim nations. He secretly brought in thousands of elite commandos through the open borders from Jordan, Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon. His secret service has remained undercover, so far. But they have not been idle. They've spent their time tagging all those in Israel (and there are many) who resisted his rule, all who refused his mark. The foolish Jews were so enthralled with his miraculous peace treaties that they never suspected a thing. Now Dr. Relt orders his secret service to execute them, suddenly, without mercy, beginning in Jerusalem.

Dr. Relt's orders go out, loosed when the angels remove God's protective covering of grace. It is an utter massacre. All in Jerusalem who had rested their trust in the covenant of peace with Dr. Relt but had not yet taken his microchip, all who had failed to heed the prophecy of Daniel and the warnings of Moses, Elijah, and the three angels, are slain. Their blood runs deep through the city. When the body count is tallied, a fifth of Jerusalem has been murdered. Finally the eyes of the rest are opened to this man they had elected as their prime minister. It is Adolph Hitler himself, back to haunt them with a whole new holocaust!

With Jerusalem his, Dr. Relt orders his secret service to spread across Israel and take control of all the highways and choke points. "Let no rebels escape!"

But those who heeded Elijah's warning to flee to Edom seem to have vanished. Gentle rains follow them, washing away the trail so no one can track them. They're welcomed and given food and shelter by David and Danelle and their dedicated band of dissidents. Covered by Michael and his host, they prosper in Edom. David takes a census, and finds nearly 14,400, mostly from Judah and Levi, with a smattering from Simeon and Benjamin mixed in, too.

The seven angels that Logos had sent through the Holy City, He now sends across Israel and the rest of the earth. "Moses has given us one month!" He cries to the angel in linen. "Go through every city, every nation, tongue, and ethnic people-group. Affix My mark on the forehead of everyone who hates evil like I hate, who weeps over the corruption that has spread across the land, who longs for righteousness to prevail." Then to the six warrior angels, "Go after him. Rip off My protective covering of grace from everyone who has not the seal of the living God. Do not pity; do not spare. Start from the hills of Judea."

As soon as God's protective covering is removed, Dr. Relt is loosed to fulfill Satan's dread command. As he had first done in Israel, Dr. Relt now sends out his orders all around the world to slay everyone without his microchip. His servants in every nation are eager to obey rather than face the wrath of his idol demons.

It's rather like a relay race. Everywhere Dr. Relt's orders come, the small angel has just finished his job of sealing God's chosen ones and warning them to flee to a 'Green Pasture' or sanctuary somewhere. By the end of the month, there are no more fence-sitters or undecided cowards just hoping for the best. Everyone on earth who does not have the seal of the living God on his forehead, now has Satan's seal (the Muslims), or Hitler's seal / mark (the embedded microchip), or is being slaughtered in Hitler's death camps.

Yes, there's no more need to call him Dr. Relt. The mask is off. He is Adolph Hitler. All who swore their allegiance by taking his mark into their bodies are now his slaves. Over the course of that terrible, bloody month, a tenth of humanity is slain. Another tenth is in hiding, protected by the seal of the living God and covered by His angels.

When the bloodbath is over, those still alive find that it is really just begun. Logos instructs His four destroying angels on their next job. It will be a unique task, a "strange work" (Isa 28:21-22) which no angel has ever done before.

To understand this next section, dear Reader, we need to redefine a few terms. You have been taught many things by modern 'scientists' who hate God and insist that the universe created itself roughly fifteen billion years ago with a 'Big Bang', which happens to be centered around our humble galaxy (as everything is moving away from us). They very much need these fifteen billion years in order for their silly theory of spontaneous generation of life from the primordial ooze to have any mathematical probability of success. In the process, they have built up an immense and exceedingly complex cosmology, involving total suspension of the law of entropy (the Second Law of Thermodynamics) for billions of years while their blown-up universe organizes itself from a chaos of basal matter, into gases, heavier atoms, molecules, crystals, complex structures, the miracle of life, higher and higher life-forms, and into the incredible intricacy and beauty we see today.

To say this religion requires a lot of faith is putting it mildly. This is blind faith requiring total commitment to absurd ideas that are laughable on their face. Most real thinkers reject such nonsense as utterly impossible, though many are too enslaved to public opinion to admit it. Sadly, many of our 'scientific' concepts are shaped by such thinking, whether we know it or not. One of these is the notion that the speed of light, 'c', remains constant in a vacuum. Nearly everything we 'know' about the celestial universe uses that 'constant c' in it somewhere. 'Scientists' have measured it down to the proverbial gnat's eyebrow, and verified it countless times in many ways.

The problem is they have a universe that is now twenty billion light years across, and still expanding, at (sadly for them) greater than the speed of light! But wait. It's okay. Nothing can go faster than the speed of light, but it is only the nothing of empty space itself that is expanding faster than the speed of light. Huh?!

The paradoxes generated by such a far-fetched scheme are many, such as the photon stopped in space because its source is moving away from us at the speed of light. That clearly doesn't work, so 'scientists' have to invent clusters of well-behaved stars with 'stretchable' space in between. Another claim is that light from the most distant star left it fifteen billion years ago. But they say the star was not there fifteen billion years ago, it was right here, at the beginning of the 'Big Bang'. So for fifteen billion years the confused photon was busy calculating just where it ought to be to fool us into thinking it came from way out there at the edge of the universe when it actually came from right here! Ha. Now 'scientists' have to invent 'multi-dimensional' space, or even 'curved' space. Hocus-pocus indeed.

Consider space-time paradoxes, oh my! If your speed approaches the speed of light, time must slow to near zero and your mass and length increase to near infinite! But you don't feel heavy or look long and thin to you, because space itself stretches to match! It's great fun if you like science fiction, but reality beckons. Let's get a grip, here.

In a true vacuum, the speed of light is infinite. There is no curved or stretchable space. It is the speed of light itself that 'stretches' so everything fits.

This will be difficult for some to accept, particularly if they have spent a lifetime using that 'constant c' in their calculations. But face it, they've never seen a true vacuum. They've never even been close. They can pump out most of the air, but they can never get rid of either the gravity or the electromagnetic plasma (ionic/magnetic flux) filling our solar system. Come on, guys! Light is an electromagnetic phenomenon! Of course it slows to a finite speed within our sun's electromagnetic well. This well is larger than the 5.5 hours it takes for sunlight to reach Pluto. I estimate it takes another 35 hours to escape Sol's electromagnetic well entirely and approach infinite velocity. The universe has lots more stars and galaxies than we can see, but even what we do see is much larger than we think, because our interstellar distance measurements depend upon that 'constant c', which isn't constant away out there.

Einstein almost had it in 1905, when he developed his theory of relativity. His formula of $E=mc^2$ revolutionized the world of physics, resulting in development of the atom bomb. His theory works! But it's all 'relative'. I guess they forgot that part. Everything relates to its electromagnetic system. But beyond its electromagnetic reach (and thus no longer 'related') all bets are off. The speed of light increases to infinite until it falls under the influence of (is related to) some other electromagnetic star system.

So the stars and galaxies, all created near the beginning of the fourth (32 hour) day of Creation, were visible to Adam on the evening of the sixth day of Creation. It took 40 to 60 hours for the light to escape the electromagnetic well of its own star system, and another 40 to penetrate ours. The rest of the distance was covered in an instant.

Thus we can no longer consider stars as 'light years away'. Sirius the Dog Star, for example, is over 128 trillion miles away, but only 87.3 light hours. If it exploded we'd see it in 4 days! So, now you know the truth. *The Light of the World, Logos, is infinite.* He works within all the laws He wove into the universe at its creation, but His essence (as well as His speed in traversing His creation) is truly infinite. Got it? Okay, now we can continue with our story.

The dragon is sleeping in his lair. Even dragons need sleep, and Satan is chafing at the inopportune delay. He has a lot to do, and as much as he needs this dragon, he hates being bound by its limitations. *If he left for a few hours while the dragon slept, could he get back in? The dragon promised him a whole year. But do dragons actually keep their promises?* As he ponders, a man walks down into the lair to calmly sit on a rock by the entrance. Satan is about to waken the dragon to blow fire at him, just to take out his frustrations, but the man speaks. "Peace, My beloved adversary. No need to awaken your beast. I come to offer advice, and help, if you wish."

It's Logos! Satan hates getting advice or help from Logos. But he doesn't have to obey it, and as long as he's stuck down here with nothing to do, he may as well string Him along. "Okay. What's up?"

"Your second holocaust has come together fairly well. Your enslavement of the world is near total, except for My tenth. You should be quite proud of yourself. However, have you forgotten the earth?"

"Huh? What do You mean by that? Of course I haven't forgotten the earth. Ever since Michael cast me out of the heavenlies, I spend all my time down here!"

"Yes. Hmm. That presents a bit of a problem, doesn't it? You should never have violated your commission. I gave you permission to harm My Bride – except for My chosen ones. Your slaves in America slaughtered them. I didn't attack your chosen ones! Remember, I asked you to spare the tenth in accord with the prophecies. If I hadn't blinded your eyes to My 'Green Pastures', you would have killed them all. Be glad I stopped you, or your punishment would have been that much worse. So… now here you are, stuck on earth, while your commission as ruler over the cosmos goes begging. I offer assistance."

"You've got to be kidding! You wouldn't help me! That's utter nuts! You'd be fighting against Yourself!"

"I don't kid, or fight against Myself. But there are things to be done, prophecies that must be fulfilled, destructive judgments which only you as My adversary are able to do, but which you are unable to accomplish because of your disobedience. I also am bound by prophecy, and by My Word. So I am offering you temporary authority over four of My crews of angels. They will assist you long enough for you to accomplish those tasks, then they will return to Me. Do you accept My offer?"

"How many angels?" Satan is beginning to see the possibilities. If he has more, Logos will have less. He might use them to reconquer the heavens and restore his place.

"My four destroying angel commanders and their hosts – a total of eight million angels. And no, they will not fight against Me. They will obey you only in things that are your rightful domain as god of this world, as I originally commissioned you to rule the physical universe."

"Were You reading my mind?! Can You really…?" Satan has long suspected, but not until now did he have the temerity to voice the question.

The man that is Logos sits back on the rock and casually leans against the cavern wall. A thought flickers through Satan's mind. *If he suddenly awakens the dragon and uses the flames from its mouth, he might be able to catch Logos unawares and slay Him right here. After all, in becoming a man, He is bound to the weaknesses of a man.*

"It won't work. The dragon's flaming breath is too slow, especially when he first awakens. I am too quick for that. And heaven is too close." Logos smiles broadly. It is like an invitation, an appeal for Satan to bow and acknowledge His Lordship, His power and authority over all He made.

"You didn't answer my question!" Satan growls, flatly rejecting the appeal.

"Yes. I can read your mind. Indeed, I cannot not read your mind. O My beloved Lucifer! How I have longed for you to return to Me. I made you! I know everything about you, including the pride that has twisted your thinking. Yet I still love you. Will you not bow and accept My…"

"I'll never bow to You!" Satan screams, startling the poor dragons so they begin to awaken.

"Then you do not accept My offer?" Logos says, lazily standing up and stretching.

The dragon is nearly awake. Satan quickly calculates the distance to the entrance. Logos is right. He would have plenty of time to step through the veil and back into the heavenlies. He sweetens his tone. "Yes, yes. I do accept Your offer. Come. We shall shake on it."

Logos laughs heartily at the deadly invitation. "When did I ever need to shake to keep My Word? I shall send the four angel captains to you for orders. They will obey you as long as it is legal according to the permission I already gave you to harm the earth, and your original commission over the physical universe." He steps to the entrance of the lair, where a rent in the heavenly veil opens for Him. Satan urges his dragon to blast fire at the entrance, but when the flames have died down, there is no body. He was too slow.

The angel commanders soon show up. Satan has his plans for them all laid out. The angels obviously don't like this assignment, but they have been assured it is within Lucifer's original created commission.

Satan tells them to zip out to the asteroid belt for ammunition. Anything bigger than a baseball is to be hurled on a careful trajectory to impact earth. Spend one week getting all the smaller ones, then another week working together to aim the big ones. After that, he orders them out to Sol's four nearest stellar neighbors, Epsilon Eridani, Sirius, Barnard's Star, and Alpha Centauri. They must force each of them to explode in a precisely timed sequence to hit earth in the same instant. (This timing is possible only because the speed of light is infinite in deep space). As soon as they get their four supernovas started, they are to return to aid in his planned earthquake.

"Go! Obey my command! I am your master now! And know in doing so, that you have defeated your previous Master! For this shall be the most deadly and spectacular event in history! Those who do not die of the shock or the meteorites shall die of fear at the display in the heavenlies! The remnant shall die in the great earthquake! No one shall survive! Logos is a fool! I shall now exterminate His precious Bride without touching a hair on their heads, and you will help me! I am the most powerful being in all the universe! When you see it, you will worship me! And blah, blah, blah…" He went on like that for some time.

The angel commanders, used to obeying direct orders without having to listen to all that boasting, get uneasy. Finally one ventures a response. "Logos told us to obey you in this, and so we shall. However, you do not have His permission to harm His covered ones, and the angels doing the covering are stronger than you think. May I suggest you open your own eyes to the way Logos uses even this tragedy to bring His Bride to perfection?"

That does it. "You have your assignments! Get out of here!" Satan snarls. "I'll have my demons on earth working to magnify both the physical effects and the terrors of the cataclysm. This will be more fun than I had with Mars. Now go! Get!" The angels leave to carry out their orders.

It is difficult, not because of the labor involved, but because of the level of trust it requires in Logos' Word, that it will all work out for the perfection of Logos' Bride and the ultimate completion of the Father's Plan of the Ages. *How could Logos allow such destruction of His Creation?*

Back on earth, Pastor Mike Mason has been reading and rereading all the prophecies in the Bible on the end times. Peter's prophecy details what God's people need to do and what will happen to them. However, the more ancient prophecies such as in Daniel, Isaiah, Joel, Zechariah, and John's Revelation describe what will happen to the earth. It's terrifying! And he now has an entire church full of almost new converts – those who fled the anti-messiah's bloody purge of all who had refused his mark. *How will they survive? Their hearts will fail them for fear!* Mike is sorely tempted to soothe their anxieties with that escapist 'pre-trib rapture' doctrine he used to love. But when he prays about it, the Holy Spirit says, "Just tell the truth."

So Pastor Mike preaches from Matthew 24. "Jesus warned us there would be 'great tribulation, such as has not occurred from the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall.' You are seeing it. You know He spoke the truth. But He also promised us that these days will be cut short, for the sake of His Elect. He promises that the one who overcomes, who holds fast until Jesus returns, who keeps His commands until the end, to him He will grant His authority to rule over the nations. (Rev 2:26) That is the Kingdom of God. It is very near, right at the door.

"Now look at Matthew 24:29. 'Immediately after the tribulation of those days [that's right now], the sun will be darkened, the moon will not give her light, the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then the sign of the Son of Man [the Messiah] will appear in the sky and all the tribes of earth will mourn, for they shall see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet [the last trump], and they will gather together His elect from the four winds from one end of the sky to the other.' That's the rapture, the real one, at the last trump and, I'm sorry to say, right at the climax of the great tribulation.

"I used to try to spiritualize all that away. After all, how can stars fall from the sky?! How can the sun actually go out?! But I've recently come to see that God means exactly what He says, every word. Stars will fall. The sun will go out. It will be very scary. I'm sorry. All I can say is: Stand firm in faith! Thank God He warned you in advance. And trust Him to see you through and to miraculously protect you and bring you to Himself as He returns. Never doubt in the darkness what He told you in the light! The next three years could get very, very dark!"

Pastor Mike's warning is just in time. That night the earth is showered with meteorites. All night the fireballs come flaming in. Explosions rock the globe, getting worse as the incoming meteors get bigger. The liberal news media, spinning the truth as always, declare, "It's just a heavy meteor shower. Don't anyone panic! It will all pass in day or two, and no one will be the worse for it." But day and night the meteors keep coming in, some the size of a house, blazing like tiny suns brighter than the day.

All work ceases, as people seek shelter. Now the news reporters have changed their tune. Trying to keep up with the ever-worsening catastrophes all around the globe and still not cause a panic, they affirm, "Astronomers have searched the heavens and have found no cause for the meteor shower. It seems to be coming from all around. But they assure us that it is nearly past." *Yeah. Right.*

Two big ones hit Lake Michigan and Lake Erie, causing tsunamis which flatten lakeside cities like Milwaukee, Chicago, and Cleveland. Then an oblong rock three miles long, the biggest yet, comes hurtling into the atmosphere. It blazes across the sky, straight for San Francisco Bay.

Before anyone can warn them, San Francisco is gone. Totally gone. From San Rafael to Palo Alto, Richmond, Berkeley, Oakland… there's nothing left except a tsunami headed toward Hawaii and a cloud of fine dust reaching to the stratosphere. The nation is stunned at the magnitude of the catastrophe.

President / Dictator Wildemann comes on television to reassure the public. "We've already rescued many around the Great Lakes. Now we'll will do everything in our power to aid the stricken people of California in this time of their loss. California will rebuild! They will be stronger than before! San Francisco will be bigger, better, and more beautiful than ever! We'll build a new Golden Gate Bridge, and a new Bay Bridge to a new Oakland! People will flock there from all over, in memory of the poor souls who died. For those spreading the lie that this is God's judgment on the area for its sodomy, shame on you! The heroic gays in San Francisco and Oakland were more righteous, loving, and tolerant than you. So if your God hates gays then let Him strike me down – let Him strike down the whole country – let Him destroy the entire world. I don't want to live in a world where God is so hateful and intolerant of…"

He never finishes his sentence, for at that moment the combined blast of four supernovas hits the earth from four directions. The Electro-Magnetic Pulse (EMP) takes down every power grid on the planet. Normal sunlight exerts a pressure of only a few pounds per square mile. But this is seven times brighter than normal sunlight. The impact sets up standing waves in the earth's crust.

Satan has prepared his demons for this. Though cast out of heaven, they're still very strong. They work to amplify that initial shock into a major earthquake. They are soon joined by the four angel commanders and their hosts on loan from Logos, as ordered.

The intense light from the four supernovas lasts seven days before it begins to dim. All infrastructures depending on power collapse. There is no electricity to run fans or air conditioning. Fortunately star light is much cooler than direct sunlight, so though it is seven times brighter it is not seven times hotter. But it is plenty hot! Many blaspheme God because of the heat. There is no escape, day or night, for it comes from all directions. Even the moon shines full, with the brightness of the sun, day and night.

But now men have more to worry about. Under Satan's direction, the standing waves in the ground are amplified and propagated around the earth. They set up a vibration of about six cycles per second in the earth's crust, with a typical amplitude of half an inch or so. That may not sound like much, but they keep it up day and night for the next six days. The ground slowly liquefies. Buildings crumble. Apartments collapse. Towers and bridges fall. Pavements crack until they look like plowed ground. It is just as Isaiah prophesied for "the day of the great slaughter." (30:26) Many survive, but no one escapes unscathed.

The well-built homes of the Amish seem to hold up just fine under the continual shaking. The big blast of EMP from the supernovas does not damage their entertainment systems, phones, or computers. It does not take down their power grid or fry their electric well pumps or sewer pumps. It does not knock out their streetlights or traffic signals. And it does not disable their microwave ovens, security systems, or digital alarm clocks. They have none of those things. Life goes on. A bit hot, perhaps, but they're used to working in the heat of the day. Steve urges them to finish bringing in all they can save from the fields quickly. He knows from Scripture that the darkness is coming.

Finally the intense light of the four supernovas begins to fade. The seventh night begins to get dark before the dawning. The shaking ceases. The people rejoice, and plan survival parties with their friends.

But dawn… doesn't! Oh, Sol comes up all right, but it has been nearly extinguished by the shock wave of the four supernovas. It is an evil-looking ogre, a shriveled prune of its former glory, with large mottled patches surrounded by fiery red cracks, though some places flare up as it tries to reignite. The moon, too, has become a blood red monster, leering down at them, reminding them of their sins. With no electricity, days become dark and fearful; nights darker still. The word 'God' is spoken more fervently, and more often, than ever before, both in prayers and in curses.

Gloom and terror rule the earth, amplified by Satan's demons. The number of suicides is exceeded only by the number whose hearts simply fail them for fear. Many flee to caves or crevasses in the rocks, or cast themselves from cliffs, or cry for the mountains to fall and cover them from the wrath of God. (Rev 6:16) The fearful day of YHWH has begun, as described in Joel 2. Who can stand?

It is all exactly as Alan Moses and Joseph Elijah had prophesied in Israel a month before. They become the most feared and hated men on earth. The Jews had failed to believe their warnings of the second holocaust, but now, finally, they begin to listen and heed their prophecies.

People's eyes are opened to the lies Hitler used to gain power. His SeeNet was wiped out with the EMP blast, so his main control now becomes the demons possessing his idols. Before, when somebody turned against him, his idol demon would just punish him until he knuckled under. But as people learn how to get rid of their idols, their demons latch on to their microchips or try to possess the people themselves. In a desperate bid to retain control, Hitler orders the idol demons to strangle the life out of all dissenters, even if they have his microchip! It gets ugly.

When the four supernovas hit, the sun went out, the earthquakes began, and chaos descended upon the world, Hitler's ten-nation Muslim super army had just finished assembling in the Valley of Jehoshaphat. But they are of no use to anyone. They're just as terrified as everyone else.

CHAPTER 58 – THE DAY OF YHWH BEGINS

Spirit gives me a high-speed overview vision of the next 2 1/2 years. Earth's residual warmth lasted way longer than I expected. Seven days of intense heat plus heating effects of the global earthquake pushed average world temperatures over 110°F. Of course that melted any remaining ice or snow at the poles and in the mountains. But contrary to liberal fools who have tried to frighten you with their doomsday scenarios, it didn't flood the land. Just the opposite. Worldwide sea levels actually went down a bit as excess moisture evaporated and was lofted into the stratosphere by the superheated air, restoring the earth's vapor barrier. Then as the earth slowly cooled, the greenhouse effect of which the liberal progressives are so terrified became the very thing that saved humanity.

All the other gods of the godless liberals were mocked as well. Their beloved 'all-powerful' coercive government failed entirely, as did their plot to keep themselves in power by taxing the productive class to create a permanent dependent class who would always vote for them to keep up their government dole. As the dark days grew steadily colder, their fetish of not burning fossil fuels flew out the window, too. Those who had wisely prepared with wood stoves, oil lamps, coal furnaces, and other such politically incorrect forms of heat and light survived, while liberals dependent on their high-tech solar heating, wind farms, and other liberal-endorsed forms of green energy were left out in the cold. They had no sunlight for their solar panels, and after the greenhouse effect equalized temperatures all around the globe, there was insufficient wind to power their windmills. Even their mantra of 'wilding the earth' to save it for endangered wolves or polar bears backfired on them, as did their efforts to save the nearly extinct rats, toads, owls, or lizards. Mankind became the endangered species. Those who had worked to save the whales while urging women to abort their babies began to get their priorities straight. Their insane insistence on disarming the public became a curse to them, too. With no police force, all law and order broke down. Violent gangs went from home to home to rape and plunder. Conservatives who had hidden their guns during the government purge were able to protect their homes and families. But liberals (who whine that the only safe world is a defenseless world) were slain by marauders (ironically, from the very dependent class they had worked so hard to create). Thus each of the liberals' gods became a curse. By the end of that first year, everyone became more conservative or died.

But in desperate times, heroes are still made. Real men don't waste their time grousing about what government should do for them. They do whatever is needed to provide for their homes and families. The heroes of our story put out a herculean effort the next year and managed to restore a power grid, using old coal-fired power plants. Others went to work on the oil, gasoline, and natural gas supplies, or repaired roads and bridges, or restored water sources.

So after the first year of darkness, all the fearful had died of fright or suicide, all the godless liberal ideologues had died of their own foolishness, and all the lazy whiners who thought the world owed them a living had been shot trying to steal from the 'rich'. All who remained had developed ways of taking care of themselves and their families.

Roughly half the people in America had survived the catastrophe, of which less than a quarter were Christians. Now came the task of cleaning up, restoring law and order, and creating a government. All the leftist bureaucrats, politicians, lawyers, judges, professors, and media hacks – America's progressive shakers and movers – had died, including Will Wildemann. They had to start from zero.

But did they learn from history? No. As before, most Christians were too busy to run for office or even vote. They could have had a powerful influence on the outcome, as many survivors had developed a more conservative, almost Christian, worldview. But no, politics is a dirty business. They stayed out. I was saddened to see it.

Atheists, driven by their demons, elected the same kind of leaders that had gotten them into this pickle in the first place. Leaders whose first priority was to protect their own wealth and power, who had their own agenda, who cared not for law except as a weapon against their enemies, who promised much but delivered little, and who staunchly defended the rights of wicked people to do wicked things, but vowed to "eliminate those bigoted, hateful, intolerant, fundamentalist Christians," confiscate their wealth, and redistribute it "to help the poor, starving mobs" who were rampaging and pillaging across the land.

So as in the past, those elected to public service were not the heroes, not the ones who dedicated their lives to restoring order and some semblance of civilization to the people, not the ones who worked against unbelievable odds to recover from the catastrophe so their children would survive, not the ones who had demonstrated the wisdom to recognize the real problems and solve them. No. As before, it was the chattering classes – those who use words to gain control over others, those who make the most outrageous promises, those who can read the winds of change and tell the people what they like to hear. Their new leaders, like the old, were arrogant ideologues who see the world backwards: evil is good; good is evil; it's your right to do wrong; tax success; reward failure; spend your way out of debt; big government will take care of you and force those rich capitalist fat cats to pay for it all; and most importantly, abort the innocents and defend the guilty.

They could now clearly see that many Christians had survived because they had prepared in advance. You might think some would come to Christians and ask how they knew and what wisdom did they have for society. But no, they hated and persecuted Christians all the more. And after the Christians were finally taken away in the rapture, they actually rejoiced and celebrated. It was sickening.

Disgusted with them, Logos pulls me back in time to one year after the sixth seal. "Cain, Do you see now how committed they are to evil? Even in the face of utter ruin, they will neither repent nor seek wisdom. Professing themselves wise, they have become fools. Just as my two witnesses discerned, it is like Egypt under the plagues – instead of turning to Me, they harden their hearts against Me. So I mock their gods with more plagues to harden their hearts even more until they are destroyed.

"But have you seen My precious ones? Look at Steve Saxon. He is such a young believer, but oh how steadfast is his faith! How firm is his love! How quick is his obedience! And look at Mike Mason and his flock. How strong is his compassion for the lost! How beautiful is the Word he preaches! How earnestly he prepares and disciples the new believers I send him! How quickly he forsakes his wrong doctrines and embraces true faith as I grant it! Look and see! All over the earth! My Bride has prepared herself! She eagerly awaits My return! She fears not the calamities. Her focus is not on the earth but on Me and My Word. Listen to the sweetness of her prayer in purified faith in My love for her! Not a hair of her head will be harmed!"

So one year after the sixth seal, Logos tears open the **seventh and last seal** on the ancient scroll. "Rejoice! Now is My day! Now all shall see the recompense of the ungodly and the rewards of the righteous, the curse of lawlessness and the blessings of obedience! The universe shall work with Me to display the beauty and perfection of Father's Plan of the Ages! It is time for Me to return for My Bride! O you seven trumpeters, prepare to herald My coming!"

Logos opens the ancient scroll and begins to read it to Himself. Silence blankets heaven for half an hour, as the heavenly host freezes in anticipation. The unified prayers of the saints fill the heavens with exquisite perfumes – for the first time not an angry, bitter prayer, not a selfish prayer, and not a faithless, whining prayer. Every prayer rises to the highest heaven clean and pure, "Come now, Adonai Yashua haMashiach! Fulfill Your Holy Word! Come for Your Bride! Bring Your judgments with You. We love Your judgments, for by Your faithfulness they are righteous and true. We have washed our robes in the blood of the Lamb. Nothing on earth, not even life itself, compels us any longer. We set our hearts to love and obey You."

"And Lord, You said right here that the dead in Christ shall rise first. [1 Thess 4:16] I sure don't see anything else that has to happen before Your return for Your Bride. So we agree together in prayer that You sound Your trumpet now to call forth the dead to resurrection life, so we can get on with this!" It is Steve and Sharon Saxon and their three boys. Logos hesitates, the scroll still open in His hand.

"Surely, Lord Logos, he is mistaken. Steve is yet young in his faith and in his comprehension of Your Word. He doesn't understand that the first resurrection is supposed to be at the last trumpet, not the first." (1 Cor 15:52)

"You are right, Gavriel. He does not understand. He has mixed things up." Logos carefully puts the half-read scroll on His throne. "Nevertheless, My Bride prays in perfect faith, in accord with My Word. Father bids Me honor her prayer. Father's perfect Plan of the Ages is certainly big enough to accommodate even My Bride's ignorance and lack of understanding. Herald! Loan Me your trumpet!"

The first herald steps up quickly and hands it over. Logos takes it and puts it to His own lips. He blows a long, clear, sweet blast, ringing the heavens and the earth with the purest bell-like tone ever heard. In response, the area for miles around the throne room quickly fills with an uncountable multitude, from every nation, tribe, tongue, and ethnic group. They face Logos in deepest love and worship. They are dressed in white robes, waving palm branches, and shouting out, "Salvation, honor, power, and glory to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

The 24 elders and the angels around the throne are overwhelmed by their sudden appearance, and by the magnitude and intensity of their worship. They fall on their faces and join the worship, crying, "Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen!"

As I view this incredible scene, dear Reader, my mind is filled with questions. Yacov Ben Levi, the first of the 24 elders, smiles at my wonder. He puts to voice the questions in my mind. "Yo! Cain! Who are these clothed in white? Where did they come from?"

"Oh, my lord!" I reply. "Surely you know!"

"This is the first resurrection, part of it anyway. These are holy ones from all the ages past 'til now. They are all the King's bondservants whose souls were in Hades awaiting this day. All of them have accepted the sacrifice of the Lamb of God for their sins and have washed their robes in His blood. They were hated, reviled, and persecuted on earth, but they came out of the great tribulation purified and prepared for their service to the King. All that lacked of their faith on earth was completed in Hades, so Logos has now adopted them into His own family. He is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters, mature children of His Father, for they serve Him day and night. Their physical bodies were awakened from the grave by Logos' trumpet call, to join with their souls in Hades. To us they appear uncountable, but Logos knows each one by name."

"But sir, why was everyone surprised that they are here? Are they not supposed to be here yet?"

Yacov laughs. Then the other elders join in. Soon the heavenly host, Yashua included, are all laughing heartily. "Cain, there is no 'supposed to be' or 'not supposed to be' at the throne! Everything is always perfect here. All that is, is! Nothing is ever wrong or out of place. However, prayer changes things. The first resurrection will now be in two separate phases."

Still laughing, Logos helps to explain it to me. "The prophecies are clear. They all say that I will return for My people on the clouds of heaven with power and glory, with a shout of the archangel and the trumpet of God, and in a moment – the blink of an eye – the dead will first be raised to resurrection life and then the living will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet Me in the air.

"But only one prophecy (1 Cor 15:52) says that will be at the last trumpet. Steve Saxon missed that one. He really thought that 'the dead in Christ shall rise first' meant that nothing else could happen until after the dead arose. That is how he prayed. Father changed plans to accommodate his request."

"But… but that's impossible! One wrong prayer and God changes plans! Scripture claims God never changes! Is His prophetic Word now broken?"

At that, Logos roars with laughter, and all the heavenly host with Him. It's a long time before He can settle back, wipe His eyes, and answer my query. "Cain, Son of Dust! How I love you! Always a stickler for the details! Always have to know the how and why! I love that! Listen and learn!" A holy hush falls over the multitude as every ear strains to hear. "Prophecy is layered, like an onion. Each fulfillment is true and complete, yet underneath lies an even greater fulfillment. And like the onion, the sweetest, juiciest fulfillment is that which lies deeper still when all the surface prophecies seem to have failed. When Steve Saxon missed the surface prophecy, Father peeled back the onion to reveal a greater prophecy underneath. The dead in Christ do have to arise first, but nothing says they all must arise at the last trumpet – only My Bride. And they will all meet Me in the air, but now some will come from heaven while the rest are ascending from the earth.

"Father will not allow My Bride to be resurrected now – to cohabit with Me before our wedding – a simple matter of propriety, you understand. My Bride shall arise at the last trumpet, as prophesied. But there is no reason why My other bondservants, those not chosen as part of My Bride, can't arise now from Hades in their resurrection bodies."

Logos joyfully welcomes the new arrivals, and assures them of His love and acceptance of their service. "It is not yet time for your rewards," He concludes, "but because of My Bride's prayer, you are granted the privilege of joining me here at My throne to witness the final judgments on the wicked and the final purification of the surviving remnant of My Bride. She is not yet raised. Please, My brothers and sisters, sons of My Father, intercede with Me for My Bride during this terrible time of her tribulation!"

"O Lord!" I'm mystified. "I still don't understand. Is this multitude of Your bondservants not also part of Your Bride? Just who all is Your Bride, anyway?"

"I know each member of My Bride," Logos replies softly, "and each one knows Me. Is that not enough?"

I hear gasps at my impudent request. Shuddering, the angels hide their faces with their wings. The 24 elders fall down on their faces before the throne. I hesitate. Logos is right. Knowing that the lover of my soul has chosen me for His own ought to satisfy me. *Am I too bold, prying into things that are none of my business? No! I have to know the details. I am heaven's historian. I owe it to my dear Readers.* Trembling, I stand tall and ask again. "Lord, I know Your Bride is made of many members, for no one person could ever be worthy of You. But if all these are not part of Your Bride, who is? Is she only the martyrs You're comforting beneath the Mercy Seat? Is Your Bride so small?"

Logos smiles. "How I love you Cain, Son of Dust! Dare to go where angels fear to tread! Dare to poke into secrets Father holds in His hand from eternity! I know all whom Father brings Me, but even I have never known the full number! In the generation after My resurrection I thought My Bride would be complete at only 144,000. But Father just keeps adding more. The fullness of My Bride is a great mystery which no one, not the apostle John who wrote the Revelation, not even Myself, can know until the time for My wedding at the last trump. So, when even the 24 elders have fallen on their faces, do you dare to stand before Me asking what no man or angel has ever fully known?"

His smile at me never wavers. It is a challenge. "Yes, Lord. You made me bold, and You made me a time traveler. I want to see the fullness of Your Bride, even if I need to travel to the very end of time."

"Bold I like, Son of Dust! You shall see My Bride, though individual identities must remain veiled until our wedding. Father!" He lifts His head. "Who is My Bride?"

For the first time we see the full glory and beauty of His completed Bride. We see the 12,000 firstfruits to God from each tribe of Israel, who died in ages past in full faith yet not receiving God's promises. In addition, we see 144,000 Israelite Christians who become martyrs during the great tribulation. We also see another 432,000 adopted by faith into Israel, in three groups of 144,000 each. First are the martyrs throughout the ages who died for Logos. Second are raptured saints who are sealed to remain alive at Logos' return for His Bride. Third are sheep who are separated from the goats at the end of the age, who served Logos in the least of His brethren. The vision fades; time returns.

In that vision of her beauty, the pure, unified prayers of the Bride become more compelling, almost irresistible. An angel holding a golden censer pours incense on the golden altar before the throne. It adds even more fragrance to the Bride's prayers, multiplying their power. The angel then scoops up coals from the altar and throws them to earth, causing it to shiver in eager anticipation. Logos again picks up the ancient scroll detailing God's Plan of the Ages. The next paragraph reads, "You have won the victory, My Son. You are worthy. Now I grant You permission to go down to claim Your Bride. Signed in greatest love, Your Father."

Logos puts down the scroll and shouts, "Father says it's time! Blow the trumpets! Herald My return for My Bride."

The **first** herald angel blows his trumpet. I'm not sure what to expect. I thought of these as trumpets of Logos' judgments, yet He just called them heralds of His coming. Now I see an irregular frozen rock as big as a tiny moon. It's speeding toward Earth from the asteroid belt. *It looks like it could destroy the earth!* Then I see three even bigger ones trailing behind it! They were collected by the destroying angels under Satan's orders, coming a little late as they are so big and heavy. I scream, "Lord, remember Your Bride!"

"Choices are all decided, Cain." Logos answers. "All My chosen ones are sealed, protected from Satan's wrath, although I have granted to many of My Bride the honor of martyrdom. There are none yet undecided. My judgments fall on the wicked but not My Bride! She is only purified, perfected, and made ready for My return."

The first incoming asteroid, Hygiea, shatters. A zillion shards drive fiercely through the atmosphere like flaming hail across Africa and South America. When the flames die out, not much of either continent is left. But in the 'Green Pastures' where those marked by God's seal are hiding, not a flaming meteorite falls and not a tree or home is burned.

The **second** herald angel sounds his trumpet as Pallas, the next asteroid, comes hurtling down. It is both larger and denser. Instead of breaking up, it blazes in a blinding arc across the sky into the sea, causing a titanic shock wave and tsunami. All across the Indian Ocean and well beyond, it turns the sea red, kills the sea creatures, and sinks the ships. But again, no one who bears God's seal is harmed.

The **third** herald sounds his trumpet. Vesta, the third asteroid, blazes out of the heavens, burning like a torch, aimed for the great land mass of Asia and Europe. Again it looks like no flesh can survive, but it too breaks apart at the last second, showering earth with fragments. They are noxious, causing all the surface waters to become toxic. Many die from the bitter waters. But all of God's sealed and covered ones still have pure waters in their dwellings.

The **fourth** herald sounds his trumpet. The last asteroid comes flashing straight down. It is the largest, Ceres – 600 miles in diameter! It punches through Earth's mantle in Siberia, also annihilating Mongolia, Manchuria, and North Korea (areas with no 'Green Pastures' to protect – the Christians there are already martyred). Molten lava spouts up five miles high. All around the Ring of Fire, ten thousand volcanoes promptly open wide in response. A band of volcanic ash rises into the vapor barrier where it cannot dissipate. The sun was mostly extinguished, but it still gives off heat and a weak and unsteady reddish light. Now even those are occulted for a third of each day and a third of each night. Now no one who's read the Bible can doubt that this is by the hand of God Almighty!

But just to make sure, another angel flies like an eagle over the earth, calling out in Kasdan, "Woe, woe, woe to earth-dwellers, because of the blasts of the trumpets yet to sound from the three remaining angels."

Again translating from the pictorial Kasdan, the word 'woe' is a much bigger word than just pain, torment, or death. It paints a picture of a terrifying and powerful enemy loosed against mankind, filled with anger, hate, and cruelty. It was repeated three times, but was bigger and more deadly each time. The word 'earth-dwellers' is even more interesting. It is a limited word, more like 'earthbound' or even 'earth focused'. Everyone hears and understands the angel, but only the saints recognize that the term excludes them. So they rejoice at the angel's message, knowing that their focus is no longer on earth, but on their Savior and His heavenly Kingdom!

Steve Saxon is especially pleased at seeing the trumpet judgments beginning. He has read and reread the book of Revelation, and now he is quite confident that their prayer was answered. Sharon is not so sure. "Steve, I went over to our cemetery, and not a single grave is opened. There have been some real saints that have died in our community not long ago. Surely if our prayers had been answered I would have found some holes in our cemetery."

Steve thinks about it for a bit. "No, honey," he answers. "The physical resurrection of the body has got to be at the molecular level, or even the atomic level. Dead bodies decay very rapidly. We prayed for the resurrection of the saints from ages past. Their bodies would be just dirt by now. God can lift their atoms from the graves without making a hole, and instantly reassemble their bodies in heaven. I know our prayers were answered. I'm sure, because we're seeing the trumpet judgments. Any minute Jesus will be here for us!" Logos is pleased with his faith.

Before I can talk about the **fifth** trumpet (which comes right after the eagle angel's warning) we must catch up with our two prophets in Israel. They are still in Jerusalem, so these judgments are falling all around them, seemingly at their command. Every day they pray that David and his growing band of Israelites who escaped the rule of Hitler will remain protected and nourished. Michael is amazed. They had seemed like such greenhorns, yet they're doing as good a job covering the Bride as Michael ever did.

This is in spite of unspeakable hatred and plots against their lives. Their prophecy of the plague of darkness had proven precisely correct, even to their outrageous claim of no wind over the whole earth. Then they had loosed the tenth plague, the deaths of the firstborn. It too had come to pass, during the initial trumpet judgments. Everyone has learned to fear them as well as fervently hate them. They are called vile names. They have finally gained the news media's full and total attention. Their 'prognostications' are published in a regular column on the front page, and it is the first thing anybody reads.

Hitler, too, has been listening to their prophecies. He notices the dramatic shift of public opinion in Israel – everyone still hates them, but now they're all beginning to believe their prophecies. They have been right too many times. Hitler realizes that he's losing control. People's eyes are opened. They have learned how to get rid of their little Hitler idols, and his spying SeeNet is still down. He dare not wait! His motto is, "Never let a good crisis go to waste." Even though he knows that his ten armies in the Valley of Jehoshaphat are still pretty discombobulated, disoriented, and demoralized by the dreadful plagues, Hitler decides on a military coup. He orders his armies to take control over all Israel, starting with Jerusalem, and slay any who resist. It shouldn't be many. The Jews are demoralized, too. Two pathetic prophets can't stop ten mighty armies! Israel will become the base for his new world order.

Alan Moses and Joseph Elijah are still living in the tiny apartment in uptown Jerusalem (paid for by the generous saints at Mike's Southern Baptist church). It still has those bloodstains on the carpet and big hole in the roof. The only real change is, their neighbors all fled, after the police cordoned off the area in their efforts to kill or capture the two prophets. They failed, of course. The blockade is no longer manned, so the two have free run of the city.

They walk to the top of the temple mount right after Ceres screams by to obliterate northeast Asia. They are looking down upon Hitler's armies, now on the march, streaming in from Hebron to fill the Kidron River Valley and the Valley of Hinnom. They look red in the half-lit sun. It is obvious they plan to encircle Jerusalem. Elijah laughs. "It looks like they've received their orders and mobilized for war!" He turns to face the TV cameras and newsmen (who now follow them everywhere). He has learned how to stage this. With Hitler's marching armies menacingly crimson in the background he thunders into the cameras:

"Let the nations be aroused to come to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. There I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations on behalf of My people and My inheritance Israel, whom they scattered among the nations. Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come tread, for the wine press is full. The wine vats overflow, for their wickedness has flooded the land. *Multitudes, multitudes here in the valley of decision!* For the fearful day of YHWH is near in the valley of decision! The sun and moon grow dark. The stars lose their brightness. YHWH roars from Zion and utters His voice from Jerusalem. The heavens and the earth tremble. But YHWH is a refuge for His people and a stronghold to the sons of Israel. Then you will know that I am YHWH your God, dwelling in Zion, on My holy mountain. So Jerusalem will be holy, and pagan strangers will pass through it no more. (Joel 3:2, 12-17) You men of Israel have hated us because we prophesied woes against you, *but now I prophesy the victory for you!* Just as Daniel said, those who know YHWH their God shall be strong, and shall rise up and do mighty exploits." (Dan 11:32)

Now Moses takes over, paraphrasing Zechariah 12, "Behold, I am going to make Jerusalem a cup of reeling to all the nations around, when the siege has come against Jerusalem and against Judah. For in that day I will make Jerusalem a heavy stone for all peoples. Any who try to lift it will be injured. All nations on earth shall gather against it. I will strike every horse with bewilderment, and every rider with madness, but I will protect the house of Judah. In that day I will make the clans of Judah like a firepot among pieces of dry wood, or like a flaming torch among sheaves of hay, to consume on the right and on the left all the surrounding armies, so the inhabitants of Jerusalem can again dwell safely in their own homes. For YHWH will defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem in that day. Then the old and feeble among them will be strong as David, and the house of David will be like God, shining like the angel of YHWH before them! So it will come about in that day that I will rise up to destroy all those nations that come against Jerusalem. And I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of Grace and of Supplication, so they will look upon Me – the Aleph Tau, the Beginning and the End – whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Me, as one mourns for an only son.

"Now you see why we prophesied against you. You accepted the anti-messiah instead of Yashua your Messiah. But when YHWH gives you victory over Hitler's armies, you will repent! Then a fountain will be opened for the house of David and the sons of Jerusalem, a fountain of cleansing for all your sin and impurity. In that day, I will cut off your Hitler idols from the land, and I will remove the demons that possess them, and the false prophet that inspires them. Thus though two parts will be cut off from Israel and perish, the third part will be left. That third part I will take through the fire. I will refine them as silver is refined, and test them as gold is tested. Then they will call on My name, and I will answer them! I will say, 'These are My people!' They will respond, 'Yes! YHWH is my God!' Then they will never again turn away from Me.

"So Israel, rise up now in holy array and defend YHWH's inheritance! Many shall be slain, for you sinned grievously in rejecting Your Messiah. *Yet still we prophesy victory for the remnant!* Hitler and his allies will attempt to annihilate you, but they shall fail, for YHWH will fight against them! So I now awaken you, Reuben in France, Simeon in Ireland, Levi in Kurdistan, Judah in Egypt, Dan in Denmark and Germany, Naphtali in Norway, Gad in Sweden, Asher in Scotland, Issachar in Finland and in Switzerland, Zebulon in Holland, Manasseh and Ephraim in England and America, and Benjamin in Belgium and Germany – *I awaken you and call you forth! Come to Israel now to share in the victory of your Jewish brothers!"*

It is the most widely televised news in history. Most of the electronics which was blown by EMP 1 ½years ago has now been repaired or replaced. So nearly everyone on earth hears Moses and Elijah's speech.

Hitler (who still tries to call himself Dr. Relt) is caught by surprise. He was allowing the news channels to carry the two crazy prophets in an effort to direct the people's hatred away from himself. But it just backfired! They were prophesying only judgments against Israel, but now they have prophesied victory for Israel – against himself! He promptly shuts down the news and orders a total curfew. His armies patrol the streets. Violators are shot on sight. He orders airports and seaports shut down, so no refugees can escape and no one can come to help. And he demands an audience with the demon prince Wormwood, now!

"You made all these <expletive deleted> promises to me, but you have failed in the one thing you've got to do!" Hitler rages. "Kill those two prophets! That's your job! If you can't do it, then tuck your sorry tail between your legs and go find someone who can! What kind of a spineless, impotent demon are you, anyway?! The great prophet who makes my statue come alive and stun the world with awesome miracles – and you can't even handle two feeble old men?! Get out of my sight! And don't come back until those two are slain, or I will tell the dragon what a weak and worn-out wimp you are!"

You have to feel sorry for Wormwood. He's never had such a humiliating tongue-lashing before, even from his master, Satan. He has already tried everything he knows, but those two prophets are absolutely covered. He can't touch 'em. He tries to pass the buck to Satan (who is still using the dragon even though his year was up last fall).

But Satan doesn't know what to do about it, either. Those two prophets are definitely putting a crimp in his plans. Awakening the entire Bride and calling her back to Israel like that! I'll tell you, that put the fear of God into him! He's desperate. "Wormwood, we don't have enough demons left. Too many have been sent to the pit, and the rest are scattered all around the world possessing Hitler's slaves. I need 'em back here, now! Every one! This is where the battle is! Stop playing games with 'em. Either bring Hitler's slaves all back here to help with the battle, or slay them so at least their demons are free to come."

"All back here? But master! We can't do that! If we do, there'll be nobody in other countries to block the Bride's ten lost tribes from regathering to Israel! We need Hitler's servants ruling in every country. If they all leave, why… The Christians might take over!"

"Christians? You fool! Christians are total wimp-outs. They'll never rule anything. I've already slain most of 'em, anyway. But have you forgotten? I still have my Muslims. None of them serve Hitler. They wouldn't take his mark. But they've got my mark! They're more devoted to me than Christians are to our Enemy! Now is the time for Muslims to rise and conquer the world. It's their destiny, as I've told them from the start! Now get Hitler's slaves back here, fast! Assemble them in Baghdad. My faithful Muslims will be taking over as Hitler's slaves move out of the way."

CHAPTER 60 – THE FIRST TWO WOES

As Wormwood tries to figure out how to get all Hitler's slaves and their demons to the Middle East, the **fifth** herald angel sounds his trumpet. Gavriel stands bowed before Logos, weeping in horror at the terrible task facing him.

Logos is weeping, too. Without a word, He takes the precious keys of death and hell from the folds of His robe and hands them to Gavriel. Then He drops His head and returns to His intercession, feeling every pain inflicted upon His suffering ones below.

Filled with righteous wrath, Gavriel hurtles through the heavens like a blazing star. He deliberately smashes into the earth at the cave on the side of Mount Hermon known as the Paneas Gates, called the Gates of Hell by Logos. On and on he blazes, creating a hole the size of a truck all the way to the magma at the center of the earth. From there, he steps through the veil into the Abyss, at the gate to the special prison cell where disobedient demons are incarcerated. "All you rebels, listen up!" he shouts.

Myriads of demons draw near, eager to hear the news. Each was sent here for violating God's Law, and is serving out his punishment assigned by Logos. "The Master has a mission for you, if you choose to accept it," Gavriel says, disgusted at being so close to these rebellious creatures.

These depraved demons weren't born yesterday. "Why should we do anything your Master wants?"

"Suit yourself. I'd just as soon you stayed here in the pit forever. But if any of you would like a change of scenery, the Master has prepared special bodies for you to inhabit."

Now that gains their interest. "What kind of bodies? Strong? Can they hurt humans?" They like nothing better than to possess a material body to torment humans.

"Yes. Great scorpio-locusts with powerful wings and teeth like lions, and with stingers in their tails to inflict the most exquisite pain. They have men's faces, women's hair, and exoskeletons stronger than iron. They've got to be strong. They live in fire and brimstone near the center of the earth. They were made to torment humans."

It sounds too good to be true. "Oh go on! There is no such creature. You're pulling our legs."

"Okay. If you're not interested…"

Needless to say, Gavriel gets his volunteers. He unlocks the cell with Logos' keys, and thousands of demons flood out. Satan recoils in amazement. He'd spent hours trying to free them when he had those keys, but at this particular prison cell the keys wouldn't work for him. Gavriel leads the demons to their mounts. Soon out of the flames and smoke belching from the center of the earth, myriads of scorpio-locusts come flying. They are permitted to sting (but not kill) anyone who doesn't have the seal of the living God on his forehead. Thus begins the **first woe.**

Gavriel commissions Apollyon ('the Destroyer'), Satan's chief of the Abyss, to lead them. He orders them to fan out and make lives miserable for every man, woman, and child on the face of the earth, except those with the seal of God. Even people with Hitler's microchip or Satan's seal are not exempt. (Satan loves to torment, even his own slaves.) This torment continues all the way to the rapture.

But long before that, right after the fifth trumpet, the **sixth** herald angel blows his trumpet. I hear a voice from between the four horns on the altar. It is Logos, appearing as a Lamb, slain, crying in deepest sorrow, "Mankind has been tried and found wanting. Judgment is fallen! Release the four demon war commanders who were bound beside the River Euphrates after the times of the seven Beast Empires of the past. [The empire of Enmar-kar and Ishtar, the Assyrian Empire, the Babylonian Empire, the Medo-Persian Empire, the Macedonian-Greek Empire, the Roman Empire and the Nazi Third Reich.] Now it is time for the seventh empire to rise again, with the power to kill a third of mankind with war." Thus begins the **second woe.**

Wormwood is delighted. It makes his job much easier. He orders those four commanders to inspire Hitler's slaves from the former Beast Empires to gather south of Baghdad, around the site of the ancient city of Babylon. One goes to China, one to Russia, one to Germany, Poland, Austria, and the Ukraine, and the fourth to Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the 'istans of the former USSR. This will become the largest army in history – two hundred million men! As before, the demon war commanders foment anti-semitism and incite them to prepare to obliterate Israel.

The rapid sequence of the trumpet blasts of the seven herald angels pauses after the sixth. We too, dear Reader, must pause to catch our breath. Hitler thought he had pretty tight control over all the Jews with his ten armies. But now Wormwood persuades him that Jews are just too stubborn. "You will never fully control them. They love our Enemy too much. They'll die before they serve you. Killing those rebels without your mark was just the first step. Now it's time to kill all the rest. Exterminate them.

"You underestimate our Enemy. He really loves them. And He really needs their land. Israel is His source of power, and He'll do anything to protect it. But as I told you, when you annihilate the Jews, His power is broken.

"It's time for you to rule the world as I promised. But you are focused on Israel. I see the big picture. I've ordered two hundred million of those enslaved by your mark to come from all around the rest of the world to Baghdad. Lucifer has Muslims in all their nations ready to take over as soon as your men leave. You'll need 'em here, trust me. For now, use your ten Arab armies to eliminate every Jew in Israel. By then our armies in Baghdad will be ready to join with yours to take over the world!" Hitler is delighted by the news of so many more troops headed his way. He instructs his generals. *They declare open season on Jews.*

All over the world, everyone with Hitler's mark gets his orders. Soon most of them are on their way to Baghdad. The rest are summarily slain by their demons for refusing Hitler's command. Thus in every country, all their kings, presidents, governors, judges, bureaucrats, lawyers, spin-meisters, and their ilk are now gone, one way or the other.

The governments of these nations basically shut down. But such a vacuum is inherently unstable. After Hitler's minions leave, three groups of people remain in countries around the world from Israel. There are a lot of Christians – but they remain in isolation, in hiding, unwilling to step into the reins of power. A lot of Jews also refused Hitler's mark. But they have also been persecuted, by just about everyone. So they also are hiding or have already fled to Israel, or have even joined the Christians.

Then there are millions of Muslims. They hate western civilization, especially Jews, Christians, Hitler's people, and anyone else who dares to offend them. They wouldn't take Hitler's mark, watch his fancy speeches, play his silly game, or bow to his stupid idols. They despise all who do.

But strangely, they haven't been persecuted by Hitler's servants. If someone dares to say a word against them, they claim an offense against Allah and deploy a suicide bomber or team of terrorists against them, their family and friends, and their town. It's what Muslims do. After Allah's offense is placated with enough bloodshed, no more is said, and everything settles back down. They know it is their destiny to rule the world. They will take over when Allah wills it.

So when Hitler's men leave for Baghdad, the Muslim leaders are ready. Allah has spoken. They don't wait for an election. They just take over nearly all the nations of the earth with little opposition. Within weeks, Sharia Law is proclaimed in the newly Islamic nations – the US, Canada, and Great Britain included. Western civilization is kicked back to the Iron Age, with laws forcing everyone to convert to Islam or die, prohibiting men from shaving their beards, prohibiting western music, dress, food, art, or culture, prohibiting the education of women, requiring a woman to remain at home unless accompanied by her husband (and then only when fully covered in black), prohibiting movies, sports, dancing, card games, or any other form of western entertainment, and so on. It's a nightmare for a western-educated mind. Leaving the Islamic faith, theft from a Muslim, sodomy, adultery (for women, not men), and speaking out against Islam are now capital offenses. Anyone accused of dishonoring Mohammed or Allah is presumed guilty and slain without trial. New mosques go up everywhere, to indoctrinate the masses.

Now the prophetic call of Moses and Elijah from the temple mount makes a lot of sense. People from every nation finally wake up to their Israeli heritage, to realize they belong to one of the lost tribes of Israel. They'd rather die than submit to Islam! So they also pack up and head for the Middle East, though to Haifa rather than Babylon.

The prophetic call is quite clear. Steve Saxon looks at his wife Sharon, now six months pregnant. They look over at their three boys. "I can't leave our boys…" Sharon says meekly. She looks down and caresses the growing bulge in her belly. "I couldn't fight very well anyway."

"I know, honey. But I must go. This is why we were kept alive! Most Christians have already been martyred, except those protected in 'Green Pastures' like ours. I'll be strong, knowing your prayers are with me." Steve pulls her close. "I really need to go. The others want me to lead."

"Will we see you again?" Sharon is on the verge.

"Yes! …at the rapture! But probably not before. And it doesn't matter in the slightest whether I'm killed or not. The rapture can't be more than a few weeks away now."

Sharon bites her lip. *This is her entire world, this sweet, gentle, rich city-boy she's come to love, and the sons he's fathered. Is it to be over so soon? What will she do without him? How will her boys cope? How can she birth another child without Steve by her side? How can God do this to her?!*

"Sharon! Be strong! You prayed for me to come to save your father's farm, remember? Well, your parents are right there, still living on their farm. There are all your sisters, each with a new farm in her name. Every farm is filled up with God's precious ones. So I saved the farm! My job here is done. Now God is calling me to save His people in Israel. How can I say no? All of this will be burned up anyway. But in our obedience, we're earning rewards in heaven. Remember the prophecies we read? God's promises!" Sharon nods as the dam bursts and a flood of tears pours forth. But she lets him go. Logos is pleased with their faith, and their obedience, both of them.

They don't have TVs, but they do have Steve's copy of *Peter's Prophecy of the End Times*. It's gotten pretty ragged with all the adults in the community pouring over it. Peter foretold the Muslim takeover as the signal. There is no uncertainty. Anyone who can fight is to go with Steve to the aid of their brothers in Israel. *Now*. There is not a weapon among them. They don't even believe in war or violence. But they'll go to support their Jewish brothers, for now they know that they are descended from Ephraim or Manasseh. They leave for Israel before the new Muslim government can get its act together and clamp down.

It is an awkward time. Jerusalem is overrun by Hitler's troops. Two-thirds of the city is occupied, and the other third is hanging only by a thread. The majority of the Jews that had been there are slain, and soldiers are using the rest for target practice. Having gained control over Jerusalem, Hitler now sends out orders for his armies to sweep the Middle East and methodically kill every Jew, even babies. None are to be spared, microchip or not. As his ten armies fan out into Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan, they're ordered to take control and combine the rest of the Middle East with Israel as one large new state called the **Fourth Reich.**

Prime Minister Davison's personal secretary had been totally snookered when Dr. Relt had unveiled his statue and it had come to life. Indeed, Marjah had carried a secret crush on him from the time he had first come to seal that treaty between Israel and the Arab states. She had accepted Dr. Relt as her messiah and voted for him in the election. When David had fled to Petra, Marjah had just continued her job, but now as Dr. Relt's personal secretary. She had quickly become one of Dr. Relt's staunchest supporters.

She had stuck with him, too, all the way up to that warning by the three angels. The third angel had said, "If anyone worships Dr. Relt or his statues and receives his microchip… he will be tormented with fire…" Her eyes were opened. With horror she realized that Dr. Relt really was Hitler, the enemy of her people. He confirmed it later when he put a stop to the temple sacrifices and demanded that everyone worship and sacrifice only to him.

But what could Marjah do? She had been a professional secretary all her adult life, up to the highest levels of Israeli government. She was well-trained to put aside her own feelings and work to make her boss successful and happy. Her professional mask was always smiling, always saying, "Yes, sir!" or "Right away, sir!" She considered fleeing, but where could she go? She lived right there in the executive office complex. She was on call day and night. This was her entire life! Besides, she still loved him! Underneath the placid mask boiled an inner conflict between her timeless love for Israel and her new infatuation for Dr. Relt.

So she stayed and kept her mask on, while looking for opportunities to escape. But the longer she stayed, the more bleak it became, as Dr. Relt gained tighter control over her people. Marjah soon found out what happened to dissidents. She was trapped!

So when the great catastrophes started, when the four supernovas hit, the sun went out, and the earthquake shook the globe, Dr. Relt was constantly with her. Marjah found herself even more trapped than ever – getting news reports, passing statements to the press, keeping up with his insane schedule of fiery speeches, correspondence, and meetings. It was like a fast-moving nightmare from which she couldn't awaken. Her only refuge was her bedroom closet, where she sometimes went to cry to YHWH.

Marjah is beside Dr. Relt when he overruns Jerusalem. She is still beside him when he orders his armies to sweep the Middle East, establish the Fourth Reich, and massacre every Jew in the land. But Marjah is a Jewess! She types up his latest orders and sends them out. Then she brings a copy into Dr. Relt's office, sets it down in front of him, and asks pleasantly. "Sir, is this how you wanted it?"

He glances at it again. "Yes… I already told you."

"Then sir, you must kill me, for I am a Jewess." She stands there, defenseless, bowed slightly, a half smile on her face. In her mind, she is already dead.

"Kill you? Why… No Marjah! I need you! You are my most faithful supporter and friend. You've stuck with me through my toughest times. What could I do without you?"

"Sir, you said 'every Jew'. You left no exception. If you don't kill me yourself, your soldiers will. I would rather be killed by you, please. I… I don't want to leave your side."

Now Dr. Relt wonders why he hates the Jews so much, anyway. *At least this one is nice. More than nice.* Dr. Relt suddenly realizes he loves her and doesn't want her to die.

Seeing his indecision, Marjah pushes it. "Please, sir, kill me quickly. Now that you've decided to kill all the Jews, I would only hurt your reputation by remaining with you. Everyone knows I'm a Jewess."

She falls to her knees in front of him. It feels good to finally admit her crush. "Oh, Dr. Relt! I love you! I've loved you ever since the day I first saw you! If it is your desire to slay my people, I insist you kill me first. I shall then enter Paradise by the hand of my messiah!" Her professional smile never cracks, even at that bold half-truth. Inside, she prays frantically to YHWH to forgive her and receive her to Himself when she dies, for she can see no other way out.

So Dr. Relt pulls his pistol (which is always at his side) and puts it to Marjah's forehead. She doesn't even close her eyes. She just stares adoringly up into his face, that plastic smile still firmly fixed.

Dr. Relt can't do it. He's bad, through and through, but still a shred of humanity remains. He drops the pistol to his side. "No, my dear. Don't be foolish. Even if every other Jew dies, I can still protect you. You can stay with me always, become my mistress. No one will dare touch you. I'll change your name – bob or dye your hair – just forget you're a Jewess. You'll become a Christian…"

But when he drops the pistol, Marjah suddenly sees a different destiny. *Is she the modern Queen Esther? Was she raised up for such a time as this?* "Sir? If you see some good in me, perhaps you can see some good in my people? We really are not the sub-humans that Hitler despised back at the time of the Holocaust. We are hard-working, intelligent, loyal, kind, loving … Don't you see, sir? I'm no better than any of my people. If you can spare me, can you not also spare the rest of my people to serve you?"

Wormwood is frosted. He has suddenly found himself outside Dr. Relt and he cannot get back in. He zips over to Satan in his dragon and together they go to find someone to hear their complaint. That doesn't take long. Logos and His archangels are all gathered above, intently watching the interchange between Dr. Relt and Marjah.

"Hitler is mine, body and soul! This is an outrage – not letting Wormwood possess him! Have You now decided to use force and deception to try to defeat me? I thought we agreed that those are my tools! How can we ever settle the Great Controversy if You cheat by using my tools?"

"How far you have fallen, My adversary! I made you My brightest and My best! Why do you have so much trouble remembering the basics of My Law? In his time of testing, neither angels nor demons nor even I Myself can interfere. How can his nature be tested if he is always possessed?"

"His time of testing?!" Satan splutters. "He failed his final exam over ninety years ago!"

"No, Satan. You're believing your own lies again. Dr. Relt is like a new person. He was born with no memory of his previous life. You put the memories and character of Hitler into his mind. You've manipulated him all his life. He gets the opportunity to choose, like anyone else."

"He has already chosen! Twice! It's doubled and set!"

"Not so. Those decisions were made under a cloud of lies. You keep telling him he's always wanted to kill the Jews, but that simply isn't true. So perhaps if he now sees My beauty in Marjah he might repent."

"Impossible! Preposterous! Why, if he repented now Your prophecies about him would fail, Your Word would be broken, and the universe would cease to exist! You talk about me not remembering the basics! Have You forgotten what is prophesied about the last battle? He has to bring all the nations against Jerusalem! He only brought his ten Arab and Russian armies. The rest are still in Babylon!"

"Since when did you get so concerned about fulfilling prophecy? Have you not read the last chapter? Or are you still deceiving yourself that you can alter the outcome? Don't be anxious. If Dr. Relt repents, you can always raise up another to fulfill the prophecies."

"I can't! He is Hitler in his soul! He was my best shot!" Satan is whining now. "I will never have another like him, so totally committed to me and my ways!"

"Ha. So find him a wife and use her. I'm surprised you haven't thought of that. Are you losing your touch? Is My favorite adversary getting old or weak? If Dr. Relt is really your best shot, I think the Great Controversy is already settled. He doesn't worship you – he worships himself. You're so focused on that last battle, you've forgotten your real goal is to get everyone to worship you. A Hitler won't do it. You'll need another Ishtar and Dumuzi for that."

Satan is stunned into silence. *What a great idea!*

The angels and demons watch tensely as Dr. Relt makes his final choice. Marjah is still kneeling in front of him. His pistol is still in his hand. With no demons inside egging him on, he is back to being the kind Dr. Relt that everyone loved before. "You're right, Marjah. I don't know what came over me. The Jews are good people. In my heart, I really care about them, you know. Don't send out the orders. Just shred this. Erase the file. Forget I ever said it."

Satan squeals in rage. "That's not fair! You can't do that! He's mine! Mine! Mine, I say! You can't…"

"Hush! Why do you always assume you know the end of the story before its conclusion? Give him time!"

Marjah takes her eyes off her master and bows her head. "I can't, sir. It's already sent. To all your officers. And what about your previous orders to blockade the ports, halt immigration, and kill any who refused your implanted microchip? Will you change your mind on those, too? What about the bloodbath of Jews when you took control of Jerusalem… you proclaimed open season on Jews. And at your last staff meeting, you said you hoped to annihilate all Jews, worldwide. We'll have to bring your staff together for damage control. You made a big deal of it, remember? You'll have to figure out a reason for changing your mind, so you don't lose face. You're their messiah, sir! You must appear strong and decisive!" Marjah is always the perfect secretary, reminding her boss of things he overlooked. Now that he's changed his mind and decided to save her people, she really wants to make him successful!

But Dr. Relt is overwhelmed. "You already sent them out? My orders to kill all the Jews…"

"Yes, sir. To your forces now gathering at Babylon, too. But I can write up a change of plans. If you want I can think of some good reasons. You know I always make you look good. A religious conversion! Everyone should buy that. What would you like to be, sir? How about a Protestant? Perhaps a Baptist. They claim to love the Jews.

"Or… wait… I've got it. Let's just say that you fell in love with me and I converted you to Judaism. Then you could grant pardons to all the Jews and we could have a grand wedding and everyone would love you again, like they did before you stopped the sacrifices in the temple. If you just allow them to resume their sacrifices to YHWH, I'm sure everyone will forgive you and believe our story."

Poor Marjah. She has seriously underestimated the power of evil. As Hitler sees all the things that need to change for him to spare Marjah's life, he hardens his heart one last time. "No, no. None of that. My orders stand. A messiah doesn't change his mind, even if he falls in love. And no messiah would ever convert to a different religion. That's for sure! I'll spare you, but you've got to become a Christian. I'll give you a good Catholic name, like Maria."

"Yes!" Satan yells in triumph. "I win, after all! And now I've got Marjah, too! You never should have allowed her to test him. She's weak! She'll serve him the rest of her days as his mistress!"

"Go, Satan. You're interrupting My intercession."

Marjah realizes she has lost. Her brief dream of being a Queen Esther is dead. Now she is dead, too. "No, sir." For the first time in her life she contradicts her boss. "If my people must die then so must I." She shakes her head sadly.

"Oh, don't be silly! What do you have against becoming a Catholic? I need you, Marjah!"

"I told you, I'm a Jewess. I'll always be a Jewess. That is what I was born. That is how I'll die. Please! Don't prolong the agony!" She reaches out and takes his hand, the one still holding the gun, and pulls it to her forehead. "Pull the trigger and get it over with, sir. We have no alternative."

At that moment the phone begins to ring. It is Hitler's emergency communication network to his troops, who have even now begun to carry out his orders. He needs to talk to them! "I can't kill you, Marjah! Not now, anyway. I've got to answer that phone. Here, you take the gun. Go into your bathroom and pull the trigger yourself."

Marjah goes to spend time in her prayer closet while Hitler answers the phone. It's his field commander at Haifa calling to tell him that the port is under assault by the Jews on land and by ships coming in from all over the world. "Hold the port at all costs, General! They can't win against my ten armies! I'll send for reinforcements immediately!"

So for the next six hours Marjah is forgotten, as Hitler recalls six top generals from his nearest armies to give them their new orders. They are to meet him in his secret planning room by six that evening. Until then, Hitler is in a whirlwind of activity, making plans to defend Haifa.

His generals come in by helicopter, and by 6:00 PM they are lined up in front of him to get their new orders. Marjah comes up behind them with a tray of coffees and sweet rolls. *Dear, sweet Marjah!* Hitler nods his head, smiling. *How much he will miss her.* As she sets down the tray, Marjah pulls out Hitler's pistol from underneath. Without hesitation, without even removing her plastic smile, she mows down the six generals in rapid succession. Then she turns the gun on Hitler himself. "YHWH forgive me!" she breathes as she pulls the trigger on her beloved.

As with most Jews, Marjah is skilled with a gun. But on this one crucial shot, her hand trembles. The bullet just grazes Hitler's temple. Still he falls to the floor as if dead. Marjah drops the pistol and flees. She had used her six hours plotting her escape. She knows places… has keys. By the time Hitler's goons reach her apartment she's gone.

Gavriel is at the throne room for another assignment. Logos hands him a scroll. It is very unlike the great ancient scroll with the seven seals, which told the whole story of God's Plan of the Ages. This scroll is small, unsealed, and already opened more than halfway to its end. "Go to earth, dear Gavriel. Many do not have these prophecies of Peter. Distribute them. All must receive their marching orders in time, so not one member of My Bride will be missing at My return! My Father will help you. Ask Him to speak directly to them. Go in My name, by My power and authority!"

Then Logos turns to me with a grin. "Cain, Son of Dust, go with Gavriel. You wonder what Father says in His seven peals of thunder. I grant satisfaction to your curiosity. The prophecy was sealed until now, so the adversary would not know our battle plans. But now the battle is joined!"

Gavriel takes me to the seaport of Haifa, which lies quiet, under curfew. He plants one foot on shore and the other in the bay. The incredible glory of God shines through him as he calls out in a mighty voice to the eternal Father. YHWH answers! I hear the seven peals of thunder! My curiosity is satisfied. But I must be careful what I tell you, dear Reader, that the adversary not learn any critical details. I'll only summarize them. The first thunder is the Father's call to every child of Abraham, including all from the ten lost tribes of Israel, reminding them who they are. The second thunder is God's call for those whose destiny lies in staying behind to care for those who cannot make the journey. The third thunder is God's call for those who must immediately travel to Israel. The fourth thunder is specific directions for their journey. The fifth grants their provisions and protection. The sixth shows them where to gather in and around Israel, and how to prepare for battle. The seventh thunder is God's call to battle, along with His empowerment to prevail against Hitler and his ten armies.

When YHWH finishes speaking the seven thunders, Gavriel lifts his right hand to heaven and swears that there shall be no more delay. Then, with laughter in His voice, YHWH tells me, "You take the scroll, Son of Dust!"

So I take the scroll of Peter's prophecies from Gavriel. He says to me, "Logos told us to distribute the scroll. It will confirm and seal YHWH's instructions. First, eat it, like Ezekiel ate the scroll containing lamentations, mourning, and woe. As with Ezekiel, it will be sweet in your mouth, but bitter in your gut, for this battle will be bittersweet." The scroll tastes like honey in my mouth, but turns to acid in my stomach. "Now, Son of Dust! Prophesy it forth, to reach many peoples and nations and tongues and kings."

I obey. The remaining prophecies from Peter's scroll flow out of my mouth and around the globe, for Israel and for the Bride's protection from this seventh Beast Empire which has risen back up to slay God's precious ones. YHWH's battle plans are thus revealed to all who were awakened by that bold prophetic call of Moses and Elijah.

It is amazing. It seems like one minute Hitler is well on his way to his goal of annihilating the Jews and nothing on earth can stop him. Then all heaven breaks loose. Hitler thought he had the port of Haifa closed, but now his army there loses control of the city. Thousands of determined Jews rise up, drive them back, and retake the port just in time to allow the incoming ships to dock and unload. Within hours reinforcements are spreading across the land. The remnant of surviving Jews in Israel, about a third of the nation, is inspired to rise up in strength and stand firm in their tiny pockets of resistance.

Reinforcements arrive from other places, too. Hitler's takeover of Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon had turned many against him there. Some begin fighting for Israel! Egypt likewise. The seven thunders and Peter's prophecies have done their job. Logos is directing the battle from above.

Steve Saxon arrives in Haifa by ship, with Papa Yoder, Sam Salizar, and many more from his Amish community. Steve misses Sharon, but he lets his feelings go. He has enjoyed his family and his life on the farm; he lets that go as well. Life has been very good to him; he lets that go, too. He puts on a smile and stands tall in front of his friends. "Thank you all for coming with me. Our brothers in Israel thank you, too. Our life on earth is over. Reckon yourself dead. Forget everything you've ever had or done. The only thing that remains is our faith, in strict obedience to the clear command of our Lord as He leads us into battle. Our faith will be tested as never before. We have no weapons. He knows that. We probably will all die. He knows that, too. He will receive us into Himself at the last trumpet, which could be any minute now. So stand firm in faith in His resurrection. Put a smile on your face as we sing together and shout our testimony. It is our faith that wins this victory! Our Lord Jesus Christ goes before us! Though His adversary slays us, we stand firm on God's promises! 'We overcome by the blood of the Lamb, by the word of our testimony, and because we did not love our lives even unto the death!' 'Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.'" It's a moving little speech. It is repeated all over the Fourth Reich as men from every nation gather in Israel's defense. Logos is pleased.

The Amish join hands in rows of three. Steve leads from the front row with Gunter and Sam. They walk up the hill, looking for Hitler's troops. When they find some, they just start singing, and walk directly toward them. They are met with withering machine-gun fire, but they just step over the dead and rejoin hands to continue their march, with not a pause in their song. When the song of praise to Jesus is over, they shout out their allegiance to Him, then begin again. Their enemy can't take it. *How can these fools keep singing and smiling?! It is utter suicide!* Hitler's men finally get spooked and back off in confusion.

Hitler is frantic. He cannot understand how the battle which was nearly won turned against him so quickly! His finest soldiers, his ten glorious armies that for five years vigorously trained for this day, are showing yellow streaks all down their backs as they turn to run from the singing newcomers. *It's insane!* And these newcomers aren't even soldiers. *They're just refugees, for heaven's sake!* Many don't even have a weapon. But their schmaltzy musical marches turn his finest troops into blithering idiots.

It's time to play hardball. If he is going down, he will take the rest of the world with him. First Hitler orders the new troops still gathering at Babylon to mobilize for Israel, now! Then he orders the leaders of his ten Arab nations to execute 'Screaming Eagle Six One Six', a prearranged plan in which nuclear-tipped missiles are launched from all over the Middle East and North Africa to the seats of power in western nations. Not realizing that Western Civilization has just been taken over by Muslims, the Arab leaders gladly comply. They've always wanted to destroy the West!

The nukes are targeted for major cities in Europe and North America. In the United States, fifteen metropolitan areas, all now centers of Muslim power, are targeted. But of the fifteen, three (Minneapolis, Kansas City, and New Orleans) escape destruction due to missile malfunction. Five others (Atlanta, Philadelphia, Memphis, Houston, and Seattle) are badly damaged, but a lot of the suburbs survive. Boston, New York, Detroit, Pittsburgh, Portland, Los Angeles, and Washington DC are destroyed, totally, and for miles around. America's new Muslim government is pretty much gone; she finds herself leaderless again. The radical Muslims who had rushed to take over the centers of power in the big cities are all dead, and a hundred million more. Their blood is on the hands of their fellow Muslims in the Middle East and the crybaby liberals who stopped America from completing its 'star wars' missile shield.

Hitler's nuclear attack also pre-targets many other western nations. London suffers a direct hit, annihilating England's new Muslim government as well as every other soul in the metropolis. Similarly, in France, Germany, Spain, Denmark, Holland, Sweden, Belgium, Bulgaria, Austria, Albania, and Greece, major cities where Muslims had recently taken control are all nuked. Of course anger begets anger. America, France, and Great Britain all have nuclear missiles, too, and they are soon flying the other direction. Swift retaliation comes upon Muslim centers of power in Turkey, the Middle East, and North Africa. Many eastern-block cities are also nuked, such as in Russia and China. However, Russia had built its own missile shield. It is only partially successful, but it does save some cities like Moscow and Baghdad. Nearly all Muslim leaders and activists are slain. *Allah has failed them.* The surviving Muslims discover they never really liked him anyway. They are set free to discover the true God, the God of love.

The reinforcements flooding into Israel devastate the morale of Hitler's soldiers. They'd been unnerved anyway, but his command to slaughter those defenseless singers pushed them over the edge. That nuclear missile exchange is the last straw. Hitler's men become raving lunatics. (Zech 12:4) After ten days it's over. Hitler is forced to admit defeat, still wondering what went wrong. A third of mankind is vaporized or lies dying of radiation burns. Hitler's finest troops now twitch in spasms like madmen. They can't even point a rifle anymore. His best officers are all slain. And his plan to annihilate the Jews? Ha. Now, whenever one of his soldiers sees a Jew, he flees in terror!

Those ten days mark the turning point in Hitler's rise to power. Up until then, he had been successful and almost unopposed in nearly everything he did. But from this time on, his empire starts to crumble. His decision made, his 'final exam' over, Wormwood is again permitted to possess him, but it doesn't help. The loss of his six best generals hurt him terribly. *How could he have misjudged Marjah so badly?* So he recalls all his armies from his newly begun Fourth Reich and flees with them toward Baghdad.

Stunned by his failure, Hitler again lashes out at his sidekick, the demon prince Wormwood. "It's all your fault, you lazy, good-for-nothing, two-bit fairy. Not only have you failed in the one task I gave you, but now your brother demons are out there harassing my troops in those <deleted> scorpio-locusts. No wonder they cracked and ran! I thought Apollyon was supposed to be on our side! At first he didn't seem to care who he was attacking – the Jews or our Master Race. But when those reckless refugees came against us, he never attacked them! Why?"

"I'll have a talk with Apollyon. He seems to take his commission quite seriously. I think he and his demonic host are afraid of losing the bodies they possess and getting thrown back into the pit. He says his commission prohibits him from hurting anyone who bears the Enemy's seal, and every one of those refugees did. That is why they won. That is why they kept coming, even when we mowed 'em down. We need to get at the source of their power."

"That's what I've been telling you, you <expletives deleted> fool! It's those two <multiple expletives deleted> prophets! Get Apollyon to take 'em out!"

So a discouraged and frustrated Wormwood goes out to talk to Apollyon, chief of the scorpio-locusts. Apollyon is adamant. "I can't touch 'em. They've got the Enemy's seal. You know I and my demons would lose our wings in a moment and be sent back to the Dungeon."

"Maybe not. Hitler believes those two are the key. He listens to all their prophecies. Everything that happens, even things we initiate, first come out of their mouths. It's like they've got total control! I'm afraid Hitler will bag out on us if we don't stop 'em!"

"So let him. We'll find another. He's expendable."

"I know he is, but not yet! Our lord is getting him ready for the final battle. If we lose Hitler now, we'll lose the final battle. Our lord will blame us! We must do whatever it takes to support Hitler – whatever it takes! If we succeed, Israel is gone and our lord takes over the earth!"

The Jews are celebrating the defeat of Hitler. Their first official act is to rename the Fourth Reich 'Israel' again – now a much larger Israel. It includes Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and the Sinai. But it is a subdued celebration, as they also mourn the massacre of a full two-thirds of their total population. There is hardly a family without several dead. Truly it's a bittersweet victory. They urgently need people to bolster their defense forces, as Hitler will surely attack again. So the surviving refugees are welcomed when they apply for citizenship. Their claims of ancestry in one of the ten lost tribes of Israel are accepted without question. They proved their loyalty to Israel when they faced Hitler's armies. Though 85 percent were slain (including Steve Saxon and all his Amish friends), about a quarter million survived. Nearly all of them join the Israel Defense Force (IDF) and send for their families to join them in Israel.

David and Danelle Davison remain holed up in Edom throughout the war. Their strong young men are armed and would have loved to fight for their country. They long to help drive Hitler from their beloved homeland. Daily as they hear the news on their radios, they pester David to let them rush to the aid of their beleaguered brothers.

But David and Danelle have heard from God on the matter. It is settled. I've translated his story for you here:

Danelle and I stood on the hill above the main entrance, gazing toward the Blessed Land, praying. YHWH Himself appeared to us, in the form of a mighty angel twelve feet tall. He called Himself Logos, the Eternal Word of YHWH. He was clothed with a deep royal purple robe. His crown gleamed with all the colors of the rainbow. His face shone like the sun in its strength, and His feet blazed like pillars of fire. We fell at His feet with our faces down in the dirt, knowing that we are unworthy to look upon His majesty.

But He just laughed at us! We couldn't believe it! For a long time we just lay there on our faces while He laughed and laughed. Finally, I couldn't take it anymore. So I lifted my head a little and asked respectfully, "O Lord YHWH, why is it that You laugh?"

"For the sheer joy of finally receiving your love and worship, My beloved!" He said simply.

At that, Danelle also popped up her head. "Finally? But Lord YHWH, we have always loved and worshiped You! Oh…" She paused, staring in awe. "Who are You, Lord?"

"I am Yashua your Messiah, whom you crucified when I first came to you." He held out His hands. We looked in horror at the ugly nail scars in His wrists, the marks of Roman crucifixion. But He only laughed the harder as we fell anew on our faces and wept at the sudden knowledge of what our rejection had cost Him. Laughter is catching. Our grief could not compete. Slowly our tears became His laughter, until we all rolled on the dirt in utter abandon.

Finally He sat up. His clothes still gleamed in spotless beauty. "Now that we have had a good laugh together, you shall not soon forget Me, nor turn away. I accept your repentance, your mourning over your sin. But I am the one who turns mourning into laughter, and sorrow into joy. By My death I paid the full price to take away your sin, and by My resurrection I won the victory over death for all time. Go back to the people I have commissioned you to lead. Tell them of Me. They do not know Me yet, but I know them, and you. I have chosen You all. I have written you on the palm of My Hand and engraved you upon My heart. You are My Segula ['treasured possession']!"

"Yes, Lord! We will tell them. They will rejoice with us! Then we'll hurry back to tell all of Israel!"

"No." His face grew stern. "You must remain here for now, lest you die in the battle before you have entered My Kingdom." Then He disappeared.

CHAPTER 61 – THE LAST TRUMP, THE THIRD WOE

Alan Moses Benson and Joseph Elijah Johnson come to the victory celebration. They listen to the speeches and watch the ceremonies honoring the dead. They rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. *How deeply the Lord loves these His chosen people!* That their eyes are being opened to Scripture is evident – one of their speeches acknowledges the fulfillment of Ezekiel's great prophecy of the stick of Ephraim joined to that of Judah at the time that Israel returns to YHWH her God! (Ezek 37:15-26) Everyone agrees, this is that time!

The ceremonies finally wrap up. The last speech is over. The people are ready to depart to begin rebuilding their shattered lives. Moses and Elijah know they must give one more prophecy. In a way, they dread it, for they know how it will be received – ending with their death! But it's a relief to know it is nearly over. It's been a wild, fun ride. All the cruel hatred, the vile names, the abuse heaped on them… all for trying to love these people with a true and faithful love, a tough love, that does not shrink from giving them the truth they need rather than the platitudes they prefer.

They step up to the microphones, in front of all the TV cameras. Moses is suddenly very weary. "You go ahead, Elijah. I'll pray!" he whispers to his sidekick. Elijah nods. He is all fired up and ready. He thunders out, "Every prophecy has come to pass exactly as we have spoken. Now hear the Word of YHWH one last time. The second woe is past, but the **third woe** is yet to come! The first woe was merely painful stings from the scorpio-locusts. The second was Hitler's slaughter of a third of mankind. Can you imagine how terrible will be the third woe? It will be the total collapse of the old world order, as YHWH's wrath floods the earth with every fearful catastrophe from your worst nightmares. This will conclude with the destruction of the world by fire. *Every soul on earth will die.* But just as with the great Flood when those who entered into the Ark with Noah survived, so it shall be in this 'flood of fire'. Your Ark is **Yashua your Messiah,** who will return for His own at the seventh and final trumpet. You know Yashua – the one Christians call Jesus the Christ. His herald angel will sound the seventh trumpet in just a few days now. Finally you will believe and receive Him as your Messiah, though you will mourn over your guilt in crucifying Him. *Yashua is your only salvation. His crucifixion is the only sacrifice for your sin. In His resurrection is your Life.* Any who reject Him will die when Hitler returns to Israel. But don't worry about that. I know you will receive Him. Scripture foretold it! YHWH turned to the Gentiles when you Jews rejected Yashua. But at the last trumpet the mystery of God will be revealed. God promised 'a partial hardening of Israel until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled' (which they now are) and 'then He is able to graft you back in again, so all Israel will be saved!' [Romans 11:23-26] So all you beloved of YHWH, you chosen of Yashua the King, rejoice in the fire, for in it you know that your redemption draws near!"

The people's reaction to Elijah's speech is pretty much as expected. They do not want to hear about their 'partial hardening', or the 'times of the Gentiles', or the Christian God Jesus, or about Hitler coming back to do more killing. They have just suffered more than any nation should have to bear, at the hand of the very man who had engineered the first Holocaust. Everyone had sworn, "never again" yet it had happened again. *Where was their God, anyway?* Their anger flames against the two prophets. They know better than to fire weapons, but they hurl verbal abuse upon them, trying to drown out Elijah's speech.

Moses' weariness cannot be denied. He is burned out. His life's work is done. "Yashua, remove Your covering. Bring us home." he breathes softly. Elijah overhears him. "Amen." he agrees. "We're finished, Yashua. We did all You asked. Into Your hands we commit our spirits."

At that very moment, Apollyon and his demonic host make their move. Two dozen scorpio-locusts descend upon Moses and Elijah at once, stinging repeatedly until both are bloating with the venom.

Gavriel instantly arrives to rebuke Apollyon. "You have violated the terms of your commission! Begone, back to the Abyss, the entire lot of you, in the name of Logos!"

But he is too late. The two prophets are old and weak. The scorpion venom is too much for them. All day they lie writhing in infinite pain, as the multitude jeers at them and rejoices over their death. At sunset they succumb to blissful unconsciousness. Their bodies are cruelly dragged outside the city gate and left beside the street that heads toward Damascus. They die there, at the very spot where their Lord was crucified 2000 years before. Everyone who goes by laughs them to scorn and spits upon them, then leaves to go home and celebrate with loud parties, feasting, and gift-giving. All the troubles of the last 3½ years are laid at the feet of these two who prophesied their judgments.

Gavriel next comes to rebuke Satan himself. "You got the Master's sanction to use the dragon on a technicality. You were supposed to be cast out of the heavenlies. Logos only permitted it because you cut a legal deal with the dragon, in exchange for services rendered. But your year is long past. You broke the terms of your agreement with the dragon. Your sanction from Logos is therefore withdrawn, He commands you to set the dragon free."

"No. You forget, dearest Gavriel, that I operate under different rules from you. It has always been that way, from the beginning of time. You have to keep your vows, your promises, your word. I don't. That is why in the end I win. Your Master is a fool for binding Himself to His Word. But I am free! Even your Master agreed that I am the liar and the father of lies. So I lied. I told the dragon I only needed to possess him for one year, but I lied. So live with it already."

"Must I inform Logos that you have violated His direct command? You know what that means…"

"You can't! I know the law! Logos responds with His help only if there is prayer, and I assure you, nobody on earth is praying for this dragon. People hate dragons. Always have. That's why I use him. And you can't battle me here, either, for you must kill your precious dragon first. So you see, you are totally defeated! Once again, I win!"

"You are mistaken. There is prayer for the dragon. Believing, continuing intercessory prayer."

"What? Impossible! You're lying. Who?"

"I thought we had agreement between the two of us that you are the liar. I only tell the truth. The one praying is his mate, whom you brought to life."

"What? Impossible! You're lying…"

"You already said that. I already answered it. With all your braggadocio about defeating Logos, you appear very silly arguing in circles like that. Now release the dragon without another word, or I shall inform Logos of your rebellion!" Gavriel will tolerate no more argument. Satan can see that. He is not as stupid as he appears to be in this little exchange. He flees to earth, now without a mount.

His sanity restored, the dragon thanks Gavriel. "You are welcome, dragon. Return to your mate and to the twins she bore you. They need their father."

"Twins? Oh my God! I'm the father of twins! Our race is saved! How can I ever thank you?"

"Give up your hatred of humans and your lust for their gold. You were created to help the humans, not kill them, remember? You were the wisest and best of all creatures, made to be the most helpful of all their animal friends."

"But they hated us first! They tried to kill us! They feared our great strength, our fiery breath…"

"I swear to you that all who hated you will soon perish from the earth. YHWH will cleanse the earth with fire and start over with a new heavens and a new earth. He wants you and your family in it, Mr. Dragon. Will you agree?"

The dragon proves wiser than the adversary who had possessed him. He bows his huge head. "I do agree. I will endeavor to get my mate to agree as well. We will hold the gold until the earth is cleansed, then I swear to contribute all of it to your Master's loved ones. But I have one small request. When He restores the earth, we dragons would appreciate it if He would make the air a little thicker and warmer. It is deucedly difficult to fly in this cold, thin air."

Gavriel laughs. "Of course, dear friend! Whatever our Master restores is always perfect!"

Satan needs a body. Cast out of the heavenlies, he can't do much without a speedy physical mount. He rages about the earth, furious at his loss of the dragon and searching for a replacement. *He doesn't have time for this.* Finally, he strikes a deal with a bitter old crow. *How humiliating!*

Chris and Anna get another letter from Israel. It will be their last. It is very brief and all in Hebrew. Their husbands have been in Israel for so long they've forgotten that their wives know only English. But Pastor Mike knows Hebrew, and is able to translate for them and for the church. He reads it to his congregation. It just says, "Victory for Israel – at great cost. Millions from all over the world came to aid Israel. Most are slain – I think all the saints. By the time you get this, we will be also. Those who lived joined the IDF. Hitler's troops are gone – don't know where. With the return of the ten lost tribes, Israel is finally prepared to meet her Messiah! Ephraim and Judah are reunited! Keep looking up! See you there! Love, Alan and Joseph."

Sharon Saxon never did have a problem with Blacks like her husband Steve in his younger years. When Sam and Suzy Salizar and the other Blacks from Pastor Mike's church had arrived, she had welcomed them with open arms. Now Suzy is one of her closest friends. Suzy even led them all in an ebullient ladies' choir. So it's not unusual for Sharon and her sisters to be sitting around Yolanda's table with Suzy and her Black 'sisters'. But today is different. Every one of them knows that her husband is dead.

It is a crushing grief, yet a comfort to bear one another's grief knowing that each one understands. It is especially tough for Sue and Samantha, so recently married to Ben and Dan. But perhaps it is toughest for Sharon, now with four little boys under the age of six. Her new baby was born yesterday. Another boy. She and Steve had agreed that if it was a boy, they would name him John, to complete their 'Gospels' of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

John's delivery had been difficult. Without Steve by her side, she hardly had the will to push. She had told Brother Philip that she didn't even want to deliver the new baby. (As the oldest patriarch, Brother Philip had not gone with the others to Israel. Someone needed to stay behind to shepherd the community.) Sharon had insisted that she just wanted to die and go be with Steve.

But Philip had wisely responded, "Sharon, remember King Hezekiah, when he was troubled by the Assyrian invasion? He said, 'This day is a day of distress, rebuke, and rejection, for children have come to birth but there is no strength to deliver.' Yet that is the time when God worked His greatest deliverance for Israel! So now is not the time to be discouraged at the difficulties. Now is the time to look to God for a miracle! He loves the little children!"

So John was born, with an inspiration of faith. "Just look at him!" Momma Yolanda gushes as her daughter sits there nursing him. "A perfect baby! Every perfect baby is God's vote that the universe should go on. We look at our world in all its terrible trouble 'n torment and think, 'How could I ever bring a baby into this?' But God just gives us a baby and says, 'Don't you worry about the world. I'll fix it!' Don't you see? He's giving us children, not for this evil age, but to fill His Kingdom in the age to come!"

Steve arrives in the Welcoming Park about the same time as Papa Gunter, Sam, and many others of their dear brothers from the Amish community. Of course they greet each other, but Steve has just got to scan down to see how the battle is going. Papa Gunter laughs, "Be anxious not, Steve. Vut vill be vill be. The end of it all ve know. Yust as Peter's prophecies vorned, so has happened it all."

"I'm not anxious," Steve insists. "I believe all those prophecies, too, or I wouldn't be here. I just want to see Hitler's battle-hardened troops turn and run from a bunch of defenseless people holding hands and singing. I found that one really hard to grasp."

"Ach du lieber! You haffen't been Amish fery long Steve. The Amish vay that has alvays been. Guns, violence – to vin the battle, not needed they are."

"That must be why you all so readily agreed to join me when I showed you Peter's prophecies… Look, guys! Look! They're running away, screaming, throwing down their guns, like frightened kittens! In madness, blindness. Just like the prophecy said!"

"Ach. Ya. But look at how many haff died. I thought they vould run before this. Nearly all our group haff died." Gunter is counting those already in the Welcoming Park.

"Papa, I understood Peter's prophecies to say that all the true saints who came to Israel would become martyrs. It's what I expected. Those left alive down there… look at them. They are from all the lost tribes of Israel, but they're not Christians. They've just come to rejoin their brothers so they can meet their Messiah together. We who already know Yashua have gone on ahead. Don't you remember the prophecy about the martyrs who refused to worship the beast or his image, and who never received his mark? [Rev 20:4] It says, 'They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.' That's us! That's why God gave us the privilege of being His martyrs."

"Ya, sure. But… only us men? Vut about the ladies? Momma? Sharon and the boys? Sue and Samantha…?" They shift their focus to look down on their wives.

"I don't know, Papa. We have to ask Yashua when He comes for us. I don't think He wants us to reign with Him a thousand years without our wives. The way I read the prophecy, our wives are sealed from the enemy and don't get martyred. Papa! Look! Another boy! He's beautiful! Baby John! O God, how I long to be with Sharon now!"

Suddenly Logos is there, welcoming, loving, healing, and restoring them to their physical resurrection bodies.

"Yes, Steve! Your longing is My longing, even from ages past. Now it is time. Time for fulfillment of every longing – healing from every sorrow – deliverance from every fear. Time for My Bride to be one. Why should your bride go through the pain of martyrdom? You died for her as I died for Mine. *Now I bring her to you, never to be parted again.*"

The rapture is impossible to describe, for it all happens in a moment, far shorter than I can tell it. I write linearly, dear Reader, sequentially. I must, for that is how you read. But the rapture happens all at once, in the blink of an eye. I've hinted to you before at Logos' ability to be many places at one time. For example, in the Welcoming Park He greets each one personally, in gracious warmth, spending time as if each one were the most precious person in the universe. Yet even when thousands arrive in the Park at once, as with the martyrs from the great tribulation, He is still there with each one as if he were the only one. At the same time He's in Paradise feasting with everyone in Hades from the ages past, in the Nursery ministering to each one who died in infancy, and… everywhere He's needed. He is unlimited, not bound to one time and place as we are. At the rapture, you must understand this, for now He is not just many places at once, He is everywhere all at once, so every eye sees Him, all at precisely the same time. As His time traveler, I have returned in time to be in several places at the same time, so I can understand… well, uh… barely.

With that in mind, I will proceed with our story. It is Tishri 1, 5 years since Dr. Relt signed the peace treaty with the Jews and 1 ½ years since he broke it. Alan Moses and Joseph Elijah prophesied for 3 ½ years. They were felled by the scorpio-locusts and dragged out of the city 3 ½ days ago. Parties have been going on all over Israel ever since, partly for their victory over Hitler and partly celebrating the demise of the two hated prophets, whom they blame for the deaths of so many of their compatriots. At the moment of which I speak a crowd of carousers gathers around their bodies, which look and smell rather gross. The news crews want to make one last story of it, shot live and broadcast worldwide. A few fools make speeches, which are so utterly inane I won't bother relating them. The ringmaster says, "We left them unburied to prove to you that they are really dead. Three days and nights have passed, so we can be certain they aren't coming back to life. Take a long, last look! They caused us so much gr…"

The sun has been struggling along trying to restart itself ever since the four supernovas hit it. Now it gives up and extinguishes completely. This time it's pretty clear that it's out for good. It remains hot, glowing an eerie red, like molten lava. The dim light that it casts on earth turns everything the sinister hue of blood.

Logos calls to the seventh herald angel. "The mystery of God is finished. My Bride is one. She has joined together in the physical realm – all twelve tribes of Israel. And she is joined together in My realm – the Gentile church adopted into Israel. Sound the last trumpet! I go to take My Bride!"

In bold finality, the **seventh** herald angel sounds his trumpet, a penetrating, triumphant sound.

Logos, with exquisite laughter and delight, sings out in an incredibly loud voice, "**COME UP HERE!**" His voice blends with the trumpet blast in perfect resonance.

The crowds gathered around the two dead bodies (TV cameramen included) are startled at the voice from heaven and horrified at the sudden blood-red darkness. But their eyeballs have not yet had time to shift away from those two gross, stinking, fly-covered, maggot-filled corpses. They see the two prophets spring up, suddenly full of Life.

Until this moment the sky has been cloudless. Now a cloud instantly covers the earth. It is not a normal cloud, for it casts no shadows. Rather, it is an intensely alive cloud, radiating with a gold-white brilliance coming from within. The sun's sinister red light is blocked by the cloud, but it is no longer needed, for the radiance from the cloud is brighter and more beautiful than the sun ever was. It is not the harsh light of midday, but rather the soft, gently caressing golden glow of dawn. Now there is no night, anywhere on earth. Every dark place, every shadow, even basements or caves, are touched by this new 'dawning'.

Logos shouts out to the great multitude in heaven, "Brothers! Sisters! Come! Be witnesses at My wedding!"

Logos calls sweetly to His Bride: those still alive, those still in Hades (who hadn't risen with the multitude), those under the Mercy Seat (where He has been comforting the martyred souls of His Bride ever since the fifth seal), and those recently slain who are still in the Welcoming Park. "I come for you, Oh My Beloved! Now is the time for the fulfillment of all that I promised – the redemption of your bodies, and your restoration to the surpassing glory of the children of God! You who have died, rejoin your physical bodies which I have called up from their graves. Father grants that you all be made whole. Come to Me!"

Logos appears, descending from the cloud, just as He appeared ascending up into the cloud 2000 years before. Except He does not descend into one place as when He ascended from Mount Olivet. No. He descends every place at once. Everyone on earth hears the trumpet and the loud call from heaven. Everyone on earth looks up to see Him come out of the cloud. Everyone wants to respond to the call. However – remember this is all the same moment – most cannot go! When they see Moses and Elijah ascend into the air toward their Savior, those enjoying that silly TV broadcast are horrified. They suddenly realize to their dismay that the call was not for them. *They are left behind!*

Not only Moses and Elijah, but all who had been slain by Hitler's men come back to life, including Steve Saxon, Sam Salizar, and Gunter Yoder. Their souls, which had been talking excitedly in the Welcoming Park with Logos, suddenly rejoin their bodies where they had fallen under Hitler's hail of gunfire. Their bloody, mangled flesh is instantly whole and very much alive. They too rise, right after Moses and Elijah, arms outstretched to Logos. And right behind the martyrs, the saints who had survived the great tribulation also arise to their Savior. This includes the wives and children of the martyrs. Their earthly bodies are all transformed into resurrection bodies.

In an amazing twist of time and space, Sharon Saxon and her four babies come up right behind Steve, at the same moment as Steve reaches Logos under the cloud. Even in the multitude, Sharon sees only Steve and Logos.

Logos has just assured Steve at the Welcoming Park, "Now I bring Sharon to you, never to be parted again." With a heart full of love and worship, Steve begins a bow to thank Him for the promise, but Logos laughingly points down, as if to send him to earth for something he forgot. Steve looks down, wondering, *what could possibly be more important than falling at his Savior's feet in worship?* But Steve is no longer in the Welcoming Park. He is in his restored body, rising to meet Logos in the air. As he looks down, he sees Sharon and their four children below him! Sharon's long hair streams out behind her. Her arms reach up toward him, or toward Logos, Steve can't be sure.

When Sharon catches sight of Steve, her eyes grow even bigger, her smile wider, and he knows. In a thrill that just cannot be described, she flies into his arms. He spins her around in a wild, dancing hug, thinking that he really should stop to thank Logos but wanting this hug to never end. They spin faster and faster as Steve draws her body close to his, just like a pair of professional skaters spinning on the ice. There is no friction on their feet; no dizziness; nothing to slow them down. In a whirling blur, their two bodies become one. (Their four babies, though separate, still somehow join them in this joyous dance.)

Steve is thinking Sharon's thoughts. Sharon is thinking Steve's thoughts. Steve suddenly knows what it's like to be a woman, and Sharon knows what it's like to be a man. She stops spinning, in awesome awareness that the level of communication she has achieved with her husband is far deeper than the closest intimacy possible on earth. This is what marriage is really all about. This is how people were created to live. What joy! What incredible satisfaction! What perfect peace that the love and trust they share can never diminish and will never be broken! Sharon-Steve gathers her joyful, dancing babies into her arms. Finally she is complete, whole! The urge to kneel at Logos' feet and worship overwhelms their love and joy for each other.

But Logos begins to laugh! Rip-roaring, hearty guffaws! Whether He laughs at her, or for her, or at something else unrelated to her, Sharon-Steve does not know. She would be content to kneel there forever – or until Logos directs her otherwise. She knows He is the reason she has found such love and wholeness. She owes her life and joy to Him. For the first time, Sharon-Steve understands the term 'rapture', face to face with her Lord. *Whatever it may cost, to arrive here at this moment is more than worth the price.*

That glorious golden-white cloud she saw when arising to meet her Lord has closed in upon them. The things of earth are cut off. The cloud smells like, well, like eternity! In reverential awe, Sharon-Steve becomes aware of the eternal Father's presence. Yet that laughter still goes on.

In a voice that intimates the power of a kazillion suns, yet with the tenderness of a teddy bear, the eternal Father speaks. "My beloved Son! You have overcome! By Your perfect, everlasting, infinite love, You have triumphed over all! You have fairly won Your Bride back to You, and have brought her to the perfection worthy of You. I am very pleased!" Logos' laughter continues louder than ever.

In the same breath, the eternal Father says "Sharon-Steve! You have overcome! By your faith and obedience you have triumphed over all! You have washed your robe in the blood of the Lamb of God, and have kept yourself pure unto Him. I hereby declare before the universe that you are a worthy Bride for My Son!"

Then and there, amazingly, the eternal Father's hands extend from the shining cloud. He bears a single golden ring. His right hand takes the hand of The One Who Laughs. His left hand takes the hand of Sharon-Steve. He puts her hand in His, and slips the ring, one ring mind you, on the ring fingers of both Sharon-Steve and Logos, thus joining them in the mystical/spiritual union typified by marriage. As He joins them, He exultantly pronounces, "Hear O universe! Hear O ye heavens above, and ye earth below, and ye hells beneath the earth! From this day forth and forever, Logos My beloved Son is joined in the perfect union of holy matrimony with Sharon-Steve Saxon, a daughter of Adam. Together they shall rule the universe throughout all the ages, until My Plan of the Ages is fulfilled. And if any man or woman, angel or demon ever again doubts that My ways are righteous, that My wisdom is best, that My plan is perfect, look at their joy! Behold their love! See their perfection of beauty and glory! Doubt no more! The Great Controversy is forever settled!"

That laughter has grown increasingly compelling all through the Father's presentation speech. But suddenly Sharon-Steve understands. Logos laughs not at her or for her or at anything unrelated to her. He laughs in the sheer overwhelming joy of His union with His beloved Bride. So she joins in His laughter and turns to face Him. Her four boys are still in her arms. But that doesn't seem to impede her as she steps into His embrace and lifts her face to His for their first kiss. The music swells. The Dance begins.

The glory cloud concealing their private, intimate moment lifts. Or perhaps they just reach through above it. For they see not earth below, but myriads of glorious angels above and the multitude of witnesses all around, all shouting their praises in a glorious blend of worship surpassing by far anything in the history of the universe. The multitude sees them and bows low, singing:

"All praise to YHWH the eternal Father! All praise to Logos His eternal Word! All praise to His eternal Spirit, holy, holy, holy beyond measure. Now the kingdoms of this world have become the Kingdom of YHWH and of His Son our Lord Yashua haMashiach in union with His Bride. He reigns forever and ever to the ends of the ages!"

Now the 24 elders sitting on thrones around the throne of God also fall on their faces, worshiping and shouting, "We give thanks unto You O Lord God the Almighty, who is and who was and who is to come, for by Your great power You have begun to reign. Now is come the time for Your wrath to fall on the nations who raged against You, and the time for judgment to consume the peoples who are spiritually dead. Now is the time for the saints who fear Your name, Your prophets, ministers, and bondservants both small and great, to receive their rewards, and to be vindicated as the children of the eternal Father. And now it is finally time to destroy those who destroy the earth."

At the same time – remember this all happens at the same time – a colossal earthquake shakes the entire globe. This earthquake is not caused by a slipping fault line, a passing planet, or a shock wave from space. It is caused by the fierce wrath of almighty God against all the religious institutions men have established in opposition to His Lordship. A tenth of Jerusalem falls in the massive quake. Though many buildings are unharmed, every religious building crumbles, including the Dome of the Rock and the newly rebuilt temple of Solomon on top of Mount Moriah. Those who had made their living from religion, or who had fled to the venerable old cathedrals for refuge, are slain in their collapse – seven thousand in Jerusalem alone. Likewise all around the globe, millions die in the falling rubble of their proud religions. Truly, "**Fallen, Fallen is Babylon the Great**," along with every man-made church, cathedral, temple, synagogue, mosque, and shrine.

Along with the earthquake comes an incredible world-wide storm, with thunder, lightning, and hail mixed with fire. Now for the first time in history, not a person on earth can claim this is 'just a natural catastrophe'. Each one, even the blind and the deaf, saw the sun extinguished, heard the mighty trumpet call, heard the great shouts from heaven, saw the glorious golden-white cloud cover the earth, saw the King of kings descend, and saw the saints arise to join their Lord and Savior. Not a person can deny it. No longer can they fool themselves with the lies that God does not exist, that all they heard of Him all their lives are myths and fables, or that they evolved from pond scum and made of themselves someone great. All the lies are blown away. Those not slain in the earthquake or the storm fall on their faces terrified and give glory to the God of heaven.

David and Danelle Davison, along with all the rest in their rocky hideaway at Petra, are on their knees and faces crying out in fear and anguish. That they had been warned is no consolation. Now they recognize their Messiah, Yashua, the very one their forefathers had hauled before Pilate to have crucified. He is come for His saints and they are left behind! Similarly those in Israel, including the newly received immigrants of the ten lost tribes, fall to the ground weeping, writhing in agony, mourning as if their only son had died. (Zech 12:10) Seeing the Truth, they know their lives are vanity, striving after the wind.

Logos dances about the universe with His Bride. The heavenlies have seen many great dances, for Logos loves to dance. Indeed, He invented the dance as an expression of His irrepressible joy. But no other dance in history can compare with this Dance. Words fail me. If you take the finest dance since time began and multiply by 720,000, you might approach the glory and beauty of this Dance.

Why 720,000? Because Logos dances with Sharon-Steve as if she were the only member of His Bride, *yet it is clear that she is not.* She dances with her Beloved in full knowledge that He is much bigger than she – she is but one person; her Husband fills the universe. As she dances, Sharon-Steve sees Yolanda-Gunter, Mary-Mike, and Suzy-Sam, all with their children. Anna-Alan and Chris-Joseph also dance alongside, and many others. Each one has a story to tell just like Sharon-Steve, as each one was joined by the eternal Father in holy matrimony with their Savior at the very same instant. It is hard for us mortals to wrap our minds around it, I know, dear Reader. But trust me, Logos is everywhere at the same time (if this rapturous moment can even be called 'time') yet personally alone with each one as if she were the only one in the universe.

And the eternal Father has worked the greatest miracle of all, greater even than the incarnation of the eternal Word (Logos) into human flesh. For now, human flesh, the 1,440,000 men and women making 720,000 husband / wife pairs, have been purified through tribulation and martyrdom, joined together with their spouses (for every one now has one true spouse), and then welded together into one glorious Bride – a Bride worthy of God Himself in the Person of His Son Logos / Yashua haMashiach.

Sharon-Steve is aware of the others also dancing with her Lord and Savior, but it is not like she can read her sisters' minds or anything. They are still all individuals. But she can sense her Lover's mind. Knowing that He can read each of their minds is enough for her. They are one. And in this intricate and glorious Dance involving so many individuals (and their babies) dancing with the same Lord at the same time, there is not a misstep or a missed beat.

But as you can guess, dear Reader, as heaven's historian and being insatiably curious, I have got to count to see if they're all here. It takes a while, but here in the heavenlies time seems to have little meaning. I see that every member of the Bride had her faith purified on earth through great tribulation, even martyrdom. I also discover that the veil has been removed. The name of each individual is now revealed. The first resurrection is complete. The rest of the dead will not be raised until after the Millennium.

I notice that literal sons of Israel are a minority – the majority are adopted from other nationalities. *Abraham is indeed the father of many nations!* I marvel at the now unveiled 'mystery of God', that 'partial hardening' of Israel (Rom 11:25 ff) which has brought so many others into Messiah's Bride! Logos turned sin's tragedy into triumph!

I first count the 144,000 of Israel, the literal sons of Abraham, 12,000 from each literal tribe – those purchased as **firstfruits** to God and to the Lamb (Rev 14:1). These are the great saints and patriarchs of ages past, each in oneness with his God-ordained wife, who lived and died by faith in the promises of God, though never fully receiving them on earth. Like Sarah-Abraham of old, they looked for a better country – that Holy City whose builder and maker is God. I note that those with multiple wives have only one wife now. Jacob is one with Leah, and King David with Michal, for example. Bathsheba is there, too, but only as the wife of faithful Uriah, not of David. Each who had no spouse now seems to have one, I think. Or perhaps they are completed by Logos Himself. Anyway, they are whole and satisfied.

I then count another 144,000 of Israel, 12,000 from each literal tribe (some mixed / half-breeds), who became believers in Christ in the end times. These mostly became **martyrs** (or martyrs' wives) during the great tribulation. They obeyed Peter's prophecies, went to Israel to aid her in her time of great peril, and got mowed down by Hitler's army. They include Sharon-Steve Saxon and her Amish brothers and sisters, Anna-Alan Benson, Chris-Joseph Johnson, their supporters such as old Brother Philip and Mary-Mike Mason, and many martyred Jewish Christians. Their young children are as one with their parents.

Next I count 432,000 of many Gentile nations, who were Israelites only by adoption. In what was a marvelous mystery, God employed the hardness of Israel's heart and turned it into a blessing. These **Gentiles** are in three groups of 144,000 each. The first group **died** in the service of Christ in ages past (many during the Church Age, plus some, like Pharaoh Mentuhotep II at the time of Abram, who found faith in prior ages through the testimony of the patriarchs). They had heard the gospel and had believed it and remained faithful unto death. Suddenly I see myself in this group, unified and glorified with my lovely wife Darla! I shouldn't be startled. I already know I'm a member of the Bride. But we look so beautiful! It's one of those paradoxes of time travel that I can see myself as I will become. I'm but a lowly servant of Christ, whom He elevated to His Bride. How humbled, yet how pleased I am! I am Adam's first son, and not even in the chosen line of Seth. I was the first murderer, the chief of sinners. But by the grace of Logos (and Darla's prayers) I found true repentance, and gave my life gladly into His service. I don't know why Logos chose me as heaven's historian, unless it's my curiosity. Or it may be because of Darla, who remained faithful and true to Logos and to me during my murderous rebellious years.

The second category of Gentiles I count is the 144,000 raptured saints, Christians who **remained alive** through the great tribulation because they had been protected in 'Green Pastures' by the seal of God. An amazing number of these came from the efforts of Pastor Mike Mason – ones he discipled in the Southern Baptist church of Newark and the 33 affiliate churches he helped awaken near the end.

The final category of Gentiles I count is 144,000 from all the ages who were not Christians. They had died with no measure of faith in YHWH or Logos, in ignorance of the gospel, in total pagan darkness with no missionary voice to bring the light. Yet Logos had seen their hatred of evil, their longing for something better, and their service to His loved ones. He counted it as if they were serving Him. Even in their minuscule faith He gave them trials and tribulation to purify what little they had. To you and me it appeared that they had no chance. But Logos had brought them to Hades and revealed Himself to them, carefully culling out all the goats (who had served only self} from His **sheep**. Their tender hearts were eager to believe and receive Him, recognizing Him as the One for whom they had always longed. Thus, like me, they had served Him in Hades by serving His servants there. Now the least of all has become the greatest – part of the Bride, ready to rule with her Lord.

I finish my tally, make out my report, and present it to Logos. Silly me. I should have known! He laughs heartily and gives it back to me, saying, "Cain, how I love you! Now that We are one, We all know who We are. We don't need your count. You'll understand when you reach this time for real. Just put it in your story. It will be a valuable service to your dear Readers as they approach this time."

So I insert it just as you see above, and go on with my writing. Let's see. Where am I? Oh yes, the Rapture, the Wedding, and the Dance. It all seems to come on the same day, though I learn later that the Dance spanned ten days, from Tishri 1 - 10. But as I said, time in the heavenlies flows differently from time on Earth. Everything is always in the present. It is as if the Dance is never really over, and as if the Bride has always been with her Lord. Now we realize the true fulfillment of the Feast of Trumpets (the call for the Bride to come to her wedding) and the ten Days of Awe (no longer in fear of judgment but dancing in awe that we have been judged – and exonerated!).

At any rate, I also look down. Remember, all the things in this section transpire at the same time. While we rejoice with Logos on our wedding day, the **third woe** overtakes the earth. And it is not just the extinguished sun, nor the colossal earthquake, nor the horrific lightning storm, nor the fiery hail. No, it is far more than that. It is one thing to reject the truth when you are barricaded behind your wall of lies, rationalizations, and justifications. But it is quite another to have every lie blasted away and to stare face to face with the unadorned, unabridged Truth, knowing full well that you rejected Him and it is now too late. This is the situation facing those still on the dying earth. There is no more doubt. The veil is removed; every eye sees clearly; every heart understands. Truth has grabbed them and will not let them go. That is the third woe. They put it off all their lives – waited too long. Now at that final trumpet call, their wasted existence lies in shambles at their feet. All that matters anymore is, what will they do about this One who has come for His own and left them behind?

CHAPTER 62 – THE WRATH OF GOD

As you know by now, dear Reader, I love stories with happy endings. But now the wrath of God falls. There does not appear to be any possibility for a happy ending to those left alive on earth after the last trumpet. God exists. He is who He said He was and He did what He said He would do. Seeing His wrath still falling all around them, they are left with no hope. Their earth is a wreck. Their sun is dead. They have nothing but the words of the prophets and the call of the seventh trumpet ringing hollowly in their ears. Can you imagine their misery – the utter horror of being lost without hope in a dying world, knowing full well that it was your own pigheaded, rebellious, and self-centered arrogance that has just cost you your everlasting destiny?

What would you do in such a situation? Would you go to a church cathedral or synagogue to pray? You can't. Every religious edifice was destroyed in the earthquake. Would you visit some pastor, priest, or rabbi to make your confession? Nope. The true ones have all gone up with their Lord and you know it. Any who remain are impostors in the same sinking ship as you. So would you kneel and cry out to God in repentance, begging for a second chance? Good luck with that, too. *God is not here – not anymore. He has taken His own and He is gone, gone, gone.*

His blessings, which you just took for granted, always covered the earth – the sun, wind, and rain falling on the just and the unjust alike; the beauty of His world; the peace of the cosmos in harmony with His Law; the joy of family, friends, fellowship; the delight of your ambitions, making plans, preparing for your future; the strength and abilities He gave you to work towards a better world – it's all gone, shredded, torn to tatters at your feet. God does keep His promises. But you rejected Him. Now it is too late.

Wailing, mourning in deepest anguish, arises from every throat. David and Danelle are no exception. But they have about 14,400 now who are looking to them to lead, whom they have been trying to teach about Yashua the Christian God as He asked them to do. *Yashua promised to turn their mourning into laughter and their sorrow into song! But now He has come and gone! What went wrong?*

They read and reread the book of Revelation, but now it all seems dark and confusing. In it they spot that third angel's warning: "If anyone worships the beast or his image and receives his mark… he also will drink the wine of the wrath of God mixed in full strength…" *Well, they didn't take the mark. But did they ever worship Hitler or his statue that came to life? Dr. Relt was David's best friend! He supported him so strongly that he would do anything for him. Is that the same as worship? Are they forever lost? It isn't fair! They didn't know! Dr. Relt had them all fooled!* In the agony of their souls they wrestle back and forth, growing more confused and desperate by the hour. Then as they lie on their faces in the dirt, Danelle suddenly pokes up her tear-streaked face to say, "Why don't we pray to Yashua?"

"What good will that do?! He's gone!" David's words come out more harshly than he intended.

Anna-Alan Benson has an anxious thought. The Dance screeches to a halt. Logos holds her close and kisses her tenderly as He reflects her anxious thought to the rest of His Bride. *Will he make the right choice? He had trouble making the right choice even when I was there to coach him! And now he has no one!* Chris-Joseph Johnson responds, "May I go to him, Lord? Counsel him? He listens to me. He doesn't understand the Scriptures. I'll show him the way."

"No, My love. This is his hour of testing. No one, not you, nor Me, nor angels, nor devils may go to him in his hour of testing. He has My seal. We must trust Father's Plan. He will make the right choice."

"But if he does not, all Israel will be lost!"

Logos holds her closer and gently caresses her hair. "My eternal Word prophesies that all Israel will be saved. Father knows. He sent the Word. And now David and Danelle have the Word. See? Look how diligently they search through it! Has My Word ever failed to give insight to those who diligently search? My Spirit is available to help them understand if they will only ask. And besides, they now have 3500 years of practice in hearing My Word and reaping the consequences, whether good or bad, from how well they heed it. Intercede with Me for them!"

There is a brief silence as David and Danelle continue to weep with eyes that have run dry of tears. Danelle starts first. "Lord Yashua, we're s-s-sorry that we missed You. Please, Lord Yashua, show us where we w-went wrong."

Surprisingly, after a couple of good deep breaths, David begins to calm down. "I'm sorry, too. Lord YHWH, Lord Yashua, please forgive us. We're just ignorant fools. Grant us wisdom. Maybe we worshiped that beast, but we didn't mean to. We didn't take his mark. We tried to help when he went to slaughter the Christians. That ought to count for something! And we tried to teach these people about You. So are we too late? Is there nothing left for us? What do I tell these people, these sons of Israel, these Children of the Promise? We're Jews! Were we supposed to deny our own Jewish heritage t-t-to… to become *Christians?*"

He sounds a little bitter to Danelle. "David! Don't talk like that! YHWH hears. He always hears! He knows who we are. We are the Apple of His Eye. We are His Segula ['special treasure']. 'Can a woman forget her nursing child, and have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even she may forget, but I will not forget you. I have engraved you on the palm of My hand. For a brief moment I forsook you, but with great compassion I will gather you. In an outburst of anger I hid My face from you for a moment, but with everlasting lovingkindness I will have compassion on you, says YHWH your redeemer.' David, when He hides His face, when all around us looks darkest, that is when we most need to trust Torah!"

"Trust Torah?! This isn't Torah!" David holds up the Bible that Alan and Joseph had given him. "This is the Christian's Bible! I don't know if I can…" He was going to say, "…believe it." but stopped short. The prophecies in the Revelation, though confusing, seem to have been pretty accurate so far. Rather amazingly accurate, in fact.

Danelle takes his pause as an opportunity to jump in with both feet. She knows her Torah! "'Thus says YHWH Adonai: "Behold I will take the sons of Israel from among the nations where they have gone, and I will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land; and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king will be king for all of them; and they will no longer be two nations, and they will no longer be divided into two kingdoms. And they will no longer defile themselves with their idols, or with their detestable things, or with their transgressions; but I will deliver them from all their dwelling places in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them. They will be My people, and I will be their God. *And My servant David will be king over them,* and they will all have one shepherd. Then they will walk in My ordinances and hear and obey My statutes. And they shall live on the land that I gave to Jacob My servant, in which your fathers lived. *They will live on it, they and their sons and their sons' sons forever. Thus David My servant will be their prince forever.* I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant with them. I will give to them and multiply them abundantly, and I will set My sanctuary in their midst forever. My dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be My people. The nations will know that I am YHWH who sanctifies Israel, when they see that My temple is in their midst forever."' (Ezek 37:21-28)

"I think maybe you are the David in the prophecy! Moses and Elijah sure seemed to think so. Maybe God took the Christians to heaven without us, because He wants us to live in the Beautiful Land. You can restore the temple service, David! You can lead His people. They need you!"

"Me? The David of the prophecy?" He shakes his head, incredulous. "The Beautiful Land has now become cursed. Just look around, Danelle. How much longer is this planet going to be habitable, with a dead sun?" David pauses, remembering the promise God gave to King Solomon after his dedication of the temple. "I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for Myself as a house of sacrifice. If I shut up the heavens so there is no rain, or if I command the locust to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among My people, and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin, and will heal their land. Now My eyes shall be open and My ears attentive to the prayer offered *in this place.* For now I have chosen and consecrated this temple, that My name may be there forever. My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually." (2 Chron 7:12-16)

"Maybe you're right, Danelle. We should return to the temple, cleanse it, then pray to YHWH there. He promised to dwell there forever. If we turn from our wicked ways and seek His face from there, He promised to hear from heaven and heal our land."

While David was thinking, Danelle has been flipping through the Christian Bible. She stumbles upon the book of Romans, and her eye catches, "…there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him, for whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." (10:12)

"David! Look! This says the Christian God is the same Lord as YHWH!" She shows him the passage and they read it together, then continue on down into chapter 11, which starts right out saying, "God has not rejected His people, has He?! May it never be!" They like the part telling about Elijah and the prophets of Baal – that they can understand. Then it gets really interesting! "…a remnant according to God's gracious choice… only those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened… God gave them a spirit of stupor, eyes to see not, ears to hear not, down to this very day… they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make them jealous… for if their rejection becomes the reconciliation of the nations, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?! … God is able to graft them back in again… a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in, and thus all Israel will be saved… for the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable!"

They are almost panting when they finish the passage. They go back and read it again. Now it is all beginning to make sense. "Danelle, when God took away the Christians I think that was just the 'fullness of the Gentiles'. After that, it says all Israel will be saved! It's just like Elijah said in his last speech before he died. We've got to just believe it, and obey His commands. If we go back and cleanse the temple and pray to Him from there. He'll hear us and heal our land. We've got to believe it. He created the world in the first place. He can heal it now!" Danelle is right with him as he concludes positively. "We've been looking only at the physical calamities. We've got to keep our focus on YHWH's promises. Uh… *on Yashua's promises!"*

"You see!" Logos beams. "He took the Word and just believed it. He passed the test! Even in the darkest hour mankind has ever known, he still puts his faith in the Word! Father's Plan of the Ages is fulfilled!" The Dance resumes, in glorious ecstasy, for the Bride knows full well that victory is attained by faith in the eternal Word of God.

David gathers his refugees. "We've hidden away long enough. Now the Beautiful Land needs our help. Gather all your stuff. Get your weapons. Tomorrow we head back to reclaim Israel, to help the survivors rebuild, to cleanse the temple and restore the pure worship of YHWH!"

When the Dance is over (although this Dance is never really over) the King and His Bride come to the temple of God in heaven, and sit down on the throne. Multitudes of Logos' bondservants from all the past ages (whom He now calls His brothers) surround them. For five days nothing but purest praises pour forth from a zingtillion throats as they finally are able to release the love and gratefulness that has been pent up inside. Myriads of angels join them, all bowed in worship and adoration. Their combined laughter fills the universe with inexpressible joy. They are celebrating the wedding of their Lord and His Bride. They extend clear across the sea of glass, shouting, singing, clapping, playing musical instruments, leaping for joy. They sing the songs of Moses and of the Lamb. "Great and marvelous are Thy works, O Lord God the Almighty! Righteous and true are all Thy ways Thou King of saints! Who will not fear, O Lord, and magnify Thy name? Thou alone art holy! All nations will surely come and worship before Thee, for Thy righteous acts have been revealed! Hallelujah! For the Lord God Almighty reigns! Let us rejoice and be glad, and give glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His Bride is worthy of Him!"

With His Bride cuddled under His arm, the King laughs for pure joy. Finally He calls out in response to their songs, "Blessed indeed are you who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb! Now, let the wedding feast begin!" For the next seven days all else is forgotten, as the grandest celebration in history unfolds.

On the eighth day, Logos nudges His Bride up to stand next to His throne. "Let all the universe keep silence, as My Bride now stands to take her place beside Me as My Queen, for she is now granted authority with Me over small and great, to rule with Me in My Kingdom forever! Hear her, all you angels and peoples and souls and spirits of mankind; hear her all you vile spirits and demons of hell. Every created thing, rejoice with Me! For she has made herself worthy! She has washed herself in the blood of the Lamb and is clothed in the righteous acts of the saints."

She rests her arm lightly around His shoulders. He smiles encouragingly up at her, inviting her to address the multitudes. She pulls her gaze away from His smiling face to focus on the adoring crowd. Please bear in mind, dear Reader – this is a many-membered Bride. Sharon-Steve is a bit hesitant; she never was very good at speaking in front of crowds, but here her natural humility gives more glory to the King. Anna-Alan is delighted; Alan's professorial instincts are roused. Chris-Joseph is eager; Joseph loves to preach. Mary-Mike has much experience in counseling and discipling. Suzy-Sam understands the rejection and prejudice they have suffered through. And so it goes throughout the 1,440,000 members, 720,000 pairs, of the Bride; every member has something special to add, so overall, the Bride is worthy indeed to be the wife of the King of kings. A holy hush settles over the multitudes as, with every member giving input, she begins to speak.

The Bride stands tall, now every inch the Queen. "My King, my Husband, has truly won me with His goodness, faithfulness, kindness, and awesome self-sacrificing love. Can there be any doubt that His ways are best? I declare that Satan's ways of self-serving pride, of lies and deceit, of force and fear of torment, are banished from the Kingdom and cast into the pit. The Great Controversy is settled. Satan is defeated along with everyone who chose his ways. Therefore, in righteous justice and in perfect love, let the natural consequences of their evil deeds fall upon them until the wrath of God is finished. *Give the seven herald angels the seven bowls of the wrath of God!"*

One of the four unique angels quickly obeys, and the seven herald angels each receives a bowl. "Now go," the Bride continues. "Pour them out upon the earth, until every tare, every weed in our Father's garden is taken out to be burned. Then the wheat in our Father's fields shall finally be able to flourish and bear a bountiful harvest for my Husband's Kingdom. And Michael, you ministering archangel over my brother Israel…" Michael comes and kneels at the Bride's feet. "Your ministry is now restored. Go back to earth. I grant my brother two years to repent. Cover Israel from the wrath of God. Protect Israel from the backlash as Satan thrashes about in fury, knowing his time is short. For even as every saint has now found salvation in the Lamb of God, so also **all Israel shall be saved**."

The universe is stunned. The Bride's words are filled with authority and power, spoken with ultimate finality that brooks no argument. They demand instant obedience as if they are the very words of God Himself. The heavenly temple doors are flung wide. The seven herald angels stride forth, carrying the seven bowls of the wrath of God, and leaving behind them a trail of fire and smoke which fills the temple. The universe keeps silence in holy awe as the seven bowls of wrath are poured out.

When Sol was nearly extinguished, everyone was sure they would die of cold as Earth slowly froze over. They almost did. But when the four monster asteroids had impacted Earth, its orbit had shifted. Earth had lost kinetic energy and gained mass by the impacts, causing it to spiral closer to Sol. Thus at the Rapture when Sol was totally extinguished, the ice was already mostly melted and Earth had thawed out. Now Earth has found a new stable orbit at 77.5 million miles, halfway to the orbit of Venus. Though extinguished, Sol is still giving off radiant heat in red and infrared frequencies. And the moon is closer to Earth and faster, causing gravitational stresses which also warm the earth. The net result is, though Sol is much colder, the Earth is actually hotter. No ice remains anywhere on the planet. Both air pressure and atmospheric moisture have increased, due to the greenhouse effect. Thank God for that! Tides get pretty high, but sea levels have decreased enough so they don't inundate the land. There is no wind at all, so wave action is minimal. The oceans are getting saltier. Rain and fresh water are scarce.

The careful balance of life on planet Earth dramatically shifts. Heat-loving vermin which had struggled before now flourish, becoming loathsome, malignant red sores on men and beasts. Vermin in the hot salty waters now bloom in abundance ('red tide'), poisoning the seas until all therein that had the breath of life now die. Vermin in the rivers and springs of waters also flourish in the heat, so they also turn a bloody red and become toxic.

The angel in charge of the waters acknowledges, "Righteous are You, O Holy One of YHWH, who judges the Earth's inhabitants in this way. For they poured out the blood of Your saints and prophets, therefore You give them blood to drink!" The echo comes back from the altar, "Yes O Lord God Almighty! Righteous and true are Your judgments upon the earth!"

The darkened earth continues getting hotter in its close orbit. It becomes unbearable, especially to those who were so sure they would die of cold with the extinguishing of Sol. Average earth temperatures climb up over 100° F, with no relief day or night because of the thick moisture canopy overhead. The only ones happy about this are the dragons. They take to the air, praising God for answering their request for warmer, thicker air. But the people of earth curse and blaspheme God for the heat and plagues, and will not repent of their evil deeds. So the herald angels continue pouring from the bowls of God's wrath.

Though he fled from Israel in defeat, Hitler has now consolidated his power at Baghdad. The major Muslim centers of power were all nuked, so Hitler now has control of all the oil in the Middle East. He always was a good leader of men, inspiring them with his fiery oratory and glib silver tongue. He still has over 200 million men in his army from many eastern nations, congregated at Babylon, fifty miles south of Baghdad.

Dr. Relt's motto was, "Never let a good crisis go to waste." Now, in the worst crisis known to man, Hitler has plans to use it to accomplish his goal to rule the world. His dark kingdom doesn't need the light of the sun. He's got the power of the sun in his oil fields. So they lost to tiny Israel. Who cares? He's got the rest of the world in his back pocket. Forget Israel for now. They are nearly defenseless, and just as ravaged as anyone else. Hitler decides to build a new city as his power base to recover his strength before trying to attack Israel again.

So now Hitler mobilizes his entire two hundred million man army to the task of building what must become the greatest city the world has ever known. He calls it Babylon, since it begins at the site of the ancient Babylon of King Nebuchadnezzar. But while the old city of Babylon only covered about fifteen square miles, Hitler's city will cover 666 square miles, four miles wide and 166.5 miles long, all the way down the Euphrates to its seaport in the Persian Gulf. He sends his oil all over the world for the world's energy needs, repaid with materials for his wondrous city.

Wormwood comes to Hitler, hoping to get a little appreciation for his success in finally getting rid of the two crazy prophets, though it cost him all the scorpio-locusts and their associated demons from the Dungeon. Hitler is rather unsympathetic. "Yeah, you finally got rid of them, but not until Israel had gotten so many reinforcements from all around the world that I could not overcome them. I thought you said you were powerful? You told me that your master is the most powerful god in the world. Where is that old dragon, anyway? I want to give him a piece of my mind. I think he's a fraud! An <expletive deleted> two-bit sissy who looks and sounds so fierce, but turns tail and runs from the battle! If he were really so powerful I would have beaten Israel. I had all the men, the weapons, the right strategy. But instead of you and your demons putting the fear of Lucifer into our enemy, those <expletives deleted> Jews put the fear of their God into my armies! So go tell your <multiple expletives deleted> dragon to put that in his pipe and smoke it!" (He actually raged on like that for a good bit longer – Hitler knows how to use words like a mighty warrior wields his sword – but I couldn't handle his vile language and shortened it.)

Wormwood glances at the old crow perched on the windowsill. "You tell him. He's right there."

Hitler, for the first time in his life, is speechless. He splutters a bit and points to the old crow, but when he opens his mouth, nothing comes out. Finally Satan, not wanting to lose face, explains. "Hey, I'm a being of spirit. I can possess any creature I want. Before, I needed the dragon. Now I need this crow. So live with it. And as to your loss in Israel, the way I heard it, it was your own men who turned tail and ran like yellow-bellied lizards. The only reason I wasn't there was I had already left my dragon, but was still searching for just the right crow. So next time you want to start a war, give me a little advance notice."

Now Hitler has found his voice. "You pitiful, pathetic, pipsqueak! You sorry, insignificant, son of a sapsucker! Get out of my presence! You think you're going to inspire confidence in my men with an old crow?" He emphasizes his words by throwing his stapler at the crow, who dodges with frantically flapping feathers. "And don't come back until you get your <six expletives deleted> dragon back!"

Thoroughly humiliated, Satan flies his crow back to look for the dragons. They are not in their den. He spots them soaring majestically to great heights, exulting in the warmer, thicker, wetter air. Again they are the masters of the sky. The chagrined crow cannot hope to catch them. He retires to their den to wait.

It's a long wait. The dragons are again strong and free. Satan's only consolation is that Hitler and Wormwood now seem to be doing well building the city without him. They'll get the Jews as soon as they regain their strength. By then he'll have his dragon back. This time Michael is not here to challenge his right to possess it as long as he wants.

Finally the dragons return. They eat their dinner and put the twins to sleep for the night, then settle in for some quality cuddling. It's a good life.

Still hidden in the shadows, the crow speaks up. "My friend! It seems we have some unfinished business, do we not? I gave you your mate and restored your strength, but I don't recall your twins being part of our bargain. However, I am willing to overlook it and allow them to go free, in exchange for the use of your body for one more year."

"What do you mean, let them go free? They're mine. You have no authority over them!"

"Ahh, my friend! Here is where you misunderstand. Though technically they are under your own authority, yet I have the right of temptation. It is my job, assigned by Logos Himself. I'm really very good at it, too. In fact, other than that one time when Logos disguised Himself as a man, I have never failed in my temptations. Never. In all of history since the dawn of time. So you see, if you reject my offer, I shall simply tempt your young twins. Of course they will fall to my temptations – eventually they all do – and I shall then possess two small dragons instead of one big one. But I'd really rather have you. We work so well together! I promise I'll leave your mate and the twins alone forever if you will just give me one short year. I swear it."

"Go to hell! I will never again make a bargain with the devil. You didn't even keep your promise last time. You stayed almost two years. Besides, you want to use me to harm the humans. I promised Logos that I would never again harm the humans. I was created to protect them!"

"Suit yourself. You'll be singing a different tune when I provoke your twins to madness and then suicide!"

"You wouldn't! You couldn't!" The dragons look at each other, horrified at the thought. *Their twins are the hope of the recovery of their race. They cannot lose them!*

"I'd rather not, as I said. But a deal is a deal, and since they were never a part of our deal, I have the right to do whatever I want with them. Even the devil has gotta do what he's gotta do. Sorry for your race."

It is too much. The parental protective instinct is the strongest force on earth, and the father dragon sees no way out. Rather than go to ask Logos, he agrees to the deal. But when he sees that old crow flying toward him, he changes his mind and blows a blast of fire at it. Fried crow falls at his feet, but he's too slow. Satan in his dragon exits the den and flies away without a backward glance at his mate.

Now Hitler, Wormwood, and the dragon are able to establish a better working relationship. Having regained Hitler's respect, Satan again orders his demons to scatter across the face of the earth, this time to legally possess everyone with Hitler's microchip. That includes nearly everyone still alive except those Israelites who refused the microchip and are marked with the seal of the living God.

CHAPTER 63 – THE GREAT DIVIDE

For those who care about the details, the rapture was two years early. It came five years after Dr. Relt finalized the Covenant of Death between the Arabs and the Israeli people. The time was cut short for the sake of the saints. Now, those last two years of the seventieth week of Daniel are chugging by, with mankind slowly recovering from the catastrophes to rebuild their lives. Empowered by Wormwood and the dragon, Hitler is using his virtually infinite manpower and resources to build a new Babylon. He's enlisted the help of all the kings of the earth (who are also now demon possessed and eager to help). During those two years, Babylon, now the physical and spiritual capital of the world, becomes an economic powerhouse. Hitler is happy. He is finally getting the worship he feels he deserves and achieving the power and control he'd been promised. Wormwood and Satan are also happy, for as you surely know, all that worship actually goes to them.

And in a way, Hitler's slaves are happy, too. They had thought the world was coming to an end, but now, they have work, food, shelter, security, even a little luxury at times. With the darkened sun, it was a bit touch 'n go for a while in the fields and farmlands for producing decent crops. But Hitler has supplied them with plenty of oil, and crops are all now grown under artificial sunlight. In exchange for Hitler's oil, the wealth of the nations pours into Babylon, including gold, silver, and costly jewels.

At the age of only 39, Hitler is still young and virile. Though he dedicated his life to politics, he's still human. Now the dragon assures him that, "Any great emperor must take a wife, to become his queen and rule with him. The people will love you for it! They will demand it."

"Fine with me. I was going to just find a cute mistress, but if you know of a woman worthy of me, I'll take her as my queen." Big mistake. Hitler has gotten too trusting of this dragon, who already has someone prepared. She is a tall, mature, regal, and talented exotic dancer named Eva Braun, which strikes a responsive chord in Hitler from the start. Her long wavy hair is a stunning strawberry blonde. She is also unusually intelligent and shrewd – a perfect match for Hitler. With Wormwood's encouragement he falls in love with her immediately. They get married before Hitler realizes that her ambitions exceed even his.

So, with all the wealth pouring into Babylon, Eva is promised her own temple. Satan is delighted. His plan is working perfectly. If you recall, dear Reader, there are no other temples left on earth. They were all leveled in that huge earthquake at the rapture. So besides being the finest religious structure ever built, Hitler's temple for Eva will be the only one. Strangely, the site Hitler picks for the new temple is on the very spot where Enmar long ago built his temple for Ishtar, at Bactra beside the Euphrates River near the Persian Gulf. But with all Hitler's wealth, this one will be even bigger and more lavish than Ishtar's was.

I skip back in time to view those two years with David and Danelle. They've led their refugees back to a torn and troubled Israel. Bear in mind that Michael is doing his job. Israel's trouble is not the malignant sores, the vermin, or the scorching heat, for they are covered. But the terrible grief of finally recognizing their true Messiah and then being left behind, is almost too much to bear. Plus, their land is laid waste, their new temple is leveled, and they have millions of their compatriots to bury. Truly, it was a bittersweet victory they achieved over Hitler's ten armies.

David is appalled at the loss of their new temple. His primary goal in coming to Jerusalem was to cleanse the temple and there lead Israel in prayer. (2 Chron 7:14-15) When he sees the mounds of rubble on the temple mount, he and his helpers frantically search through it to find the irreplaceable Ark of the Covenant, but it isn't there.

Heartbroken, he has to put that aside as he and his 14,400 help the survivors with food and medical needs. They then get to work on the cleanup, and finally set up a government at Jerusalem for the devastated remnant. David's re-election as Israel's prime minister is almost unanimous – no one else is even willing to run for the job!

He has been really wrestling with the Scriptures. When it comes time for his acceptance speech, he's ready. After thanking them graciously for their vote of confidence, David stands tall, squares his chin, and lays it all out straight. "By now, not a person among you can doubt that our true Messiah is Yashua, the same one our forefathers crucified over two thousand years ago, who has now come again and gone without us. I'm just as sorry as you that I didn't listen to the Christians when they tried to tell us. We accepted their friendship and their aid, but we rejected the most valuable thing they had to offer, this!" He holds up his Christian Bible, open to the book of Revelation.

"It prophesies clearly of this time and the coming of our Messiah, exactly as it has happened. We missed it not only because we didn't listen to the Christians, but also because we didn't understand Torah. The prophet Isaiah was told to 'render the hearts of this people insensitive, their ears dull, their eyes dim, lest they see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and repent and be healed.' That's us! But get this. When Isaiah asked how long, YHWH told him, 'until cities are devastated, without inhabitant, and the land is utterly desolate.' (Isa 6:10-11) Well, we're there. That has all come to pass, in spades. Now it's time to open our eyes, ears, and hearts and repent.

"Zechariah prophesied, 'I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city will be captured… Then YHWH will go forth to fight against those nations… in that day Messiah's feet will stand on Mount Olivet… which will split in the middle from east to west in a large valley. Then you will flee by the valley of My mountain, which will reach all the way to Azel. You will flee just as you fled before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. *Then YHWH, O My God, will come, and all His holy ones with Him!'* (14:2-5) He says this will be at a time when the 'luminaries dwindle'. That's now! However, most of that prophecy, especially the last part, wasn't fulfilled, not yet!

"Now, that should give us hope, for though ten Arab nations came against Jerusalem and captured it, Messiah never came down to stand on Mount Olivet, and it did not split into a large valley. That part is yet to come, probably very soon. Messiah will return with His holy ones – the Christians He just took to heaven. Just read the rest of the passage. It says living waters will flow out of Jerusalem when YHWH is King over the whole earth, ruling from Jerusalem. 'The people will live in it, and there will be no more curse, for Jerusalem will dwell securely.'

"I don't think He wants us to rebuild the temple. In the Revelation, it says there is no temple in the New Jerusalem. We are to take care of the land, cleanse it, and get ready for our Messiah to return. He's not going to reign only from heaven. He will also reign from right here in Jerusalem. But we must prepare ourselves first. You chose me as your prime minister for that purpose. I will help you get ready."

At that point, wild cheers and applause from virtually everyone listening overwhelm the sound of his voice. They are right with him, and now that he has given them some hope and guidance, they will do whatever it takes to be ready when Messiah returns.

It has been a glorious day, the first real hope the Israeli people have experienced since Dr. Relt was unmasked as Hitler. As David and Danelle go to bed that night, they bask in the glow of the people's enthusiasm for David's reforms. They know that the land can't be cleansed without first cleansing the people. That requires repentance. So David's first official act as prime minister was to establish a new calendar, starting with the Fall Feasts: Rosh haShanah, the Days of Awe, and the fearsome Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur). That little act had been passed by the newly elected Knesset on a unanimous vote! David couldn't remember his bickering people ever being unanimous before! Ever! He is starting to think Danelle might be right about him being the David of that prophecy in Ezekiel.

Over the next two years as Israel cleanses and rebuilds, David and Danelle do a lot of studying in the Christian Bible given them by the two prophets. For some reason it seems easier to understand now; easier than their Torah ever was. The Christian Old Testament, which is quite similar to their Torah, seems to come alive before their eyes. Danelle voices the obvious, "David, when we prayed to Yashua we asked Him for wisdom – for Him to show us the way. I believe He is answering us by opening our eyes to see, and our hearts to understand as we read." David agrees, so from then on, every day when they open the Christian Bible, they pray for Yashua to grant wisdom and guidance. They keep finding little nuggets to encourage them and verses that help them know what to do next.

One evening David and Danelle are reading that famous passage (Mal 3:2-3) asking, "Who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like refiner's fire, and like fuller's soap. He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi, and refine them like gold and silver, so they may present to YHWH offerings in righteousness."

"Well, we've sure been through the fire. But look at verse one. [Danelle points to it.] '… and the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple…'"

David bows his head in agony. "He can't come, Danelle. His temple is destroyed. I was hoping He would come this year, at Sukkot. There's no way we could get the temple rebuilt in time for Him."

"Maybe we're reading it wrong. Remember what we read in Revelation? The New Jerusalem has no temple in it. The Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. It says the New Jerusalem comes down out of heaven from God. Maybe the temple Malachi is talking about is in that New Jerusalem – a spiritual temple He brings with Him."

"Well, if He's bringing one with Him, we'd better at least have the ground prepared. Right now the temple mount is just a pathetic pile of rubble!"

So they begin clearing off all the rubble from the destroyed temple and the Muslim mosque beside it. It's a big job, but they will have the temple mount cleansed for Yashua, in case He comes at Sukkot.

"You see!" Logos tells the heavenly host. "I have put My Spirit upon My brother. He shall not fail! See how eager he is to hear My Word and how quick to obey! The **Great Divide** is complete. Everyone has made his choice. Put in the sickle and reap the harvest!"

There always seems to be a Judas around somewhere, doesn't there. This Judas came from Denmark, claiming to be of the tribe of Dan. He had passed the tests; he did not have the microchip imbedded under his skin; he swore allegiance to Israel. But he did not have Israel in his heart. No. He had death in his heart. He had excelled in the screening, and managed to obtain a high position in the IDF. His expertise was electronics and nuclear weapons. He had accepted the job, so necessary for Israel's survival, of keeping constant surveillance on the surrounding nations. He now works in the same complex as Israel's nuclear arsenal. Secretly he works to disable certain of Israel's surveillance capabilities – not totally, just in one direction – east across the desert toward Baghdad. And then only at the ground level, for he knows his master will use no aircraft in the upcoming attack. Having achieved that, he begins work to re-program the nuclear missiles. His goal is Israel's destruction. His secret orders are to send up a missile containing ten warheads, and to detonate ten neutron bombs over the major Israeli population centers. *This brings us near the end of the two years I mentioned.*

The spectacular new temple Hitler has built for his queen Eva Braun is nearly finished. Plans for its dedication are under way. Eva is thrilled with it. She's also pregnant with their first child, a son, ready to be delivered any day. *Perhaps he will be the next emperor after Hitler.*

As they make their final plans for the dedication, the dragon has a few suggestions for them. "You know, names and titles are important, my friends. The dedication of the temple is a perfect opportunity to take a new name. Too many people still associate the names Adolph Hitler and Eva Braun with the traumas of the second and third world wars. They serve you because they're forced, and their worship is not wholehearted as a result. I believe it's time to leave that part of your past behind, and to work towards a glorious future for you and the human race."

Hitler laughs. He is feeling very good of late, and is enjoying his new wife immensely. She has proven to be a fervent lover – one might almost say an ardent worshiper. The fact that Wormwood and the dragon pulled a few stunts to solidify his control over the entire earth (except tiny Israel) doesn't hurt his mood either. "An extreme makeover, eh? Sounds good to me. What new names do you have in mind?"

"Oh, not new names. We're not making anything up, here. I've just decided to tell you about your real past. Your distant past. Long before your present life. Even long before your past life as the first Adolph Hitler."

"Huh?" Hitler and Eva glance at each other. "You mean we were someone else in a previous life?"

Now that Satan has regained the use of the huge dragon he has earned Hitler's full respect and trust. He'll sure need it for this whopper. "The dragon you see in front of you is only a thousand years old. But I have possessed many dragons before this one. As you saw with the crow, I can possess anything I want, for I am a mighty being of spirit. I never die. I have lived longer than a hundred billion years and I will still be alive a hundred billion years from now. I made you after I let those stupid dinosaurs die off. Your names then – I know this is tough for you to believe, but in order to become the emperor of the world you really need to know – you are my original Adam and Eve. I intended you to rule my creation! You were brilliant, but you got hotheaded and stubborn. You disobeyed – turned against me. So you lost your spirits, and got yourselves thrown out of my garden. But I loved you. I would not let your spirits be destroyed. I managed to recover them, to form new bodies for them. You next were Noah and Fuchi. I sent you to redeem the earth. And you did! But after the Flood you took to heavy drinking and lost your spirits again. Once again I recovered them, and made new bodies, named Enmar and Ishtar. By this time, you had learned wisdom. This time, you did not turn away. You built a mighty empire! You ruled the world for me for a thousand years! Your teachings still inspire and guide mankind."

Satan waxes eloquent. Lying is his specialty, you know, and he's really having fun with it. Satan has always wanted people to think of him as the creator rather than Logos. But the eyes of Hitler and Eva are starting to glaze over, so he thankfully pauses. "Would it help if I unlocked that part of your memory? I only left it locked while you matured."

Without waiting for an answer, he plants images from the Universal Data Banks into their minds, showing Enmar ruling as world emperor with lovely Ishtar at his side. He shows them brief clips (leaving out any bad stuff, of course) of the splendid temple that Enmar had built for his wife at Nun-ki, and the even bigger tower/temple he had built for himself at Bab-ilu. "As you may have guessed," he confides, "this temple is patterned after her temple, and is on the exact same spot. I suggested it, remember? And later, I will show you where Bab-ilu was, so you can build your tower on that exact same spot, too. It will be glorious beyond words! And your astronomical observatory will again be at the top, to enable you to extend your power and control even out to the stars!"

Hitler and Eva are really getting into this. I guess it's the vivid full-color images from the Universal Data Banks that does it. "So, you think we ought to change our names back to Enmar and Ishtar?"

The dragon shakes his great head from side to side. "Nah. It actually gets much better than that. You ruled as Belos, or Bel, after the confusion of the languages. You were known in other countries as Mars, Nergal, Nisroch, Marduk… the list goes on and on. Eve, you ruled as Ishtar, Aster, Isis, Queen Esther, Aphrodite, Venus… you ruled for a very, very long time, you know. Mankind followed you, worshiped you adoringly, for over a thousand years, as I said. But eventually many turned away from you and tried to establish their own kingdoms. Still you remained faithful to me! I was so proud of you!

"So I sent you back many times as their messiah, trying to reach out to them, to save them from their rebellion. You were El; you were Allah; you were Buddha; you were Vishnu; you were Deus, Ishvara, Brahman, and Krishna; you were the all-embracing Aten; and Ahura Mazda, Pan, Shamash, and Zeus; later you were Mahatma Gandhi…"

Satan is having way too much fun. He realizes that he's losing them again. He'd better get to the point. He has 'em on the hook. It's time to reel 'em in. "The most important one though is when I sent you back to Earth as Mary and Joseph. As messiah for that age, your name," he smiles at Hitler, "was actually Joseph Christ. And your first baby, Mary," he nods to Eva, "was Jesus Christ. I transferred the spirit of messiah from Joseph to Jesus at conception. That's why you don't hear much more about Joseph in the Bible. He didn't die, but he was just an average Joe after I put your spirit, your essence, into Jesus. So you two are the original Madonna and Child sent to redeem mankind, now returned to rule mankind."

It is the biggest lie he has ever told, and he has spun some real humdingers in his day. But he dare not push it too much or they might get suspicious. The dragon just sits there, smiling pleasantly.

They are considering it. Eva gets this gleam in her eye. "What about my baby? This one." She pats her swollen abdomen. "When will you transfer that spirit of Jesus Christ into my baby?"

Yes! She's bought the lie! Satan can barely hide his joy. "Well, my dear, it's not that simple. After I promoted Belos to the highest place as god among the stars, I transferred his holy spirit to your baby, Dumuzi. That was the first immaculate conception. That means no earthly father, you see, because I took the holy sperm only after promoting Belos to the heavens. So your baby Dumuzi was born in sinless perfection, mankind's redeemer for that age. I did the same for Mary and Joseph. I first promoted the Joseph Christ spirit to his place with the gods, then took his holy sperm to make baby Jesus, making the second immaculate conception. But this time it's got to be a little different, because Adam… ah, Hitler – sorry if it's getting confusing – you're too valuable to promote to the stars right now. You are the messiah spirit to this age, as I said. I really need you here. If you don't mind, I'd like you here for many years before you take your rightful place among the gods. So though you can call your baby Dumuzi if you want, he won't have the spirit of Jesus Christ until after you get promoted to the stars. Is that okay with you?"

Eva looks smugly at Hitler. "So after Hitler is promoted to the stars, then I get to be the mother of god?"

Hitler blinks. He hadn't realized she was so ambitious. The dragon is quick to smooth it over. "Oh, my dear lady! You are the mother of god already! Several times over! It is only your new baby that has not yet had the privilege of the indwelling messiah spirit. All things in their proper time!"

Hitler is still not so sure. "So if I am Jesus Christ, then who was it that just took off with the Christians?"

The dragon is ready for him. "An impostor! You did notice, did you not, that He didn't fulfill the prophecies! He wanted to, and tried, but I scared him off with my crow. That's why I needed the crow, you know. He's terrified of crows. Watched too many Hitchcock movies, I guess. While your wimpy army was running away from the Jews, I stopped Him cold. He was planning to come down to Mount Olivet and try to take over, just like the prophecy in Zechariah 14 says Messiah will do. He figured if He could pull it off, He'd fool everyone into accepting Him. But I saw through His little charade and put a stop to it."

Hitler nods. It is really a big relief to him, as he was quite sure that Yashua was the real Messiah. But having studied those prophecies himself, he can't deny that Yashua didn't fulfill them. *So, his dragon is the real heavenly father and Yashua is just an impostor*… that's the best news he's had!

Thus, to the exquisite delight of Satan, they buy the whole line. It's like taking candy from a baby. These humans are so foolish, so arrogant, so quick to believe whatever they want to believe. And they just love the idea of being 'promoted to the stars among the gods'!

They stage a grand double ceremony. First the glorious new temple is dedicated and Eva Braun is installed as its high priestess. She takes the name Madonna Mary Ishtar Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Mother of God. Her baby, who was born the week before, is named Prince Adam Noah Dumuzi at the same time. And second, with even greater pomp and ceremony, Hitler is crowned World Emperor Jesus Christ the Messiah, King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. Of course the whole production is televised all over the world, and everyone is given the day off to watch it – the first world holiday in the history of mankind.

To seal the deal with their public, a rather gruesome scene is reenacted. It is familiar to any who have studied how Queen Ishtar used to worship in her golden temple at Nun-ki, although it's rather foreign to modern mankind. Through some slight-of-hand, the Madonna Mary Ishtar sacrifices 'her' newborn baby on the altar as part of the initiation rites. She and all her chosen sister priestesses drink his blood, then dismember him, roast his flesh, and eat him, right in front of the TV cameras.

Now the great red dragon flies down from the clouds, circles the gathering a few times for effect, and with a mighty rush of wings, settles down on the altar. In a great, booming voice, Satan thunders out from the dragon's mouth, "Your sacrifice is acceptable to the eternal father! You are all redeemed! I've received Prince Adam Noah Dumuzi into myself as my own son! Now I give him back to you as your perpetual living sacrifice!" He gently stands up from where he was crouching, and there between his legs is the baby prince. He is lying on his back on top of the altar, waving his arms and legs and loudly squalling at being stifled in the hot folds of the dragon's legs.

Their audience is completely snookered. *It's a miracle!* Madonna Mary Ishtar Inanna runs to pick up and comfort her baby, unbuttoning her blouse as she goes, and quickly puts him to her ample breast. The lovely scene is caught in magnificent closeups by the alert TV crew. In that moment their new 'Madonna and Child' have captured every heart.

But even that production is upstaged by what follows. After Hitler is crowned as World Emperor Jesus Christ and the familiar show with his golden statue coming to life is reenacted, he gives a slick and impassioned speech as only Hitler can do. Then he runs through a list of diseases all over the world, saying, "Jesus Christ heals the multitudes! If you love me, I heal your cancers! If you love me, I heal your blindness! For those who are deaf…" and so on. When he finishes, he has healed nearly everybody of something, and has the entire world eating out of his hand.

Needless to say, Wormwood and his demons are kept very busy for a while, going around the world healing all those diseases. Although, if you want to know the truth, it wasn't that difficult, as most of them were caused by his demons in the first place. But just the sheer logistics of keeping up with Hitler's bold speech was quite a feat.

The upshot of it all is, nearly everyone on earth now acknowledges Dr. Relt / Hitler (now officially renamed World Emperor Jesus Christ), 'his' dragon, and 'his' spirit prophet Wormwood, as some kind of gods. Bear in mind, these are not people who have a great deal of experience in recognizing the true God from the false. And of course, those rebels in Israel are excepted from all of the above – they wouldn't even watch his silly TV show, much less acknowledge Hitler (by whatever name) as their messiah. He fooled 'em once, even twice, but for sure never again!

For, in an amazing coincidence understandable only if you recognize the deep workings of Satan, the big show at Madonna Mary Ishtar's lovely new temple is performed on Tishri 1. To the Israelis, this is Rosh haShanah, the Festival of Trumpets. They are celebrating their New Year. Now David Davison is exhorting them on how to live during the ten Days of Awe so they will be acceptable to the holy God YHWH at Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.

"Yashua our Messiah is returning to Mount Olivet at Sukkot," he says. "This year, if we are ready. I don't want to put it off for another year, do you? Study Torah. Study the Christian New Testament, too. Believe Yashua! Believe His Words! He said, 'You shall not see Me again until you say, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of YHWH."' [Matt 23:39] So from now on we'll sing the parts of Psalm 118 referring to Messiah every day until Yashua returns.

"'The stone which the builders rejected has now become the chief cornerstone. This is YHWH's doing. It is marvelous in our eyes! This is the day YHWH has made! We will rejoice and be glad in it! O YHWH, save us, we beseech Thee! O YHWH, return to us prosperity! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of YHWH!' *That's Yashua!* We know it now! We know He's coming back! We have His promise!" David's speeches are having their effect. Now the Israelis, even those who just came to join the IDF, get serious about repentance and holiness. Their ancient heartfelt longing for Messiah is born anew.

So that evening, as the Israelis begin their ten Days of Awe with fasting, repentance, and prayer, the rest of the world is celebrating the coronation of World Emperor Jesus Christ and Queen Madonna Mary Ishtar Inanna Mother of God with feasting and dancing. It is just like the days of old – a full-fledged orgy with lots of red meat, wine, and drugs, followed by the striptease dance that ends up with the naked bodies all over the floor. Things haven't changed much from the ancient days of Enmar and Ishtar. The main difference now is that Enmar was revolted at the public nudity, while Hitler and Eva actually enjoy it.

The next morning, Hitler and his queen are difficult to rouse, but Satan is persistent. He's already had the dragon well over a year, and it is possible that Michael will come and throw him out again. He cannot afford to wait until next year. "Get up, you lazy bones!" he chides. "You've got a world to run!" But his dragon is too large to enter their bedroom, and the hungover couple just ignores him.

So Wormwood goes in for him. "Today's the day we mobilize our forces to conquer Israel and wipe out the Jews. They've been rebellious too long. We now have the power to crush them like you've always wanted."

Hitler turns on his face with his pillow over his head. "Go to hell. Leave me alone. My head hurts."

"Rise 'n shine! You are my sunshine, my only sunshine! You make me happy, when skies are…"

"For crying out loud! Shut up!" Hitler finally gets up and flees to the bathroom, slamming the door.

Wormwood follows. Spirits are not blocked by closed doors. "How is our messiah feeling today?!"

"You do not want me to answer that. Trust me."

"Well, I'm sure messiahs never forget, but just in case, I'll remind you that we're on a rather tight schedule here. It's already Tishri 2. Zechariah says Messiah will come to Mount Olivet on the Feast of Tabernacles, Tishri 15 - 21. It won't work any other time. This is the seventh year since the covenant of peace you made with Israel, the end of the seventy weeks of Daniel 9. This is the year when you 'finish the transgression, make an end of sin, make atonement for iniquity, bring in everlasting righteousness, seal up every prophecy, and anoint the most holy place' in Jerusalem – it's all right there in the Book. Now that you have been anointed as Jesus Christ, you don't have a choice. It's got to be done. Or the dragon will have to pick another messiah."

"It's utterly impossible. I've got two hundred million men from almost two hundred nations. You simply can't mobilize that many men that fast. We can't get 'em there that fast, either. We don't have near enough transports. And even if we did, there are not enough bridges over the Euphrates to move them all across in fourteen days!"

"With God, all things are possible, my friend. We've already alerted all your generals to mobilize, in your name, of course. The new highway direct to Israel from Babylon will be finished by the end of the week. We only left the last part unfinished to not arouse suspicion from the Israelis. And the boss took care of the river. The men are ready to move out in two hours, under your command, of course. They'll arrive in Israel by noon on Tishri 10, giving you five days to conquer it and reach Olivet. What's to worry?"

"What do you mean, 'the boss took care of the river'? There's no way to get that many men…"

"The river is dry. We just march across."

CHAPTER 64 – ARMAGEDDON

Hitler's head is spinning – not just from his hangover. He doesn't really like it, but in the end he goes along with the plan. Once again he wonders who is really in charge here, him, or the dragon? He got in a hurry last time, attacked before his main army had arrived from Baghdad, and lost. This time he will have his whole army there, or he simply won't order the attack. He must not lose this one! He leaves his new queen to play goddess and frantically runs around preparing for the battle.

Madonna Mary Ishtar Inanna is quite happy with that arrangement. As I said, she has big plans! Her own temple was just the first step. With the help of her adoring news media / TV crews and with a lot of audience participation, she now intends to teach the nations how to worship. She sends her trained high priestesses to six other big cities. By the end of the week, she has begun cult worship centers in Rome, Byzantium (Islam is gone, so it's no longer called Istanbul), Moscow, Peking, Kansas City, and Salvador, Brazil, each major centers of population which the nuclear holocaust missed. She orders construction of new temples in each, similar to hers in Babylon. But first, even before they're built, she must teach them to worship. They've all seen her perform on television – now they will experience it live. The whole bit. The orgy, red meat, wine, and drugs in abundance, followed by the striptease dance and ending with the naked bodies all over the floor.

The people love her. She's really very skilled at her exotic dance routine – able to inflame the passions of the most Victorian of souls. Hitler had found her to be a good lover, but he had no idea how good! Thus Ishtar's ancient goddess-worship cult is reborn around the world.

The multitude of brothers and servants of the King have gathered with Logos and His Bride to prepare for the annual Feast of Tabernacles, which is now recognized as the anniversary celebration of their wedding two years ago. But just before they begin the Dance, the Queen calls a halt and waves for silence. A vast hush settles over the crowds. She doesn't address them very often, but when she does, it is with authority and of the utmost importance.

"My wedding date had to be moved up two years, or not one of my members would have remained alive when my King came for me. Sadly, my brother Israel, though he was invited to our wedding supper, missed it. He wasn't ready. Do not blame him! Even now some prophecies have not yet been fulfilled, and he was determined to not believe until he saw every prophecy fulfilled. But he heard the trumpet call, and these last two years have opened his eyes. He has been repenting and making himself ready. Now the fullness of time is come. The King and I go now to fulfill the final prophecies. Now My brother Israel will see and believe! This anniversary feast is like our wedding supper, and the wedding invitation my Lord gave remains open! My brother shall be our honored guest at the feast!"

Hitler orders his troops to move out. In addition to his two hundred million soldiers, his army has 180,000 tanks, 200,000 troop transports, 250,000 heavy artillery, and vast quantities of small arms and ammunition. It is utterly invincible – the biggest and best equipped army in history. They'll be at Israel's border in a week, ready to fight. Since there aren't enough transports for everyone, they collected millions of horses and camels, too. He has no aircraft. He's been assured by his Judas in the IDF that although Israel's air radars are operational, all ground searching systems pointing east toward Baghdad are disabled. But Hitler has not been told that, right after his big invasion, Judas is also preparing to launch that nuclear strike on Israel.

Satan has everything he wants. Madonna Mary Ishtar Inanna Queen of Heaven and Mother of God has been wildly successful from her new temple with her seducing worship. Satan always did prefer religion to war – he gets willing worship! He was the one who inspired his Judas inside the IDF to fire the ballistic missile carrying the ten neutron bombs. Hitler and his army are expendable. That hogwash about how much he needs him was just a ploy to get him to take the world's military forces to Israel, leaving his wife in charge of the world's religions. This time, Israel will surely be destroyed and Logos' power will be broken. After that, Satan has no more need for Hitler or his armies. *Logos was right. Hitler would never really worship Satan. He's too consumed with his own self-importance.*

When Hitler's army (composed of nearly all the armies of the world) and Israel's army are both annihilated, most of the world's weapons will be destroyed along with them. Thus the world will be effectively disarmed. It is an ideal situation for the totalitarian dominion Satan has in mind.

Dragons live thousands of years. There's no way in heaven he will give this one up a second time. Michael will be so weakened by Israel's annihilation, Satan will easily overcome him, too. Then Logos will be afraid to return to the earth, leaving Satan alone to rule it within his dragon. *What's to go wrong?* Satan laughs at his own brilliance. *Logos has the heavenlies, but Satan has conquered the earth!*

Wait… it's Judas, performing the sacred prayer ritual. Not daring to leave his dragon even for a moment, Satan sends Wormwood to impersonate him. Judas is frantic. "Oh master! I have failed you! The Jews hard-wired their missile targeting system so it cannot be reprogrammed to hit Israel itself. I tried everything…"

"Just make it go straight up and down, you fool!"

"No, it won't let me. It's hard-wired, I tell you. Israel is totally locked out. The closest that I can target is Amman, Jordan. There is nothing I can do."

Wormwood almost lashes out, but they really need Judas. Satan would be displeased. So he sweetens his tone. "Gods can do anything they want. I have confidence in you, Judas. You will find a way. Do it. Now. It's time."

It is Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), Tishri 10. Nearly everyone in Israel is gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast. The few who don't care to attend the feast have offered to manage Israel's essential early warning systems. But their satellite surveillance of Hitler's troop movements in Baghdad has been replaced by a 300-hour continuous loop recording. Israel thinks they are as disorganized as they were two weeks ago. In fact, Israel is sure that everyone in the world is so demoralized by all the calamities of the past few years that there is zero probability of anyone attacking now. So their total focus is on preparing to meet Yashua when He comes at Tabernacles. They celebrate Yom Kippur, the most high, holy day of Israel, as they always have, but with much more fervency. The fasting, prayers, and repentance have never been more heartfelt. They are still mourning over their recognition of Yashua as their Messiah, and then getting left behind. They cry out to YHWH to cleanse their hearts and send Him again.

David has not had time to do any more on the temple mount than just get the rubble cleared off and get an altar built on the spot where the temple was supposed to be. He was glad to get that much. He never found the Ark of the Covenant, or any of the temple furnishings. They have selected a perfect lamb to offer for their sins in accordance with the law, in hope that they will be cleansed for Sukkot.

With the support of her high priestesses in the six other cities and a substantial number of demons as well, goddess Madonna Mary is now ready for the greatest orgy the world has ever known. She will start the worship service, to be televised all around the world, at precisely noon, Jerusalem time. Her high priestesses will follow when noon arrives their local time. Then every city and town all across the world will duplicate the service. Everyone will experience, live, what the Madonna has been teaching – the love and joy, the sheer ecstasy! Madonna Mary explains to the world the dramatic implications of the coming of World Emperor Jesus Christ – he came so all the world could experience this grand feast of love, from now on forever! Each high priestess will begin with the infant sacrifice to demonstrate the proper use of unwanted infants conceived during the orgy.

It is noon. The high priest on the temple mount raises his knife to slay the chosen lamb. The Israelis are gathered around in deepest reverence. The heavenly host look on in awe as Yashua and His Queen step through the veil, to materialize directly above the high priest. A mighty shout rings forth, *"Stay your hand! Slay not the lamb!"*

A knife slashes down. A brief cry is heard. The other priestesses gather around Madonna Mary. They pass the ceremonial cup of the baby's blood, then rip the body apart and devour the flesh to energize them for the dance.

The high priest pauses, knife still raised over the lamb, and looks up. What he sees above him makes him drop his knife and fall to his knees in worship.

It is Yashua! This time not a person in the group fails to recognize Him. Every soul that mourned when Yashua left without them thrills to see that He has returned for them. In the dim blood-red light of the dead sun, the splendor of the King shines forth like a new sun all across the land. The Light of the World has returned to Jerusalem! And this time the King has brought His Queen. With sudden insight they recognize her as the union of many members – all the Christians they've ever known are evident in the Queen's beautiful face, radiating in her smile.

The Queen separates from her Beloved and descends to the top of the altar where the lamb was about to be slain. The King, however, moves east, to alight on Mount Olivet. When He touches down, there is a sharp earthquake. Mount Olivet splits in two, creating an ugly dark chasm that opens up from east to west.

The Queen ignores it. She smiles at them as she unties the lamb, cradles him in her arms for a bit, then sets him free. "My brothers and sisters!" she calls. "Must I remind you? Tenach prophesies that they shall neither harm nor destroy in all our holy mountain. The perfect Lamb of God has been slain, once for all time," She points across to her Husband on Mount Olivet beside the fresh gash in the earth. "The blood of His sacrifice has already atoned for all your sins, *if you will receive it.* God shall never again require an animal sacrifice for sin." Here she reaches down to touch the altar of burnt offering. With a sharp crack that makes everyone jump, it splits in two. The stone slab on top, where the lamb had been tied, tilts crazily toward the center. It is clear it can never be used for another sacrifice.

"You sons of Abraham couldn't believe in your Messiah because He didn't fulfill some of the ancient prophecies. Now is the time for every prophecy to be fulfilled. Now our Kingdom is come to earth, for all who will believe. Messiah invites you now to receive His atonement. First get your wife and your children, for ours is a Kingdom of families. Then go…" again she points to her Husband, "…to Him! Confess to Him your faithlessness, and believe!"

It is already past high noon and the crowd is very large, nearly a half million men. This could take weeks. Will He really wait up there on Mount Olivet that long? The men rush back to retrieve their families, as the Queen ordered. No one wants to be left behind this time!

Those whose families were nearby begin forming a line up the side of Mount Olivet. David and Danelle run right over to the end of the line. If each person in Israel has to confess and be judged by Yashua, it could take forever. But they are determined to wait for Yashua this time, no matter how long it takes. However, after they calm down, they are surprised at how rapidly the line moves. Soon David and Danelle are near the top. Now they understand why the line is moving so fast. In what might be called a time warp, the activity next to Yashua is clearly moving much faster than normal, like a movie played on fast-forward.

Oh no! Yashua is sending most of the people down into that dark ugly pit! Only a very few are allowed to go free! David and Danelle are indignant. After all this, haven't they learned to accept their Messiah? They surely will not have a third opportunity!

So when their moment arrives to step into the time warp bubble, they fall on their faces before the King, pledging their faith and loyalty, in repentance for having rejected Him before. Here in His presence there seems to be no hurry. Time has slowed to normal. The King stands sternly before them as they make their confessions. Then He says, "Those who hide idolatry, murder, rebellion, lies, sorcery, or immorality within their hearts can never enter My kingdom. What lies hidden within your heart?"

David and Danelle glance horrified at each other. With the King's query the eyes of their souls are opened to their utter sinfulness deep within. They each confess, "O Lord! All those terrible things You mentioned are hidden in my heart! I am filled with sin! But I repent! We were going to sacrifice the lamb and sprinkle its blood to atone for our sin, but Your Bride stopped us! She told us that the blood of Your sacrifice has already atoned for all my sins, if I will receive it. O Lord, I do! Please, cleanse me! I beg You, apply Your blood onto me! Take away my sin!"

But all their pleading does no good. He orders them down into the pit. They are loath to leave the time warp bubble. Why are so many sent to the pit, while so few of Israel are set free? They manage to just hear the confession of the young man and his wife who followed them in line. "O Lord, we gladly receive You. Our hearts are pure before You. No lies, idolatry, murder, rebellion, or immorality lie hidden there. We've cleansed our hearts to receive You."

"Okay," Yashua responds. "Then you're free to go." Again David and Danelle are indignant. All it took was that easy confession and those two are set free? They look at each other as they head toward the pit. "I couldn't deny the things hidden in my heart. I couldn't lie and tell Him they weren't there! He is Messiah! Surely He knows my heart."

So they're feeling pretty dejected as they step into the ugly gash in Mount Olivet. But rather than falling into a pit, they find a surprisingly gentle and well-lit path leading into the depths of the earth. They walk together, hand in hand, heading west, toward the temple mount, though surely it couldn't reach that far. Yet it continues deeper and deeper. Does it end in hell? *Naa. This path is too nice.*

That is confirmed when the narrow path opens up into a huge cavern. Again, it is well-lit – the light seems to come from the walls and ceiling. Many people are already there – more are streaming in behind them. They are obviously enjoying themselves, meeting, laughing, talking together. Clearly, this is not the place of torment they had feared.

"Azel!" Danelle whispers to David. "This must be Azel, the 'valley of My mountain', as Zechariah said." (14:5)

"This is no valley. It's just a pit!" David retorts. But as soon as he says it, he knows she is right. "But why did He send us down here? To be punished for all that bad stuff hidden in our hearts? I really thought we were going to be tormented in that legendary fiery Abyss called Hades!"

"Well, if this is Azel, then maybe He sent us down here to protect us. Whatever the reason, He ordered us here, and we must obey Him. He is our Messiah. That we know for sure! I'm never going to reject Him again!"

David heartily agrees with that. "I'm glad we told Him the truth about our hearts. That lady with Him called Him 'the perfect Lamb of God'. I guess our confession of the sins in our hearts was like the priest confessing the sins of the people over the head of the sacrificial lamb."

Scanning the cavern, David sees no food or water. They are fasting now, but they will need water, soon. And potty facilities! The huge cavern is still filling. David begins to fret about the logistics of caring for all these people.

Suddenly with a thrill he spots the Ark of the Covenant, glistening in all its golden glory like a fabulous throne. It is up high, in a niche carved into the far wall like a speaking stage. As he gazes, Yashua and His Bride appear beside it. They sit together on the throne. At that moment the earth gives another sharp quake, and the path by which they entered closes. They are sealed in. Yashua and His Bride seem unconcerned. They are smiling down at the group, radiating infinite love, joy, and peace! It fills the cavern, displacing all of David's fretting. He finally understands what the Christians meant with their word, 'rapture'.

"Your sacrifice is acceptable to Father! You are all cleansed!" Yashua shouts in triumph. In a burst of insight, David and Danelle grasp His meaning. *His own sacrifice is acceptable to the eternal Father, and His own blood has now been sprinkled on them by their faith in His Word.* "Some of you worry about food or water in this sealed cavern," Yashua continues. "But I am now and forever your Water of Life and your Bread that came down from heaven. We shall feast down here, hidden away in our secret room until the indignation is past. [Isa 26:20] Does anyone know what day this is?" He laughs and looks to His Bride.

She responds. "It is Tishri 15. The Feast of Tabernacles. It took five days for you to gather here with your wives and families, but we shortened the time so you could bear it."

Yashua stretches out His hands to us, palms up. "I have longed to partake of this Feast with You. Even though the earth is no longer safe, yet here, deep beneath the temple mount, we are safe. Here I shall set a table for you…"

"Safe from what, Lord? Whose indignation? We're not at war. We won! We drove off Hitler's armies!"

Yashua doesn't seem to mind the interruption. "My adversary is consumed with indignation and wrath against the Beautiful Land. Look into My eyes. I shall show you."

Everyone looks into His eyes. Suddenly they are staring down at Earth from high in space. It's a beautiful vision! Then they see a nuclear missile streaking around the globe and they know right where it will fall. Now they zoom in on the Middle East, and see the new highway Hitler's men built across the desert from Babylon past Amman, Jordan, up to Megiddo in the Valley of Jezreel. They see his troops filling the road, uncountable millions in their machines of war, and even more walking or trotting beside them on horses or camels. *There could be no defense! Whatever happened to their surveillance and early warning systems?*

"Satan is consumed with indignation and wrath against the Beautiful Land," Yashua repeats sadly. "But never fear. I will keep you safe. I have atoned for your sin. Those who had no sin, those who chose to live independently from Me as if they had no need of My atonement – they will all die."

Yashua, the Master of Time, speeds up the vision to catch up to the present. They see Hitler's forces streaming into Israel. They fill the Valley of Jezreel. Hitler sets up headquarters at Megiddo. From there he sends his troops throughout Israel, easily overcoming the few defenders remaining on the ground. They see Hitler crowing over his victory. They hear him command the execution of every living Jew on earth, starting with his prisoners of war. Finally, his lifelong ambitions are nearly fulfilled! With this final conquest, Hitler has control of the entire earth! *Now he'll be worshiped and obeyed as he deserves!*

In the vision they see Hitler enter Jerusalem just as they are escaping into Azel. He ascends Mount Olivet just as the earthquake seals them inside Azel. The television cameras are fixed upon him as he regales the world with tales of his magnificence as the unquestioned World Emperor Jesus Christ the Messiah. They hear the conclusion of his speech. "I have fulfilled the ancient prophecy! I stand upon Mount Olivet on Tishri 15, as Zechariah foretold. [14:1-6] The earthquake splitting the mount is your proof! I am God!" The only ones on earth who don't hear his fine speech are those who are still drunk and stoned out of their gourds after the five-day orgy led from Nun-ki by Madonna Mary Ishtar Inanna Queen of Heaven and Mother of God.

That pesky missile has entirely circled the earth. Its inertial guidance system has drifted just slightly. The net result is, it is now over Israel once again, but it doesn't know it – it thinks it's above Amman, Jordan. Judas has found his way to release the ten nuclear warheads on Israel without targeting her directly, defeating their protection. The missile deploys its deadly payload in a wide spread programmed to blanket Israel in a massive neutron burst.

Satan is laughing his head off. First he wipes out Israel, and now he eliminates that fool Hitler who is beginning to get way too big for his britches. *Victory is sweet, so sweet! Oh. His Judas is praying to him.* "O my dark lord! I have accomplished all your desire. Save me now, I pray!" Ha. Since when has Satan ever saved anyone who served him?

CHAPTER 65 – THE WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

Michael, his job protecting the Bride now done, flies through the mid-heavens, calling to the birds of the sky above Israel, "Come, assemble yourselves together for the great supper of God!" He continues down to the fields and shouts the same command to the beasts of the Beautiful Land. He leads them all to the entrance of the dragon's lair. Leaving them there, he goes down to see Mrs. Dragon, who is still grieving with her twins over the loss of their father.

"Mrs. Dragon! Satan has violated your mate's trust for the last time. Now I want to make a deal with you. A deal I will keep. If you loan me the use of your beautiful big den for two days, I will return your mate to you. I swear he will not be forced to leave you again all the days of his life."

"Two days? You can have it for a year with that kind of promise. I trust you. You are the one who cast Satan out the first time. I gladly accept your deal."

"You don't have to move out. I just need shelter for my friends." Michael returns to the entrance and beckons to the birds and the beasts of Israel. "Come down with me. The dragons have given their permission. We will be safe down here while the indignation runs its course." He leads the horde into the hole, which drops deep, deep down into the heart of Mount Hermon, to the dragons' lair.

At first Mrs. Dragon is appalled as her den fills up with millions of animals of all kinds, including crows, vultures, buzzards, and other carrion birds, as well as lions, tigers, jackals, bears, and other carnivores. But she made a deal. She will not renege. Soon, the birds and beasts are all packed in. They fall asleep. Michael winks at Mrs. Dragon. "Fret not. They will cause you no trouble. They'll all fast and hibernate until I come to waken them in two days."

In agony of soul, Logos calls out from the throne of the heavenly temple, "Empty now the final bowl of YHWH's wrath upon the earth, down to the dregs!" The seventh herald angel empties his bowl of wrath upon the air as Logos shouts, "**It is done!**"

The vision of Hitler fades just before the neutron bombs explode in the air above Israel. Yashua and His Bride are smiling through their tears. "We are safe down here," the Bride says. "The earth must be cleansed by fire, but it shall not touch us. Today begins the Feast of Sukkot. We invite you to celebrate the Feast with us. Would you like that?"

A thrill goes through the crowd. *Like to celebrate the Feast with their Messiah?! That is what it's all about!* With growing joy, they realize that this was what they'd truly been longing for all their lives! "Yes! Yes!" they cry. "Celebrate the Feast with us! Our Messiah! Our King!"

"But, Sir?" A little boy tentatively raises his hand. "Where is the food? The wine? We don't even have water down here! And where are the sticks for us to make our sukkim? We have nothing here, Sir."

Yashua winces briefly, as if struck with a sharp pain deep within, then smiles at the boy. "You have Me. I am all you need." At that moment, the Bride and Groom appear before the vast multitude gathered for the Feast. "We have found our brother!" the Bride calls. "He has repented and accepted our invitation. He is here. Let the Feast begin!"

The solid rock walls of the big cavern seem to shimmer. It reminds David of the 'transporter effect' in his favorite old Star Trek movies. The cave fades into an open meadow in a land where colors are brighter, fragrances sweeter, music more joyous, and flowers more sublime… human senses shift into overdrive. Even the sun… wait! There is no sun! Whence comes this glorious light? It is soft, warm, but so bright it would certainly blind earthbound eyes.

The light is coming from their Messiah! He leads them through the delightful meadow to a multitude of people, seated at tables laden with the foods and wines of a great feast. David looks around. With him are several million new people but he sees no empty tables. He raises a hand eager to volunteer his help.

"David and Danelle! I love you! Your concern is always to care and provide for My people. I accept that as service to Me. But here in My realm, do you not know that I can provide?" Yashua and His Bride laugh as if it were the greatest of jokes to see the startled expressions on the new arrivals when their tables laden with food materialize before them. Yashua sits down with His Bride at the head of each table. Their chair is a golden throne, looking a bit like the Ark of the Covenant David saw in Azel.

So the anniversary feast begins, the fulfillment of all that the old Feast of Tabernacles symbolized. The Festival of Lights, the Season of our Joy, God dwelling with His people, the Ingathering of the Nations – it is 'The' Feast.

Yashua and His Bride walk among them, wiping away every tear, understanding and sympathizing with their griefs, healing their pains and sorrows, restoring their joy. A normal festival lasts for seven days, hardly enough time for Yashua to even see each person in that great multitude, let alone talk personally, intimately, with each one. But now the Master of Time and Space is everywhere, at the head of every table, ministering to every heart.

Michael has a promise to keep. At dawn on the third day of the anniversary feast he returns to the dragon's lair. "Thank you, Mrs. Dragon. Your generous hospitality is most appreciated. All these would have died without it. Now I awaken them to lead them, and you, out to a great feast. After the feast, we will retrieve your mate."

At Michael's call, the hungry birds and beasts awaken and follow him up to the surface. "Go now," he commands them. "Feast on the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men of the earth, on the flesh of horses, camels, and those who sat on them, and on the flesh of all men, free and slave, great and small, who rebelled against our Creator God."

As Mrs. Dragon rises to the sky to fly behind Michael across Israel, she is appalled at the carnage below. The ground is littered with bodies. Their blood flows in rivers. Their flesh is already rotting from their bones. Whoever died instantly from the direct nuclear blasts was fortunate. The rest are yet dying of excruciatingly painful radiation burns. Mrs. Dragon sees the importance of protecting the animals until the neutron blast had dissipated.

"Was my mate involved in this?" Mrs. Dragon scans the ground hoping not to see him lying there.

"No. Satan is foolish, but not stupid. He wants to use your mate for many years. But Satan does not keep his promises. I trust your mate will never again make a deal with the devil. Now, you and your twins may feast with them, for I cannot get your mate until the feast is over. Logos prefers that dead bodies be cleaned up quickly, and no one here is left alive to bury them. I will return right after your feast."

It takes the rest of the week for the animals to finish cleaning the rotting meat off the bones. This great supper of God for the animals therefore overlaps the same week as the great anniversary feast in the heavenlies. Something else is overlapping this busy week, as well. Satan and Wormwood left Israel before it was destroyed, and went to Madonna Mary's temple at Nun-ki in Babylon. Satan is in a devilishly good mood with the world under his thumb. Madonna Mary has fallen in love with the big red dragon. She now includes him in her exotic dances. It reinforces her image as a galaxy-class goddess to be seen dancing with a dragon on TVs all over the world. She cares not that Israel, her husband, and his entire massive army are now destroyed. *The dragon gives her power! Prestige! Control over the masses!* She never really loved Hitler, anyway. She loves herself. She had just used Hitler for her own pleasure and to attain worldwide fame and adulation. Like I said, her ambitions exceed anything Hitler ever imagined.

All pretenses are gone. Satan (in his dragon) declares himself the god of the universe. Madonna Mary (now fully possessed by Wormwood) declares herself Earth goddess, and her son Earth's savior. All the world's worship is directed to their temple at Nun-ki, as they demand every knee on earth bow to their authority, on pain of death. The abomination of desolation, which was begun when Hitler revealed himself 3 ½ years after his treaty with Israel, is now complete. [The 1260 days of Revelation 12:6; 13:5.]

The beasts have finished their feast by the end of the week. So Michael leads Mrs. Dragon to Nun-ki. Madonna Mary Ishtar is in the middle of her daily dance routine with the dragon, televised around the world for the people's entertainment and worship. She is already virtually naked. She plays seductively with the dragon as part of her dance. Mrs. Dragon is horrified to see her mate so degraded! So shamed! So… she hides her eyes. *So possessed!* She weeps for him and prays to the Creator for his deliverance.

"Release him!" Michael wastes not a word nor a moment. It is clear he means business.

"Go to heaven!" Satan snorts through his dragon mouth. (Remember, heaven is a swear word to him.)

"He cut you a legal deal. He should never have fallen for it a second time but he did. Yet once again you violated your agreement. Logos commands you set him free. If you don't release him I will have occasion against you. Even you cannot violate the Law of God without consequences. Logos granted me the authority to enforce His command. If you do not release him this instant, I swear I shall bind you and cast you into the Abyss for a thousand years."

"Ha! You can't! You are not strong enough! You forget, I have authority over the earth! And I have gained strength drinking the blood of two hundred million mighty men, while you have lost strength with the loss of every prayer on earth! No one left on earth serves you or your Master! None! They're all mine! You literally don't have a prayer!"

"That's not true!" Mrs. Dragon interjects indignantly. "I pray for my mate every day. And now I will battle to the death to get him back!"

"So be it!" Satan says through Mr. Dragon, who levels a blast of his fiery breath at his own mate.

Michael steps quickly between them, absorbing the blast. "No! This battle is of a different realm. Satan, you have given me occasion. I bind you by the Word of Logos!" At his voice, a slender chain appears in one hand, and a set of keys in the other.

"You can't do that! I will not come out! This dragon is mine! You will have to kill him before you can touch me. I know the law. I possessed him legally – he consented. But I don't have to keep my promises to him. I'm the liar, remember? You must keep your word – I don't. I lied. I…"

He might have gone on like that for a long time, but Michael will brook no more of it. He swings the slender chain, which is a chain of the Spirit of God. Satan is not expecting that. He's never seen a chain of the Spirit of God before. He didn't even think God made chains. The only chains of spirit he's ever seen are of his own making, which he forges to enslave the souls of men. They can't hold him.

But this chain of the Spirit of God is different. It swings through the dragon as if he is not even there, but it wraps around Satan to yank him from his mount. In moments he is bound hand, foot, and forked tail. Mr. Dragon is free.

Madonna Mary Ishtar is horrified at this battle between the gods. She backs away nervously, trying to maintain some semblance of dignity while picking up scattered bits of clothing in an effort to conceal her nakedness.

Michael speaks to Mr. Dragon. "My friend, you have been violated by this woman. You have lawful occasion against her. Do with her as you will."

Mr. Dragon can hardly believe he is free. He inspects his limbs, wings, and tail to check for damage. "I…I guess I'm okay. Thank you, kind sir, for freeing me again. I swear I shall never again be fooled by his promises. But it is he…" he points to Satan, now bound on the floor, "…against whom I have occasion. He lied to me, again. And treated me with the gravest dishonor and most shameful abuse."

"He is a spirit. You cannot harm him. But his offense was against God's Law. For that, I assure you, he shall be punished more harshly than you can imagine. Now do you wish to exact legal vengeance against this woman, or not?"

"I swore to never again harm the humans…"

"You also swore to help the humans. Let me explain the difference. Your mate helped the humans by eating the flesh of Hitler's army, thereby helping to clean up their world. You would help the humans most by destroying her who hurt them most: this harlot! She drank the blood of innocents! It is a service to God and to all mankind when you execute a murderer according to the Law of God."

Mr. Dragon nods. "I understand. If it will help them…" He blows his fiery breath at Madonna Mary. In moments she is consumed in flames. The false prophet Wormwood who possessed her now lies exposed within her charred remains. Before Wormwood can say a word, Michael has the other end of the slender chain around him, as well.

"Thank you, Mr. Dragon. In ridding the world of this loathsome evil, you have done the universe an exceptional favor. You and your wife are free to go. Your twins have need of you. Yet…" he pauses.

"What is it, Sir? Is there anything else I can do for you? You have rendered a service of inestimable magnitude to me. How can I express my gratitude?"

"If you wish to be of further service, there is one thing for which you are admirably suited."

"I'll do it! Just say the word."

"For thirty days the earth will now be cleansed by fire. The beasts of the field and birds of the sky cannot avoid the flames on their own. They will perish – if they are not led. But if you take charge again as king of beasts you could save many by your wise leadership."

"I am under your command and at your service. I will organize the birds and beasts to follow me as I follow you. Thank you for this opportunity!"

So Michael tells the dragons where to lead the other animals to be safe from God's wrath. Then he hauls Satan and Wormwood down to the Abyss. There he casts them, squealing like pigs, into the same cell where Apollyon and many others of Satan's demons are serving their sentences. As Master of the Abyss, Satan has enticed many there to gleefully torment. But he himself has never suffered there before. Now he is punished just like any rebel demon.

"Don't forget!" Satan screams to Michael. "Only one thousand years. You must release me when my sentence is served. Revelation 20:7-8 says I still get to go out and deceive the nations! God promised!"

Michael is bewildered. "Oh? You accept that part of God's Word, yet you don't believe how it ends?"

Another earthquake begins, small at first, then worse and worse. You see, Satan has been bound. That presents a problem. Satan's kingdom is hierarchical. His demons only work at his specific direction. So when he's bound, they're basically out of work. When zillions of idle demons see their master bound, they're understandably upset. He can't direct them. He can't even see or hear them. But they sense his pain, anger, and despair. It builds within them, too. *Is this their ultimate fate?* Most of them have spent time in this cell before, for some violation of God's Law. They know what it's like. It's where they always went when they broke God's Law. They sit around at the center of the earth howling, moaning, beating the earth with their fists or feet, lamenting their loss of guidance and purpose.

After a bout of disorganized chaos they develop a chant which imparts a rhythm to their grief. With that beat, the vibrations rise to Earth's crust and resonate throughout the globe. The demons, who have little initiative on their own, remember what they had done when the four supernovas hit. It was lots of fun for them, leveling buildings and terrifying people. Now they discover a purpose. They find the precise resonate frequency that creates standing waves around the earth, and redouble their efforts.

That other earthquake was a half inch amplitude. This is more like six inches. It goes on all day, liquefying much of Earth's crust. The last earthquake destroyed towers, bridges, and roads. This one levels entire mountain ranges to fill the valleys in between. Islands sink. Coastlines are rearranged. Rivers change courses. Everything that Hitler had built at Babylon comes down, including Madonna Mary Ishtar's glorious temple at Nun-ki. (Hitler never got to build his tower at Bab-ilu.) No man-made structures, not even the mighty pyramids, remain standing.

So in a fitting conclusion to the most momentous week in history, that final day is a doozy. Oil and gas pipelines break and gush forth across the land. The static electricity buildup due to the earth's vibrations causes incessant thunder and lightning, igniting the gas and oil. Terrible fires sweep the land. Especially in the population centers, where Hitler's oil powered nearly everything, flames engulf the cities. The wealthy merchants who live in the suburbs view the smoke arising from their beautiful new Babylon and mourn her loss. She was the pride of the new age, the economic powerhouse of a brave new civilization, burned up in one hour! Ships coming into her harbor turn to flee the flames. Their owners wail bitterly to see their profits going up in smoke. Now everyone remembers the angel's dire warning, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the Great!"

But surprisingly, it is the hail that really gets to them. The combination of the vibrations, the fires, and the static in the air creates huge thunderheads, in which ice is flung clear up into the vapor barrier. When it finally comes down, the resulting hailstones are up to a hundred pounds each. Falling out of the sky at that weight, they pretty much crush anything or anyone in their path. Many who fled to the fields to escape the fires and falling buildings are crushed by the hailstones. Nearly all the ships fleeing the harbors to escape the burning city are sunk by them. Never has a more severe plague struck the earth, at least not since Saturn came too close and pulled up the moon. Altogether, eighty percent of humanity die in the plagues during that terrible week. Those who survive do not repent, but rather curse God because of the hail. It spells the end of an age.

Planet Earth's doom is now certain, to even the most optimistic of souls. Its orbit has shrunk to 67 million miles from Sol, where Venus used to be. Like Sol and our moon, Venus appears huge and blood red. They look like leering demons filling the sky. Average surface temperatures soar to 110° F, baking the ground. If that thick vapor barrier were not still there, all life would already have perished. Everything that can burn is consumed or is still a raging inferno – once a fire gets started, nothing can stop it. It is clear our world is in a death spiral that nothing can reverse.

The mean sea level is way down, nearly thirty feet over the last seven years. That is a good thing, because the mean surface elevation is down as well. The liquefying of the earth's crust has greatly lowered the flattened continents. The main population centers would mostly lie under water at the previous sea levels. Still, many great island chains are gone completely: Hawaii; the Aleutian Islands and Alaska Peninsula; Cuba, Jamaica, and the Antilles; most of the Islands of the South Pacific including nearly all of Indonesia, the Philippians, the Malay Peninsula, and half of mountainous New Guinea; all of Japan and Korea; nearly a third of Taiwan; and so it goes around the globe.

Continental coastlands are also dramatically altered. Oregon, California and the Baja Peninsula are gone. The Rocky Mountains are flattened, spreading out over areas where the West Coast used to be. Florida is gone. The Prince Edward Islands and much of New England is gone. Manhattan Island, New Jersey, and most of America's East Coast are gone. The Sierra Madre Range that formed the backbone of Central America has been leveled, filling in the deep trench just to the west. Likewise the Andes are leveled, filling in the Peru / Chili Trench. Even the great Himalayan Range is flattened and the Tibetan Plateau is nearly at sea level. No place on earth remains untouched by the catastrophe. All surface waters are blooming with red toxins and vermin. Edible fish are extinct, along with dolphins and whales. People blaspheme God for the heat, the fires, the earthquake, the hail, the plagues of vermin that now possess the earth, and the stunning loss of life. Truly has the wrath of God fallen upon mankind.

CHAPTER 66 – RECLAMATION – RESTORATION

The wedding anniversary celebration with Israel is past (although this feast is never really over). The wrath of God is done. The seventieth week of Daniel 9:27 is complete. *It is now Tishri 22, the eighth day of the feast.* Logos' Victory Reclamation begins. The heavens open wide. The King, in perfect unity beyond our comprehension with His Bride, rides forth, seated on a great white horse. He returns to declare victory over His enemies, in righteousness and justice. His eyes are flames of fire. His robe is dipped in blood. His hair and beard are like thick wool, purest white. His name is Logos, the Word of God, Faithful and True.

This scene can be confusing to any of my dear Readers who have never seen into the heavenly realms. From the heavenly perspective the King appears as a single mighty warrior astride a magnificent white stallion. Yet He is far more. He is in perfect mystical union with His new Bride, His beloved many-membered wife. Saints and angels see Him as one, yet they still have no trouble distinguishing each member of His Bride as well. But most earth-dwellers have difficulty even seeing trinity, much less the unity of 1,440,000. To them, the King is one mighty warrior on a white stallion, followed closely by five armies of soldiers, clothed in glistening armor with white linen capes, also riding white horses. Every soldier is male, for war is a male function. Yet each one, like Yashua Himself, rides in unity with his God-ordained wife. Thus the people see them as 720,000 warriors on white horses following the King.

Remember, this is a dark, ruined world, spiraling into a sun that looks like a macabre red prune. Earth is so hot even heat-loving vermin begin to die out. The survivors of these terrible plagues are without power, without shelter, without food or clean water, and without hope – until the heavens open and they see the King and His Bride!

The King comes to earth in shining splendor. The doomed darkened planet is dazzled by His glory. Not a soul can deny He comes with ultimate authority and power as King of the Universe. Again, the view from earth is quite different from what the angels see. To them, the King merely shouts triumphant commands and the planet is restored to a new stable orbit. But earth-dwellers see it as a thirty day drama unfolding above and all around them.

In a shockingly bright blaze of light and glory, the mighty horsemen thunder through the sky, surrounding the earth. Then the King rears up on his white steed to beckon his warriors back. They form a chain, like a lasso, around the planet. At the end of the chain, the King hauls the entire earth back to a decent orbit at a proper distance around the dying star. The earth begins to cool. The fires circling the globe die out. Soon a wondrous cleansing rain begins to fall, renewing the rivers and refilling the lakes and oceans. As it rains on earth, the King and His Bride ride about the solar system, similarly lassoing and restoring the orbits of our moon and other planets and moons.

At the head of His army, the King claims His victory over the world's religious systems. He cries out, "Now indeed, 'Fallen, fallen is Babylon the Great!' She became a den of demons and a prison of every foul spirit, a haunt of every unclean beast and bird. For all nations got drunk on the wine of the passion of her immorality, the kings of the earth sank to the depths of her depravity, the merchants of the earth drowned themselves in her prosperity, and the peoples of the earth gorged themselves on her sensuality."

Now Alan-Anna Benson, who is appointed the first of the generals in the King's armies, shouts, "**Come out of her My people**! Come out now – out of Babylon – that you not participate any more in her sins nor receive any further of her plagues. For her sins have piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities against her!"

Joseph-Chris Johnson, second of the King's generals, shouts out, "The vile whore is paid back as she has given, even double according to all her deeds. To the degree that she glorified herself and lived sensuously, to that degree she receives torment and mourning, for she asserted in her heart, 'I sit as a queen, not a widow! I won't even mourn my husband's death!' So in one day her plagues have come, pestilence, earthquake, fire, and famine. She is burned up with fire, for YHWH Elohim who judges her is strong!"

Mike-Mary Mason, third of the King's new generals, follows, shouting, "Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints, apostles, and prophets! Rejoice because God has pronounced judgment for you against her!" He takes a great millstone from his soldiers and hurls it to earth where it disappears beneath the sea. "Thus is Babylon, the notorious harlot, thrown down to never be found again. Her musicians, craftsmen, rulers, and merchants are heard no more, nor is the sound of her weddings, orgies, and revelries. For in her was found the blood of innocents, prophets, and saints, and of all who have been slain in the earth. Her sorcery deceived and enslaved every nation."

Sam-Suzy Salizar, who is now the grand maestro of the King's musicians, raises his hand. With a spine-tingling cymbal crash the music of the spheres is restored to the earth. The silent planet is silent no more. Suzy-Sam then invites the survivors of mankind to join the Dance.

Sharon-Steve Saxon, choir director of the heavenly host, raises her hand. To the wonderment of mankind, a vast multitude in the heavens behind the King's Army sings, "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God! His judgments are righteous and true! He has judged the harlot who was corrupting the earth with her immorality, and He has avenged upon her the blood of His saints, prophets, bondservants, and brothers. Hallelujah! The smoke of her torment will arise to the ages of the ages! So give praise to our God, all you His bondservants, all you who fear Him, small or great. Bow in worship before Him. Give Him the honor due His name. For He has now settled the Great Controversy and won the victory for all time!"

At first the global rains are very heavy, because the skies are supersaturated with moisture due to the heat. But the vapor barrier does not collapse as it did at the Flood. The torrential downpour just comes to extinguish the fires, cleanse the earth, and refill the lakes and oceans. Then the King returns with His glorious rainbow as His light breaks through the clouds, God's promise of hope for the future! After that, for an hour or so each day the rains return, but gently. The tortured earth again sprouts forth to cover its nakedness. Altogether it takes a month. Logos is pleased. He makes a new covenant like the one He made with Noah. "As I restore the rains, I establish new cycles of day and night, summer and winter, springtime and harvest, which shall last to the end of the age. I reclaim what is Mine, and I revoke Lucifer's commission as ruler of the cosmos."

Thus the thirty-day Reclamation is complete. Now the Restoration begins. The King and His Bride return to the heavens where the multitude is feasting. They have forty-five days until the earth is habitable. Time for the King and His Bride to express thanks to their guests at the feast. No guest at an Israeli wedding feast can leave without a gift. Yashua and His Bride sit on the judgment seat (called the Bema Seat – it looks like the Ark of the Covenant David saw in Azel) to reward their guests. The Universal Data Banks are unlocked. Each deed, motivation, or intention of the heart, good or evil, is exposed for review before the King and His Bride. They study each life with great care, looking for praiseworthy acts and saddened at failures or wrong motivations. Wisdom and understanding flow freely as each soul sees what was, compared to what could have been. Their gifts are based upon their service (or lack thereof) to the King and to His precious ones.

The gifts for many are modest, for their service to the King was halfhearted or rare. If only they had kept their priorities straight! Their own comfort, pleasure, and self-indulgence had been a priority before. Now it is clear that the only thing on earth that mattered, the only thing with lasting consequence, indeed the only reason for their earthly lives, was faithful service out of love to the King. But for others, their gifts are more lavish – golden crowns, places of authority in His Kingdom, areas of greater service or ministry. The King knows and trusts them fully. So they are gifted, commissioned, and sent. Thus the heavenly realms are populated with bondservant / brothers of the King, each with a task to do in His Kingdom.

Please note, dear Reader, that no gifts are given or withheld due to each soul's faith or lack thereof. The Bema Seat judgment is not based on faith, for faith, like salvation, is a free gift for all who seek it. Everyone who came to the feast is a faith seeker! There are none here with closed, hard hearts. Here, the gifts are totally based on works, although I must say, most of those with a mighty faith got that way by practicing good deeds and giving the glory to God, while those whose faith remained weak now discover it would have grown stronger with regular use.

This Bema Seat judgment of the saints seems like it would take years. So many people – that "great multitude no man can count" (Rev 7:9, 14) – came to life at the first resurrection. It includes every human in heaven except the many-membered Bride (who was judged and found worthy by the Father at her wedding). But as I said, time runs strangely in the heavenlies. The judgment of the saints takes 45 days, during the Restoration. Added to the 30-day Reclamation, it totals 75 days after Daniel's 70th 'week' (7 prophetic 360 day years) is past. [Note: For those interested in such details, in accord with the prophecy that Fergis gave Daniel, the abomination of desolation – from the time Hitler desecrated the temple until the earth was completely reclaimed – was 1290 days, plus the 45-day Restoration equals the 1335 days of Daniel 12:11-12.]

Yashua arises from the Bema judgment seat. All those invited to the wedding feast have been given their gifts and assigned their areas of responsibility and service in the heavenly Kingdom – except David and Danelle and their (relatively small) group of Israelites from Azel.

They've been wondering why they are last, and why the King now stands up beside His judgment seat. He explains, "I have gifts for you as well!" He grins. "I love you, every one. For Israel too is My brother, firstborn of My brothers. But your heavenly gifts must wait until your earthly life is done – and I still have much need of you on earth."

"We are at Your service, my Lord, my King, Messiah!" David breathes. Every heart echoes his. But a little girl, about two, runs to the King, hands raised and hair flying out behind. "Why, Messiah? Can't we have a gift now?"

Yashua laughs heartily and reaches down to lift her up into His arms. "Yes. There is a gift I can give you now. It is the best gift of all, for it is the gift that makes all the others possible. But I've already given it! Haven't you noticed?" He holds her out in front of Him and smiles into her face.

She is mystified. "I don't see any gift…"

"It is I! I am your Gift! Before, you didn't know Me. You longed for Messiah, but you could not see Me. Now I have come to you. You can see Me for who I am. You know Me. You called Me Messiah! I have granted you faith in Me – that is the greatest gift of all!" He gives her a big hug, and everyone in this group knows that His hug is for them, too. "Now that you know Me and My love for you, every deed you do will be united with faith. When your life on earth is done, your heavenly rewards will be that much more, for My rewards are not based on good deeds driven by selfish motives, but on good deeds united with faith in Me."

Satisfied, the girl returns to her parents. He continues, "Your souls kept the Feast, celebrating in the heavenlies with us, but your bodies still await you back in Azel. I've kept them safe for you these seventy-five days, because I would like you to return to your bodies, and to Israel, My Beautiful Land, so you can rule it with Me and My Bride."

David, as always trying to look out for the needs of the people, raises his hand. "O Lord our King and Messiah? The Beautiful Land is beautiful no more. The sun is dead. The earth is dying. The land is poisoned by radiation and vermin. Heat blisters the skin. Plants cannot grow. There is no food, and no shelter. The water is undrinkable. Yet, we trust You. Tell us what we must do to survive there."

"Survive…?" Logos and His Bride begin to laugh. Great, thundering belly laughter, as if this is the greatest joke ever. Good laughter is catching. The mystified group joins in. At the peak of their hilarity, Logos bends down to lift off the top of the judgment seat. With a thrill David finally recognizes it. It is the heavenly reality from which the earthly Ark of the Covenant was copied! Still laughing, Logos takes two items from the Ark and replaces the cover.

They are all still laughing as their souls find their way back to their bodies down in Azel under the temple mount. It is still sealed, and their bodies still protected. With the realization that they are back in their physical bodies, their laughter dies down. Now Logos stands triumphantly and holds up the two items that He took out of the Ark in the heavenlies. He and His Bride are now standing in the niche in the wall, beside the golden Ark that is clearly His throne on earth. Logos opens it up, puts the two items inside, and replaces the cover. Then He sits back on His throne with a sigh of delight. He seems to get way more satisfaction than I would think possible from just moving two items from one place to another. His Bride turns to us to explain.

"Ever since Israel's apostasy after the generation of Joshua passed away, the Ark of the Covenant on earth has been empty of all but the law. Even at the peak of King Solomon's power and the glory of his temple, Israel was only on probation, to see if you would keep the law or not. As you know, even the wisest, richest, most powerful, most righteous man on the planet still fell into gross sin, along with all Israel. So Logos could not dwell with you. His law did all that the law can do for sinners – it brought death. The temple was destroyed. Israel split apart in her apostasy. In spite of many warnings – many warnings! – my brothers sank deeper and deeper under the weight of their sins until they were exiled to the nations as foretold. The Beautiful Land was left empty and desolate.

"Now the apostasy is over. As Logos said, He is your gift – the gift of faith. He has now returned to the Ark of the Covenant the hidden manna and Aaron's rod that budded. The manna represents life within, for it becomes our life when we eat it. Aaron's rod represents life's fruitfulness, for true life within is never futile or barren. It always brings forth much fruit. Together they represent the Life of Logos Himself, who now and forevermore dwells within your bodies, just as the hidden manna and the rod that budded now dwell within the physical Ark of the Covenant."

"Follow Me!" Yashua beckons victoriously as He heads toward the collapsed and crushed entry.

The Israelites had been celebrating in the heavenlies. They had not seen the Restoration. Now Logos explains His little joke. "You'll find it easier to 'survive' here than you thought. I created the universe in six days. Do you not agree that seventy-five days is long enough to repair the damage caused by My adversary? He is now bound for a thousand years, along with his false prophet Wormwood and their entire religious empire, Babylon. You are now set free to be all I created you to be. The Age of the Gentile Harvest is past. Now you are My reapers! This is what I called you to be since the days of father Abraham. I and My Bride will assist you from the heavenlies, but I want you to go all over the earth and invite everyone into My Kingdom. Of all that My Father's Plan of the Ages decrees, not one dropped stitch shall mar the beauty of His tapestry. Of all I have spoken, not one Word shall fall to the ground."

As He talks, He leads them up. The rock opens before Him into a wide, lovely ramp. As they emerge, they look about in stunned amazement. The land! Truly it is now the Beautiful Land, more beautiful than they have ever seen.

The daily rain has just let up. The glory of God bursts through the clouds like the sun. A rainbow fills the sky from one end to the other. The ground, once rocky, hard, and arid, is now level and fertile, with plants sprouting up everywhere like green peach fuzz. But the landscape! The mountains of Judea and Samaria are now level meadows. The Arabah (land below sea level) is filled in. The Dead Sea in its ugly pit from the Sodom and Gomorrah catastrophe is no more. The Jordan, a mighty river now that the rains have returned, meanders south through several new lakes to the Red Sea, like it used to before the time of Peleg. The Sinai Desert and the Negev (and all the world's deserts) are deserts no more. New grass has sprouted all over the earth.

Though the entire land is nearly level, sloping gently toward the sea, there is still one mountain in Israel. All the rest of the land sunk to fill in the valleys and reach out to the new sea level, but the temple mount didn't sink. Indeed, it seems higher than ever. They had thought they would return to Mount Olivet where they had first entered Azel, but no. Mount Olivet and Mount Zion are both gone. Only Mount Moriah is left, and it really looks huge. David realizes that Azel, the cavern that protected their bodies during the Restoration, was never under Mount Olivet – the gash from Mount Olivet had led deep under Mount Moriah. And Azel has held firm. The temple mount is above it still, towering over the rest of the Beautiful Land.

Yashua gazes happily at the one lone mountain. "I now rename it Mount Zion, chief of the mountains. Here I shall establish My throne, My Kingdom on earth! Here on my holy mountain you shall rule with Me for a thousand years, David, My beloved chosen servant, My shepherd."

David glances at Danelle, then back to the King. "Who? Me?" I know that sounds lame, but David was caught off guard. He wasn't wanting to rule anything, just to serve.

Yashua laughs and claps him on the back. "Yes, you! You and your sons forever, just as I promised. Remember? 'David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne.'"

Danelle knows that passage. It is her favorite. She has it memorized, and can't resist quoting some of it back to Yashua. "'Behold, days are coming,' says YHWH, 'when I will fulfill the good word which I have spoken concerning the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In the later days, I will cause a righteous branch of David to spring forth. He shall execute righteousness and justice on the earth. In those days Judah shall be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell in safety.' This is the name by which she shall be called: 'YHWH is our righteousness'. For thus says YHWH, 'David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel, and the Levitical priests shall never lack a man to sacrifice burnt offerings, grain offerings, and sin offerings before Me…' For thus says YHWH, 'If you can break My covenant for the day and night, so day and night do not come at their proper time, then My covenant may also be broken with David My servant so he shall not have a son to rule on his throne, and with the Levitical priests, My ministers. As the host of heaven cannot be counted, and the sand of the seashore cannot be measured, so I will multiply the descendants of David My servant, and the Levites who minister to Me…' Thus decrees YHWH, 'If My covenant for day and night fails, and if My fixed patterns for the heavens and the earth do not remain, then I will reject the descendants of Jacob and My servant David…'" (Jer 33:14-26) Danelle hesitates, her smile fading. "But Lord Yashua? Jeremiah ties it to the fixed patterns of the heavens and the earth. So does Psalm 89, which says David's throne shall endure as the sun. But the sun is dead! The fixed patterns are all gone! Is Your covenant broken? The Levites don't even have a temple to sacrifice burnt offerings now! You stopped us from offering the lamb!"

Yashua puts one arm around Danelle and the other around David, and agrees. "Yes, my beloved. What you say is quite true. The old covenant is broken. As My Bride said, God will never again require an animal sacrifice for sin."

His words clarify a passage in Jeremiah to David's mind. He quotes, "'Behold, days are coming when I shall make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. Not like the covenant I made at Mount Sinai… which they broke… But I will put My laws within them. I'll write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they shall be My people. And they won't need to teach everyone to know Me, for all shall know Me from the least to the greatest. I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more,' declares YHWH. 'For I who ordained the laws making the sun shine by day and the moon and stars by night, and even causing the sea to roar – I whose Law undergirds and governs everything – swear that if this fixed order departs then the sons of Israel shall cease from being a nation forever…' [31:31-36] The 'fixed order' may refer to God's immutable Laws governing the cosmos."

"Yes, David. An excellent interpretation! This is why I chose you. You understand My intent in that passage. My covenant with the cosmos has changed, but not My Laws governing it! The same Law still undergirds and governs everything I created. My Law can never fail! Now is the time of that prophesied new covenant. Today I shall make it with you. Gather everyone onto the temple mount."

David doesn't think everyone can even fit on the temple mount. The top is only about 500 by 600 yards, and there are nearly a million people! But by urging them to stand close to each other they all fit with a little to spare. So now he worries about toilet facilities and seating for the elderly. What might happen if someone faints and starts a panic!

Yashua seems unconcerned. He and His Bride sit on top of the broken altar in the center, beaming at the gathering people. Is Yashua going to preach? David decides to tell Him to keep it short, before some kid has to go potty or needs a drink. But when he comes up to warn Him, Yashua pulls David up to sit beside Him on the flat side of the broken altar and laughs. "David, look at My hands!"

David looks. *Nice big strong hands, aside from the scars left by the nails at the Roman crucifixion. They look like capable, loving hands. Working hands, with calluses…* "No, David. You are seeing only the outside. Look within!"

David tries again. *How do you look beneath the skin, anyway?* But Yashua has commanded it, and he struggles to obey. Slowly his spiritual eyes are opened, to see the hands that framed the cosmos, the hands that molded the first Adam from the clay, the hands that wove the Law of God deep into the fabric of the universe, the hands that surrendered to the Roman nails – for his redemption! He begins to cry. How could he have doubted? How dare he try to warn this King of the Universe of their petty needs?

Yashua laughs. "Well seen, David! Oh how I love you! You are a man after My own heart. You care so deeply for My people, with a love reflecting My own. I do not criticize your concern for their needs. I only encourage you to look up in faith to the abundance of My supply!"

Yashua turns to address the gathered Israelites, but this simple word burns within David for the rest of his life. *"Look up in faith to the abundance of Yashua's supply!"* becomes David's daily motto and his nightly meditation. All through Yashua's speech David pushes aside every worry – the need for facilities; those in back might not be able to hear; they will get tired of standing and have no room to sit down; darkness will fall, leaving them with no shelter for the night; they will faint for lack of food – with the challenge to look up in faith for Yashua to supply all their needs. He begins to pray for God to do just that, from His riches in glory. He wrestles in his soul. He's used to doing everything by himself. But abundant grace pours over him. He opens his heart to receive the gift of faith.

Yashua's speech is indeed very long. And it isn't until it is over that David realizes Yashua has already answered his prayer. For the Master of Time and Space simply shifted the crowd over into heavenly time, which took but a moment of earthly time on the temple mount.

Oh, how I wish I could write out His entire speech for you, dear Reader, for I know you would enjoy it. But alas, it is much too long. It would fill volumes. Besides, it is all in Kasdan, the pictorial language of the heavenlies, so to translate it into English with any degree of poetic accuracy takes more words yet. As He speaks, David becomes aware that the modern Hebrew or Yiddish perversions are gone. Everyone is communicating in what he knows as ancient Hebrew, the language of Noah, and of Adam and Eve.

This is a mind-blowing revelation. Though David had of course heard the three angels' warnings, he hadn't even been aware that they were speaking a different language. Now he realizes that they've all become perfectly fluent in this heavenly language without ever studying it. It is a miracle! David remembers the lessons in ancient Hebrew the two prophets had taught before the Knesset. They had insisted that from the beginning, the spoken word was intended to be a bridge connecting spirit to spirit. David's heart burns as he becomes aware of this truth. Yashua's words have joined their hearts in perfect understanding. That is true communication! Thus David, and all the rest, encounter Pentecost anew as the Holy Spirit of God fills them, opens each mind and heart, and transfers His thoughts directly to theirs, Heart to heart, Spirit to spirit.

I can't write out his entire speech. But since this is the greatest speech in the history of the universe, I feel that (as heaven's historian) I must string together a few snippets of it to give you a feel for what Yashua said. So here goes.

"My beloved sons of Israel, children of Abraham My chosen! How I love you! With everlasting love I brought you to Myself, that I may enjoy you forever. You are strong, passionate, bold! I love that in you! Yet in your stubborn idolatry, rebellion, and pride you have suffered more than any nation. Only the tenth has survived to the 1335th day. [Isa 6:13; Dan 12:12] How blessed are you, My remnant! In you I fulfill My plans and purposes for the earth.

"I gave you My Word, that you might teach the nations and draw them to the light of My presence. But instead, you hardened your hearts and despised My Word, thus profaning My holy name among the nations. You turned against Me and become My enemy, breaking the covenant I made with you. Therefore the sun died, the cycles of day and night failed, and the fixed order of the heavens and the earth were undone. Therefore My covenants to David My shepherd and to Levi and Aaron as ministers in My temple were nullified. Therefore My temple was laid waste, My Holy City was profaned, and My Beautiful Land was filled with the bodies the slain. That is why you were left behind. That is why you missed My wedding feast and the Dance.

"But I have loved you with an everlasting love, and true love cannot ever give up on His beloved! Thus I duplicated My wedding feast so I could share it with you, *My brother!* (Yes, I, too, am a child of Abraham, a Son of Israel in the royal line of King David, though I am also Yashua your Messiah and YHWH your God.) Therefore I make a new covenant with you today. This covenant is not like the one I made with you at Mount Sinai. That covenant was only external. No matter how hard you tried to keep it, you eventually forgot and turned away from Me. But the new covenant I make with you today is internal. I write it on your hearts! You no longer have to exhort one another to know Me or obey My commands, for you all know Me, and My Words live within you, within each one of you, engraved upon your hearts from this day forth forever!

"I also make a new covenant for the fixed order of the heavens and the earth. Even in disaster My Law still rules, as David so wisely noted. That Law can never change. But now I decree that you shall no longer be dependent upon the sun for light and heat, or on the clouds for shade or rain, or on the stars for signs or seasons. The old is past. My storybook in the stars is also finished. It told the story of your redemption. You are fully redeemed this day!

"The new is come. I have reset Earth's orbit to a perfect 360 days, and the moon's orbit to a perfect 30 days. I have fully recharged the electrostatic and magnetic fields of the planets by My own power, so you will be protected from all cosmic radiation. I will keep it charged by the light of My glory, as I shine on you for sixteen hours of each day and hide My face to reflect off your moon for the eight hours of each night. I have restored the resonance of the planets in tune, in harmony with Me, so the music of the spheres again rings true. I personally will sustain this established order to the end of the age. I have restored earth's vapor barrier in the heavens, so no place on earth will be too hot or cold, and no storms will blow upon you. I have restored earth's crust. The rocky ground is broken down so the soil will again produce abundantly for you. I've brought low every mountain and filled in every valley, so you will have plenty of good fertile level land for you and your children to spread out and repopulate the earth. The rains will come without fail, gentle rains, to water the earth each day. The vermin, the plagues, the harmful bugs 'n slugs and perverted creatures that harassed you and your gardens have all been burned up in the fires that I sent to circle the globe. Yet I sent My family of dragons across the earth to lead the good birds and beasts to safety. They shall return to aid you and to become your friends as they were before the Flood. Be grateful to your dragon friends for the service they have done you.

"The fish of the seas, the whales, dolphins, and all the myriads of My sea creatures, are not quite extinct as you suppose. Some I preserved from the time of the Flood and the Ice Age, in a huge undersea cavern beneath Antarctica. I now release them to repopulate the ocean deeps."

Yashua pauses and nods to a pert youngster with her hand raised. "Sir? Are there good dragons? That dragon with Hitler was bad! I read stories about them – in my stories, dragons are always bad. They steal the king's gold and kidnap his princess. The brave knight has to ride forth and slay the dragon to rescue the princess and win her hand…"

She wants to go on, but Yashua is laughing so hard she has to stop. "Yes, dear Tana. Some of them were very bad, just like some humans you may have read about. But if humans can repent, why cannot dragons repent? Indeed, why cannot all the birds and beasts which were perverted at the Fall of Adam be restored so they love and serve humans instead of fearing and fleeing from them?" He grins. "Would you like to meet a good dragon, my dear?"

Tana has to pause to think about that. She is bold, but clearly she faces a fear that holds her back. Then her new faith and trust in her Messiah wins out. "Yes, Sir. If You say they are good, Sir, I would love to meet one."

Still laughing, Yashua calls out, "Mr. Dragon! I have a young lady here who wishes to meet you. Perhaps others in the crowd want to meet you, too. Please come down." Soon a huge dragon swoops in from the sky. Those who look up see three more dragons circling lazily, high over the temple mount where they have been listening.

He is immense. David gulps in fright, partly of the dragon, and partly of the panic he may cause as people step back on each other in their effort to flee. Then he stares in shock. It looks to him like the big red dragon who was in league with Hitler! It's all he can do to restrain himself. "Look up in faith…" he keeps telling himself.

"Mr. Dragon, thank you for dropping in. Would you please introduce yourself to Tana here, and tell her what you think of Hitler and other kings, and knights in shining armor, and gold, and fair princesses?"

Bear in mind, dear Reader, that dragons do not have the faculty of verbal speech. However, they've developed their telepathy to a fine art, like a nonverbal Kasdan. Not a soul in the group can deny that these thoughts come from him. "My dear Tana! I am honored to make your acquaintance. You have rightly feared dragons, for my father, my grandfather, and his father before him all fought against kings and knights in shining armor, stole their gold, captured fair princesses in splendid gowns and sparkling jewelry, and devoured their slaves. For that my race was hated and hunted to the very brink of extinction. Indeed, I was the very last of my race. I so feared for my life that I remained in my den during the day to hunt only in the dead of night.

"But recently I was reminded of my grandfather's grandfather. He saved Noah's life, and he himself was saved by living on Noah's ark during the Flood. So I repented, and determined to try to get along with the humans. Yashua has accepted my repentance, and has given me a task to do for Him."

Everyone is listening to his speech, but it is what they are seeing that amazes them. Birds of all kinds are flying around him, many landing on him as if they are the closest of friends. Now, even some beasts of the field have made it to the top of the mountain and filtered through the crowd. The big cats come first, pairs of lions, cheetahs, and tigers. Then horses and some antelope. A pair of bears, some deer and elk, a few goats and sheep, two big wolves and some dogs. They keep coming as he continues to talk – rabbits, house cats, a badger, and a pair of monkeys, obviously delayed by their slower speed on the ground. They all come fearlessly up to the dragon, first grouped around him as if in a family circle, then turning to face the humans.

Yashua laughs for joy. "What is that task I gave you, friend dragon? And who are these around you?"

"You made me king of birds and beasts, good Sir. These are my closest friends, my generals. Through them, I am teaching the animal kingdom to respect and honor the humans, as they did before the Fall."

David can restrain himself no longer. "You didn't answer Yashua's question about Hitler! You were right with Hitler, working for him! I know! I saw you!"

The great dragon hangs his head. "I was. Yet not I but Satan who possessed me. He restored my mate and gave me back my strength in exchange for my body for one year. Then after I was delivered, he threatened my twins and possessed me for two more years. He would have kept me forever if Yashua had not saved me through His servant Michael. I am sorry. I hope to make it up to you by freeing these animals from their fear and hatred of humans."

"How successful have you been, Mr. Dragon?" Little Tana is beginning to believe.

He merely shrugs at her and says, "Come and see."

Now is the most beautiful part of our story. Tana is tiny for her age. But having made her decision to trust Yashua, she becomes bold. She walks slowly close to the dragon, staring up into his face for a long moment. He holds his breath so it won't singe her hair. It looks a bit funny, as she is barely taller than his front paw. Then she nods to him without a word and moves to stand in front of each of the animals with him. Now it becomes clear, she has learned to communicate using animal telepathy just like the dragon. Children always seem to learn faster than adults.

In front of each animal, she reaches out a hand to touch its head, questioning it silently, "Do you love the humans? Do you promise to do us no harm?"

Tana's parents are biting their lips, especially when she reaches the bears and lions. It helps that several fearless goats and sheep are standing peacefully beside them. Finally she turns back to the crowd. "It's okay. They've all sworn to love us now. They will help us rather than harm us. So we must learn to respect them and love them, too."

Now she turns back to stand before the dragon once again, this time speaking audibly so the others can hear. "Thank you, Mr. Dragon. You've done very well. I forgive you for what Satan did with you. I guess you're not the only one who has had that problem." She reaches out both arms to grab the dragon's paw, and gives it a feeble hug.

Not a soul there can miss the profound significance, for these are people who know their Torah. They love those legendary prophecies of Isaiah 11 and 65 which promise that the wolf will dwell with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the kid, the bear will graze with the cow, the lion will eat straw like the ox, an infant will play with serpents, a little child will lead them, and "they will not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of YHWH as water fills the sea."

When Tana finishes her dragon hug, she looks back to Yashua, wondering it she dares to do the same with Him. He welcomes her with open arms, and commends her. "Tana, you've just given us all a great sermon. I bless your love of animals. You may help them find their proper place in My new earth." Still hugging her, Yashua addresses the crowd. "You will find that many limitations under which you've labored are gone. Tana has given you one example – you can talk with the animals, or with each other, using thought-speech. You can focus your thought toward one, or many. Animals will become your friends, so you must no longer kill or eat them. You won't need meat for food anymore, for I restored the air so it is thicker, warmer, and contains more oxygen. Oxygen is now your primary food, supplemented by fruits, nuts, and green plants as it was before the Flood. Plants will grow in lavish abundance in the warm air and with the daily rains and long daylight time. Your toil to 'make a living' is thus greatly reduced.

"Some other limitations also are removed. The veil, the boundary blocking you from entering the realms of spirit, is now open for you as long as you keep yourselves holy, covered by your faith in My perfect sacrifice. This is very important, for you have a job to do. You cannot do it if you turn away in rebellion as you did before. Your task is to go throughout the earth searching for survivors, restore them to faith in Me, and bring them into My Kingdom. All who attained to the 1335 days are blessed, including any who don't know Me yet! Right now My Kingdom is limited to these on My holy mountain. It must grow to fill the earth! But you no longer have any cars or boats or airplanes. So to go to the farthest corners of the earth, you must learn to step into the realm of spirit – the second heaven, where the angels dwell – as Peter did when he walked to Me on the Sea of Galilee (until his fears overcame his faith). There, you can move with a thought. When you arrive, step back through the veil. Minister My love to all creation. Speak My Word of Reconciliation. Enforce My laws. Discipline those who hated Me and fled from Me. Disciple those who receive Me, teaching them to obey all that I command you. Then adopt them into My family, the children of Israel."

Yashua sets Tana down and spreads out His arms to circle the whole temple mount. "My temple is no longer a physical building here on the mountain. You all are My temple. I dwell in you. I make a new covenant with you now, different from the covenant I made with David my servant and with the Levitical priests who ministered in the old temple made with hands. David Davison!" He turns to David and lays His hands on his head. "I've chosen you as My king, to rule My people with righteousness and justice. No longer will you be a prime minister, with your days filled with petty arguments among your peers. Now you are the king. Your word is law. I Myself will enforce it, and will strike down any who dare to oppose you.

"The rest of you are living stones in My temple. You are all priests, no longer after the order of Levi, or Aaron, or even Zadok, but now after the order of Melchizedek. Every one of you shall minister to Me and draw all people to Myself in holiness and truth. My new covenant requires no animal sacrifices or burnt offerings. No more blood need be shed. Instead, it is one continuous sacrifice of worship and obedience to Me. It is the sacrifice of keeping yourself holy and offering your life to serve Me and My precious ones. I in My Bride will be with you always, guiding you from the heavenlies. So go to the nations, to all the other survivors. Intercede for them as I do for you. Love them as I have loved you. Bring them into My Kingdom of Love."

Danelle, standing beside David on Yashua's left, asks meekly, "What shall we tell them, Lord?"

"Come!" the Bride answers. She is sitting just to Yashua's right, appearing to the people as a lovely woman, filled with Spirit. "Just tell them to come! Let everyone who is thirsty come! Let everyone who wishes take the Water of Life without cost. Those who chose to worship Hitler are dead. All who remain alive served him only out of fear or coercion. They long for something better than his kingdom of lies and force. Let them see our Kingdom of Love! They will thirst for it. They will come. Bring them here, to our holy mountain. We release the Water of Life which flows from the throne of God." The Bride waves her hand and a flood of pure water pours forth. It looks like it's coming from Yashua, or from the altar, or both. It divides into two sparkling streams, one flowing west toward the Great Sea, and the other east toward the Jordan. "Invite them to drink and be satisfied. And we plant for you the Trees of Life. Invite the nations to eat its fruit to extend their lives, and use its leaves for healing. Command them to return each year to celebrate the Feast of Sukkot with us. Adopt them into our family. If any of the families of the nations will not come, command that the daily rains not fall upon them. They will die if they do not come and be cleansed, because no one who hides his sin may eat of the Trees of Life or drink the Water of Life. Let the holiness of God spread from here to cover the earth!" Even before she finishes speaking, the Trees of Life are sprouting up along both banks of the two streams of the Water of Life.

Yashua now stands, His Bride beside Him. They begin to ascend into the sky. "I have returned the Promised Land to you…" He shouts, "the land flowing with milk and honey. It is again My Beautiful Land. I give it to you from the Red Sea to Hamath and from the Great Sea to the River Euphrates. Obey your King David My shepherd. Dwell in the land and prosper. Take dominion over the earth, over the fish of the sea, over the beasts of the field, over the birds of the sky, and over every creeping thing. As I first gave it to Adam, so now I give it to you. Lo, I am with you always!"

"Wait!" Mr. Dragon calls out. It is the first verbal word he has attempted on his own. Though it comes out a bit gurgley, it is quite clear, and thunderously loud.

Yashua and His Bride have nearly reached the altitude where Mrs. Dragon and the twins have been circling. But now they stop and return to the altar. "What is it, my friend? I granted your request for the thicker, warmer air. Behold…" Logos points up. "You now have the strength to remain aloft for hours. Do you have another request?"

Mr. Dragon bows, his great head dragging on the ground. "Sir, I am sorry to trouble Your Majesty, but our den is lost. We have no home. All during the cataclysms, we were directing the birds and beasts to avoid the fires that circled the globe, as You requested through Michael, Sir. But now that it is all over, we can't find our den."

"Ahh, then it is I who owes you a new home, is it?"

"You owe us nothing, Sir. We're Your servants. We will go wherever You ask – serve in whatever way You wish."

Yashua and His Bride glance at each other and smile. "We like your new attitude, friend dragon. You have learned well your lessons in repentance. Be at peace.

"However, where you make your home is not up to Me, for though you are now king of beasts, I already granted dominion over you and all the beasts to King David and the ones he appoints over you. They will tell you where to go, where to serve, and where to build your den." Yashua puts an arm around His Bride to again ascend.

"But, Sir? The gold! I had the gold of a thousand kings, the wealth of all the nations, silver and jewels too, in my den. I planned to return it to Your people when needed. The gold cannot, it must not, be lost!"

Again, Yashua settles back down on the altar. "Gold, silver, and precious stones have little value anymore my friend. Look around. Every man-made fetish, every idol, every precious thing that mankind elevated above Me is gone. Let it go, and good riddance."

"I cannot, Sir. I made a promise. I must keep it. I swore to return the gold to the humans when they needed it."

Suddenly Yashua shows an interest. "Aha! You made a promise. That is a different story. You must keep your vows. It is My Law." With that He is gone.

CHAPTER 68 – THE GARDEN OF EDEN

The incredible speech of Yashua and His Bride is over (although I get the impression that that speech is never really quite over). They've ascended through the veil and disappeared from view. Now David stands up on top of the broken altar and calls for order. For the first time in that long speech, they seem fidgety and are whispering among themselves. David knows he must release them pretty soon. But Yashua just called him a king and he'd better say something to start his government, or he is likely to lose it before it begins. Momentarily, he wishes he were back to being prime minister. Arguing with his colleagues is easier than having the full weight of the government fall directly upon his own two shoulders.

As heaven's historian, of course I am eager to hear how this new King David is going to handle the awesome responsibility. The first King David spent most of his life fighting Israel's enemies, and was known as a man of war. But Israel has no enemies now! I can't even imagine what this David will do. But before I find out, I am summoned to the throne by Yashua. He is being asked a question by Joseph-Chris Johnson. I recognize the 'preacher' in him as he asks, "Logos, that was a beautiful sermon, but I don't understand the part about the new covenant. I thought the new covenant was at the Last Supper, when You took the cup and said, 'This is the new covenant in My blood.'"

Logos laughs joyfully – He seems to be always laughing anymore – and responds, "What did Isaiah say about Me? 'There will be no end to the increase of His government…' (9:7). And what did Matthew write about Me… that My kingdom is like leaven, or like a mustard seed. (13:31-33) The new covenant began at My crucifixion, as My blood was shed for the atonement of mankind. Yes. But it began hidden only within the hearts of those few who believed, and then only as a tiny seed or a measure of leaven. There it has been growing ever since, until… now that seed is a mighty tree! The nations eat its fruit! And that leaven has risen into an entire loaf, so all can know Me, from the least to the greatest." He laughs great guffaws. "You didn't really think that your itty bitty wafer and thimble of grape juice was the fullness of My Kingdom, did you?!"

Joseph-Chris now joins in His laughter. "I wondered about that when I preached on the new covenant passage in Hebrews 8:11. It says, 'they shall not teach… saying, "Know the Lord!" for all shall know Me…' yet here I was teaching it! But I thought the new covenant had come at Pentecost when Your Holy Spirit came to write Your Law on our hearts. I guess we all had a lot of growing to do."

"You sure did! My Kingdom remained hidden within you until the old covenants died. After My covenant with the old order of the cosmos failed, after My covenants with the Levitical priests and the temple services were broken, after all the external covenants proved ineffective – only then is My internal covenant revealed to prevail over all."

Logos suddenly turns to me. "Cain! Son of Dust!" Abruptly the laughter is cut off, as if with a knife. I wonder if I've done something wrong, or made an error in my book. But He reassures me, "Your writing is coming along just fine. I'm enjoying it immensely. You've learned to be in many places at once. I'm pleased."

"Thank you, Lord Logos. But if You're pleased with me, why then are You no longer laughing?"

"You were thinking that I always seem to be laughing." He chuckles. "But behind the laughter, underneath the joy that is My nature, I am deadly serious. The enemies the first King David faced in battle are weak compared to the ones this David and his son will face, even in a perfect world with Satan bound. *For these final enemies are yet locked within the hearts and souls of the human nature."*

"Aw'right, now! Listen up!" David shouts. He suddenly realizes another limitation that has been eliminated in this new earth. He no longer needs amplification. Everyone hears him, and settles down immediately. "Yashua has given us a wondrous gift – a second chance! We failed Him the first time. We will not fail Him this time. He told us, 'How blessed are you, My remnant. In you I fulfill My plans and purposes for the earth.' And He has put us back in a perfect world, cleansed and renewed – now all a veritable Garden of Eden, just like Adam and Eve before the Fall.

"At first I had thought we would build another temple up here, and possibly a throne or house of congress. But as He spoke, I changed my mind. No man-made edifice of any kind will be built on this temple mount. We will leave this broken altar as a reminder of the old covenant, but nothing else. Instead, we will plant grass, flowers, and fruit trees. We will create another Garden of Eden, beginning where the Waters of Life flow out from under the altar. When people come to eat of the Trees of Life, I want them to come to a garden, not a stuffy government building!

"Now for the animals. Back up a bit to give room for our dragon friends to land so we can meet them all." They do, and the people are glad that Mrs. Dragon is just as polite as her mate. The twins are adorable. Tana is passing out hugs. More animals gather around the dragons, filling the space. "Dragons!" David addresses them with an authority he was not sure he had. "As king of the birds and the beasts you shall rule from this mount. No longer shall your den be a hole in the ground. Construct a thicket among the trees. I want this garden filled with animals and birds. Bring the most beautiful, the most polite and respectful, the most helpful animals that you can train. Will you do it? Will you dwell here and take charge of the animals here?"

"Yes sir! We would love to do that, sir!"

"Tana! Yashua blessed your love of animals and said you would help them find their place in the earth. How would you like to work for me? Are you willing to be my commanding officer in charge of the dragons?"

Tana's eyes get very big. "Me, sir? I'm only ten."

"Yashua trusts you. Why should not I? Besides, Torah asserts, 'A little child shall lead them.' You are indeed very little. And I think the dragons love you already. You were the first to be able to speak their language. I think you'll make a great officer. All you need to do is communicate. Tell me what are their needs or problems, and pass along to them my orders. That's all an officer does."

Brave little Tana comes to stand before David. First she glances at Danelle, who is beaming at her, then she stands her tallest (which is still pretty short), looks up at David, and salutes. "Yes sir! Ready for duty, sir!"

A wild applause breaks out among the rest, and David realizes that his first choice for an administration officer is a big hit. "Next I need a master gardener, to take charge of planting and maintaining our new Garden of Eden. Do I have any volunteers?"

Immediately a little hand shoots up. Tana's twin sister Tina runs forward. "I want to be in charge of the garden. My mom taught me all about gardening. I'm just as good with the plants as Tana is with the animals, I promise. Please, Sir? I want to work with my sister, sir."

David did not expect this. In fact, he had rather hoped to have a mature adult working next to Tana just in case. But the applause has started again. No one else volunteers. David momentarily closes his eyes and breathes a prayer. "Yashua! Help! The first crisis of my administration, and I don't know how to handle it. Is this right?"

Instantly David finds himself in the heavenlies with Yashua. He is beaming at him, and laughing at the same time. "Well done! Well done, My beloved! How I love you! This is why I chose you. You are truly a man after My own heart. You love the little children, yet you would protect them from their own childish choices and cover them so they can grow. You want to trust them and give them responsibility – only as they can handle it under authority. You shall make a great king indeed! But best of all, I have seen how quickly you align yourself under My authority. For as soon as you get beyond yourself, you call upon Me. Know that I shall always hear you, and answer you, and show you great and mighty things which you know not – though I may not always bring you into the heavenlies with Me. Now, in answer to your question, yes! I made the Tzedique twins to work together. For Tina speaks the language of plants as Tana does with the animals."

The vision fades, and David is back before the group. Not an instant has passed. "Yes, Tina Tzedique. I hereby appoint you as my commanding officer in charge of the plants in the garden. Tana and the animals will help you. Yashua has given you a gift to speak to the plants, just as Tana speaks with the animals. They will obey you. And you shall have as many helpers as you need. The garden will always thrive beautifully under your command."

"Sir! Yes, sir!" Tina steps forward and salutes. "But sir, how did you know my name? Do you know everyone's name? And how did you know that I talk to the plants and tell them how to grow?"

David laughs as he returns the salute. "Yashua made me the king. He tells me all I need to know. As long as I obey Him, I'll be a good king. And as long as you two obey me, you will be good commanders and this garden will be a place of refuge for all who need to be cleansed by the Waters of Life and eat from the Tree of Life. Now, where are your parents? Mr. and Mrs. Tzedique! Step forward!" They do, awed that their little daughters have been given so much responsibility. "I have taken your daughters from you. As king I have the right to do that. But as your brother and fellow Israelite, I will not trample upon your rights as parents. I hereby appoint you gatekeepers to the garden. Thus you may watch over your daughters and guard them from harm, while helping them to fulfill my commission."

So it goes, as David boldly and decisively picks the key members of his administration under the inspiration of the Spirit within. With every choice, the people cheer and applaud even more, for they know and trust David, and now love him all the more for his wise choices.

Soon he is ready to send them away. "All of you drink of the Waters of Life before you go. Then find edible plants to harvest for your evening meal. We will all sleep back in Azel until we have time to divide up the land among us and build homes and shelters."

The crowd streams down off the temple mount in all directions. But David and Danelle just kneel down beside the broken altar to pray. Yashua and His Bride are there, beside them in the spirit realm, rejoicing in their presence, encouraging, and commending their wise choices. David is filled with joy – more joy than Danelle has seen in him for a long time. He admits to Yashua, "When You first told me I was chosen to be king over Your people, I was scared. In a democracy if we goof up it's everyone's fault, but if I'm king and we goof up, it's all my fault. But I'm beginning to see now that I'm not really the king. You are the King. ruling through me. Whatever I say, every decision I make, I sense Your guidance. I'm just your visible representative. With You, I can't fail! It's totally awesome! Thank You!"

"You're welcome, My beloved. I, too, am grateful!" Yashua is just as excited as David. "This is the way you were made to live – you abiding in Me in perfect harmony. You now have My wisdom written on your heart. You are quickly learning a careful sensitivity to My Spirit within. With that, you really cannot fail, just as the eternal Father through Me cannot fail in His perfect Plan of the Ages."

"So what do You want me to do now?"

At that, Yashua and His Bride laugh delightedly. "Rule, David, just rule! Be the king! I've never had so much fun! Believe Me, I share your every joy!"

It's a long time before David and Danelle stand up to head back down the mount, but it is still light. Everyone is now gone except the Tzedique family. Tana and Tina are still plotting the layout of their garden as their younger brothers and the dragons watch in awe. Their parents come to David. "Your Majesty…"

David shakes his head. "It's 'His Majesty', not mine. Please just call me 'sir' or 'Mr. Davison'."

"Yes, sir. Thank you for what you did for our daughters. They love Yashua. They're really excited about using their talents to serve Him. We think they will do well here."

"I know they will, because it is His Spirit who is giving them wisdom, just like He does for me."

"He's doing that for us, too. Your choice for us… Well, I've always wanted to be a gatekeeper in the house of our God! And this temple mount – turning it into a Garden of Eden was the best idea I've ever heard. What better way to build a temple for Him now, than by planting a garden! Logos said the people who come here are the real temple."

"So you think He will be honored here?"

"Think?" Mr. Tzedique shakes his head. "I know He is honored here! He came to us in a vision, just now as you were praying. He was as excited about the garden as we are – maybe more. He said this was the original location of the Garden of Eden, and this altar is on the exact spot where He built the first altar to sacrifice the lamb for Adam and Eve. I'm sure you knew that before, but…"

"No, I didn't know that. That's incredible! I'm amazed! Thank you for telling me. What else did He say?"

"He made us a spiritual guard, a prayer guard, over the garden. With the help of our children and animal friends, we will be able to keep the garden a holy place always. He told us that's really important, so He can dwell with us.

"Also, He, well…" Mr. Tzedique looks down at his toes "…He gave us a special gift of discernment. To be able to recognize those who sincerely want cleansing versus those still trying to hide sin in their hearts. He says that sinners must be prohibited from eating of the Trees of Life."

David bows, awed. "Yes, I see it now. As servant to His servants you have taken the lowest place, gatekeeper to the temple of God. So He has lifted you up to the very highest place, to maintain the holiness of His temple, His dwelling place on earth! The highest place! And I'm just a king…"

"Coming, Dad?" It is Solomon II, David's oldest son and heir, who has just climbed back up the mountain. "You've been up here a long time. We've all finished our dinner – there is an abundance of edible plants down there. We may not even need to cultivate in this rich soil. But evening is nigh and you haven't yet joined in the dance. Haven't you seen what's going on down below? Please come, before everyone gets tired and goes to Azel."

He leads them to the east rim, nearest to the entrance to Azel. David and Danelle are awed! As far as the eye can see are meadows full of flowers as well as edible plants. And for a least a mile in all directions are graceful circles of dancers, all dressed in flowing robes which are so white, they sparkle as they twirl. "Where in… in heaven's name did they get all those white robes?" Danelle splutters.

"Come and see!" Solomon races back down the hill to rejoin his wife Maria and their five youngsters in the dance. They flow back out onto the meadow.

So David calls for the Tzedique family to follow, and starts down the mount with his wife. As he leaves he hears Tana instructing the dragons how to guard the hilltop area while they are gone. A hearty cheer arises from those below when they see their new king descending. But just before they reach the meadow, they are stopped by Yashua and His Bride. "Come! Share My joy!" Yashua begins.

"I'm sorry that you missed our wedding dance," His Bride adds. "Yet here is joy in abundance! I would like to share it with you now. May I have this dance?"

David and Danelle fall at their feet. "I give you my all, yet… we have never learned how to dance…" David begs. He discovers he wants it more than anything in his life, but fears to look like a fool in front of all these people, and thus bring shame to his high office and to Yashua's Bride.

She just laughs. "This dance is not something you need to learn," Yashua confides. "It is something you do just because you are filled with My joy!" He raises His hand, cymbals crash, and Sam-Suzy Salizar's orchestra breaks into some energetic dance music. This is not classical, nor jazz, nor big band, nor waltz, nor pop, nor folk, nor square, nor ethnic, nor country, nor gospel, nor blues, nor rag, nor rock, though in a way it contains elements of all those. This new music style can only be called pure joy!

A thrill goes through David and Danelle as they reach out to take the hands of Yashua's Bride. Instantly they are off in a high-energy romp among all the others flowing in graceful circles around the meadows. Not knowing how to dance, David and Danelle just humbly follow the lead of Yashua's many-membered Bride. In no time, they have joined the circles of happy dancers as if they were experts. They glance down to see that they also are clothed in white robes, gifts from Yashua when they started the dance. But in glancing down, they notice that the flowers beneath them are not getting trampled, for their dancing feet never get closer than an inch or so above the meadow.

The Tzedique family has also joined the dance. All the little children have enthusiastically joined, too. They soon prove to be the best dancers of all. Even babes are included – held in their parent's arms. Finally every Israelite alive has experienced, in limited measure, the Dance which they missed in the heavenlies. Time itself holds its breath. The dance goes on and on until they can stand no more.

CHAPTER 69 – THE BEAUTIFUL LAND

David and Danelle are well past middle age, past the age when they can dance with all their might for hours and not suffer for it later. But it was worth it. Never before have they experienced such incredible, overwhelming joy. They can't know that it was but a taste, a thousandth part, of the wedding dance that they missed. The next morning they arise expecting to feel stiff and sore. But they are still energized by that joy, and eager to do the same thing again the next Sabbath and every Sabbath the rest of their lives.

David has always been an early riser. He decides to hold a meeting of his new cabinet members before breakfast. If they are going to serve him, they had better be early risers, too. But the Tzedique twins are nowhere to be found. "They went up to the temple mount," their parents report. David does not want to trudge all the way up there to get them. It would be breakfast time before they got back. But he simply cannot allow them to miss his first cabinet meeting. He's stuck. *Lord Yashua, here I am in another crisis already*… he thinks.

Instantly he is reminded of the dance – his feet were not touching the ground. What was it that Yashua had said? Something about other limitations being removed? He remembers. "The veil blocking you from entering realms of spirit is open… You must learn to step into My spirit realm. There, you can travel with just a thought!" That had sounded so preposterous at the time, but he certainly hadn't been in the realm of earth as he danced. "Pardon me a second. I'll get the twins," he tells the others. He takes a step away, praying for Yashua to open to him that realm of spirit. Then he concentrates on thinking, 'Temple mount!' Instantly, he is there.

"Tana! Tina!" he calls cheerily, as if he has done this every day of his life. They stare up at him and gasp as if they've seen a ghost. "Sir? Are you Yashua?"

David laughs. "No, no. But I am learning to let Him live through me. Now come. Take my hands. We're holding a cabinet meeting. I will not allow two of my top officers to skip out on cabinet meetings."

They jump up and run to him, apologizing. It will be a delight working with these two. They're so responsive. "Hey! You don't need to apologize! I never told you about the meeting 'til now. In fact, you are to be commended! You were at work even earlier than I was!" He takes their hands and prays the same prayer as before. Instantly they are back in Azel, startling the others. "It's easy," David reassures them. "Later I'll teach you all how to do it."

The meeting is pretty boring – basic stuff – preparing to set up a government and planning the next step. Just two highlights. Tana and Tina report that they aren't going to need any human helpers. The dragons are already helping to train various animals to do all the digging, planting, weeding, everything. All they have to do is direct.

Then Solomon II, who as David's oldest son has been appointed his chief advisor, makes his report. "Dad, I noticed that as we were dancing, our feet weren't quite touching the ground." Other heads were nodding. That was pretty hard not to notice. "It's a good thing, because if we were touching the ground, we'd all have to be unclean for a week for touching dead bodies! They're all over the ground. They're hard to see, because the animals have cleaned the meat off the bones, and grass has grown up over them. Their rifles are easier to spot, or the rest of their gear. When you spot the gear, there is usually a dead body close by. There must be many thousands, maybe millions. All of Hitler's men, killed by the neutron blasts. We've got to do something about the bodies to cleanse the land."

Danelle, whose good memory and literary skills have earned her the office of recording secretary, comments, "Ezekiel prophesied about that. He says that to cleanse the land, Israel will be seven months burying the bodies and seven years burning all their weapons." (39:9-12)

"Does it say where the bodies will be buried?"

"The Valley of Hamon-Gog, wherever that is."

"Probably Edom," Solomon says, looking it up. "It says, '… in Israel, the valley of those who pass by east of the sea.' That must be the Dead Sea, though it's not dead anymore. The road east of the sea goes into Edom. Yashua told us our boundaries reach to the Euphrates, so Edom is all part of Israel now. And all the major prophets prophesied against Edom. They said it would become an object of horror; no one would live there; its land shall be turned into burning pitch which no one can quench; and its smoke will go up forever. (Isa 34:5 ff; Jer 49:17 ff) There might still be a few deep chasms there where we could throw the dead bodies and burn the weapons. If we burn it all in one place, the explosives and wood from the rifle stocks will be enough to keep the fires going until the bones are burned to ashes."

At the word, 'ashes' Danelle gasps. "David! Remember that prophecy in Malachi, the one that you enjoy so much? 'On the day I prepare My own possessions, I will spare them as a man spares his own son whom he loves. Then you will be able to distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, between the one who serves God and the one who does not. For behold, that day is coming! Burning like a furnace! And all the arrogant, all the wicked, will be like chaff, which that day will set ablaze, leaving them neither ancestors nor descendants. However, for you who fear Me and esteem My holy name, the Sun of Righteousness will arise like a mighty angel, with healing on His wings! Then you will go forth, to skip about like calves set free from the stall. And you will tread down the wicked, for they shall be as ashes under your feet on the day which I am preparing, says YHWH of Hosts.' (3:16 – 4:3) I always thought that was just figurative speech. But we sure did dance yesterday like calves set free from the stall, and we trod all over the wicked like ashes under our feet!"

So that afternoon, David chooses another officer in charge of the burial detail, and assigns him two hundred men to gather the dead bodies for burial and collect their weapons to burn. It isn't enough. So he assigns another three hundred, and orders their wives and children to help by planting a bright colored marker whenever they spot another body. Two hundred million men is a lot to bury.

The land is mostly level now, but they do find one nice crevasse in Edom. It's deep enough so the exploding ammunition won't endanger anyone. They get some huge fires going, and start throwing in bodies (which are mostly bones by now), rifle stocks, explosives, and anything else from the war that might burn. The crevasse is named Hamon-Gog. The workers' town that grows up near it is called Hamonah. Everyone supports them and calls them heroes for the valiant effort they make in cleansing the land. And yes, it really does take seven months to get all the dead bodies into the pit, and with all their weapons and ammo, the fires are still smoldering for a full seven years.

Now the land has really become the Beautiful Land. The new city of Jerusalem (without any walls this time) really is the Holy City! David has divided up the land Yashua allotted them, so each family has plenty of land to expand for many generations to come. Their first big task is to plant millions of trees, which grow fast in the warm thick air. They don't need much by way of shelter, except from the rains for an hour or so each day. Some even enjoy their daily dousing. Those that don't, can take shelter back in Azel, or find some privacy among the trees, as soon as the trees get big enough.

But what they enjoy the most is their weekly Sabbaths! Every week now Yashua and His Bride join them in their Sabbath evening meal and in a group dance the following morning. Everyone is invited. Sometimes they dance the entire Sabbath through! Everyone learns to harmonize with the angel choir, and many of them make instruments to join the angel orchestra.

It's hard to tell who gets the most joy out of it all – those still on earth or those coming down to join them from the heavenlies. But I think Yashua and His Bride get as much joy out of it as all the rest put together. It's like all the ages of time focus now upon their Sabbath fellowship and dance. Finally they can understand what the Scripture means, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men. He shall dwell among them. They shall be His peoples, and God Himself shall live among them." (Rev 21:3)

The garden on the temple mount grows fast. It soon becomes the most beautiful garden David has ever seen. He had no idea that two little girls could be so creative. They hardly need any orders from him at all. When he asks their secret, Tana says nonchalantly, "We visit Yashua in our dreams. He shows us His gardens in the heavenlies. Each day we pick something we like up there, and then try to pattern some place in our garden after it."

"It sounds too simple. Surely it's more work than that! You've got mounds of earth with paths winding in between – groves of trees – and glorious beds of flowers making lovely patterns – yet you didn't want any helpers from me? How do you do it all?"

Tana looks at Tina, who just shrugs. So she turns back to David. "You told me I was in charge of the dragons, didn't you? And they are in charge of the other animals? Well, Tina just tells me what she wants. I tell Mr. Dragon. He decides what animals are needed to do it. We train the animals and order them around. It's pretty easy. We've got moles trained to loosen up the ground. Horses trained to do the heavy pulling. Chickens trained to put fertilizer in all the right places. Speedy big cats trained to scout around for special plants. Wolves or bears trained to dig holes for them. Monkeys or gorillas trained to uproot them and plant them in the holes. Or for big shrubs or trees, he's got a crew of elephants to haul them around with their trunks."

"What do you think about all this, Mr. Dragon? Are you satisfied living here on top of a mount instead of inside one? And are you happy being ordered around like that by a tiny ten-year-old girl?

"I am exquisitely content, Your Majesty. I can think of no better way to spend my days than being ordered around by a little girl who loves and respects me – so much better than always fleeing from the humans who used to fear and hate me! And all the animals that used to fear me, too – they appreciate my saving their lives when fires circled the globe. They serve me willingly. And our little nest in the thicket at the back of the garden is quite comfortable now that the air is dense and warm. My only concern is, how am I ever going to keep my vow to return my gold to Israel? I'm not sure I can ever find it, since the mountain over my den is no more. But Yashua agreed, I must keep my word."

"Yes, He did. I certainly don't mind if you take a little sabbatical to go search for it now. Your trained animals seem to be doing very well here."

But when Mr. Dragon returns three days later after an exhaustive search, he has to report, "It's no use. I don't have a single landmark left. I don't know if I'm even in the same general area anymore. It's all level ground with meadows and flowers instead of rugged slopes. I'll never find my old den this way!"

"Maybe it isn't time. You promised to keep the gold until Israel had need of it, and we sure don't need it now. Maybe it would just become a snare to us if it came out of the ground too early." David smiles wryly.

Mr. Dragon nods. *If the king is content, so is he.* He goes back to work with his favorite humans. Thus are fulfilled Isaiah's legendary prophecies. The wilderness blossoms like the rose. Fruitful plants and trees flourish over what was once hard, rocky ground. The animals eagerly serve mankind, and it is the little children who lead them.

CHAPTER 70 – THE INVITATION

The land is still called Israel, but David names his new kingdom administration YHWH-Tzidkenu (YHWH our Righteousness, from Jer 33:16). He has not forgotten the commission Yashua gave him. He orders construction of a new highway, from Hamath in the north, up to the new Jerusalem, and then down to Egypt. It will connect to the highway Hitler made from Babylon into the Jezreel Valley. Hitler intended it for evil but now David reclaims it for his kingdom. He calls his new road the 'Highway of Holiness' (from Isa 35:8). He has guard towers built at the borders, and orders the guards to verify that people coming in from other nations are at least repentant and seeking cleansing. Logos' Bride seemed pretty adamant about keeping the wicked away from the Holy City and the Trees of Life!

His highway is finished in seven months. His people are all settled and the land is finally cleansed. Now David can turn his attention to the task of inviting the survivors of the wrath of God back to the new Jerusalem to be cleansed. Some have already come, broken, repentant, hungry for God's Word and a touch of His love, and eager to forsake the sins for which they were left behind. But many more around the world are still lost, despairing, not knowing that God still loves them and wants to forgive them.

David led classes for his staff, and they taught others, so by now, nearly everyone in Israel has learned to travel in the spirit realm by just a thought. It's pretty easy, as long as they keep themselves humble and holy before God. That gives them an advantage over other nations who are still recovering from the chaos. Their people are focussed on themselves and don't have a clue what's going on in Israel.

Finally David is ready. He asks for volunteers to go out to the rest of the world with his invitation from Revelation 22:17: "The Spirit and the Bride say 'Come!' Come to the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, on the Highway of Holiness. Let everyone who hears repeat, 'Come!' All you who are thirsty, come. Anyone who wishes, come drink the Water of Life without cost. You who hunger, come eat fruit from the Tree of Life without charge. Let the sick also come – the leaves of the Tree of Life are for the healing of the nations. You saw Messiah. In rejecting Him you suffered His wrath. Now soften your hearts to accept Him and receive His mercy and love. But only those with repentant hearts, only those who wash their robes by faith in the blood of the Lamb of God, Yashua the Messiah, only those who want Him as King of their lives, will be welcomed on the Highway of Holiness. Double-minded dogs, sorcerers, idolaters, lovers of immorality, and liars will be stopped at the borders and not be allowed to enter the Holy Land."

Roughly half a million missionaries go out. They learn to flit through the heavenlies until they spot a survivor, then step through the veil to give the invitation, like an angel. If there is trouble, if they are threatened or harassed, they can simply step back through the veil and disappear.

The world is big. There are many hiding places. Even with so many missionaries, it takes years. But they keep at it. This is now their calling, their primary purpose in life. They failed their Messiah before and got left behind. They will not fail Him again!

About 96 percent of the world's population either went to heaven in the rapture or died and went to Hades in the great tribulation and terrible plagues that surrounded it. But that still leaves 300 million Gentiles in the world. Most of those had accepted Hitler's microchip implant and his idol that went along with it, and had even worshiped him or his idol, especially back when they were led to believe it was just a computer game or a sales network. David's Israeli missionaries have a problem with that right off the bat. The Revelation says, "If anyone worships the beast or his idol or receives his mark, he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger, and will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest day or night…" (14:9 ff)

So the next Sabbath, when Yashua shows up with His Bride for their evening meal opening the Sabbath, David broaches the subject. Yashua does not laugh this time. With a deep sigh, He asks, "David, how well do you know Israel's history?"

"You know, Lord! I've sure studied it all, though my memory is not as good as it ought to be."

"Allow Me to assist your memory…" Suddenly David sees the point, as he remembers how many times Israel had gone astray and then been given another chance. *Surely, a thousand times God extended mercy instead of judgment.* Yashua nods. "Shall I not then give these sheep a second chance? These sheep who were lost, blind, deaf, ignorant, gullible, and foolish; these sheep who were lied to all their lives; these sheep whose lives were enslaved with fears; these sheep who never knew Me or the joy of My love? They have indeed drunk of the wine of My wrath in full measure! They have indeed been tormented in fire and brimstone in the presence of Myself and the holy angels! I wept for them as I tasted their suffering and heartaches. I cannot stop their torment. Yes, the smoke of it will arise in our presence to the age of the ages – unless they repent!

"But I believe most are not so hard-hearted as you may think. Indeed, I believe most of them only took the mark of the anti-messiah out of ignorance, fear, or peer pressure. Of those, many cast their idols out into the streets rather than worship them once they realized what was going on. Shall I not give them another chance to repent? Did I not give you a second chance? My old covenant with the day and the night was broken as much to mitigate their torment as it was for your restoration to walk by My Spirit. Shall I not also invite them into My new covenant? Yes! My invitation stands! **Whosoever will may come!**"

Yashua is right, of course. Many do repent and come to the new Jerusalem. From all nations, they come. They are cleansed, healed, and adopted into the family of God. They return to their homes praising God, and they invite yet others to come. *As examples, allow me to reach back in time and relate the stories of just two of the millions who come.*

Remember Karl? He is the Israeli policeman who was first sent to Alan and Joseph's apartment with orders to gun them down, and who got his face nearly blown off when his gun blew up. His injuries were very serious. He almost didn't make it. He barely remembered when David visited him at the hospital. He was there when Hitler took over the government. He was still there during the battle, when Hitler's army was defeated and fled to Baghdad. He had agreed to Hitler's microchip because it had been required of all policemen and he was proud of his service for Israel. But those years in the hospital in agony, those dozens of skin grafts and surgeries, those long sleepless nights when the drugs couldn't dull the pain, he was sure having second thoughts. When Hitler proclaimed himself World Emperor Jesus Christ and healed all those around the world who loved him, Karl had not been healed. After finally leaving the hospital, his face remained disfigured so terribly that his own family had rejected him – even his wife. He had fled to Turkey to start a new life.

The only thing that kept him going was the promise of the old prophets, "…rush your wounded buddy to the hospital. If you hurry, you will save his life." They did, and his life was spared. Now he knew that the old prophet had been right. So he was determined his life would count for something again, someday.

Karl moved far out into the countryside and took up farming. He married Kathy, and they now have a baby boy. They survived the fires by jumping into their pond and ducking underwater as the fierce flames swept overhead. Their home collapsed in the earthquake and then burned. When it was over, they rebuilt and went back to farming.

It is David and Danelle who find them. (Yes, all who can, even the king, get missionary duty, a duty they love!) They step through the veil as Karl and Kathy sit down for dinner. "May we join you?" David asks pleasantly, with Danelle hanging on to his arm and smiling to them.

After a stunned silence, David goes on, "You may remember me. I was Israel's prime minister before Hitler. This is my wife, Danelle. After you got shot by those two crazy prophets I visited you in the hospital."

"Sir?" Karl has found his voice. "I was not shot by the two prophets. They had no weapons. My gun blew up in my face. The prophets weren't crazy. They were very kind. They warned me. It was my own fault for not listening."

David smiles. "Yes. I know. I wanted to see if you still harbored any bitterness against them. It is clear that you do not. So you probably will gladly accept our invitation."

"Invitation?" It is Kathy, now more curious than afraid. Karl introduces her. "This is Kathy, my wife. She is the only one who can look beyond the ugliness of my scarred, twisted face and see the honest gentleman underneath."

"Then I'm sure that you also will be glad to receive our invitation," Danelle says sweetly, smiling at Kathy.

Karl jumps up to get out two more place settings. "We will be happy to listen to your invitation, but first you must share our evening meal with us." It is the Israeli way.

During the rest of the meal, David chats happily with them. He is in no hurry. He learns that though Karl took the microchip and worshiped Hitler's idol, it was never from his heart. He obeyed orders, as any faithful son of Israel who loves his country. He was as much deceived by Dr. Relt as anyone else, and now regrets it deeply.

So when the meal is over and David recites the Bride's invitation, it is not at all surprising that Karl and Kathy are quick to accept. That love of his homeland still runs deep in Karl's blood. His only concern is, "What if I encounter my first wife, Barb? She hated my ugly face! Barb brought divorce papers while I was still in the hospital, but I never signed them. I guess I was a coward. I just ran away."

As always when David gets a question he can't answer, he asks Yashua for the truth. "Karl, six months after you ran away, Hitler invaded. His army was slain, along with every soul remaining in Israel, including your first wife. When she died you were free to remarry." David then tells them the tale of Azel and of their miracle deliverance by Messiah as the wrath of God fell upon the rest of the earth. "Messiah gave us each an opportunity to repent and accept Him as our sacrifice, our sin offering. Barb rejected Him, holding on to the bitterness and hatred in her heart. She never came with us into Azel. You see, Barb didn't really love Messiah, or you. She loved self. That is why she died. Kathy is your true wife, not Barb." Karl is glad to hear it. They talk until midnight, then David moves on, to search for other thirsty souls. The next day Karl and Kathy take their son and head for the Highway of Holiness at Hamath.

Karl gets more than spiritual cleansing. By daily use of leaves from the Trees of Life for a few weeks, the hideous scars on his face are healed. As a bonus, Hitler's imbedded microchip pops out. But Karl's love of Israel does not keep him there. He returns to his farm to spread the good news.

Not all are as receptive as Karl. Some are still bitter, angry, and full of hatred against God for all that happened. The hardness of men's hearts can be profound. Others are proud at having survived the cataclysms, and have no need for Messiah or His proffered cleansing. Even with Satan stuck in the Abyss and his demons out of work, the human nature still has an astonishing capacity for self-deception. I won't tell their stories yet, for it may take many years of painful rebellion and chastisement before the upward pull of Messiah's love can redirect them toward repentance.

But I have one more example here. After gunning down Hitler's six finest generals, Marjah tried to join the Jews in their battle against Hitler's forces, but they didn't trust her. She was one of Hitler's top aides! Finally she fled to Egypt and dressed like an Egyptian. She can speak fluent Arabic. She found a job there in a Christian orphanage. When the Christians were raptured, she took over, devoting her life to caring for the Arab orphans and trying to forget her past.

She is there, hugging and cuddling each child before putting him to bed, when David and Danelle step in from the spirit realm. They stand silently in the open doorway, watching her work, once again understanding why Yashua insists on giving the worshipers of Hitler a second chance.

Now she is finished. She has given the last hug, tucked the last orphan in, and blessed them with the traditional, "YHWH bless and keep you. YHWH make His face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you. YHWH lift up His countenance on you and give you peace." (Num 6:24-26) She sweetly sings a Jewish lullaby as she blows out the light and backs toward the open doorway. David and Danelle try to back out of her way, but their hips jam together in the narrow door frame. Before they can say anything, Marjah bumps into them. With a squeal of fear she stops singing.

"Sorry! Sorry!" Danelle comes to the rescue. "We were so entranced by your lullaby we didn't want to interrupt. Please finish. Then we can talk." David is glad he made the rule for missionaries to take their wives. That could have been embarrassing. They retreat to a rough kitchen/eating area to wait for her. She's glad to see them. David always was a kind boss. She makes them tea, which they sip while renewing acquaintances and trading stories.

Finally, "We have an invitation from Messiah, the real one," Danelle says. "He and His Bride want you to come back to Jerusalem to be cleansed. Bring all your children. Drink the cleansing Waters of Life. Eat of the Tree of Life. Let its leaves heal your pain."

"I can't come. I have Hitler's microchip. I loved him, and even worshiped him. I made my choice. I can never be forgiven." Marjah bows her head and the tears roll down her cheeks. "I am forever cut off from Israel."

"Marjah!" David speaks adamantly. *"The Spirit and the Bride say 'Come!' Let everyone who hears say, 'Come!' Let everyone who is thirsty come! Let everyone who wishes take the Water of Life without cost.* Messiah didn't make any exceptions, even for those who took Hitler's microchip. His invitation is open for whoever will come, whoever wants to be cleansed. Yashua told me so Himself."

Marjah can hardly believe her ears. "He would do that, even for me?" Thus another precious soul is redeemed for the Kingdom by the God of incredible mercy and love. She brings her orphans into Israel to be cleansed and restored. When her story is told, Marjah becomes a national hero for bravery by turning the tide in Hitler's second holocaust.

CHAPTER 71 – THE MILLENNIUM

Some people don't like fairy tales. They're so 'happily ever after', like a childhood fantasy land or a Camelot, that they don't make sense in a real world filled with trouble and woe. I normally feel sorry for them, for I've always loved fairy tales, but at this point in our story I don't have a shred of sympathy. I get to just tell it like it is. Our world is indeed nearly perfect in the thousand years after Yashua's wedding with His many-membered Bride.

For one thing, Satan is bound in the Abyss. The few out-of-work demons not in the pit with him can do nothing but bemoan his fate. Nearly all of the truly wicked, the violent, vile dregs of humanity, died in the plagues and went to Hades, too. But more importantly, Yashua, His Bride, the angels, the saints watching from the heavenlies, and even the animals are always eager to help the humans. The veil between the earthly and heavenly realms has never been thinner and more transparent, as God's holy ones on earth learn to step through it to move to other places in service of the King or to fellowship with the heavenly watchers. Thus with no downward pull of sin, and with a strong upward pull of holiness from the heavenlies, the Israelites are now empowered to keep the new covenant which Yashua wrote on their hearts right after the Restoration.

They all want to love and serve Him. They want to fulfill His commission to evangelize the nations. They want to fulfill His mandate to rule over the rest of Creation in the name of the King of kings. They want to keep themselves holy, so they can enjoy the fellowship with Yashua and His Bride and join in the dance every Sabbath.

Besides, the earth has been restored to nearly like new. It's still about 70% sea – that didn't change much. Many islands and coastlands sank, but the mountains liquefied and leveled out, which spread the continents out a bit to make up the difference. So though the land area is nearly the same, there is a huge difference in the quality of the land. Ever since the Flood, not much of the land had been arable. A lot of it was either too steep, too marshy, too dry, too cold, too hot, too rocky or whatever. But now, with the highlands leveled out, the swamps and gullies filled in, and the stratospheric vapor barrier protecting the earth at an even temperature, virtually all the land is arable.

Not just arable, but bountiful. The plagues and vermin died off in the fires, including the bad bugs, slugs, and other inveterate pests. Now the earth is producing of its strength once again. And the animals? Well, let's just say that Mr. Dragon is working his tail off to make up for allowing his body to be used by Satan to harm mankind. He spends all his time training animals to help mankind. All the animals he trains, in turn help to train others, for they are now eager to be helpful to the humans. They are learning to work in gardens, carry loads, and in general be the kind of good friends that God created them to be in the original Garden of Eden.

Speaking of the Garden of Eden, Tana and Tina have done famously. People come from all over the world to visit the garden. There they are cleansed and restored, and their lives are reset to higher priorities. They're invited to freely drink the Water of Life and eat of the Trees of Life. There they meet Yashua, and worship Him. They lay their burdens at His feet and are adopted into His family.

Every life is precious. Everyone has tasks to do for the King, and finds fulfillment and purpose in doing them with all his heart. But whatever they do, all over the earth, their greatest joy is returning to Jerusalem and the glorious garden, to Yashua and His Bride, to dance and celebrate the Feasts with their beloved Messiah.

David, with Danelle's gracious assistance, rules just as Yashua said he would: in justice and faithfulness, with a good deal of love and caring for his people. He continues to rule humbly, always seeking for Yashua's guidance and wisdom in every decision. He doesn't even want to be called 'King David', for he knows that Yashua and His Bride are actually ruling the earth. But some insist, with Scripture to back it up, so he finally relents to the title. But he always says that he is only an earthly king, while the heavenly King of the Universe is the King of kings.

King David has become a lover of the Christian Bible, especially their New Testament. He never did become a 'Christian' in the sense of forsaking his Jewishness as some Christians had insisted he do. Instead, he added the New Testament to the Tenach, and Peter's prophecies, and the other scrolls Alan Benson had found and translated. He loves them all, and searches them daily for wisdom. Now that his eyes are opened to the Truth, David is constantly finding wonderful nuggets throughout the Word of God. And whatever he finds, he does it, for he is a doer, not just a hearer. Logos is very pleased with him.

A good example is the Feasts of Israel. Though Yashua forbade them to kill animals anymore, He never said to stop celebrating the Feasts. So instead of our traditional Christmas, Easter, Lent, Halloween, and St. Valentine's Day, David invites everyone to celebrate Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot at Jerusalem each year. Without blood sacrifices, the Feasts become times to rehearse what God has done, educate their children, and enjoy the fellowship with each other, the way they were intended all along. Now with the new covenant written on their hearts, they'll never turn away from God, but knowing their history, they determine to pass on their fervent faith to their children as well.

People from other nations who come streaming in to Jerusalem for cleansing are also encouraged to keep the Feasts and to take a copy of the Holy Scriptures home with them. But David insists that is not enough. Every family must return to Jerusalem at least once a year to celebrate Sukkot with the Israelis. David knows they will drift away from the faith if they don't. He orders the daily rains to dry up for families who refuse. (Zech 14:16-19)

The air is much thicker and warmer, to the delight of the dragons. All life now grows stronger and healthier. Plants grow as if in a tropical greenhouse. Wounds heal in hours instead of days. Broken bones heal in days instead of weeks. Cosmic radiation is completely blocked both by the high vapor barrier and by the recharged geomagnetic field around the earth. By using the Trees of Life, the aging process nearly stops, so people are able to live free of all the diseases and deterioration that plagued old folks in the age of sin. A normal human life span is a thousand years. Now for the first time since the great Flood, achieving that is common. Even sinners, without ever eating fruit from the Tree of Life, are still strong past the age of a hundred.

The great Millennial prophecies of Isaiah 11 and 65, Jeremiah 31, Ezekiel 34, Hosea 2, Micah 4, Zechariah 14 and so on are no longer just 'pie in the sky by and by'. They are now a daily reality. People all around the world realize with stunning clarity that Satan's perpetual promises of pleasure and happiness were all lies. Real happiness never comes by coveting, immorality, theft, or any of the other self-centered passions of those whose focus is pleasure, riches, fame, or power. With Satan not around to foist his lies, even the heathen in far off lands begin to discover true happiness, in love and caring for others, and in sharing themselves and all they have instead of serving only self.

Thus their shattered homes and lives are rebuilt. The past is forgotten. The heavens and the earth have been renewed in true peace and beauty. The dream, the deep longing, that lay hidden within the heart of everyone since the Fall is finally fulfilled. Messiah has come! Now…

"…the former troubles are forgotten; they are hid from My sight. For behold, I renewed the heavens and the earth, so the former things are no longer even remembered. Be happy and rejoice in what I create! I create Jerusalem for rejoicing, and her people for gladness. I also rejoice in Jerusalem, and am glad in My people. No longer is heard in her the voice of weeping or the sound of crying. No longer in her is anyone who dies in infancy, or a man who does not live out his full days. At the age of one hundred, he is still considered young, for only one who is accursed dies that young. So My people build homes and live securely in them. They plant vineyards and eat their fruit. Never again shall they build only for another to inhabit, or plant only for another to take the harvest. As the lifetime of a redwood tree, so is the lifetime of My people. My chosen ones now live long enough to wear out the work of their hands. They do not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity, for they and their descendants for many generations are children of those blessed by YHWH. Now before they even call on Me, I answer them. I respond to them while they are still speaking. The wolf and the lamb graze together, the lion eats straw like the ox, and dust is the serpent's food. Now they do no evil. They neither hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth is full of the knowledge of YHWH as the waters fill the sea." (Isa 65:16-25)

The curse of sin has been broken. The land now dwells in security. There is no need for walled cities, for people do not learn the art of war anymore. Most weapons of war are just burned, or made into useful things such as plows or garden tools. Peace is no longer a meaningless platitude or fund-raiser for politicians who don't keep their promises. Peace is a reality, all over the earth. It feels good.

"Now the mountain of the Garden of YHWH is the chief of the mountains. And the people stream toward it from many nations saying, 'Come! Let us go up to the mountain of YHWH, and to the Garden of the God of Jacob, that He may teach us His ways, that we may walk in His paths!' For from Zion goes forth the Law, even the Word of YHWH from Jerusalem. YHWH judges between many peoples. He renders just decisions for mighty and distant nations so they can live in peace. Thus they will hammer their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation and never again will they train for war. But each of them sits under his vine or his fig tree with no one to make him afraid. For the mouth of YHWH of Hosts has spoken it. Other nations may walk in the names of their own gods, but now Israel will remain forever true to walk in the name of YHWH our God. So I will make her the strongest among the nations, and YHWH will reign over her in Mt. Zion for ever.

"O you, tower of My flock, hill of the daughter of Zion, to you it has come, even the former dominion that I first gave Adam and Eve to rule the earth for Me! To you has now come the endless Kingdom of Yashua the high King with His Bride, the daughter of Jerusalem!" (Micah 4:1-8)

You know, dear Reader, animals are not very bright. Their intelligence was limited by God so they would be content to be beasts of burden, the servants of mankind.

The dog, for example, makes an excellent pet, but is not quite smart enough to become the master. Likewise, the horse is smart enough to be sensitive and obedient to his rider, but not so smart that he might one day rise up in rebellion and say, "Lookit, boss, I'm tired. You pull the plow a spell while I sit in the shade and drink lemonade!" or "Since I do most of the work around here, I demand better food. No more of this plain old grass! I want only the best oats, saturated with lots of molasses!" or worse yet, "I'm on strike for better working conditions. You ride me half the time, and I'll ride you the other half!"

No, the animals were made less intelligent than man because God intended for man to have dominion. Those animals that refused to submit were hunted and slain, or incarcerated in zoos, or fenced off, away from the homes of men. The only animal that successfully overcame that and got away with it is the house cat. I suppose it's because of her soft delightful fur and comforting purr. She managed to convince her humans to become her doting slaves; to take her into their homes, feed her, pet her, and wait on her hand and foot while she lazes contentedly in the sun.

Now things have changed somewhat. With the warmer temperatures and the denser, oxygen-rich air, the animals are a lot smarter. In fact, if the humans hadn't also gotten smarter they might have been in for some competition, especially from strong, quick creatures like the dragon or the big cats. They are now capable of showing initiative and could actually have banded together to try to take over the earth if certain other changes had not also occurred.

The age of sin had severely impaired the animals. From the beginning their primary mode of communication, especially with Adam and Eve, was telepathic. With few exceptions, they did not have the capacity for verbal speech. But with their telepathy also came empathy, which runs far deeper in animals that we realize.

You know, for example, that a dog seems to sense your attitude and react accordingly. If you are fearful or mean, he will tend to bark or snap at you, but if you are kind, friendly, and trusting, he soon will be wagging his tail and sniffing your hand. From his first sniff, he will never forget your scent and will always be your friend.

But a dog is unusually forgiving. Most animals were emotionally torn up inside by mankind's sin, and could never fully forgive him. Many became man's enemy rather than his friend. All animals were emotionally scarred. They forgot their created purpose and lived for themselves and their young. Their empathy for the humans grew into fear and hatred, especially after the Flood when humans began killing them for food. Some animals even developed into carnivores themselves. It was terribly sad.

But during the Restoration, the animals healed. With their higher intelligence in the denser air, they began to remember their created purpose. Their fear and hatred of humans dissipated and their empathy for the humans returned in full force. Mr. Dragon tells his classes, "All the men who hated you, who hunted and killed you and used you for food, are dead. They were evil, rebels against their own creator! They provoked the worst in us! I, too, feared and hated them, as did my ancestors all the way back to the Flood. That is why my race is nearly extinct, for that is what hatred and killing does. But I swear to you, the men living now are neither evil nor rebellious. So now we can help the humans like we were made to do, and they will love us and care for us in return." He would not let any pass his training class until that lesson was in their hearts.

So the net result is that peace now reigns in the animal kingdom, too. Mr. Dragon is a good trainer. The animals both fear and respect him as king of the beasts. He assigns the stronger animals to take care of the weak. For example, the wolves are told to care for the sheep. Leopards become goatherds. Lions are commissioned over the herds of deer, elk, and antelope. Bears are assigned over the cattle. Foxes protect the rabbits and poultry. Even among the birds, strong ones like jays, crows, hawks, and eagles are granted the privilege of guarding quail, grouse, and guinea hens.

David hardly needs to give orders to Tana or Tina. They become famous worldwide as Queen Tana of the Animal Kingdom, and Queen Tina of the Plant Kingdom. The dragons and their trained animals who were so much help in the Garden of God on the temple mount, now began to branch out in their ministry. They offer gardening services with their trained animals to others throughout the land.

Within the year, Tana and Tina appoint their twin brothers Timmy and Tommy to high offices under them. They assign Timmy the job of ruling over the flocks, and Tommy the job of ruling over the herds. They're only seven when they begin, three years younger than their twin sisters. But as they help their parents at the garden gates, everyone can see their fearlessness of the animals and their delight in Mr. Dragon's training classes.

So it's natural for Timmy to take the job of commanding the wolves and leopards, as they guard the flocks of sheep and goats. He becomes known as King Tim, Shepherd of the Flocks. And it's perfect for Tommy to command the lions and bears as they care for the herds. He becomes known as Tom, King of Cattle. King David is amazed at the literal fulfillment of Isaiah 11:6-9.

You may laugh at this, but I'm totally serious. Timmy and Tommy are different in a lot of ways, but they both were raised to always be neat and clean. They simply will not tolerate animals randomly dropping fresh hot pies and peeing all over the grazing lands. They insist, and enforce it by the wolves, leopards, lions, and bears, that the larger animals use regular potty facilities marked out for them. Then after the manure has decomposed into good clean soil, it is spread properly over the land (by teams of horses and oxen) to fertilize the earth. Thus the pasturelands are kept pure and clean, available for use by humans as well as the animals. They need them, as the weekly Sabbath dance expands across the land.

Before you tell me that such a land is too perfect to be true, I will relate some of the problems they face. For one, all homes and man-made structures have been destroyed. Those made of brick or stone were leveled and their stones sunk down into the liquefied soil. Those made of wood burned to ashes. And since the newly growing trees are still young saplings, there is no wood to use in building new homes or shelters. Thankfully the weather is always warm, and the daily rains are over quickly. But still, some people miss the privacy of their own home and bedroom.

People don't need three meals a day anymore because the oxygen-rich air gives them so much energy, so they drop supper altogether. They move their lunchtime back to mid-afternoon during the daily rains, and eat in Azel so they don't get wet. It's okay for now. They'll build shelters after the trees mature. They have no electricity yet, so they use oil lamps for light at night, and oil or coal to fire their furnaces for forging gardening tools from the guns. They don't need coats or blankets, as the weather is always hot.

As missionary successes bring a flood of people into Israel, a more serious problem becomes evident. After they are cleansed and forgiven, after they are healed and their microchips removed, many (like Karl) return to their own nations to carry the invitation to the rest of the survivors. But some want to remain in Israel: Marjah, for example, and many other Israelites from Egypt and Assyria who had fled Israel at one time or another. It is one thing to restore their spirit and soul and body, but quite another to see the longing in their hearts to 'make aliyah'. (This literally means 'go up', but it implies a permanent immigration into their ancient homeland, rather than just a visit.)

Now we see the problem. Nearly all of the returning remnants of Israel are female! At the big battle when Hitler overran Jerusalem, not just Christians but all the sons of Abraham had streamed to Israel from all the nations around the world to aid her in her time of distress. But there were few females among them. The vast majority were men, warriors. Many had been slain, Christians had been raptured, and the rest had joined the IDF to protect Israel from the threat of Hitler's forces in Baghdad. Then in the last battle, if you recall, everyone had died from the neutron bombs except for David's band hidden away in Azel. That's over 200 million men in support of Hitler from the eastern block nations, plus another sixty million men gathered from the western nations to support Israel, who had died – and nearly all men! Most of them had left their wives and children behind. Those wives and children are now returning to Jerusalem to be cleansed.

So roughly speaking, out of the 300 million souls remaining alive on planet Earth, 100 million are women, with 180 million children. That leaves about 20 million men. That is the problem. Do the math. Nearly every adult streaming in from other nations is female, and most of them are widows. Wives need husbands. Children need fathers. And there just aren't enough men to go around.

Those who had safely hidden away in Azel are mostly intact families – the wives have not lost their husbands. So King David and his queen aren't even aware of the problem at first, until they try to take care of Marjah. She brought ten precious little orphans with her, whom she loves as if they were her own children. She needs a man in the family. She refuses to return to the seedy old orphanage in Egypt. She is a Jewess! She insists on making aliyah in Israel.

So of course David and Danelle, who really do care, try to find her a good husband. That is when they start counting and discover that of the refugees returning to Israel there are five or six women for every man. It's scary! David and Danelle ask Yashua for wisdom.

He and His Bride meet with them in the Garden of Eden on the temple mount. (Though I must say, it's not being called that anymore. Tana and Tina call it the 'Garden of God on Mount Zion'. Now that it's nearly finished it has become world famous, and their name is catching on.)

The Bride reminds them of the prophecy in Isaiah 13 concerning Babylon, "Wail, for the day of YHWH is near; it will come as destruction from the Almighty! Behold the day of YHWH is coming; cruel, with fury and burning anger, to make the land a desolation. He will exterminate sinners from it… The sun will be dark when it rises, and the moon will not shed her light. Thus I will punish the world for its evil and the wicked for their iniquity. I will also put an end to the arrogance of the proud and abase the haughtiness of the ruthless. *I will make mortal man scarcer than pure gold, and men more rare than the gold of Ophir."* Yashua reminds them of the prophecy, "Seven women will take hold of one man in that day saying, 'We will eat our own bread and wear our own clothes, only let us be called by your name! Take away our reproach!'" (Isa 4:1)

"But Lord?" David asks. "Does that mean You are going to allow polygamy again? It never seemed to work out well for the patriarchs!"

Yashua laughs, as if that is the greatest joke in years. Danelle is indignant. "Why do you laugh? This is serious! These poor women are desperate! They have children! Marjah has ten of them! Don't You provide for the widows and the orphans?"

"Yes, I provide for them. I laugh because you are still thinking in terms of the age of sin. This is the Millennial Age. It requires a whole new mindset. No, there will be no polygamy, no concubines in My Kingdom, for My goal has always been for each man to have his own wife and each woman to have her own husband. But you're thinking in the physical realm, where Adam and Eve were separated into two individuals. In My realm a man and his wife are truly one person. There simply is no lust or infidelity. As man was created one in Adam, so is the resurrected man, one in Me – perfectly one – just as I am one with the Father. Looking at Me from your old perspective in the age of sin, I might be called a polygamist with My many-membered Bride! Yet here she is, with a oneness in Me that transcends the age of sin, even the Millennial Age, into eternity.

"So forget thinking in terms of other wives, mistresses, concubines, or harlots. That kind of thinking went to the Abyss along with Satan. He is not here to tempt you, and your desire is strong for faithfulness to Me and to your wife. You now love the holiness that allows your constant access to Me and My realm of spirit. Instead, think of how to care for all these widows and their children. Can you not protect and provide for them as you would do for your own sister or mother, or for your own virgin daughter?"

King David can't disagree with that. He makes a new law allowing any married couple to take the responsibility for up to seven of these widows with their children. With Danelle's concurrence, David demonstrates the new law by officially adopting Marjah and her ten orphans into his own family. Her name becomes Marjah yasha-Davison. ('Yasha' means to free, save, help, preserve, and defend.)

This arrangement proves eminently successful with the widows now streaming into Israel. Most of them no longer want sex, anyway. They had only used their sexual allure during the age of sin as a tool to get what they really wanted: the covering, protection, support, and provision of a kind and thoughtful man. But now they can get what they want and need without all the seduction and allure of outward charms. For the men now in Israel have been healed of lust, and temptation has been bound in the pit. They only want to take care of their Israeli 'sisters'.

Another problem David has in this nearly perfect world is the lack of a medium of exchange. The old barter system quickly becomes unmanageable as millions of refugees fill the land. David knows better than to allow communism, in which 'everyone shares everything for the common good'. That has never worked and never will, even in a perfect world. It's just too easy to slack off and let someone else do the work as long as you get a share of the harvest anyway. Likewise socialism, in which government controls things and enforces 'equal' distribution, can't work either. Any government big enough and strong enough to actually enforce such 'equality' quickly becomes a tyranny, even in a perfect world. Mankind is just not made to be enslaved to a big impersonal government micromanaging our lives. We're made to live free. It's too bad modern progressives / socialists don't understand that. Private ownership – the rights to reap the rewards of one's labors and to buy or sell whatever one wants with whomever one wants on the free market – is the only successful way to run a society.

David knows all that. But what can he use for a medium of exchange? He goes to visit Tana. She is excited to see him. "Sir! The Garden of God is nearly done! Tina thinks it will be finished by the end of the month. May we have a huge dedication celebration? I talked to Yashua about it. He said He'd like that. He likes big parties, you know. The moles, badgers, and worms are finished digging; the birds are done planting; everything is growing rapidly. As far as weeds, Tina just tells them not to grow here and they obey. The bears and elephants are nearly finished transplanting the bushes and trees Tina wanted. Sheep are keeping the meadows and lawns nicely mowed. The beavers built a big gazebo and dams for the fish ponds. The horses hauled up cinders to make the paths. I have a thousand gorillas and monkeys trained to escort the visitors and maintain the garden. And I've even got ponies for their children to ride. Don't you think we're nearly ready for a grand opening?"

"Tana, you never cease to amaze me with your initiative and abilities. You have my permission to plan the grand opening any time you wish, so long as I get an invitation. Already your garden, even unfinished, has been a blessing and comfort to many thousands! But I have a different request. Tell your dragon friends that I need that silver and gold they had hidden in their den. I'm going to melt it down and use it as a hard, stable currency for the nation. God will tell them how to recover it."

Tana returns to the garden. Mr. Dragon is finishing up another class – this one for polar bears and other animals from the far north, who are finally becoming acclimatized to hot weather. The ability of animals to adapt is amazing. (Godless fools used to call that evidence for evolution!) "Mr. Dragon?" Tana calls. She and her twin have recently turned eleven. Both have become exceedingly adept at this nonverbal animal language. Still, the dragon loves to come close and bend his head attentively toward hers as if he is speaking. It is comical to see her lean affectionately against his paw while his huge bulk towers over her tiny body. "King David needs the gold and silver you promised. He said Yashua will show you how to recover it."

"Oh, my dear! Yashua did agree that I must keep my promise, but He did not seem in the slightest bit interested in helping me find my lost den. In fact, I got the impression He despised my gold and hoped it would be lost forever. Could you go with me to intercede for me?"

She agrees, and they walk together to the broken altar and kneel in prayer. Instantly Yashua (and His Bride) are with them (or they are with Him in the heavenlies – with the earth now growing with such lavish beauty and with the glory of God for sunlight, it can be a bit hard to tell the difference). Tana delights to see Him, as always. "Lord! King David agreed that we could organize a dedication celebration! A grand opening! When would You like it?"

"That is your choice, My beloved, so long as you give Me an invitation, too!"

"That's just what King David said."

"Yes. He is a man after My own heart. He loves you and wants to encourage you just like I do. Now, Mr. Dragon. You have a request of Me?"

"He needs to find his gold. David told him to. But he's afraid to talk to You about it so he asked…"

"No one, not even a dragon, need fear to talk with Me about anything," Yashua interrupts. "I really would like to hear your request directly from you, Mr. Dragon."

"Yes, Sir. David needs the gold. I know it won't become an idol or a snare to him. He'll melt it down. He wants to make it into currency for the country. But it's in my den, which is still lost. I… uh… need help finding it, Sir."

"What about you? Might all that treasure become a snare to you? At one time you seemed pretty stuck on it."

"I swear I won't keep so much as one thin dime."

"Mr. Dragon, I'll be frank with you. I once had serious doubts that you could repent so completely – change from a servant of Satan to a servant of My people so sincerely, wholeheartedly, and beautifully. I've seen your attitudes. I've seen your love for Tana and for all humans. I've been in every class as you retaught the animals of My ways. I am grateful. Go. Your treasure is found, to do as you said."

So the dragon flies back to the general area where Mount Hermon used to be. It looks the same as when he was there before. There are no clues as to the location of his den, or the mountain. But Yashua said his gold was found, so he will just believe it. He climbs to about 15,000 feet and sets up some lazy circles, no longer looking for traces of his den, but just trying to sense where God would have him go down. It takes a while, but he is in no hurry. He knows the gold is found. That is settled in his mind. Now it's just a matter of his obedience. After circling for half a day, there it is, clear as can be, a bright speck on a green landscape. He dives to the ground to mark the spot. Then he flies around the area enlisting the aid of some strong animals to help him dig.

By evening he has rounded up quite a crew. As the king of beasts, it's an honor to serve him. Early next morning they start excavating. Within the week they reach the den. They spend the next month digging out all the treasure, sorting it, and hauling it to Jerusalem. It is fabulous – truly 'the wealth of the nations'. The gold alone is worth seventy trillion dollars, melted down. But the value of the art – oh, my! Exquisite statues, goblets, diadems, royal scepters, thrones, coats of arms, golden chariots, rings and other jewelry set with precious stones – it is utterly priceless. Mr. Dragon notes with chagrin that a substantial portion is idols, including some of Hitler that the people had cast into the streets to get Satan off their backs. Funny he hadn't noticed that before. He can't wait for it to be melted down.

David and Danelle are nearly blown away. Mr. Dragon had claimed to have the wealth of a thousand kings in his den, but it had meant nothing before. Now that they see it, the massive piles are overwhelming. Towering above them is the incredible wealth of Croesus and the riches of the kings of Assyria, Persia, Babylon, Egypt, Greece, Rome… There is even gold from the lavish temple of Ishtar Inanna, and the fabulous treasures of Atlantis before the Flood! *How long have dragons been stealing gold, anyway?!*

Mr. Dragon is apologetic. "A lot of this wasn't mine, sir. It was collected by my father and his fathers before him. I guess I collected a little here and there, like when I saw it lying around on the streets. But honestly, I never broke into any castles to steal from the king's treasuries, like my ancestors did. That's what got so many of them slain."

The pull of the gold is strong. Even with Satan bound in the pit, the residual demonic presence of all those idols is powerful. The thought of all the kings and emperors who wasted their lives in pursuit of this gold is mind-numbing. David and Danelle are entranced, with eyes like saucers.

Mr. Dragon knows what he has to do. He quickly calls to his family, "Help me melt the gold!" Then he blows a blast of fire like a blowtorch at the first pile. The flame burns extra-hot in the thick, oxygen-rich air. With a lot of puffing and his family's help, the soft gold soon becomes a glistening lake on the ground. The spell is broken.

The grand dedication ceremony on the temple mount is a glorious success. Millions come from all over Israel and beyond to witness and to celebrate. Tana officially designates it 'The Garden of God on Mount Zion'. The speeches continue all morning. I'll mention a few. King David opens the ceremony with the invocation and an invitation for Yashua, His Bride, and all the heavenly watchers to attend. Instantly the skies are filled with the heavenly host, as if they could barely restrain themselves until they got the invitation. A thrill and shout of joy arises from everyone on earth, as they acknowledge the presence of the Holy One and His heavenly host.

Tana and Tina have scheduled themselves as the first main speakers. They have no amplification. David's strong voice carries easily to the crowd, but no one expects to be able to hear the twins. Besides, in such a stunning setting, no one expects they will be able to say much anyway. It can overwhelm an eleven-year-old to stand up in front of a room full of adults – these kids are now in front of millions. Tana stands up bravely. Then she flashes a big smile. Yashua is grinning at her and His angels are waving their wings as if to fan her words out to the crowd.

"Thank you all for coming, especially Yashua and all the heavenly host!" She begins enthusiastically. The group gasps and then is silent – everyone hears her, clearly, like she is standing next to them. She is using her telepathy to aid her verbal speech. "As of this day, this place is officially dedicated to Yashua and His Bride as the Garden of God, and this His holy mountain, Mount Moriah, is officially renamed Mount Zion. Now and forever more, everything that is done by everyone on this mountain shall be only to the praise and glory of Yashua and His Bride. No one shall ever come here with evil or selfish motives in his heart. But all are welcome to come here for cleansing, restoration, and healing, that they too may join in the worship that rises continually from this place. For this is God's dwelling on earth, as He promised, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall walk among them. And He shall wipe away every tear from their eyes. There shall no longer be any death. There shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain. The first things are passed away. Behold, all things are made new.' [Rev 21:3] Believe it! Come often to the garden! Come freely! There will never be a charge or fee to come here. Drink of the cleansing Water of Life! Eat freely the fruit of the Tree of Life. Use the leaves of the Trees of Life for your healing. Worship here! Fellowship here with your Lord, your King, your Messiah! For that is why we made this garden!

"Now, before my sister speaks, I want to thank all the animals who helped us. Especially the dragon family, without whose help we would barely be started. And the other animals they trained to help. You were incredible! We are grateful! In serving humankind, you have fulfilled your purpose and honored your Creator."

The crowd goes wild with applause as Tina steps up for her speech. She has to wait for it to die down. "Thank you all! Praise Yashua, our Savior and Lord! I add a big 'thank you' to the plants who poured forth their life energy to make this place beautiful, and the birds of the sky who helped to plant them. I also thank the soil which yields up its full strength, and the decorative rocks which ever cry out praise to their Maker. I thank the streams of living water, and the gentle rains that water the garden each day. I thank the flowers, exulting in glory, and the trees singing for joy before the Lord. Most of all I give thanks to the Sun that shines upon this garden and makes it grow, the Sun of Righteousness, who has risen upon us with healing in His rays! He left His throne in highest heaven to cover us with His love. Therefore let every created thing praise Yashua! For in this place His praises never cease!" She stops abruptly, having shouted out her little speech with all her strength. Again the applause bursts out. The awed crowd realizes that behind their little memorized speeches, the twins have given their all just to honor Yashua. What an inspiring thought! Other speeches follow (including one from Mr. Tzedique), but none as moving as these. Is it just because they are little and their speeches have exceeded expectations? No. It is because with total dedication and pure hearts, their worship of the Creator is compelling.

David closes with a benediction and a blessing. Then he steps back, saying, "Yashua, **the Garden of God on Mount Zion** is now officially dedicated to You and Your Bride. Please, dwell here continually with us, Your people, as in John's vision that Tana quoted. We welcome You to this, the garden of Your glory, the throne of Your power. So if You wish to say anything to Your people now, anything at all, we all would love to hear You. For You are our God, and we are Your people, now and forever. Amen."

It is a very gracious, though unscheduled, invitation. Nobody knows if Yashua or His Bride will speak or not. The ceremony part is officially concluded – only feasting and dancing are scheduled to follow. Silence descends, while the King of the Universe weighs the hearts of His people. Do they really want to hear Him, or are they just eager to get to the feasting and dancing? The silence grows as millions of people lean forward in the eager anticipation of hearing from their King.

"I agree and accept your offer, King David My beloved, shepherd of My people after My own heart. My Bride and I choose to dwell here, forever, in this beautiful tabernacle garden you have made for us. My New Jerusalem that I am building around My throne, My heavenly city, intersects with earth at this point. Know that as you see the cloud of smoke by day and the pillar of fire by night covering Mount Zion, We are here! *Now it is done!"* As He says that, the garden behind Him bursts into flames. Smoke billows up to form a cloud cover over the garden. Everyone gasps, for the hot flames burn furiously. Surely it will consume the entire garden in moments!

But Yashua seems not the slightest concerned. He smiles pleasantly and waves behind Him to the burning garden. "Behold My Holy City, My New Jerusalem, as it will be when it is finished!" Everyone looks intently into the flames towering up to the sky. An immense scene slowly resolves within the flames, clearly a future scene, for even as they look it is rapidly changing, growing. It is utterly indescribable. The tools I am given, these weak and earthy words, are inadequate to recount such scenes of heavenly splendor. But I'll do my best, for the sake of my dear Readers who have not yet beheld such glory.

First the colors. The heavenly city is clearly made of purest gold, yet in the flames the gold shines with every color of the rainbow as if it is a light giver, not a reflector. It is not set on earthy foundations of stone, but on heavenly stones, sparkling like huge jewels: diamond, sapphire, emerald, amethyst, ruby, onyx – every precious stone known to man. Even the twelve gates of the Holy City are made of jewels, each gate a single huge iridescent pearl.

Now the shape. Picture a humongous pyramid, far larger than the great pyramid at Giza. It is fifteen hundred miles wide at each base and almost fifteen hundred miles high, though the capstone, the point on top, is missing. Now, if you can, take this huge pyramid in your mind and flip it upside down in the sky. Carefully, gently, bring it down to earth, so its top, the place with the missing capstone, is overlapping the garden. Intersecting that broken altar on earth is the throne of God at the 'top' of the pyramid (completing the 1500 miles). The golden city spreads out above its 'foundation' (the throne), getting bigger and bigger as it goes up into the sky.

Obviously such an upside-down structure on earth would collapse under its own weight. But this heavenly city does not have the same gravity as earth. Its gravity is pulling up rather than down, so its inhabitants can always look 'up' at us even as we look up at them. I suppose to them, we are the ones who appear to be upside-down, though in this intersection of the two realms there really is no up or down. For the dwellers of this city clearly have resurrection bodies like angels, so they can move through the skies with a thought, and are quite at home up, down, or any which way.

How many people live in this heavenly city? Words fail me. They are as uncountable as the stars or as the grains of sand on the seashore. And they are busy, building the city, helping one another, coming in and going out to tend the universe and bring others into the city – so many, and so much going on, it is truly overwhelming. All this we see in mere seconds, while Yashua is still speaking.

"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last. I give to anyone who thirsts to drink from the Water of Life without cost. He (or she) who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God, and he shall be My son.

"What you have seen," and at this point the Holy City fades along with the flames, leaving the garden unharmed, "…is your destiny. You are all invited to join Me and My Bride in My Holy City. Yet, just as My Bride and the saints who are now with Me overcame through great tribulation, so you also must overcome. You may see this as a perfect world, an easy life, but it is not. The perfect is yet to come. But I now grant you a thousand years in this restored world to test you, to see if you also will overcome so you can join us in My realm as our brothers and sisters.

"Some will fail the test – the cowardly, the unbelieving, the abominable, the murders, those who love immorality, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and all liars. They refuse My invitation to come and be cleansed. They put their trust in their own goodness, rather than receiving My gift of faith in the blood of My atonement. Their destiny is a second kind of death, that is, destruction of the human nature and torment of the soul in unquenchable fire and brimstone in the bottomless Abyss, made for the devil and his demons.

"Remember the mandate which I gave the first Adam. He was to have dominion, to rule My earth for Me just as I rule the heavenly realms. But he failed Me, and plunged mankind into the age of sin. That seemed like a tragedy, for the age of sin has been filled with the natural consequences of sin: sickness, pain, torment, and death. Yet in My Father's Plan of the Ages, all things work out for good. For the first Adam was holy but immature, untested, naïve, while My last Adam…" He waves a hand over the crowd, "is holy and mature, tested, purified through tribulation.

"The ages of sin are past. Now Adam starts afresh with all of you, My beloved children, whether of Israel or of the nations. I grant you the accumulated wisdom gained throughout all the tribulations of the age of sin. The Great Controversy is over. All the universe knows that My ways of self-giving love are best. Satan's self-serving ways of lies and force have failed. The question remaining is, knowing all this, will you now succeed… where the first Adam failed? Yes, I believe you will! You will overcome, to join Me and My Bride in our Holy City. This is why I believe…"

He calls for the two sets of Tzedique twins. They come running, arms outstretched and faces beaming with joy. He bends to catch them as they leap up into His arms. Then, holding up two girls in one arm and two boys in the other, He says, "This is an example of My last Adam. They have believed My Word and have taken dominion over Creation, just as I wanted Adam to do. To you they look like little kids. But to Me, they stand as Kings and Queens in My Kingdom, exercising My power over My Creation, and giving all the universe hope that this last Adam will succeed where the first Adam failed!"

He sets them down, with the encouragement, "Tana and Tina, Tim and Tom, I thank you! I appreciate your exemplary faith and the good deeds it has produced in you. I bless you with the fullness of My joy."

"And I bless you all!" He concludes, holding out His arms. "I repeat to you the mandate I gave to the first Adam: Be fruitful. Multiply. Replenish the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the beasts of the field, and over every living thing that moves on the earth. Go now. Feast. Dance. Celebrate with all your hearts as unto Me, for surely you know how I love a good party! Sometimes you will see Me. Sometimes you will not. But know that I am always with you. I celebrate with you. I feast and dance with you. And I always share your joy!"

So they do. Never was there such a party on the face of the earth since time began. Their feasting and dancing covers the land for miles around the Holy City. The veil between earth and heaven, which is usually closed except for a small rent when someone passes through, remains wide open throughout the entire celebration. Yashua, His Bride, and the heavenly host feast with them, dance with them, and multiply their joy so it cannot be contained. From that day on, a cloud of smoke by day and pillar of fire by night remain above the Garden of God to remind them of this glorious day, of the Holy City – the New Jerusalem in the heavenlies – that He is building over the garden, and of His promise to dwell there among them always.

After that day is done, Yashua confides to Gavriel and Michael, "Never, in all the great feasts and dances we have celebrated, have I enjoyed Myself so much! To feast and dance with all My precious ones, My Bride, all My brothers and servants in the heavenlies, and now these My brothers and sisters on the earth as well! This is what My Father showed Me would be My reward for choosing to give Myself to die for My people. His Plan of the Ages is now being wrapped up in joy and victory!"

Those remaining on earth can't agree more. Thus the thousand years flow joyfully by in peace and prosperity, with feasting and dancing each Sabbath and at the Feasts. Yashua always loves to attend.

To wrap up a few loose ends: Tana and Tina grow up, faithful to keep the Garden of God holy. They marry Todd and Terry, and each raise ten children of their own. The stories of Tim and Tom are similar. Truly are all their lives blessed beyond measure.

David and Danelle had been 66 when they became king and queen of Israel after the second holocaust. They finally retire. Their son Solomon II, with his wife Maria and their children (now up to seven), takes over for them. Solomon rules over the greatest kingdom the world has ever known. It extends from the borders of Egypt north to Turkey, and from the Great Sea west to ancient Persia. Thus it includes all of Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and Arabia. Like his dad, Solomon rules well, in righteousness, justice, love, and truth. All of the wealth, power, and prestige of the ancient kingdom of Solomon and Muwet were hardly a drop in the proverbial bucket compared to the glorious kingdom now ruled by King Solomon II and Queen Maria.

CHAPTER 72 – CAMELOT UNRAVELS

Just as in the fabled Camelot of old, the new Israel of David and Solomon was perfect in every way, until evil was found in her. Logos had termed it "final enemies yet locked within the hearts and souls of men." Indeed. On this earth doesn't there always seem to be a pit in the pie, a fly in the ointment, a pebble in the shoe, a turd among the tulips, a frog in the punch bowl, or a speck of sand that somehow gets in to grind between the gears?

There were many around the world who rejected the invitation of Israel's missionaries to come and be cleansed. They nursed their grudge against God for the terrible catastrophes, and determined to rebuild their shattered lives without Him. Sad. Even when they heard of the great joy of the dance, they would not come, for that would mean submitting to the Messiah of Israel and giving up their hatred of the Jews, and that they could not do. The profound hardness of the human heart is unfathomable.

But they are not the ones of whom I speak. The pit in the pie was within Israel herself. How can this be? I do not know. How can anyone who feasts and dances with the saints, who celebrates the Sabbath each week, who meets with Yashua and His Bride, hears His wisdom and beholds His glory, who lives continually surrounded by the beauty and goodness of God, ever turn away? It seems impossible.

Israel is an unimaginably wealthy kingdom. All the dragon's gold and silver was melted down, minted into currency, and then paid to Israel's hard-working citizens. By contrast, the other nations are poverty stricken, still reeling under the terrible plagues. They rebuild their homes and recover a semblance of civilization, but all who refuse to come to Mount Zion to be cleansed never fully recover their health, prosperity, or technology.

In time, this becomes a source of subtle pride for young Israelis born with that mythical silver spoon in their mouths. This does not become evident in the first four or five generations into the Millennium. David, and his son Solomon after him, determine to prevent Israel from ever turning away again. Three times a year, with each Feast, they publicly rehearse Israel's sordid history and repent for their past. Then they give thanks for the bounty and blessing of their Messiah in coming to dwell with them, and repeat solemnly, "Never again will we turn away from Yashua; never again will we risk falling under His wrath." They don't exactly turn away, either. But after five or six hundred years, the blessings and joy of God's presence becomes routine, expected, even a bit mundane. It is pride, the original sin, living among the 'haves' and looking down your nose at the 'have nots' in other nations. It doesn't need Satan's temptations to begin to feel especially deserving, and critical of those 'foolish, bitter souls' who refuse the invitation to come to Mount Zion. Thus some descendants of those Messiah has saved develop a sense of entitlement, as if they are more worthy of God's special favor.

It should have been a big clue that they can no longer step through the veil to travel with a thought to the far corners of the world, as the missionaries always do. Only those who are completely holy may step through the veil. But these youngsters do not want to do missionary work, anyway. *Who cares about those still suffering under the weight of their sins around the world? If they're still too bitter to come to Mount Zion and be cleansed, let 'em suffer.*

It should have been a bigger clue when the gatekeepers of Mount Zion refuse them entrance. Jerusalem has no walls, but the Garden of God does! Only those who are holy, or seeking cleansing, can come up the mountain to meet God. The Tzedique family (which has grown large) keeps a tight guard around the Garden of God. No one with evil lurking in his heart is allowed. All the Tzediques have been gifted with discernment to know who is who!

But again, these youngsters of whom I speak don't want to come up into the garden or commune with their God. It would spoil their day to expose what hides in their hearts. They just sit back, enjoy the parties, and coast. They don't need to go to Mount Zion to eat fruit from the Trees of Life. It only takes one fruit per month to keep from growing old. They can always finagle one from parents or friends.

Of course they insist that they are not what Yashua called the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, immoral persons, sorcerers, idolaters, or liars, those vile people kept outside the Holy Land and off the Highway of Holiness by the guards at the borders. No, they were born in the Holy Land. *They are already righteous. They have no need of going up to Mount Zion to be cleansed.* Thus they are living a self-righteous lie, and have become the very ones that Yashua warned about. Now He comes to their celebrations less often, not because He doesn't want to come, but because He cannot dance with those who pretend to be righteous but hide evil in their hearts.

Though he is over six hundred years old, King Solomon stopped aging after about 35 when he started eating from the Tree of Life. He has ruled well, and the new land of Israel is now filled with happy, prosperous people. They celebrate the three Feasts of Israel (Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot) each year at Jerusalem. Vows of commitment in the Garden of God on Mount Zion replace the old blood sacrifices. Everyone is invited to drink freely of the Rivers of Life and eat freely from the Trees of Life.

But so many now come to the celebrations of the Feasts that it has become impossible to keep track of who actually ascends the mountain to be cleansed. Those who come just for the eats and the dancing have developed ways of skipping the parts of the ceremony that include confessing their dependence upon God and renewing their vows to Him in the garden. Everyone in Israel is invited, of course. King Solomon cannot conceive that any of his own people might refuse the invitation to meet Yashua on His holy mountain! So he does not notice the miscreants.

Michael is concerned. "Logos? How can I guard them while they hold a lie in their hearts? They think they can live without Your Spirit Life! They are headed for another calamity when they despise Your holy mountain and the righteousness You offer here. What can I do to prevent it?"

"You cannot prevent it, dear Michael. This is their test. In a perfect land freed from all temptation, with perfect knowledge of Me and My ways and full understanding of the consequences of their choices, will they choose to love Me, seek My ways, and obey Me of their own free will? Or will they fall back to Satan's ways of self-serving pride? Their enemy now is not Satan. It is 'self' – the human heart. Some seem to be failing the test. We shall see where their choices take them. But have you seen those of My precious ones who still remain faithful? They shall overcome! They are My trophy to the universe of the power of My grace. Cover them! Though I may not come openly to the Feasts anymore, yet to them I shall come! I shall feast with them, dance with them, and pour out My grace in abundance upon them. For they are My people and I am their God."

The years of the Millennium continue flowing by. Good years. Happy and prosperous years for Israel. But now her borders have been subtly weakened. Not borders protecting Israel from outside attack, but those keeping foolish Israelites from straying from their homeland. Why the grass always seems to be greener on the other side of the fence, I'll never know. Perhaps these young bucks rationalize their folly by pretending to 'help the poor' in those nations who so desperately need – not handouts – but the cleansing Israel has to offer. Or perhaps they just want to be free of the restraints of the Law of God now so deeply imbedded into the culture of Israel.

Regardless of why, they take their families and wealth to move north and east to far-off lands in search of fun and adventure. They travel abroad, not as missionaries with the invitation to come to Mount Zion to be cleansed, but as mercenaries. They focus on garnering fame and fortune for themselves among the primitive tribes of the earth.

In that, they are quite successful. Their wealth buys power and glory; their knowledge soon elevates them to rule those lands to which they travel. But their success is to have tragic consequences. For as those they rule grow slowly in power and wealth, they hear the tales of mighty Israel and how she has already expanded to cover the entire Middle East. *What will Israel do next?* She can expand no farther south, as she already fills the land to the shores of the Red Sea. She can expand no farther west, where she is stopped by the Great Sea and by her ally, Egypt. No, she can only expand to the north and east, to conquer their own weak nations!

Thus fomenting fears of Israeli aggression, the kings of the earth begin arming themselves, 'just for their own protection', of course. And this is led by these very sons of Israel who have abandoned their homeland!

Logos leaves His throne and goes to the Abyss, where Satan and Wormwood are still chained and surrounded by their out-of-work demons. Using His hard-won keys of death and Hades, Logos opens the ancient gates, enters, and unlocks their cell. "Satan! Wormwood! Come forth! Your punishment has been paid. You are free to come out." Their chains fall in a pile at their feet.

"You're late!" Satan growls. "You said a thousand years. I've been in there for at least twice that. I thought You said You always kept Your Word!"

"Actually," Logos responds, "I'm ten years early. Time always seems to move slower when you're in pain. I do keep My Word, but I also like to show mercy in judgment. Have you no thanks for your release? Have you no regret for your disobedience? Have you no promise to forever dwell within the boundaries of My Law? Surely you have suffered enough! Now that the Great Controversy has been settled, are you finally ready to bow before Me and acknowledge that My ways are best, repenting of your own ways, to the glory of the Father and His Plan of the Ages?"

You must understand, dear Reader, that at this point in time, all the lies are exposed, even Satan's self-deception. He knows that all Logos says is true, and he knows his final defeat is every bit as certain as the 990 years he has spent bound in the Abyss. He has no more pretensions of his own greatness in competition with God as King of the Universe. That slender chain of Spirit had seemed but a little thing. Yet Michael had snagged him with it so easily! It had held him firm these 990 years, and all his great strength had proved futile. Satan knows chains. The God who could make such a chain is certainly the true God of the universe. All his own pretensions of power and glory are vanity.

So surely Satan will now accept what must be the final invitation Logos offers. But no. "I swore I would never bow to You!" he snarls. "Do You really think I am so weak as to let a little suffering change my mind? You say the Great Controversy is settled, and the rest of the universe may even agree with You, but it is not, until it is settled in my own mind! Now gimme back my adversary badge. You've had a thousand years to perfect Your chosen people. I'll bet I can turn them away from You in ten. If I win, I get the earth and its people as my permanent possession, and I'll let You keep the heavenlies for Your saints. Fair enough?"

"And if you lose?"

"I won't… but if I do, I'll… *I'll bow to You! I swear it.*"

"That is a promise? But I know that you do not keep your vows. What assurance do I have?"

Satan looks around. What can he swear by? Nothing in heaven or earth is sacred to him. "This chain of Yours!" He kicks it. "I swear by this chain that I will keep my promise. If I renege, You can bind me with it forever and ever."

"We are agreed. Here is your adversary badge."

CHAPTER 73 – THE LAST BATTLE

Sadly, the stage is already set. The people of Israel and her allies dwell securely, with no walls, no weapons, and no worries. The nations around are beginning to grow strong and independent, and jealous of Israel's prosperity.

The world's geography is rather different from those fearful days when Israel was fighting desperately to hang on to that tiny sliver of land between the angry Arabs and the deep blue sea. Now, Israel fills the Middle East from the Western Sea to the ancient land of Persia in the east, and from the Red Sea to the hills of Kurdistan (ancient Assyria) in the north. In addition. Israel has treaties with Egypt and Kurdistan for mutual assistance, fulfilling the prophecy, "In that day, Israel will be the third party with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth. For YHWH has blessed them, saying, 'Blessed is Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance.'" (Isa 19:24 ff)

So Egypt and Assyria have also grown and prospered. Egypt is now the leader of the African states. Some of them, starting with the Sudan and Ethiopia, willingly submitted to Egypt's rule and are no longer independent, making Egypt five times larger. Others were subdued by virtue of the fact that their own governments failed and they had to have Egypt's protection. Likewise, ancient Assyria now governs much of the lands of eastern Turkey and northern Iran. This provides a good buffer between Israel and other possibly more aggressive nations to the north and east.

The Americas and Europe were devastated, first by the takeover by the Muslims and imposition of Sharia Law (which reduced them back to the Dark Ages) and second by the exchange of nuclear bombs which wiped out half their people, including 90 percent of those in major cities. Those remaining, mostly farmers and survivalists who had hidden away from the wrath of God, have recovered to a simple society, but they are nowhere close to the world powers they once enjoyed. Many individuals, of course, have been reached by Israel's missionaries and cleansed at Mount Zion. They are content with their lot, and they now work to reach out to their countrymen. But many others are jealous of Israel's prosperity and still bitter at their own loss of power and prestige in world affairs.

The Soviet States and the Far East survived the second holocaust far better than the west, for three major reasons. First, they had held a more realistic view of human nature and had better prepared for war, with their missile shield and their huge underground bunkers for fallout shelters. Second, they had not allowed themselves to be deceived by the Muslim threat and had prevented the Muslim takeover of any of their major cities. (When the nuclear bombs fell, it was mainly the Muslim centers of power that had been destroyed.) And third, they had been quick, even eager, to take Hitler's microchip and support his plans – thus their people had avoided his wrath.

David and Danelle are old. At 1056, they may be the oldest couple in earth's history. Though they had retired from politics at the age of one hundred, they still keep in touch as advisors to King Solomon II and his descendants. And they still meet with their Messiah – every Sabbath at the evening meal and again at the dance, and every Feast day, when they renew their vows on top of Mount Zion.

So conversations between them and Yashua are not at all uncommon. Even when Yashua avoids the big group celebrations, He always seems to make it to David and Danelle's humble home. It is at such an occasion, after a time of fellowship and worship, David asks, "Yashua my Lord, the thousand years You promised me are past. We're old. We've stopped eating from the Tree of Life. We don't want to live here forever. We long to leave this earthly realm to join You in Your heavenly city. Your Holy City! My son Solomon and his sons rule well. They no longer need me here. But I am concerned. The Revelation says that Satan will be released from prison, to go out again and deceive the nations and bring them up against Jerusalem, the beloved city. So what would You have us do to prepare, to protect Your people and the glory of Your name?"

"How I love you, David! Truly you are a shepherd after My own heart, always concerned for My people and the glory of My name. You will not need to fight in this battle. Never again shall My people build weapons or learn the art of war, for I am always your protection. Most of you have kept yourselves holy to Me. Yet some have not. I would save them, if possible, from the consequences of their choices. Prepare yourself to speak at Sukkot. I will give you the words. Arrange for everyone on earth to hear."

King Solomon gladly grants his honored father a place in the Sukkot ceremonies. David is given a microphone, and all the cameras are on him. His voice is still strong and steady as he speaks to the gathered crowds and to the entire world. "Israel, My people! Yashua says, 'I have loved you with an everlasting love! You have responded with vows to be faithful to love Me in return, and to never again turn away. Yet some have turned away in their hearts, and others have left Israel entirely to build their own kingdoms among the Gentiles.' Therefore know now that Satan has been released to again deceive the nations! You may have forgotten, for we have had a thousand years of peace. But in the age of sin, Satan always wanted to annihilate Israel. He tried to do it through the Muslims for many years. That is why God allowed the nuclear bombs to destroy all the Muslim cities. Satan will try again, this time using all who refuse to come to Mount Zion and be cleansed. And again, God will destroy them. He promised we will not need to fight. We will only stand and worship, and see the great salvation of our God. But you must choose sides now! I beg you, accept our invitation to come to Mount Zion and be cleansed! *'The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come!"'* All of you! If you do not, you will be destroyed along with Satan's forces when he comes against Israel and against God!"

It's a good speech. The people hear, all over the earth. Many respond with repentance, and return to Israel for cleansing. Many whose hearts had grown cold renew their vows. It's like a grand old revival. Everyone honors and respects David and Danelle as their greatest heroes from the age of sin. David is like their George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Ronald Reagan all in one. They take his words seriously. For years the Holy City is busier than ever, assisting all those who come for cleansing.

But Satan is busy, too. *He knows how to do this, and this one is for all the marbles. It will be easy. These naïve suckers haven't had a temptation for a thousand years and wouldn't know one if it jumped up and bit 'em on the nose.* Satan gives his demons their instructions: "Our task is to make Israel afraid – to cause them to lose their faith. We will do it by gathering all other nations against them in one big battle. Right now the nations fear Israel. We can turn that into hatred. We don't have to seduce the nations into idolatry, lust, or immorality. We'll have plenty of time later for our religious and sensual pleasures. Just feed their jealousy and hate against Israel. Tell 'em, 'Israel is rich while you're in poverty. Israel is mean for not sharing her wealth. Israel is preparing an invasion to take what little you have. Israel is expanding to conquer the world and force you to make pilgrimages to their silly mountain. Israel's leaders have become lunatics, religious nuts forcing everyone into their cult. The only way to stop them is to attack before they do. We've got a big head-start in building weapons, while Israel is decadent and self-indulgent! They think they're so powerful, but they spend all their time feasting and dancing and haven't developed any weapons for years. Their guns are covered in rust. What little ammo they have is a thousand years old. They have no heavy weapons at all! If we get busy now we'll take 'em by surprise! We'll attack with such overwhelming force that Israel won't stand a chance. We'll annihilate them in their sleep!'" (I shortened his speech a lot. Satan loves to hear himself talk, especially on his favorite subjects like war, fear, and hate.)

So for the next ten years Israel prepares for war with repentance, cleansing, renewing their vows, and worship, while the rest of the world prepares for war by building weapons and training soldiers. Satan practices, pitting nation against nation in friendly simulated competitions, all the while keeping their focus on hatred of Israel. The results of these competitions are rather interesting. The northern block, what was the old Soviet Union, usually wins. The eastern block, mostly driven by China, usually comes in a close second. Europe usually comes in third, and the Americas, headed by Canada but including the USA, Mexico, and South America as well, almost always comes in last. She who was first is now last.

Satan doesn't care. He doesn't care if they all die. All they have to do is get strong enough to come against Israel and make her afraid before they die. For this is a wager that he must not lose.

Both Satan and Wormwood need new hosts. Spirit beings are just great for the temptation part, but actually leading the battle requires a physical presence. Hitler and Eva Braun are still in the hoosegow, and there's no way in heaven the old dragon will allow himself to be tempted again, so they're out on the prowl. Satan tries tempting all the younger dragons. With the thick, warm air, they've been multiplying all across the earth. But no go. They've been sternly warned by their father (as have most animals) and do not fall to his deceptions.

All the fierce and aggressive dinosaurs are extinct. The stupid sauropods still living in Africa's remote rainforests are too timid. Finally Satan finds a giant anaconda deep in the South American jungles. He is nearly thirty feet long and bigger around than a man's waist. That ought to strike fear into the hearts of his armies! "Well, friend snake!" Satan comes to him with the forgotten telepathic language of animals before the Flood. "What can I do for you?"

"Who are you? Why do you care?" The sleepy serpent retorts, lethargic after swallowing an entire wild hog.

"I am a voice from the dawn of time. I lived with your distant ancestor in the Garden of Eden. He was the most beautiful creature in the garden, and the wisest, as well. Would you like to see him?"

"Huh? You can show me my distant ancestor?" The snake is skeptical. He has been called frightening and powerful before, but never wise or beautiful.

"It's all in the Universal Data Banks. I'll be happy to show you." It's a lie, of course. Satan has gotten very good at editing the Universal Data Banks to skip parts that don't support his schemes. So far, no one yet has uncovered his deceptions. Thus he projects vivid movies in full color into the anaconda's mind, showing that infamous python in the Garden of Eden, but leaving out his own possession and use of it to tempt Eve. It was indeed beautiful, standing erect ten feet tall on its hind legs almost like a human.

"That's no snake. Snakes don't have legs, silly!"

"Not so, my friend. Until the curse all snakes had legs. But the snake suffered the loss of its legs and much of its intelligence when the earth was cursed. Whether fairly or not, the Creator blamed the snake for the sins of mankind. But I have good news for you. The curse has been broken. The earth is being renewed. The Creator wants you to regain your prior status as the wisest, most beautiful, and best friend of mankind. Instead of being feared and hated, you will be loved by all. Instead of having to slink around the forest, you will be king of beasts. Men will come to ask for your wisdom; great men will seek out your help…" Satan goes on and on. It gets pretty sappy. But the foolish anaconda buys it. He allows Satan access in exchange for a promise to grant him legs and higher intelligence. Satan grows his new legs and trains him to heed his inner spirit promptings. He dubs him the 'Spirit Serpent'.

Wormwood has an obvious candidate. Though both Hitler and his wife Eva Braun were cast into Hades, their child, who was christened Prince Adam Noah Dumuzi at the grand dedication of Madonna Mary Ishtar Inanna's new temple, is still alive. As an innocent, he was spared the destructions that befell the earth at the second holocaust. He grew up in a Jewish orphanage. They just called him Adam. In his youth he was proud of being a privileged Jew. But in later years he left Israel and went to Moscow, where in time he rose to the honored post of city mayor. He is rich enough to buy plenty of fruit from the Tree of Life, and is now nearly a thousand years old. Wormwood comes to him. "Why are you the city mayor, Adam?" he whispers.

"Hey! I've worked hard. I'm smart. I'm handsome. I'm rich. I watch my backside. I deserve to be mayor."

"Deserve to be mayor, indeed! You deserve to rule the world! You were christened Prince Adam Noah Dumuzi with the hope that you would grow up to exceed them all. Have you forgotten your past?"

Adam never knew his folks. They died while he was too young to remember. But the title seems vaguely familiar to him. Still, he really doesn't know where he came from. So Wormwood reminds him, telling him all the good parts about his infamous parents, but leaving out the bad stuff. "Your dad was a military genius and a great world emperor. And your mom was the greatest exhibition dancer the world has ever known. The whole world looked up to them and gladly followed them. Only one nation failed to submit to them. That was Israel. She foolishly tried to resist and threatened war. So to protect his loyal subjects, your dad brought a huge army, the biggest army in the history of the world, against Israel. He would have won, too, but Israel fired a nuclear bomb that killed your dad, his entire army, and themselves as well. It was tragic. Your dad never thought they would commit suicide! Then your mom took over from her golden temple in Babylon. She ruled well. All the people loved her. But again, tragedy struck. A team of Israeli assassins mowed her down in her temple, right during her sacred worship dance. They had a flamethrower and it burned her up. I'm so sorry! You were taken to an orphanage. But you are a prince! I've been watching out for you these last thousand years, waiting for just the right time to help you take proper vengeance against wicked Israel for what they did to your parents."

"The right time? I'm a thousand years old! You could have come a little sooner!"

"Trust me, Prince Dumuzi. Up until now the nations over which you'll rule have been too weak to attack Israel. But now, Israel is blinded by wealth and pride – weakened by pleasures and self-indulgence – while the nations you are going to rule are getting strong! I am here to offer my assistance. I'll help you take your rightful place as emperor of the world, to achieve the destiny begun by your honored folks. With my help, you shall exact your vengeance!"

"Sir? You talk as if you knew my parents. What were their names? Nobody tells me their names! It's like they were some awful criminals or something!"

"Criminals? No, no. Just the opposite. Their names are almost too holy to mention. Your mother, God rest her soul, was Madonna Mary Ishtar Inanna, Mother of God. And your father – he was the messiah for that age, the World Emperor Jesus Christ!" Wormwood said it with such reverence and sincerity – he was almost believable.

Adam is stunned. Suddenly the pieces come together and he knows in his soul it is true. "So then, what does that make me? Am I a god, too?"

"You are the world's messiah for this age! You are not destined just to be a city mayor, but a world emperor, like your father Jesus Christ! That's what I've been trying to tell you. When the world finally recognizes you and receives you, they will know you as World Emperor Adam Noah Dumuzi Christ, King of Kings and Lord of All. I swear it!"

Again, it's like taking candy from a baby. Soon the Spirit Serpent and Prince Dumuzi are working together on a plan to control the world's armies. Now fully possessed and empowered by Satan and Wormwood, they make an impressive pair. Everyone hails them as great leaders.

Prince Dumuzi turns out to be a gifted orator, like his father before him. With Wormwood's help, he gives impassioned speeches promising freedom from Israel's oppressive rules, and the redistribution of Israel's wealth to other less-prosperous nations. His fiery rhetoric is backed up by the imposing figure of the thirty foot snake standing on his hind legs right beside him, agreeing and lending an air of authority to all he preaches.

Until now the nations have been pretty independent, unified only in their mutual distrust of Israel. But now, Prince Dumuzi and the Serpent are working to convince them of their need for a world government. The weapons they've been building are great to keep any one of them from lording it over another, but they would be no match against Israel's great power and wealth – unless they all band together under one leader. Of course Prince Dumuzi promises he'll never usurp their individual sovereignty or interfere with their laws and customs. No, no. He just wants to set them free from the threat of world domination by Israel and her two allies. So he will only command their united armies, but never interfere in their governments.

They buy the lie. Thus Prince Dumuzi is unanimously elected, not as emperor, but as commander-in-chief of the world's armies, with Spirit Serpent as his chief advisor. "That's only the first step," Spirit Serpent assures Dumuzi. "We must be cautious. People are like sheep – gullible and easily led, as long as you don't spook 'em. After we win the battle against Israel and achieve your vengeance for your parents' death, they will hail you as World Emperor Dumuzi Christ, King of Kings! I swear it!"

Satan has learned a few things over the years. For one, he knows he must work within God's Law. It is so tightly woven into the fabric of the universe that he simply cannot get around it. Second, Satan knows God keeps His Word, and His promises of punishment are not just idle threats. God does exactly what He says He will do. Third, Satan has learned to respect the prophecies of Scripture. He doesn't understand quite how, but they all get fulfilled, without exception, down to the tiniest detail. It's uncanny.

So now Satan is being very careful. He works slowly, methodically, under the Law. He gets proper permission before possessing anyone. He wins the masses to his cause by legal temptations. No one is forced against his will. Satan even sticks (mostly) to the truth, believe it or not, for he has discovered that his more outrageous lies usually backfire on him. He has gotten very good at stretching the truth, or emphasizing certain truths and omitting others, to give whatever impression he desires.

"Logos, he is so close!" Gavriel says. "Surely he knows his end after his thousand-year punishment! How can he ever think he will win the last battle when Your Word is so explicit regarding his ultimate defeat? I cannot believe he bet You that he'll win!"

"Believe it, dear Gavriel. Self-deception is a trap from which none can escape without My Spirit's illumination. Even knowing all he knows, he still thinks he is smart enough to weasel around the clear conclusion in My book of Revelation. [20:9-10 ff] Look at him pouring over it, just trying to find a loophole!"

Indeed Revelation 20 has become a favorite of Satan. He reads it with a lawyer's practiced eye, and he thinks he has found his loophole. But now that he knows Logos can read his thoughts, he's very careful never to think it; never to put it all together in his mind; always pretending that he is still searching through the verses for some way to defeat the King of the Universe. You and I, dear Reader, know that God's Word is forever settled in heaven and there is nothing Satan can do to change the outcome – his ultimate demise. Logos, Gavriel, and all the heavenly host know that as well. They have total confidence in Father's perfect Plan of the Ages. They already know Satan's loophole is a false hope. But they will let him do his darndest, that all the universe may see the final end of the adversary.

Though Satan tries so hard to conceal it, I will share his little secret with you, dear Reader, so you can understand what's going on. His bold wager with Logos was not made so lightly as it appeared. While in the Abyss, he had come to the conclusion that the way to defeat Logos is in His own Word, which He is bound to keep. All he has to do is to get Logos to promise something that contradicts His Word, then He has defeated Himself! The way Satan sees it, as soon as Logos accepted his wager, it was done! Either way, win or lose, Logos has contradicted Revelation 20:8-10! Therefore, Satan has won, and Logos has failed!

You see, Satan has been studying the Revelation for a long time, and he really has it figured out. He understands that when he is released from prison, he gets to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth and bring them to Israel for the last battle. They will surround the saints and the Holy City, then fire will come out of heaven and destroy them. (Rev 20:7-10) That could not be clearer. But what Logos has obviously missed is this: Satan is the one who "…deceives the entire world" (Rev 12:9)! It says so, right there in the unbreakable Word of God. Of course that has to include Israel. So his carefully worded wager was not that he would overcome Israel – the Word clearly says he will not. But rather that he would deceive Israel to turn away from Logos in the heat of battle and put their trust in anything else – an easy task he has done many times. Once Israel turns away from Logos, even in losing the battle Satan wins his wager. So Logo's Word is self-contradicted and the earth becomes Satan's permanent possession! Even if Satan gets thrown into the Abyss for ages, (as it says must happen) he still eventually gets out. From that time forth, the earth is his!

All the other nations are busy preparing for the assault on Israel, building weapons and armor on a massive scale. The battle plans are laid. But Satan knows that to tempt Israel he must make a few holes in their spiritual covering. So now he comes to King Solomon II. *He'll be even easier to tempt than his namesake, for he's had a thousand years with no temptations and has surely forgotten how to guard his soul.* Already he's made a small compromise. His father had authorized each husband to take care of up to seven widows, as long as he remained faithful to his wife (which was easy during the Millennium). Well, King Solomon II, being very rich, had made an exception for himself. In his kindness, he had taken into his palace all the widows no one else wanted. Over the years more and more came to Israel to be cleansed. They now amount to a thousand 'yashas'. Solomon calls them his 'princesses'. He fulfills his obligations to them in a royal way, like his own sisters. Never before have widows felt more loved and cared for.

But it was a compromise, just the same. Besides, Satan had a precedent. Just as the first Solomon had eventually fallen into sin with his princesses, so would the second. Satan and his demons are now there, doing what they do best, day after day, gently, slyly slipping suggestions into Solomon's mind, always sticking to the letter of God's Law.

The years pass, yet Solomon remains true. He still treats all his princesses with the utmost purity and respect. He values his relationship with Yashua and his access to the heavenly realms far more than the sordid thoughts that sometimes pop into his mind. Satan cannot understand it. But he cannot take chances here. He works on many other leaders in Israel as well. Someone must fall! Satan pulls out all his favorite tools: lust, complacency, desire for fame, glory, power, adventure, and even fear of the unknown, the planets, and the resultant idolatry.

But every one of his best tools seems to be disabled. Who can lust when the true Lover of their souls is always with him? Who can be complacent when he actually meets with God at the Sabbath fellowship and dance and at the three annual Feasts? Who can desire fame, glory, power, or adventure when he lives in such peace and prosperity and his rulers are righteous and just? Who can fear the unknown or the planets when the Master of the Universe has proven beyond doubt that He holds the cosmos in His hand? Who can be turned toward idolatry when Yashua Himself spreads the Light of His presence across the earth each dawn? So the more Satan works the more frantic he becomes. *Maybe he should have asked for twenty years.*

It's time to pull out the big guns. Satan knows these people! They are stubborn, self-consumed, fearful, proud, lustful – he has worked with them for thousands of years. They always eventually fall. *Logos was a fool for choosing them in the first place. His love for them must have gotten terribly frustrating, as many times as they've stood Him up!*

"Ahh, I know!" Satan tells his demon prince in charge of Israel's temptations. "We'll play on their compassion. Have you noticed how quick they are to receive people from other nations who come to repent? We'll get some plants, moles, super-secret spies. Let's do two or three from every nation, just to be sure some get through. Once they're successfully embedded into Israel, they'll minister fear of the upcoming battle. Then we've got 'em!"

That turns out to be surprisingly easy, after so many failures in virtually every other area of temptation. Over six hundred of Satan's moles succeed. They go through the rituals of repenting and being cleansed at Mount Zion. They eagerly join Israeli society with their newfound, untested, faith in Yashua. The first thing Satan does is to begin planting fear in their hearts. They're soon coming to David, Solomon, or any of their leaders, anyone who will listen, crying, "The nation from which I came is building fearful weapons! Their army seems invincible! They're led by the Spirit Serpent himself! They're planning an all-out attack on Israel. We must defend ourselves!"

And when they're assured that Yashua is their defense, that worship and holiness before Him is like a shield, like a fortress against the enemy, they respond, "Yes, but…! He is our spiritual protection, but I'm sure He expects us to prepare our defenses in the physical as well. We must have lookouts, scouts, soldiers. We need walls and guards all around our borders. We need weapons, bombs, and the aircraft to deliver them. How can you stand around saying, 'God is our defense' and do nothing! That's presumption! Don't you know that 'Faith without works is dead'?"

Solomon tries to reassure them, "The only work God accepts is obedience united in faith. Any work we do out of fear of our enemies is iniquity. Yashua told us we would never again have to fight, or even learn the art of war. He will fight for us. We must not fear, only believe and obey!"

Logos is pleased. "Look, Gavriel! They really trust Me! Even after ten years of Satan's most persistent temptations, they still trust Me! Now My Father's Plan of the Ages has been validated in full. My chosen 'Children of Israel' are children no more. They have grown up. Now they are My brothers, the sons of My Father, faithful in all My house. Therefore I shall arise!"

Satan is in a frenzy. All he has to do is get them to turn away, even for a moment! Turn away to anything at all, lust, greed, covetousness, anger, pride, unfaithfulness, immorality, idolatry, fear, it doesn't matter. Wormwood and Dumuzi are on their own with the other nations and their armies. Satan is working full-time on Israel now. He's tried every trick in the book plus some new ones that he concocted recently. The only thing he has not tried is using force, violating their free will. Logos seemed awfully grumpy about that the last time he violated His Law. Satan does not relish another thousand years in the Abyss!

But by heaven, he'd better think of something soon! His ten years are nearly up, and he still has totally failed to turn Israel away from Logos. The armies of the nations are now prepared for battle. Perhaps they will be sufficient to turn Israel to fear. He orders a slow, methodical buildup of the military forces around Israel's borders. This time he will not attack until he is good and ready! He has learned much from previous encounters. This time he will attack from all sides at once, both by land and by sea. He knows better than to use manned aircraft as they are too easy for angels to bat out of the sky. All his tanks and ships are protected from lightning bolts from above. God's fire-from-heaven nonsense cannot affect him this time. Satan has gained a vast amount of experience from all those lightning bolts from Mars, and knows how to protect his armies. And that psychological warfare that Logos used in the last battle, when Hitler's soldiers went mad firing into rank upon rank of defenseless people holding hands and singing – never again. This time, his soldiers will stay inside their tanks looking at the world through computerized view-screens. They will not see real people – it will be like a video game, where all they will see are evil-looking green aliens coming to kill them. They will have no trouble firing back, as they coldly drive the Israelis into the sea!

So the last year of Satan's ten-year wager is used to gather the armies of his 250 nations in an ever-tightening noose around Israel and her allies, Egypt and Kurdistan. The Americas have filled the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden with their navies, and their armies cover the parts of south and central Africa not ruled by Egypt. The Europeans have deployed their navies in the Mediterranean, ready to take the Suez canal, and their armies occupy north Africa. The Soviets have brought their armies south through Turkey and Iran; their navies fill the Black and Caspian Seas. The Eastern Block nations are filling Persia with their armies; their navies have flooded the Persian Gulf. Now that two hundred million man army of the last war seems small.

A military operation of this magnitude can hardly be imagined. Lots of people got born during the Millennium and not many died. Satan now has almost two billion men and women to play with, and he has brought every last one who can point a rifle or drive a tank to this battle. As I said, this one is for all the marbles.

It takes months for them all to move into place. During that time Satan keeps stepping up his fear tactics. His unwitting moles among the Israelis continue whining for the government to do something. Satan's men fire missiles overhead, which shower Israel with leaflets warning them to surrender or be annihilated. He steps up the media war, and the major television hosts are eager to do what the media has always done: spin the facts, shout hyperbole, and predict the greatest of catastrophes, urging Israel to surrender quickly or they surely will fall and be destroyed by the overwhelming force. (News journalist's claims of 'impartiality' is a farce, as it always was.)

Satan has decided to attack on Sukkot. He doesn't really understand its significance. All he knows is that the Feast will be a big distraction, thus making the attack that much more frightening. This has got to become the most fearful display ever. He has got to get Israel to turn away from their faith in Logos, or all is lost. He knows that now, and for the first time in his life he begins to fear that he might not succeed. *What happened to these Israelites? They always fall to his temptations. They always buckle and run. They always pray secretly to the gods of the nations, or turn to other people or treaties or material things to give them security and comfort.* He dare not wait any longer. It's time for the showdown. He has got to make it look good!

He sets it for high noon on the Last Great Day, the eighth day of Sukkot. At that moment every big gun on every warship circling Israel will fire twenty rounds. Then while those half a billion rounds rain down on Israel his tanks will begin their advance, to sweep her into the sea.

"King Solomon, I beg of you, call off the Feast this year! It is virtually certain that the surrounding armies will attack us during the Feast, and we are unprepared!" Satan's moles are still whining.

So Solomon broadcasts a speech to all Israel. "Everyone gather for the Feast of Sukkot. Leave your homes empty, your doors unlocked. Bring your parents, wives, yashas, children, and babies. The fearful among us are certain that the armies of the nations will attack us during the Feast, and we want to be as close to our Lord Yashua as possible during their attack. We will put aside fear, and worship Yashua in the beauty of holiness. We will surround His temple, the Garden of God on Mount Zion, His dwelling place on earth, even as our enemies surround us. For Yashua is our strong Fortress and our Deliverer. We will worship Him as He delivers us. And if YHWH chooses to allow our enemies to destroy us, we will worship Him in the highest heavens forevermore! Praise YHWH!"

"Yes!" Logos screams in delight, doing backflips and spins around the heavenlies in sheer joy. "Can it possibly be any more clear? Can anyone deny that My son is now manifest on earth? He has been tempted in every way known to man. Can anyone complain that he was all ready to fall with just a little more temptation? I gave My first Solomon great riches, power, and honor and he fell to lust, self-indulgence and pride. But My second Solomon is ten times wealthier and more powerful! He has ten times more honor before the nations! Yet still he remains true to Me. My first Solomon had a thousand princesses and he fell to temptation with each one, plunging into immorality and bowing to their gods. But now My second Solomon guards himself, body and soul. He prefers holiness and fellowship with Me to the pleasures of sin for a season. He protects his thousand princesses with the utmost purity and truest love – love divine! Now I shall arise and deliver My son, according to the abundance and perfection of his faith!"

King David and Queen Danelle are very feeble, but they refuse to stay home from the Feast. "Joy and excitement are in the air! This may be the greatest day in the history of the universe! How can we stay home on such a day – only to protect our lives? No, those who seek to save their lives will lose them. Where better to meet our Maker than in the Garden of God?" His vow of faith turns out to be prescient. They are brought by hand-carriage up Mount Zion. They are set down next to the ancient altar which Yashua's Bride broke when she stopped their sacrifice. There they get out of the carriage and bow in worship to Yashua, the King of the Universe, their King, their Messiah, their Lord, their Friend. And there they sink lifeless to the earth, a smile still on their faces, their hands still entwined in prayer.

This is a great tragedy, for they are national heroes. On this, the first day of the Feast, what should have been a happy occasion turns to sadness, as the grateful nation reels with shock and sorrow.

King Solomon rises to the occasion. "Lord Yashua has taken them home. It is His right, for they belong to Him, and He loves them more than we. We rejoice that they are in His presence now and forevermore. Yet we also mourn this day, for we shall miss them. So I decree this day a day of national mourning for King David and Queen Danelle. No one shall rearrange their bodies, so all who wish to come by and pay their last respects may see them exactly as they lay in worship at the moment they were gathered to their fathers. But only this one day is a day of mourning! Their bodies will be interred in their tombs right at dusk. Tomorrow the Feast shall begin anew, in joy and worship as we have planned."

"But sir, surely… a hundred million people will want to come by and pay their respects. The rest of this day is only long enough for five or ten thousand to pass by."

"Then let the Sun of Righteousness pause in His course this day until all who wish have passed!"

It's a bold statement. The multitude surrounding the holy mountain gasps in awe, then cheers its approval and shouts in faith. "O King, all that you have said we will do!"

Logos turns to Gavriel. "You see? Now I've found true faith on the earth! Now nothing is impossible for them!" He smiles happily. "Shall we go now to meet My beloved?"

David and Danelle come into the Welcoming Park, still holding hands. They see the peaceful meadows, the bright flowers, the animals, and the lovely river, but they are searching only for Yashua. "Where is He? I was sure He would meet us here. Yashua? Is not this Your heavenly Holy City, where You promised to meet us when we died?"

"See how eager they are, Gavriel? Can anyone doubt that David is a man after My own heart?!"

"David, look. That book across the river, and the open door just beyond it. It must be the Book of Life! Yashua wants us to cross the river and find our names in the Lamb's Book of Life! Let's go!" Without another word, they both run into the river. But it is deeper than it looked, and soon they are struggling to keep their heads above water. They were good swimmers on earth, but here, something seems to be dragging them down. They quickly give in. "Yashua! Help! Though I die a thousand deaths, yet will I trust You!" they say as they are drowning.

Instantly they find themselves cradled in strong arms and hauled to the far bank. "No more deaths will you have to die, for you have proven faithful even unto death. You have overcome. You have demonstrated to all the universe the power of faith. To you I grant a crown of life. Your names are inscribed forever in My Book of Life. Welcome to the Kingdom I have prepared for you! I have gifts for you, a new robe of righteousness, a white stone of acquittal in the Day of Judgment, and a new name of endearment between Me and you. Also I give you to eat of the hidden manna, that your eyes and hearts may now be opened to the wisdom of the ages."

"O Lord Yashua! Thank You! But all we really wanted was to come and worship You here in Your Holy City. And to join You in Your intercession for Your people on earth. They are now in great need, with all the armies of earth surrounding the Holy City on earth – in need of prayer. May we intercede for them with You?"

"O My beloved! How I love you! I share your concern, but the intercession for them is now complete and I have already won the victory. I will let you see it when this week is done. Now we have some introductions. Many people in My realm are eager to see you, not the least of whom is your own namesake, David-Michal. He has been watching to see if you would succeed where he failed."

"Did I? Where did he fail?"

"With Bathsheba. It caused him terrible heartache. Do you have a Bathsheba in your past as well?"

"You know I don't, Lord. I've always been faithful to Danelle. Why do you ask?"

"What about those times you looked at Marjah your secretary, to lust after her in your heart?"

David is aghast. "But Lord! Yes, I was tempted… every man on earth is tempted! But I resisted those temptations! I always treated Marjah with respect! And I repented of those thoughts and trusted in the cleansing of Your own blood to forgive me! You can't still hold that against me!"

Now Yashua starts to laugh. At first David is indignant, but good laughter can hardly be ignored, or repressed. Soon David and Danelle are laughing with Him. Now He draws them together in a flaming hug, and for a long time there is only one brilliant flame, in a land still filled with the sound of their laughter. When He separates Himself from them, they are one, David-Danelle, or Danelle-David, depending on which relationship he (or she) feels the need to express at the moment.

Yashua is still laughing. "Yes, My beloved! Your faith in Me and in the power of My shed blood is indeed sufficient for all your sins to be washed away. You knew that; I knew that; but it is such joy to point it out with each son I receive into Myself, so all the universe can see the power and glory of My grace. Come now. Let us go through the door to meet all those waiting to welcome you! Enter into the joy of your Lord, My beloved son, for you I have found faithful in all My house."

That day does indeed last until all the mourners pass by the peaceful bodies of David and Danelle. In all that time, not a person gets hungry or thirsty, not a beast or carrion bird contends for the two bodies, and not an enemy soldier surrounding Israel moves from his place. It's a day unlike any before or since, when time bows the knee to a man. When they finally put the bodies in their graves at dusk, they are not even beginning to decay. It is truly a miracle, though an easy one, as that place intersects with the Holy City in heaven, where time runs differently from earth. As a veteran time traveler, I calculate that day's equivalent earth-time – it comes to an entire year in suspension.

Still, when the bodies are buried and time resumes its natural course that evening, it is with great joy that the people realize what happened. All who knew and loved David and Danelle and honored them as their heroes, their national founders, have passed by to bid them good-bye and voice their Shalom. They have taken all the time they needed to give vent to their grief, offer their prayers for the dead, and vow to greet them again in the resurrection. Now their joy is restored. The remainder of the Feast is even more more joyful because of the miracle.

Thus by noon on the Last Great Day of the Feast, during the final water drawing ceremony when they traditionally expect Messiah to come, they are all totally focused on the Feast. Not a one is even thinking about the pending attack.

CHAPTER 74 – JUDGMENT DAY – THE GREAT WHITE THRONE

David-Danelle has spent the week receiving his gifts, meeting his ancestors, renewing old acquaintances, eating the hidden manna, and exploring with Yashua (who wants him to call Him Logos). Now back at the throne room, he is watching the Feast on earth with great delight.

The final Simchat Bet haSho'ayva (Water Drawing Ceremony) is now complete. The priests have finished chanting the familiar words of Isaiah 12:

*"Behold, God is my salvation. I will trust and not be afraid. For the Lord YHWH is my strength and song, and He has become my Yashua [salvation]. **Therefore we joyously draw water from the springs of Salvation [Yashua].** And in this day we say, 'Give thanks to YHWH, call on His name. Make known His deeds among the peoples. Make them remember that His name is exalted. Praise YHWH in song, for He has done excellent things. Let it be known throughout the earth. Cry aloud and shout for joy, O inhabitants of Zion, **for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.'"***

The silver trumpets sound out their thrice sevenfold blast and the Hoshanna Rabbah (Praise Psalms 113 –118) is sung. The people all wave their palm branches and shout Hosannas and Hallelujahs. Their joy, their anticipation, their eager longing for their Messiah cannot be denied.

"It is time for Me to come to them…" Logos says, to no one in particular. He is strangely quiet. One would think He would be bouncing off the clouds with joy. The end of the ages has come, He has won the victory, and the total banishment of sin and death is near. Yet those who know Him best, understand. They look into His eyes and see tears. He weeps for those who, even after all He has done, still have not repented. He drops His head. "Lucifer, my shining one! What more could I have done? My beloved adversary! How I have yearned to woo you back to Myself, to teach you My ways, and to heal all the pain and suffering you have earned for yourself. Yet now your house is left to you desolate, your doom is sealed, and all your precious people destroyed. O Father! Forgive them! Forgive them! For they know not what they do!"

The Spirit Serpent gives the order to Prince Dumuzi. He relays it to all 250 of his commanding generals. "It is time. Fire that initial massive volley, then start the final tank assault to push the Israelis into the sea."

Logos reaches high above His throne, grabs the veil that separates His realm from earth, and, with a cry of deepest agony, rips it violently down, rending it apart from top to bottom. The brilliant glory, the awesome holiness of the throne of God, bursts through upon the earth. You know, dear Reader, how light dispels darkness. It's not a struggle. It's effortless. You turn on the light and the darkness is just gone. In exactly this way, the holiness of God dispels the wickedness remaining on the earth.

Satan was not expecting that. He was ready for storms, earthquakes, floods, lightning bolts from Mars, or deadly pestilence. He was prepared for angels to bat his missiles out of the sky, and for millions of silly suicide soldiers to walk toward his tanks holding hands and singing. *He has such an overwhelming force, nothing can stop him.*

Except the purifying fire of the holiness of God.

It floods the earth like an intense blast of pure energy, like light, except in all its frequencies rather than merely the visible spectrum. Everything it touches is exposed, opened up, laid bare before the King of the Universe. Everything that is not holy is burned up in that instant, for nothing unholy can exist in the presence of Father God.

The great Spirit Serpent, proud Prince Dumuzi, their generals and mighty men, and every soldier sitting in his ship or tank with his nervous finger on the trigger, is instantly consumed by the fire of the holiness of God. Even the land and the seas are purified of blood-guilt. The earth is cleansed. The last battle is over before it begins. Satan and Wormwood are out on their ears with no remaining mount available on earth. For the first time since the Fall of Adam and Eve, our world is holy – totally free from sin.

To us who have lived out our dreary existence with a darkening veil between us and heavenly realms, this scene is impossible to visualize. We look up and expect to see the sky, the clouds, the birds. We look down and expect to see the earth, the grass, the flowers. We look around and expect to see people, animals, houses, and lands. But now the saints, the holy ones of Israel, look up and behold the heavenly host, the holy watchers, the New Jerusalem still under construction at Mount Zion, and the great white throne of God in all its shining splendor gleaming over all. They look down to see the darker realms of Hades, the Dungeon, the fiery Abyss, and the souls suffering therein. They spin around and survey the Welcoming Park, the Paradise of God, the Nursery, the abode of all the souls whose fate is yet to be decided. It's a bit disconcerting at first, as they are still definitely on earth. But with a little practice, they quickly learn to direct their focus either on the heavenly realms or the overlapping physical realms depending on their desire at the moment.

And at this moment, their desire is definitely directed to the heavenly realms. For it is Yashua, their Messiah, their King and their Friend, who is seated on the **great white throne**, shining like the sun on top of Mount Zion. It is the fulfillment of the Feast of Sukkot! Their Messiah has come to earth to reign forever on His glorious throne. No longer must they be content to catch a glimpse of Him at the Feasts, to sense the presence of His Spirit in the Garden of God each Sabbath, or to share His joy only in the dance. The darkening veil is gone. Now they see Him face to face – His beautiful face, the most beautiful face in the universe – for the first time in the full radiance of His inexpressible glory. They fall down in worship, overcome with joy.

Once again, dear Reader, we have entered a time when time itself takes on a whole new meaning. There is no day or night here. No need to eat or use the bathroom. No need to rest or go for a walk to stretch your muscles. For all the events of the rest of this chapter take place on the same afternoon – indeed the same hour of the same afternoon, beginning about noon of the Last Great Day of the Feast. How can this be, you ask? Surely the reading of the Books of Life and reviewing of lifetimes stored on the Universal Data Banks must take longer than one hour? Trust me. It takes just one hour. Though the only way I'll be able to tell the story in that short time is to skip most of the details.

The saints gathered around Mount Zion are ready for this. They have purified their hearts and have prepared their souls with longing for their Messiah. Each one (there are roughly half a billion of them) is invited to stand with his or her spouse before the King of the Universe on the throne of His power. As I said, He can be many places at once, and there is no waiting here. Each one is invited first. I will describe a few examples, so you'll get the idea.

Let's first pick Marjah. Logos commands, "Marjah Davison, bring your husband and come before Me!"

Suddenly the vast crowds are gone. It is just her and her Lord. She kneels before Him, saddened by the invitation. "Lord Yashua, You know I have no husband. I am but a yasha to David Davison, who recently died."

Logos doesn't answer. He is scanning a large book in front of him. "Ahh, here you are, My dear. Marjah yasha-Davison. I know you!" As He speaks, Marjah's life plays back before them. "Look! You have spent your life serving My servants, raising My precious children, and honoring My saints. I thank you! In serving them, you serve Me. I shall reward you. But you're wrong about one thing…" His eyes twinkle and a big smile spreads across His face.

"Yes, Lord?"

"You do have a husband. You've loved him all your life. Get him. I want you to give him a big hug from Me."

There is a pause while Marjah struggles to decipher the riddle. She has never been married – of that she is certain. Just whom has she loved most of her life. David? Not really. She loved him, but it was not that kind of love; it was more a respect and honor. So whom has she really loved? Messiah! "Yashua? You are the one I have loved, all my life…" Suddenly she knows it is right. She leaps forward into His arms and gives Him a hug, the one hug she has always longed for. He has been her Husband… she knows it now. He has always been her protector, her provider, her wisdom, her covering. Even when she turned aside to love Dr. Relt, it was Yashua who drew her back to Himself. Now, in this hug, she is complete, whole, fulfilled for the first time in her life. How could she have missed it before? This is what she was made for; whom she was made for. Their hug lasts a long time. Indeed, it never really ends.

As Logos is welcoming Marjah, He also invites King Solomon and Queen Maria Davison to a separate private interview. They prostrate themselves before the King of kings in deepest reverence. Logos is studiously paging through a stack of books on a bench in front of Him. This goes on for a long while, as Solomon gets more anxious by the minute. Finally, "My Lord, what are those books You are searching through? And why must You search so?"

Logos looks up, 'nary a smile cracking His face. "This one records the names of the damned, who chose to serve Satan even after knowing who I am and tasting of My power and glory. This one records names of the ignorant and hard of heart, who served only self all their lives and did not seek Me or My ways. That one records the names of the foolish, the lazy souls who knew there was something better in life but put off seeking until it was too late. This one records the names of all those bound in the sins of their fathers and the false gods of their culture, who never had a chance to know Me or My ways. That big one lists the names of all who died in infancy or were slain before birth, as well as all who lacked the intelligence to know Me."

There is a pause. Solomon searches Logos' face for some sign of recognition. Finally, "B… but Lord, You know Me. Why do you search those books? You know my name is not in any of them. My name is in the Lamb's Book of Life! Where is that book?"

A look of concern passes over Logos' face. "The Lamb's Book of Life? Are you sure you're in the right courtroom? Whatever makes you think your name is written there?"

"Right courtroom?!" Solomon is a bit indignant. "Lord, I know you! You are Yashua, King of kings, Lord of lords, my King and my Messiah. You have a Book of Life. Find it! My name is listed there!" He is trying not to get angry.

"Are you quite sure? How do you know?"

"Sir, I served You from my heart all my life. I was tempted, but never fell to those temptations. I have always honored Your holy name. I was faithful to my wife. I took care of Your precious princesses in purest love. And I led Your people in justice and truth, always pointing them toward righteousness. I did all that You asked of me."

"And it is because of these good deeds that your name is recorded in what you call the Book of Life?"

"Oh. Uh… no Sir." Solomon stops to think.

"My name was written in the Book of Life when I was a young man, before I had any good deeds at all. My father, King David, told me about You and Your perfect sacrifice for sin when You died on the Roman cross. He had just discovered that You are Israel's Messiah! He was so excited he wanted his whole family to know. I believed him, and prayed to You right after his call. I told You that I believed You and that I would serve only You the rest of my life. That's when my name was put in the Lamb's Book of Life."

"I see. Might I have you confused with another King Solomon? One who fell into temptation with a thousand princesses and worshiped their gods?"

"Yes Sir! Uh, no, Sir, that's not me! I read all his books of wisdom. I lived by his proverbs. But I heeded his warnings and rejected the temptations to fall into immorality or idolatry. Just ask my wife. She'll vouch for me."

"Maria! Is this true? Any of what he says?"

"Yes, Sir. You know, Sir. All of it is true, and more. Never was a husband so faithful and loving."

Now Logos' face cracks a smile. "I see… I see… Well. Let's see if we can find this Book of Life here somewhere."

At that point, a tiny snicker breaks through His lips, startling Solomon. He pounces on it. "Sir! Lord Yashua! You… I believe You're joking with me!"

Now Logos starts to laugh. Deep belly laughter. At first Solomon is miffed. This is far too serious a matter to make jokes about! But good laughter is catching. Logos sure had them going! Soon Solomon and his wife have joined in.

It is good to finally let it all out. Solomon hasn't laughed like this since… he can't remember when. In between the bouts of laughter, Logos explains His joke. "My beloved son! I do so appreciate your service to Me." As He speaks, Solomon's life plays back before them from the Universal Data Banks. "Like your father David, you've done all that I asked, in faithfulness, justice, and truth. But is it possible that you've taken your life, your work, a tad too seriously? I always thought that being king of the greatest nation in history should be more fun! You have ruled well over one nation, always returning to Me the increase. In the ages to come I shall grant you authority over many nations. But now that we have had such a good laugh together, you will not soon forget this lesson! In the future your rule will not be such a hard labor, but rather you will relax and play, to laugh, rejoice, and have fun with Me as I do with you!"

As that scene is going on, the four Tzedique twins are also being welcomed. They are quite similar, so I'll pick Tana and her husband Todd as our example. "Todd and Tana Tzedique, Come! Stand up here before Me!"

After welcoming them, showing them their names in the Lamb's Book of Life, and viewing together their life of worship and service to the King, Logos commends them both, and then adds, "Tana, My beloved daughter, from childhood you've loved and served Me with all your heart. I gave you a special gift with animals. You took My gift and used it for My Kingdom. Because of your faithfulness, My Beautiful Land is filled with animals trained to submit to the dominion I gave My last Adam. Many others, watching you, learned how to fulfill My mandate and take dominion over the animal kingdom. Thus your gift multiplied. Now it has blessed not only Israel, but also the whole earth, earning you great rewards! Now, you have a question."

Tana's head is bowed. She keeps wanting to throw her whole body facedown on the ground before her Messiah. "No, Lord. I am grateful for all that You have done for me. I have no questions. You have totally won my heart."

"Nevertheless, you have a question. I want you to ask. Never let your awe and reverence of Me become a fear that prevents you from being yourself, from telling Me what is on your heart. I love to hear you!"

"Yes, Sir. It's a little thing. I wondered why You ordered us to stand. I wanted to kneel before Your majesty, to…"

"Tana! I see your heart. It is bowed before Me always. I accept your worship. But if you were on the ground before Me, how could I get My hug?"

"Your hug, Lord? You just… want a hug?!"

He is standing before them laughing, arms open wide. Todd and Tana run into His embrace, amazed that He only wanted what they too have wanted all their lives. This is what they were made for! This is the highest worship – giving and receiving His love. When their flaming hug is over (though that hug is never really over) Todd and Tana find that they are joined together into one new person.

So it goes, with each person or couple, coming before the King to review their lives and receive His welcome, commendations, and hugs. He invites each one to dine with Him in the fulfillment of the Last Great Day of the Feast of Sukkot, the eighth day, which prophesies of a never-ending feast in glory. Thus the overcomers from the Millennial Age receive their rewards and join the saints from ages past. In one hour, it is done. Every living soul on earth has entered into the fullness of the Kingdom of God for which they had longed all their lives.

But I speak of "every living soul" in a very limited sense. For when the veil was rent and the holiness of God blazed across the earth, only those souls who were holy survived the fiery blast to be welcomed to the Feast. All the rest, those who had been deceived by Satan and had joined him in his vendetta against God's people, were instantly slain, including their spouses and children. It was tragic. I hate to even talk about it, but this is **Judgment Day**, after all.

So in this same hour in which all the overcomers from the Millennium are welcomed into the fullness of Logos' Kingdom, another judgment takes place – the judgment of all whose name is not found in the Book of Life. These are not overcomers, though many are merely ignorant and hard of heart. Remember that at the first resurrection not just the martyrs from the great tribulation, but all the bondservant/sons of God and brothers of Logos up until that time, had been raised to life to celebrate the wedding of Logos and His Bride. The rest of the dead were not yet raised. They remained in Hades awaiting Judgment Day.

Well, this is it. Logos still sits on His great white throne. But now those other five books I mentioned are opened.

It is the same great white throne of God. It is the same Logos, King of kings and righteous Judge of all the Earth. It is the same hour in which all those overcomers receive their resurrection bodies and are joined with their godly spouses, welcomed into the Kingdom, and invited to the never-ending feast in glory. But for these degenerate souls, the prevailing mood seems less jovial and more serious.

The white light bursts forth upon the darker realms of Hades as the throne of God appears above the heads of the souls waiting there. "Let the dead come forth! Let the earth be cleansed and set free from its slavery to sin!" the One on the throne commands. His commands loose the souls in Hades and restore them to their physical bodies. Besides those who were just slain by the fire of God, this includes all the dead who did not go up in the first resurrection, as well as all those who died since then. They rise from their decaying bodies, from their graves, from their ashes, from the oceans, even from the dust to which they'd returned. Thus every atom of the wicked is cleansed from the earth and re-formed into resurrected bodies, which now stand before the great white throne of God in the highest heaven. These wicked, though, are not in heaven, nor in Hades, nor on the earth. They stand naked before the throne of the King, having no place at all until He assigns them one.

Some are hopeful. Now that they have bodies again, perhaps He means to pardon them? Others are weeping, finally understanding their evil deeds and expecting what they know they deserve. None have any illusions left as to their own righteousness. The lies Satan told them about being so special and deserving of God's favor are blasted away by the brilliant light from the throne above them.

Satan, having lost all his servants on earth, is angry and indignant. "That wasn't fair!" he whines. "You can't take down the veil! It leaves me no place left to work! And it doubly isn't fair for You to shine the light from Your throne into my realm! I own this place – these people! First You prohibit me from coming into Your throne room, then you bring Your throne into my realm? How rude! And You said You were kind and loving? This is so cruel! You've gone back to using my ways of force and deception, and You…"

"Satan, quiet!" Logos interrupts. Satan is startled into silence, since he's not accustomed to being interrupted. "No longer shall you accuse Me of using your ways. The Great Controversy is settled and My ways of truth and love have proven best. Everyone in the universe now sees you for what you are. You can no longer get away with claiming that the strict consequences written in My Law from the dawn of time are given in anything but the purest love and justice. Now, we have this little matter of your wager.

"We agreed on ten years. That has now past. You failed to turn My chosen brothers in Israel away from Me, you must admit. If you recall, you swore by My chain of Spirit that you would finally bow before Me and acknowledge that I am Lord of all, to the glory of the eternal Father."

This is it. Silence reigns, as the heavenly host look on with awe and wonder. Everyone waits with bated breath to see the long-prophesied bow which would restore Lucifer to his place of submission to the King of the Universe.

The pause lengthens. Satan knows that the angels of the heavenlies are all watching. He also knows that all his demons, including Wormwood, his finest and most loyal demon prince, are watching. *What will they think? They'll despise him for having failed. They will look at him as weak and worthless. They will never follow him again. All he has worked for all his life, to enforce their loyalty and worship… It will all be for naught. And what about all these people he has fairly won into his kingdom? They will all turn away and follow Logos. It just isn't right! He worked hard to recruit these people into his service! He should be permitted to reap the fruit of all his labors! Isn't that a law of God somewhere?*

"Lucifer! By your own words you must either bow to Me or be bound with this chain forever and ever. There is no third alternative. Now that you've lost your wager you must make your choice. I will not force you, though I remind you of the ancient prophecy. One day you will kneel to acknowledge that I am Lord, to the glory of the eternal Father. [Isa 45:23 ff; Phil 2:10 ff] It will happen, whether now or later, for so the Father has ordained for every created thing. I urge you to make the right choice now, so I can begin your punishment and your healing for all the damage that sin has inflicted on you. For I love you! I would restore you to Myself, My beloved Lucifer."

I'm sorry. As much as I hate all that Satan has done to destroy the earth, I'm still sorry for him. He just can't do it. I know it is utterly irrational for him to choose to be bound forever with a chain which he certainly knows will hold him fast, rather than bow and accept his punishment, cleansing, and healing. How can he refuse this invitation of truest love? I guess he has this idea that as long as he holds out refusing to bow, the ancient prophecy will remain unfulfilled, giving him a chance to defeat Logos.

"No! I refuse to accept Your victory. It was unfair! You cheated! I demand a rematch! And this time You've got to play by the rules and keep Your holiness veiled so I have room to work. I only needed one more hour! Or if You want we can call it a draw. I'll take earth as my permanent possession and give You the heavenlies as Yours…"

Logos doesn't respond to his silly demands. Instead, He commands, "Listen to Me, you heavens above, you earth beneath, you hells under the earth, and every creature who dwells therein!" Stillness reigns throughout the universe in obedience to the sharp demand. "Here sin has reached its ultimate conclusion, as in his self-serving pride Satan has hardened his heart to choose his own destruction rather than bow to accept My loving reproof, punishment, and healing. So, according to his own wager, bind him with the chain of Spirit and cast him into the lake of fire. Give him his own separate cell in the center of the Abyss."

By the power of His command, the nature of the Abyss is transformed. It is a stunning, sweeping change. Before, Satan had been master of the Abyss. It was his playground to torment any who chose him. He had full access, except for that one large prison cell where Logos punished the demons who violated God's Law. But now, the Abyss is filled with zillions of individual cells, arranged in order of the level of suffering within. The most painful one, the one with Satan's name on it, is in the center. Wormwood's cell is next to it. Billions of other cells circle around for other demons, commensurate with their crimes.

Thus Satan is bound with the chain of Spirit and taken to his cell. Wormwood is next. But before the warrior angels can haul him off, he has a request. "Sir? Is there any hope for our master? What shall I tell him? Is he really bound in the pit forever and ever? Is he so bad that he can never receive Your pardon? Is his punishment eternal?"

Logos glares at Wormwood. He speaks sharply, sternly. "Why? Do you care about him?"

"Of course I care. He is my master!"

"When you chose to follow him, did you not know it would end like this?"

Wormwood hangs his head. It is almost a bow. "No, Sir, I did not. I believed his promises of glory and power."

"Then his is the greater sin. Go; suffer beside him. But because you care, I grant you to give him this message. When he has suffered every pain he has caused, when the fires of torment have burned up all his arrogance and pride and that deep love of wickedness within him, when his bent nature has been consumed in the flames so he no longer loves to inflict pain and suffering on others, then I will come to him with another invitation to bow before Me. For that prophecy must be fulfilled, however long it takes, even to the ages of the ages."

Wormwood nods sadly. As the warrior angels escort him toward his cell, he considers. *He will pass along the message, but not just yet. Someday his master will be able to hear it. Wormwood will share his suffering until then, for this was his choice. He is only receiving what he has earned.*

Likewise Prince Dumuzi comes before the Judge. He is proud, arrogantly refusing to bow. "I am the king of all the earth! I am World Emperor Adam Noah Dumuzi Christ, King of Kings and Lord of All! How dare you haul me up here before this court like a common criminal! I demand to see my lawyer, the Spirit Serpent! It is he who made me commander of the world's armies and promised that I would rule the earth! He swore it to me! Where is he?"

"Yes, your name is here in My book. You may see him. Go now with Wormwood. My angels will escort you there. As I review the record of your deeds, I see that you and the Serpent are much alike. I therefore assign you a place next to him. And I will send your parents nearby as well."

"Well, that's more like it! I've always wanted to meet my folks! I hear they were great people! We'll talk about old times and swap yarns…" He runs to catch up with the angels, and then walks beside his old friend Wormwood, chatting happily, oblivious to the torment awaiting him. He is the first human ever sent to the Abyss by Logos.

The rest of Judgment Day goes pretty much as you might expect. Everyone in Hades comes before the Judge of all the Earth. It all takes place in that one hour. First, the Judge locates their names in one of the five **books of God's judgment.** He reviews their lives in careful detail, taking all the time needed. Then He pronounces final judgment, strictly according to their evil deeds. In perfect justice He assigns them individual cells in the pit, each precisely tailored to fit their sins. Then the warrior angels escort them to their cell in the Abyss. After it is all done, Logos places the five books on a bench just outside the chasm.

I'll give a few examples of the billions that are judged.

Ned's name is found in the **book of the damned.** A review of his life shows that he clearly saw the power and glory of God. He heard the message of repentance and cleansing from Israel's missionaries. He actually received the invitation to 'Come! Let everyone who is thirsty come! Let everyone who wishes take the Water of Life without cost!' He knew it was right. He wanted it. He went through the rituals. But then along came Satan with promises of power and glory and Ned decided that he wanted that more. He became a general in Satan's army, and had just given the command to fire on Israel when he found himself in Hades. Logos assigns him a cell not far from his master, immersed in flames of torment in the lake of fire.

Nell's name is found in the **book of the ignorant and hard of heart.** A review of her life shows that she lived for selfish pleasure, studiously quenching all promptings of Spirit. She doggedly believed what she was told, that there is no god, she evolved from pond scum, and her destiny is the grave. She lived her life as anyone would under those circumstances: she went for all the gusto she could get and to hell with the consequences. *After all, if you only get one life, you may as well enjoy it. Let other weak suckers waste their lives in constant dread of a fictitious hereafter trying to placate Someone who doesn't exist.* Nell's motto was 'Get yours before someone else does.' When missionaries from Israel visited her, she threw them out, saying, "Why would I want your 'Water of Life'? I've got the good stuff! I'm never thirsty – I'm always drunk!" Logos assigns her a place in the lake of fire where the suffering is designed to get her to start taking the claims of God more seriously.

Nate's name is found in the **book of the foolish and lazy.** He knew about God. His Israeli parents had taught him the Law and the Prophets. He had seen the glory of God on Mount Zion. But he was young and having way too much fun. He would come to God and be cleansed, later. There was no hurry; they'd had a thousand years of peace!

Nate's family had been caught up in the revivals that swept the land at the end of the thousand years, after Satan was released to tempt the nations again. They had all renewed their vows and restored their relationships with their Messiah. But still Nate put it off. Real holiness and purity is just too much trouble for someone who's still young and playing the field. Next year he'll settle down, climb the mount, get right with God, marry, start a family, and become a pillar in the community. After all, he's an Israelite by birthright! He is entitled! But he has a few more wild oats to sow first. Logos is disgusted with his attitude. He assigns him a special place in the lake of fire where the flames will burn up his arrogance and that youthful sense of entitlement, mellow his cockiness, straighten out his bent priorities, and put the fear of God into him.

Ness had lived a timid life in the dark jungles of South America. Her culture was one of voodoo and superstition, where they worshiped snakes, bugs, frogs, trees, or pretty much anything that might harm them. Her life was filled with fears of all the gods and the pains she might suffer if she failed to placate them. Thus her name is recorded in the **book of those enslaved in paganism.** Missionaries had reached her village and told her of the true God of Love. She had believed, and received Him gladly. But after they were slain, her lifetime habits and culture had dragged her back to the paganism of her tribe. Logos assigns her a place on the edge of the chasm. She discovers the consequences of her rejection, but she can also see across the chasm in hope that the God of Love might give her another chance.

The above examples all start with 'N'. These are people who knew the gospel and were quickened by the Holy Spirit to receive it, but then closed their hearts with the conscious decision to reject it. Thus they blasphemed the Spirit and have 'No' sacrifice for sin (Heb 6:6 ff; 10:26 ff), since they have chosen to pay sin's penalty on their own. But the following examples start with 'Y' for 'Yes'.

Yelina never really lived. Her name is found in the **book of those who lack understanding.** She had survived a late-term abortion, but barely. A compassionate Black momma with two kids of her own had discovered her whimpering piteously in the trash bin behind the abortion clinic. She had kept quiet about her find, not wanting the abortion staff to come after her at night like they had so many others who had tried to help the victims of the clinic. So Yelina had been raised by a praying momma, who nursed her and treated her just like one of her own babies. But Yelina's frail body had been badly damaged by the attempted abortion. She grew up to be petite and lovely, but never matured mentally beyond the age of six or seven. Her new momma tried to protect her, but being single, she had to go to work. Then the young bucks would come and abuse her, and she didn't have any way to resist. She eventually died of the abuse. When she is resurrected, Logos lovingly cleanses her mind of the horrible memories and takes her to the Nursery to learn of Him.

Yumia was actually a cousin of Ness, but she had been stolen from her tribe in battle and forced to marry the chief of a neighboring tribe. Missionaries never came there, as the tribe was cruel and violent. Thus Yumia never heard the gospel and never had the chance to break free from the paganism that enslaved her and everyone she knew.

Her husband, Chief Yegaul, came close. He discovered the missionaries in Yumia's old village. They tried to reach him, but in demonic rage he slew them and burned their books. Yegaul then went on a murderous crusade to kill everyone who admitted to accepting the foreigners' new religion, which was more than half the village.

If Ness had admitted her new faith, she might have been slain, too! But timid Ness denied it and was spared, only to later slide back into the paganism from which she had come. Ness couldn't keep on believing in a God who had allowed His missionaries to be so brutally slain. So the fragile light was snuffed out. That was really sad for Ness. Had she only confessed her faith she could have died a saint, a martyr, and been raised a child of God! But in a way, the slaughter turned out good for her tribe. All who died for their faith had it easy compared to those who were swept back into the paganism from which they had come.

Yegaul's tribe, and many others for miles around, were plunged into darkness. Yegaul ruled the area by the fear of his murderous wrath as much as fear of his pagan gods. No other missionaries came – the area was too violent, unsafe for foreigners. You might think that on Judgment Day such a vile and bloodthirsty tribe would be sent to the deepest pit in hell to pay for all the suffering they caused, but no. Yashua insists that each soul make his final choice only after hearing and understanding God's claims on his life. Yegaul's stolen wife Yumia was good to him. She tried to soften his rage and help those he abused. Yet she also had never heard or understood. Thus they were all entered together into the book of those who lack understanding. On Judgment Day the entire gospel is explained to them. Of course Yumia quickly accepts it, but surprisingly, so does Yegaul. He is awed at the incredible grace of God.

Yitzak was conceived of a young Jewish girl in New York City. Being unmarried, she could not bear the shame and aborted her defenseless child. Yitzak went straight to the Nursery in Hades. There he was nurtured and loved by the God of all comfort. When he was grown, Logos led him into the gospel, which he gladly received from the only Father he had ever known. He spent the rest of his time in Hades helping others who came into the Nursery.

All who were in the Nursery have now reached the age of understanding and have learned of Logos and His ways. They, too, are reunited with their bodies and brought before the Judge. Logos has taught them well. Like Yitzak, Yumia, and Yegaul, nearly all of them gladly receive the gospel and confess their faith in Him as their Messiah. Their names are transferred into the **Book of Life.**

Poor Yelina remains in the Nursery until the last. Logos stays with her, holding her, wiping away her tears. Her emotional wounds are severe. She had never known a father. The only men in her life had treated her like a toy for their own personal pleasure. Only Logos can heal such horrible scars. That He does, lovingly, tenderly, teaching her the nature of a true father. Finally, Yelina is home. Her mind is restored. A few who graduate from the Nursery still reject Yashua and are sent to the pit. But not Yelina. She chooses life, abundant life, from the Source of Life.

With Yelina, the book of those who lack understanding is finally emptied, mostly into the Book of Life. Now Hades is empty, too. There are no more souls in the Welcoming Park, no more souls in Paradise, no more who lacked understanding in the Nursery, and no more imprisoned in the Dungeon. Every soul has now been reunited with its physical body. The Millennial Age has reached its close. Everyone is either feasting with Logos in the heavenlies, or is across the chasm in the Abyss – also called the lake of fire or the bottomless pit – to suffer the law's just penalty for every evil deed. Logos closes the Book of Life. "My Father! I have won the victory! Of all that You have given to Me, I have not lost one!" Logos claps His hands over His head, bursting with the conflicting emotions of joy at His victory and the successful conclusion of the ages, yet grief at the loss of so many whose names still remain in the other four books of God's judgment. Then in dread finality, Logos softly sighs. "Father, it is done. There are no more. Let Death and Hades be cast into the lake of fire."

Logos picks up the Book of Life from its pedestal, turns, and carries it through the open door into the third heaven to rejoin the feast of the saints. He doesn't look back, but behind His back strange things have happened. That many-splendored land called Hades, with its Welcoming Park, Paradise, Nursery, Dungeon, deep river, and even the meadow and table where the Book of Life used to lie, everything down to the place where the final judgment was so recently concluded, is gone – cast into the lake of fire. Nothing of Hades remains outside the chasm except the judicial bench where Logos left the five books of God's judgment. Those near the chasm's edge can still see the books through the ancient gates, but nothing beyond. The pleasant parts of Hades are gone, including the open door which had hinted so entreatingly of life with the eternal Father. Those in the Abyss are abandoned without hope.

But one other thing happens, too. Remember the law of sin and death; the law of sowing and reaping; the law of immutable consequence woven into the Creation at the dawn of time; the old covenant which only imparts death, never life, because no one can keep it; the law under which every sinner who rejects Messiah's blood sacrifice is self-condemned? The power of Logos' final words has wrested that law from the fabric of the universe and formed it into a book in His mouth. It is titled, '**The Law of Sin and Death**'. That book is also cast into the lake of fire.

The hour of judgment is past. The wicked now receive their rewards as the full consequences of their evil deeds return upon them in the Abyss. The righteous also now receive their rewards. They are blessed, welcomed to the Feast and the Dance of the ages, and assigned their places of responsibility and honor in the Kingdom of God in the heavenlies. They discover that the heavenlies are bigger and more extensive than they had imagined from earth. There is much to see and do, and learn! But the immediate concern of Todd-Tana is for his animals. He doesn't even want to go exploring the fascinating new realm until he has learned what has happened to his friends. So he comes and asks, "Logos? I know You are very busy now, but…"

"Todd-Tana, My beloved son!" Logos grins jovially. "I'm never too busy for you. Ask whatever you will, for a father always loves to grant good gifts to his children."

"Thank You, my Lord and King. I am concerned for my animals – the dragon family, and the sentient animals they helped to train. Whatever happened to them? They are our friends! They served You well during the Millennial Age. Don't You think they deserve to be brought here into the heavenlies with us?"

"Oh, they're just animals. You know… they don't have eternal souls like you. When they die, they merely return to the earth. Why do you think I should bring them into the heavenlies with us?"

Todd-Tana is so shocked he can barely talk. "But… but… Sir! No animals…? I was sure You said that… well… You blessed the dragon and thanked him for his efforts in building the garden and ruling the other animals. Don't You still care about him? How can the heavenlies ever… b-b-b-be heaven, without the animals?"

Up until now, Logos has kept a straight face, but now a twitch appears at the corners of His mouth, and then a snicker bursts out. With great restraint, He pulls it back in and repeats, "Todd-Tana, My beloved son! Ask what you will. A father loves to give good things to His children."

Startled, and wondering why he did not catch it before, Todd-Tana bows to his knees. "Lord Logos. Please! I want my animals to dwell here with me."

Now the dam breaks and the laughter flows out. Todd-Tana too is swept away by it. When the flood finally settles, Logos answers. "I do, too! I was only waiting until you asked. For you are assigned to be their master in My realm, as in the last. I never take back that which I have given. They are all awaiting your orders, corralled up in that fair land beyond the crystal sea. Teach them how to live in My realm. Tell them to be fruitful and multiply here. I want them to fill My realm with beauty and grace. Tell them I am grateful for their service. Just as they were such a blessing to the Beautiful Land as they worked with you to build the Garden of God, so they shall become a blessing to all My precious ones throughout the heavenlies."

CHAPTER 75 – THE LAKE OF FIRE & BRIMSTONE

Satan spots that book falling into the flames, but it falls far outside the limits of his cell. "What in heaven is that?!" he yells to Wormwood. It is already starting to burn.

But neither Wormwood nor his demons can reach it. "Dumuzi!" he screams. "It's a book! Catch it and pass it in here before it burns up! We've got to know what it is!"

Dumuzi catches it, but the cover is already in flames and he knows if he opens it the contents will be consumed before he can read it. In a brilliant move he passes it, not deeper into the pit where Satan and his demons are, but out toward the edge of the lake of fire. "Quickly, pass it out beyond the flames! We've got to quench the fire to find out what is in it!" he yells. Thus the book is passed quickly from cell to cell out to the very edge of the pit, to Ness, the timid pagan from the jungles of South America.

This has been remarkable team effort for those who had only served 'self', especially considering that each one is engaged in his or her own personal torment and can't even be heard more than one or two cells away. It is a big effort to reach the edge of one's cell to pass the book along. But even in the Abyss, a bit of self-giving goodness is found. With that, the very nature of the pit begins a subtle change.

I must pause here, dear Reader, to explain the nature of the Abyss, for you probably have never been there and my terms may seem a bit confusing. First, you must understand that the dark Dungeon (Tartarus in 2 Pet 2:4), which was just emptied and cast into the Abyss, had been outside the chasm. Its purpose was to imprison any sent to Hades who were too dangerous to be allowed to roam freely, but had not yet been judged or sentenced, such as a group of angels who tried to marry into the human race (Jude 6) and the violent civilization that had perished in the Flood (1 Pet 3:18-20; 4:6). They were imprisoned only to protect the others also awaiting Judgment Day. But they were not tormented there, except by their own guilt-ridden pangs of regret and shame. God is a righteous judge. He torments no one without due process. Now, Judgment Day is past.

Enclosed by an ancient wall and an uncrossable chasm is the Abyss. Like the Dungeon, the Abyss is a prison where the light of God's glory rarely shines and from which no one can escape. But there the similarity ends, for the Abyss is a place of torment! The Abyss is also known by other names describing the horror that is ever-present there. For example, it is called the 'bottomless pit' because those imprisoned there feel cast away from God's presence, with no stability or purpose, as if they're always falling.

It is also called the 'lake of fire', because the punishment for their misdeeds burns like flames of fire. Every bad deed hurts someone, often many. That suffering returns in full upon them according to the immutable law of sowing and reaping, without one smidgen of grace or mercy, until they fully experience every pain they have ever caused.

It is also called 'outer darkness', for this is a dark place where God has removed the Light of His glory.

Finally, it is called the second death. This is far more than physical death. The second death is the absence of the abundant Life of All Ages, who is Yashua. All those now imprisoned in the Abyss knowingly rebelled against Him, willfully rejected His free gift of Life, and chose to suffer the consequences of their misdeeds on their own. Yashua's sacrifice is sufficient for them, too, but they would not receive it and therefore cannot be forgiven. The law must be satisfied: "The soul that sins, it shall die." (Ezek 18:4) The second death is the final destruction of that rebellious 'self' nature that wants to play god. This death is the worst torment of all, for the wicked hang on to their self life to the bitter end, kicking and screaming as their self-centered nature is consumed in the unquenchable fire of God.

Who is in the Abyss? It wasn't created for people. Before Judgment Day God never sent people there. (When Satan had the keys he enticed many into the Abyss, like foolish Nabal, but that was by their own choice – they gave him permission to torment them!) It was created to punish Satan and his demons when they violate God's Law. When they defy God or harm His people without permission or occasion they're sent to a cell in the Abyss. The severity of their sentence is according to the severity of their crime. Even when Satan had the keys of death and Hades he could not unlock their cell until their time was served. After Judgment Day humans go there only by their own choice to reject their Creator, thereby binding themselves to serve Satan and join in his punishment. Their torment, like his, is limited, tailored by Logos to precisely fit the sin. Now it is retailored as bad attitudes begin to moderate.

As instructed, Ness holds the book way out where the flames can't reach it. They go out, and the charred cover cools. "Open it! Read it to us!" the tortured souls cry.

Ness opens the book. She stares at the pages, slightly burnt at the edges though still perfectly readable. But alas, "I can't read," Ness admits.

"Then give it to someone who can!" they howl.

"If I pass the book back, deeper into the flames, it will just burn," Ness concludes.

I must admit, dear Reader, I never in my life expected to see what I see now. This is the lake of fire and brimstone, for heaven's sake! It's filled with those who were so self-consumed they couldn't bow to the King of the Universe and acknowledge His Lordship even after He had clearly won the victory. I figured they would be so filled with hate and rage that they would have nothing to do with each other, assuming they could see each other at all beyond their own all-consuming torment. I expected to hear only curses and screams, with never one kind word or helpful attitude. But I was wrong. The book piques their curiosity. They actually pull together to solve their problem.

When Satan hears that Ness is illiterate he yells back, "Then teach her to read, you fools!"

"Yeah!" Wormwood agrees. "We've got to know why Yashua threw that book in the flames! It just could be our ticket out of this place."

Hitler, who is ashamed of that role and now just wants to be called Dr. Relt, gets interested. "What language is it? She has to learn the language, before she can learn to read. I don't care if it takes a thousand years. That's still nothing compared to the eternity I'm told we have to spend here!"

"She is describing the shapes of the letters. It sounds to me like some ancient form of Hebrew."

"All Israelis know ancient Hebrew. We call it Kasdan. Find some Israelis near her who can teach her."

So they do. They actually work together to teach Ness the ancient Hebrew language. It is slow, painstaking work, but the pain of their torment seems to be less when they are concentrating on helping Ness. It takes several years, but as Dr. Relt said, they have nothing but time on their hands. Eventually, she gets enough translated so they realize what she has. "It seems to be a book of the law. An ancient law, from long before Moses," Dr. Relt announces. "Maybe God's Law. Did someone say Yashua threw it into the pit?"

"I don't know," Satan responds. "We didn't see it. But it must have been Yashua. He was the only one out there at the judicial bench. Maybe it was an accident."

"Nope." Wormwood shakes his head. "One thing I've learned from watching Logos, if you will pardon me, my master, is that He doesn't make mistakes."

"Ask Ness, silly. She's closest to the gate," Eva Braun finally speaks up. She wasn't going to say it, because she is still angry that the flames mussed her hair and destroyed her clothes. Looks have always been important to her. Here in the Abyss she feels ashamed of her nakedness. That surprises her, after her nude dances before millions.

So they ask Ness. The message returns, "I saw Yashua as He left us. He crossed Hades to the open door. Then He turned to say something – it must have been important because this book came right out of His mouth. He next took that other book from its pedestal and went through the open door. After that Hades collapsed, all the way to here. His door merged into the big gate at the drawbridge. And the book from His mouth came sailing over the gate."

"Now, why would Yashua do that?" Dumuzi asks.

"I am, or was, a lawyer." Dr. Relt says. "If this is God's law book, and if Yashua – the Lawgiver – threw it into the flames to be burned, it must have a legal significance. If a covenant maker deliberately destroys his covenant, it is no longer enforceable. He has made it void. If this is the law that Yashua used to condemn us and send us to the pit and He burns it up, then He means to set us free!"

"I can tell you were a lawyer all right. You've built your whole case on suppositions! If this, if that! We've got to know what laws are in that book!"

Wormwood sees his chance. Perhaps this is the right time to relay Logos' message to his master. He calls to Satan, "Logos gave me a message for you just before He sent me here. He said, 'When you have suffered every pain you caused, when the fires of torment have burned up your pride and that love of wickedness within, when your bent nature has been consumed in the flames so you no longer love to inflict pain and suffering on others, then I will come to you with one more invitation to bow before Me. For that prophecy must be fulfilled, however long it takes, even to the ages of the ages.'"

"He never gives up, does He," Satan growls.

Dr. Relt sees it differently. "Sir, wait. Don't you see? When He threw the book of the law in here with us, He was making a statement. He was saying that He is willing to burn up the law and do away with our condemnation, which, you must admit, was entirely just. He is willing to spring us! But He no doubt wants us to do something, too."

"What? Bow to Him?!" Satan is now snarling.

"I don't know. Maybe… maybe just acknowledge to Him that our punishment is just and tell Him we'll serve out our sentence without complaint."

"My sentence is forever. And I'm going to serve without complaint?! You've got to be kidding!"

"You know, I never heard Him set a time limit for mine," Wormwood says. "He just told me to suffer with you." Dumuzi agreed, as did many others, including the lower demons surrounding them.

During this long and often heated argument, a message is passed back from the edge of the chasm. It's from Ness herself. "Tell them that my cell has gotten cooler. I don't have to hold the book out so far. The pages aren't even charring any more. It has something to do with this book. Studying it helps my attitudes and reduces my pain."

That's a startling conclusion! Now everyone else has to agree. Since they started working together on translating the book, their cells have gotten cooler, too. And they find it easier to talk to each other and relay messages. Their hearing and eyesight have improved. Their sense of falling is diminished. Even that debilitating pain is forgotten as long as they concentrate on the book. But now another message comes in to the central core. It is from Nell, whose cell is about halfway out to the chasm. "Yashua told me how long my sentence would be. He said my sin was willful ignorance and a hard heart. He said my punishment would be finished when I had learned to appreciate His Law and had grown a soft heart to submit to Him. He said I have to learn to… to love His Law! That seemed really stupid to me until I started helping with His book."

"Love His Law?" That's a new concept. "Maybe the length of our sentence is not based on time at all. Maybe it is totally based on our attitudes?"

"That's nuts. He told me I have to suffer for every single pain I ever caused. And I've caused a lot!"

"But how much have you already suffered? I heard that Yashua took on Himself all the sins and suffering of the saints, yet He was only in here for three days!"

"Three days? What a cheater! We've already been here over two years. And I was locked up in the Dungeon for 5500 years before that, ever since I drowned in the Flood. How can He pay for anyone's sins in three days?!"

"Maybe His heart wasn't as hard as ours…"

"Maybe He was in the center of the pit where Satan is, rather than way off in a corner like you!"

"Guys! Guys! Quitcher bickering! Ness is right! The pain is less when we're working together. And I think Nell is right, too. What Logos said to Satan may apply to us all. After the fires have burned away our bad attitudes we all might get one more invitation to bow to Logos. If He sees we're ready to be good, maybe He'll let us out!"

"Be good? His definition of good sure isn't the same as mine! I thought I was pretty good until…"

"That's why He gave us the book, stupid!"

"Us? I don't have any book! Ness has got it!"

"We've all got it, if we'll only work together, you nitwit. And if one of us is good enough to get out, then the rest of us will know how it's done!"

"Well, Ness is probably the best one in here. That's why God put her on the edge where it's cool. So if anyone gets sprung, she'll be the first. Tell her to put in a good word for us when she gets out." Satan is not really very hopeful.

But they pass along the message. Ness redoubles her efforts. Maybe learning to read the book is her key out of here! She stares at the gate. Will Yashua return for her?

Thus begins 'the Project'. Everyone in the Abyss – and there are many billions of them – gets involved. It's the first group project ever attempted in this ancient pit. It turns out that many already know the original Hebrew and are willing to help. Those that don't, soon learn it, just from passing the messages from cell to cell. It also turns out that there are many lawyers besides Dr. Relt in the pit. In fact, most of the world's lawyers and politicians ended up there somewhere, but they're all spread out so they can't argue directly with each other. All each one can do is add his two bits to the growing sum of knowledge being passed back as the book is slowly translated. Have no illusions, this is a very difficult project. It takes five more years of concerted effort. But in the end, a pretty accurate overview of the book becomes common knowledge throughout the pit.

Here is what they discover: The book is much more than the Law of Moses. It is a detailed list of all the laws of God which Logos wove into the fabric of the universe from the dawn of time, and the consequences if you break them. It includes things like the law of gravity, the law of light dispelling the darkness, the laws of planetary motion, the laws of the electromagnetic spectrum, the laws of physics, chemistry, biology, mathematics, and the other sciences, laws giving harmony and beauty to the universe, and the law of entropy – that everything in the physical realms is wearing out and tending toward chaos. It also includes deeper laws, from the spirit realm: the laws of sowing and reaping, of sin and iniquity, of righteousness reflecting the character of God, or wickedness in rebellion against Him. They seem to be pretty stern. The penalty for unholiness, even the slightest sin, is death! There are no exceptions. Any soul that does not perfectly reflect the nature and character of God all the time in every way, must die.

"That's impossible!" Satan snarls when word gets back to him. "That is not a book of the law. It is a book of death! Now I see why Adam and Eve fell into sin so easily. Nobody can ever be that perfect!"

"But sir!" Wormwood is still hopeful. "Logos cast it into the fire! He realizes that no one can keep it, so He wants it destroyed! That lets us off the hook!"

"I guess you fools made a mistake in saving it from the flames!" Eva Braun spits out. "Better pass it back in here and let it be burned up!"

"No, wait, Eva!" Dr. Relt is fascinated by it all. "Listen to me, everyone! That book can't possibly be the original covenant God made with the universe. If that covenant gets burned up, the entire universe ceases to exist! The book just tells about the law. And what Wormwood said about God not making any mistakes – it all makes sense. He wanted us to catch the book and find out what's in it. It's like a grand puzzle Logos wants us to solve. I'll bet if we study it further, we'll find a way out of here!"

"Logos always did seem to enjoy jokes and puzzles," Wormwood comments to no one in particular.

So the search begins, for some way, any way, to get around the law of sin and death. In the process everyone in the pit begins to see how far short they've fallen in keeping the law. They can no longer blame anyone but themselves for their punishment. They finally realize that God had made a perfect world, but their own willful ignorance, foolishness, and sin were destroying it! God had to banish them just to protect His Creation. It's a sobering thought.

It's a long way from paganism in the dark jungles of South America to Hebrew legal scholar. However, Ness is no dodo bird. She learns rapidly. It all boils down to her, so everyone works with her. Only she can read the book. As she reads, she often glances through the locked gate. She begins to pray, "Lord Yashua, help me! Come to me!"

CHAPTER 76 – THE PUZZLE

It's been seven years since Judgment Day. The Dance now extends throughout the universe. Logos calls the multitudes together before His throne. He has already rewarded them and assigned them areas of responsibility in His Kingdom and places of authority and ministry in the building of His Holy City. Except for the old earth, which was abandoned to its fate at the end of the Millennial Age, the Celestial Symphony is in perfect tune. The Last Great Day, the eighth day of Sukkot, is now fully come.

With His Bride seated beside Him at the throne, Logos calls out, "My beloved brothers and servants! As kings and priests unto Me, you have all helped My Kingdom to grow strong and beautiful. Due to your faithful, loving service, My Kingdom now extends to the ends of the universe – with one exception, as I'm sure you're aware.

"We abandoned Earth when I brought you to live with Me in the heavenlies. I couldn't bear to face it – I had to turn My back in My agony for those souls still suffering there in the Abyss. I went there too once, you know, for three days. It is a terrible place – a place of great torment, deep under the earth in fire and brimstone, a bottomless pit where tortured souls fall forever in endless death, ever burning but never consumed by the flames. It is a place where those who would not receive My perfect sacrifice by faith are doomed to pay the full penalty for their own sins, however heinous they may be. It is the old covenant, the law of sowing and reaping, the law of sin and death, under which every soul that sins must die regardless of how few or small their sins. It is the law of vengeance, where the full consequences of each soul's wickedness returns upon his own head. You know how much I appreciate the many billions of you here with Me, but locked up down there are hundreds of billions of the wicked, who in their ignorance and hardness of heart fell under My wrath…"

Logos is weeping inconsolably, so His Bride continues. "Most of them, though self-centered, aren't really rebels at heart. So we sent them the book of the law of sin and death. They're learning. Some are repentant. Some have begun to appreciate, if not love, the Law. And today, for the first time, we heard a true prayer! A humble, repentant prayer! Logos the Judge has fixed the times of their punishments. You are not permitted to know how long that will be. But each true prayer in humility and repentance is our signal that someone's debt for sin is paid and the law has lost its power over her. Who will volunteer to go to the one who prayed, to free her from the Abyss?"

From many eager volunteers, Marjah is chosen. "Here is the key to the ancient gates which guard the drawbridge over the chasm," Logos tells her. "Ness is the one who prayed. She is just beside the drawbridge. She has the book of the law. It shows the way out. You'll know what to do, for My Spirit is always with you. Tell Ness her punishment is paid. Give her My love and lead her back to Me."

With but a thought, Marjah is at the gates, but her thoughts will carry her no further. She unlocks them and steps through, leaving them open behind her. The chasm is indeed fearful, and the lake of fire behind it even more so. But she breathes a prayer and strides purposefully down to the edge, looking for the drawbridge. It is up, on the far side. She has no way across. But there on the edge of the flames beside the drawbridge is a woman, reading a book. It must be her. "Ness! Ness!" Marjah calls.

Ness jumps up so suddenly she almost drops the book. She was deeply engrossed, with tears in her eyes now that she understands it. She didn't see Marjah on the far side. "It's me! I'm Ness! You've come for me, just as I prayed! Oh, thank you, thank you! What shall I do with the book?"

"Hi, Ness! I'm Marjah. Have you finished it yet?"

"Yes, Marjah! Well, almost. I've been reading it to the ones near me. They've been relaying it back throughout the pit. But I've been reading ahead now that I know how to read, and I'm almost to the end."

"Then finish it, and do what it says. I'll wait."

Now Ness is in a hurry. She skims it frantically, looking only for something to 'do'. She gets to the very end. The last words are, "Now that you have finished, leave the book in its receptacle for the one behind you." Ness looks up. There is a box, like a large mailbox, beside the drawbridge. It is just within her reach. She has played with it before, but was never able to open it. Now it opens easily. It is just the right size, so Ness slides in the book. The front falls shut.

Wow! It must be a sort of key! The drawbridge drops down to the other side. Marjah walks over to it and starts across. "Thank you for coming for me!" Ness calls.

"Ness, tell me what you learned from the book."

"Well, first that those gods I worshiped all my life are all false. It was just the adversary playing on my fears. But mostly that Logos, the Word of the eternal Father and the Creator of the universe, is the one true God. I was made by Him. He owns me, and my job is to do whatever He wants."

"Is that it?" Marjah had expected much more.

"Well, all the rest is what He is like, how He made the universe, the laws He built into it to make it work and what happens when we break 'em, and what He does to take care of me and make me happy. It says He loves me, you know."

"It's true, Ness! He sent me here to tell you He loves you! What about you? Do you love Him?"

"O Marjah! How can anyone read Logos' book and not love Him? I love everything about Him! I can't believe I denied Him – rejected Him – before."

"That's what I wanted to hear. Logos told me to tell you that your penalty for sin is now paid. You are free. Just step up out of your cell onto this bridge."

Ness steps out, stunned that after all those years she is really free. She looks at Marjah. "What does He want me to do now? I want to serve Him!"

"I don't know. He wants you to be free. In His Kingdom, everyone is free to do whatever she wants. He doesn't force anyone. We only serve Him because we want to. So if you want to do something for Him, why don't you ask Him? He hears your prayers you know. He loves to hear prayers like yours as much as anything. That's why He sent me."

Ness prays. Then, "I don't know. I think He just wants me to follow you…" Marjah nods, smiling, and offers her an arm. They walk together through the still-open gates. Then, with a thought, they arrive at the throne.

"Thank you, Marjah. And thank you, Ness, for coming. You are welcome here, for your debt of sin is paid in full.

"If you wish, you may remain here to learn more of Me, for I am much greater than what you learned in My book! Or… if you really wish to serve Me, I have another task…"

"Yes, Logos! Ask whatever You want! I'll do it!"

"I know you will, for I see your heart. Your time in the pit, though difficult, was not wasted. I am pleased at how quickly you learned My language! Now there are many others there who are interested in completing My little puzzle and coming to Me. Go back to the chasm. Tell them to move forward one cell, which will reset the puzzle to begin again. I'm not there to teach them. I cannot live with sin. They each must learn My language and read My book to learn of Me and My ways before they can be released."

"Yes, Logos! A lot of them learned Your language trying to teach me to read. They worked together."

"That was the plan. And in working together they also discovered the benefits of a life lived for more than self. Father's Plan of the Ages is still at work."

So Ness returns to the pit. The gate is still open, the drawbridge still down, and her cell still empty. She runs across, crying, "Look! Look at me! I'm free! I finished the book and followed its instructions and it set me free! Logos told me that my punishment is complete. My debt of sin is paid! He wants all of you to learn His language, read His book, follow its instructions, and be set free like me! His book taught me to love Logos and want to serve Him!"

Now Nell's comment makes sense. Logos had told her that her punishment would be finished when she learned to appreciate His Law, and when she had learned to love and submit to Logos. That shocking concept had been endlessly debated throughout the lake of fire, but now the debate was over. Ness had just proved it!

Everyone is clamoring for the book, but they're still bound in their cells. They can't reach it. Ness thinks about it and remembers, "Logos also said for everyone to move forward one cell, and that will reset the puzzle."

Of course everyone tries to move. But they cannot. They are still just as bound in their own cells as before. It doesn't work. Once again, the comments and suggestions fly, as the captives work together to solve the puzzle.

"Ness! Try taking the book out of its box."

"I can't. The box locked when I slid the book in."

"Maybe if you go back into your cell you can get it out. Then you could pass it back to us."

"I couldn't pass it back even if I got it out. The flames are still too hot. It would burn up. If it burns up, you all are doomed! Besides, I really don't think Logos wants me back in my cell. He said you all have to move forward one cell. That must mean you are in some kind of order, perhaps by the severity of your sins. As your punishments are paid, you get to move cell by cell closer to freedom."

"That makes sense. So why can't we move?"

"Oh. I know. Ness is on the drawbridge. When she was reading the book, the drawbridge was up. I think it has to go up again to reset the puzzle. Ness, you've got to get off the drawbridge first." It is Tamil, the old Indian in the cell next to Ness. He had been raised in Hinduism all his life, and, like Ness, had received the gospel at first, but then slid back into the comfort of his family culture. Now the book has renewed his faith. He already knows almost as much about it as Ness, just from passing her messages back.

"I think you're right, Tamil. I'll go, then see if you can get into my cell. Good-bye!" Ness runs back to the far side. As soon as she steps off the drawbridge, Tamil jumps into Ness' old cell. And as he does, the drawbridge lifts back up. Now Tamil reaches for the box, and it easily opens. He has the book. The puzzle is reset, just like Logos promised.

"Tamil!" Ness screams from across the chasm. "Hurry! Read the last chapter. I was ahead of you by one chapter. I'll wait! You can join me!"

However, Tamil now does something that seems quite unthinkable in this place of torment. He calls back, "No, Ness! I've got to help the others first."

So instead of just reading the last chapter to himself, Tamil reads it, line by line, to the woman in the next cell, pausing to allow her time to relay it on after each line. It takes an extra day, but when he is done, the entire book has been relayed toward the central core of the Abyss.

Except that last sentence: "Now that you have finished, leave the book in its receptacle for the one behind you." Tamil obeys, and is set free. He jumps out and onto the drawbridge, crying, "Everyone, follow me! Now that you've finished the entire book, all you have to do is obey the last sentence!" He runs across the drawbridge, which springs up behind him when the next in line jumps into the final cell. Soon, they are coming across every thirty seconds. Having finished the book, the puzzle is solved.

Tamil's plan has borne fruit. By taking the extra time to relay the last chapter back, a thousand more people have crossed by the end of the day. And they keep coming! For days the area across the chasm fills with grateful people. But suddenly the steady stream stops. Everyone waits, staring across the chasm. Tamil slowly returns across the drawbridge. "What's wrong, you guys? Why aren't you coming? Don't you all want to be free?" Now he sees, the cells all along the chasm are empty. But beyond that row, no one has been able to move up. The puzzle must be more complicated than they thought. He crosses back. "We've got to go ask someone. It's not working."

"Let's go ask Logos," Marjah says. "I'm sure He wants to see you all anyway. Follow me." She leads them all through the open gates and brings them to Logos. He spends time with each one, welcoming, caring, healing, assuring them that their debt of sin is paid and they are accepted and loved in His land.

But after getting settled in the new realm, Tamil expresses his concern for the rest. "Lord Logos, why did Your puzzle jam up? Why could no one move up after the cells along the chasm emptied?"

Logos smiles at him warmly. "Good puzzles are never as simple as they appear on the surface."

"Oh. Well… is there anything we can do to help? Or do they have to figure it out for themselves? They can't figure it out! They don't have the book anymore. It's locked up! I'm not even sure it all got relayed that far back!"

Logos laughs. "Now, if I gave you all the answers, that would rather spoil the fun, wouldn't it?"

Tamil cannot understand making light of such horrible suffering as he knows his former cell mates are going through. But he does not want to question the One he now recognizes as the King of the Universe.

"Go ahead, Tamil. Ask of Me. I can handle it."

"Well, Sir… I mean… they're in t-t-torment down there! And You're making a joke out of it! Can't we help them? Have You no compassion at all?"

The smile is instantly gone from Logos' face, as if He had never smiled in His life. Tamil is startled to see tears in Logos' eyes. "In My great compassion," Logos says sadly, "I made the puzzle. It gives them something to work for. It gives them hope. It teaches them of Me, of My nature and character. But the Law must be satisfied and Father's Plan of the Ages must be fulfilled. Like you, they've chosen to pay sin's penalty for themselves. There is nothing you, nor I, nor anyone in heaven or hell can do to get them out any sooner. You don't know how long their punishment will be, but I assure you, it is just. When it is done, they will solve the puzzle and be freed from the law – not a moment before." Logos bows His head and weeps. Tamil catches a glimpse of the incredible love He has, even for the wicked.

The weeks go by. Ness, Tamil, and the others rescued from the pit delight in feasting and dancing. But they can't get out of their mind the plight of those they left behind in the pit. The viewport at the throne shows the smoke of their torment rising. It is gut-wrenching. One day they get together to make an appeal to Logos. They elect Tamil as their spokesman. He bows before the King. "Lord Logos? You've given us tremendous freedom here in Your realm – more freedom than we've ever known. We want to use it in Your service – to be a blessing to all Your precious ones. We saw how much You love those imprisoned in the pit. So we'd like to ask Your permission to… er… is it possible to… uh… may we… is there some way…"

"Spit it out, Tamil!" Logos laughs. "Here in My realm there is no longer any need to worry about offending Me. Your heart is right before Me, or you wouldn't be here."

"Yes Sir. We'd like to go back to the pit to see if we can help get the puzzle started moving again."

Logos is still laughing. "And how do you propose to do that? Break down the cell walls?"

"No, Sir. We plan to build a bridge to the second row, so they can reach the first row by the chasm."

"And of what will you build it?"

"I don't know, Sir. Something that won't burn. We'll find a way. We just need Your permission."

"No, Tamil, you don't need My permission. This is heaven. You have perfect freedom here. I made you to be free. You have been slaves too long. Go now, and enjoy your freedom. If you want to help those in the pit, then that is what I want, too, for your heart is now in tune with My heart. I hope you succeed, but whether you do or not, know that I'm pleased with you, for you love those I love!"

So they set out on their great quest. There are about 5,000 of them agreed to work together. They first try to get materials from Earth, but it is still writhing in cataclysms, ever since the destruction of Satan's armies. So they ask the angels where they get the materials for the New Jerusalem. It turns out supplies are abundant; some planets are nearly all gold or silver; others are filled with precious jewels.

Well, the gold or silver is out. It gets too hot, and it is certain to melt in the fiery pit. But big diamond crystals might make a good bridge. They are led to a planet filled with them, and shown how to mine and shape them. It's a big job, taking several years. They return with 5,000 nice diamond slabs, each 2 x 4 feet across. Now it's back to the pit with their treasures. The drawbridge is still down, and the sufferers are still locked out of that final row of cells. Working together, they build a beautiful broad diamond bridge from the first row to the second, third, fourth, and fifth rows. But when they finish their sparkling bridge, nothing happens. Nobody is able to get out of his cell, no matter how hard they try to help.

"I know!" Ness calls. "Marjah had to step back off the drawbridge before I could be set free. Let's all go back across the drawbridge!" The others agree, and they all troop back across the chasm. When the last one steps off the drawbridge, it raises. The puzzle is reset. Now those imprisoned in rows two through five are freed to move toward row one, where they each have to finish reading the book and obey its command, just like Ness and Tamil.

It releases another 20,000 out of the pit. Everyone is overjoyed! But after a week, the flow stops again. Those in rows farther back cannot reach their diamond bridge. Tamil is not satisfied; he had hoped to release them all. Now he realizes that no matter how long he extends their diamond bridge, it will never reach the many billions of people still in torment. And at 20,000 a week it will take a million years to free everyone. They need a faster method.

So Tamil goes back to Logos. He is very pleased. "Tamil! Thank you! It truly delights My heart to see all the precious servants of Mine you helped release!"

"You're welcome, Lord. But, Sir, Your puzzle is simply too slow. At that rate, it will take forever to get them all out. I'm looking for a faster way."

"Maybe it is supposed to take forever, for the last ones, the worst criminals, the adversary himself."

"I don't believe that, Lord. You said You were there only three days and nights, and You paid sin's penalty for all who would ever believe in You!"

Logos smiles. He always did enjoy a good joke. "Ask, My friend. What would you like Me to do?"

"Oh. Uh… Make it faster, Lord. Lots faster."

"How, Tamil? I gave you creativity, ingenuity, and authority as well as freedom. You must learn to use it. How will you learn if I do everything for you?"

"Yes, Lord." Tamil thinks fast. "Well, a thousand cells face the gate. Instead of everyone going through every cell, change the puzzle so everyone comes straight forward in parallel. Uh… to do that, I need a thousand drawbridges."

"Good!" Logos looks pleased. "It is done. Go and see." They hurry down to the chasm. Sure enough, a drawbridge crosses to each cell, each with its own mailbox and copy of the book inside. A thousand puzzles ready for business. But nobody is in the first five rows. No one can reach them.

Try as they might, they cannot get across the chasm, nor can anyone in the pit hear them. They are thoroughly stuck. They even call for the angels to help fly them across. Sadly, the angels explain that nothing, not even Logos Himself, can cross that chasm except on a drawbridge. If they tried to fly across they would fall into the chasm. "We're done," Tamil explains. "We've done all we can. Logos made the drawbridges, so we know they'll work. But those inside the pit need to figure out how to use them."

CHAPTER 77 – THE HONEYMOON AGE

The years ever since Judgment Day have been spent feasting, renewing old friendships and making new ones, dancing among the stars, exploring the wonders of the cosmos, and learning to know Logos in a more intimately personal way than ever before possible. They thought they knew Yashua – as their Savior – when they learned of Him through the book of the law. But they discover that Logos as the full and complete Word of the eternal Father is far more than just Yashua as their Savior from sin.

In fact, they learn that saving them from sin was but a small thing, like getting them back on the main highway after taking a wrong turn. So while they still appreciate their recovery from that painful detour, almost nobody in the heavenlies calls Him Yashua anymore. Getting to know Logos as the King of the Universe and as the only expression of the eternal Father in our space-time realm has become far bigger than anyone could have imagined.

Their view of the book of the law has changed, too, especially for those who had studied it so hard, and even treasured it, while trying to get out of the pit. The book of the law is no big thing to them anymore. It is like a good children's book that has been read, enjoyed, and put aside for better things as the child grows up. For to tell the truth, the book of the law woven into the fabric of the universe at Creation and the simple summary of it written by Moses at Mount Sinai are expressions of the nature and character of God and revelations of His wisdom, power, and glory. Now that they have Logos with them continually as their Lord, Guide, and Friend, they no longer need to look at written expressions of Him. He is the reality toward which the Law always pointed. When one has the reality before his face, the picture is no longer needed. It is fading away.

I must pause at this point and describe what I mean when I say 'Logos', as you, dear Reader, have probably never known Him like this before. Several times since His wedding I've talked about Logos and His many-membered Bride as if they were separate, independent entities. That does Him a disservice. Logos is totally one with His Bride, in a harmonious union which human marriage only hinted at. They are always together. Logos, as the head, the male aspect, the authority and power in the union, is of course dominant. In fact, His new many-membered Bride doesn't even have a separate name of her own – her identity is totally wrapped up in Logos, her Lover. Yet she does have names. Fourteen hundred and forty thousands of them. For each individual member retains his or her unique identity forever.

So whenever I say "Logos," His Bride is now always included. He has changed, as the eternal Father promised. Yashua never married during His sojourn on earth. He was saving Himself for the Bride He knew He would win. Now that He has won her, and married her, He is complete, whole, perfect in a way we cannot understand.

Now, we must be careful here. It's not like Logos changed into a different person, nor is it like He was incomplete or imperfect before He married, and is now perfected by His Bride. It's this 'eternity' thing around which we time-dwellers can never quite wrap our minds. In eternity Father God, in unchangeable perfection, is all there is. When He sent Logos out from Himself to create the realm of time and space, to live and die and to bring back a pure Bride for Himself, He sent the fullest possible expression of Himself to each given moment of time.

But as those moments of time tick down, Father God is able to reveal more and more of Himself. Before the Fall, Adam and Eve may have seen the fullness of God, though they were too immature to comprehend it. But during the age of sin, the fullest possible expression of Himself was rather limited. God revealed more of Himself to Abraham, more yet to Moses, and a good deal more to the apostles and the fathers of the Church Age. But that was still far less than He is able to reveal now! For now, in the fullness of the Kingdom of God, Logos finally reveals all that Father YHWH intended from the beginning! Each member of His Bride adds to that revelation, so finally, Logos the Word of the eternal Father says all that Father God sent out from His eternity. So it is only from our limited time perspective that Logos is now perfected and completed in union with His Bride.

As I said at the beginning, God is love, and love must have a beloved. When Logos first created the universe, He had a beloved: His perfect, but weak, immature, ignorant, and self-centered baby. Adam was quick to turn away and unworthy of his Lover. Logos and Adam, that first Adam, were never really one. They had fun together, but it was like a child playing with his grandfather. As such, together they could not portray the eternal Father very well.

The same Logos is with this last Adam, but now after His wedding with His matured, purified Bride, He portrays the eternal Father much better. This is the Word the Father sent out! For this last Adam is totally one, perfectly in harmony within himself, though now many members. He is no longer weak, foolish, self-centered, or quick to turn away. He is no longer divided, as Eve was from Adam. This last Adam is one person – strong, wise, and full of the wisdom and knowledge of God, as well as submissive, quick to love, serve, and give Himself to the Father's will.

But be careful. The last Adam is not God any more than the first Adam was. The first Adam was just a human, a created being. The last Adam is far more glorious, not only as a matured, perfected, many-membered Bride but also in perfect union with Logos, the Word of YHWH. But this glorious person is still human, a created being.

In fact, in some ways this last Adam is more human than ever. He is now truly trinity, in a way that perfectly portrays the divine nature. This is the way we humans were supposed to be all along.

His body is dramatically changed – not just because he has many members, but also because those members are in a harmonious unity beyond our comprehension. But the biggest change is in the other two aspects of the trinity. This last Adam is now directed in his soul by the Head, who is Logos, the Word of the eternal Father, and is filled in his spirit by the very Holy Spirit of God, not just in part, but in fullness. Yes, he is still human, but you never knew humanity to be so glorious, so far above the angels in heaven! This is the way we were created to live.

So, Logos is still divine, and the last Adam is still human – what do we have here? We have humanity filled with and directed by the divine, the Holy Spirit and Word of the eternal Father. That is humanity at its highest and best, as God intended all along. This last Adam now says all that the eternal Father wants to say, revealing all His glorious nature and wondrous love. Humanity is finally elevated to "partake of the divine nature" (2 Pet 1:4), and divinity now has a worthy vessel to shepherd His Creation. (Rev 5:10)

Do you understand the term 'honeymoon'? In a way, these years are like a honeymoon for Logos and His Bride. This glorious human, this last Adam of which I speak, acts rather like young newlyweds taking their first vacation together. They have put aside all else – the struggles of making a living – and have set aside the time to get to know one another on an intimate basis. It takes time to take down all the walls and expose your deepest desires, needs, and ambitions, your core nature and character, to each other. In the same way, Logos takes delight in revealing Himself to His Bride, bit by bit as she is able to handle it, and His Bride likewise opens up to her Husband, all the intimate details of her many-membered nature as she learns to trust Him ever more completely. Thus for a thousand years they bask and delight in each other's love as in no honeymoon you ever heard of before.

The heavenlies are filled with angels and now the redeemed brothers and servants of Logos. How do they see Him now? Those recently brought into the heavenlies only know Him as He is: always there, always loving, always understanding, always joyful and encouraging. But the angels who knew Him from before the wedding see a difference. It is the difference between a piece of music played by a famous pianist, or that same piece played by a full, professional symphony orchestra. It was awesome to hear the pianist, but the full orchestra is better!

In the same way, Logos is now speaking the Word of the eternal Father with more clarity and authority than ever before – not because He has gained more authority. He had all authority from the beginning. But because He now has a many-membered Bride to speak through, to rule through.

Thus the redeemed, along with all creation, are filled with awe and wonder as they behold the power and glory, the wisdom and authority of the last Adam, Logos the King ruling over, in, and through His Bride.

Satan and Wormwood, like all those near the core of the pit, are furious. The messages had been getting back; the flames were cooler; the scuttlebutt was that thousands had already been freed. Then it had all stopped. Now they are left in silence, with no information from the front lines. They finally have to accept the word of those in the sixth row, who said that those in front of them all climbed up on something, they know not what, and escaped.

Sadly, those in the sixth row are too involved in their own private hell to take much initiative. Dr. Relt sends messages telling them to "Exert every possible effort to find out what allowed the others to escape! If you do not, we all may be in here forever!"

It takes a long time. The self-centeredness of mankind can be profound. But finally the message comes back. "The first guy in row six saw a bridge. It was made of bricks which look like thick slabs of diamond, so it didn't melt in the flames. But he says it never reached to his row."

"We need a hero here! Who is this guy?"

"It is Nate. He's a Judean. Logos told him that he was foolish and lazy. He knew about Logos, but put off doing anything about it until it was too late. I think he just did the same thing when those in front of him left on the bridge."

"Okay everybody. Make an appeal to Nate. He is the key! We're all depending on him! Beg him to do whatever it takes to get one of those diamond slabs and pass it back to us, so we can figure out this puzzle! Even if he has to pray to Logos!"

Nate has been suffering for a long time. The truly lazy will sit on a cactus and moan, without even expending the effort to stand up. That was Nate. But his punishment has begun to change him and the appeals move him. He prays, "Yashua, I'm sorry. I'm beginning to see the consequences of my own thoughtlessness and self-centered laziness. Please give me courage to try to help the others."

Surprisingly to him, with that prayer he is just able to reach out and grab the last diamond brick on the bridge. Should he just climb out and leave the pit behind? The temptation is there. Self is all he's ever thought of before. But with his prayer, his self-centeredness is diminished. Nate asked for God's grace to change, to become more courageous, and he got it. Instead of climbing onto the bridge, he pulls out the slab of diamond and passes it back.

All along the way, it is analyzed. By the time it gets back to the crew in the center, the message is, "It seems to have the ability to bridge between any two cells. However, it doesn't matter. No one can move if both cells are full."

So Dr. Relt formulates a plan, and sends it back to the front lines with the brick. "Nate, you've got to put the slab back with all the other slabs in the bridge, climb on, and then rearrange all the slabs so they reach the sixth row. That should get the puzzle started again, I hope."

That's a lot to ask of someone who has been lazy and self-centered all his life. But again, God's grace comes through his prayer. Nate puts the diamond brick back in the bridge. Then, with a great deal of effort, more than he has ever expended in his life, he climbs onto the bridge. He walks to row one. There he sees the drawbridge with the mailbox. He already knows how that part of the puzzle works! The temptation is strong to just get himself out.

But no. He sees the new drawbridges along the chasm. They're empty. For almost the first time in his life, Nate stops to think about deeds and consequences. The bridge is made of 5000 slabs of diamond. There are a thousand bridges along the chasm, each five rows away from all the people who need to escape. He was told each diamond slab can bridge to the next cell. Do the math. Suddenly it clicks.

Now ne'er-do-well Nate is working harder than he ever has in his life. He runs to the end of the bridge to get as many slabs as he can carry. Then he returns to row one. The cells are cooler there. He climbs into each cell and inserts a diamond slab. Eventually, all of row one is linked. Finally, starting with the farthest drawbridge, he links its first row back to row six. Now to see if his plan will work.

He tells the poor fellow there, "Hey buddy! God has answered your prayer today! When I'm gone, you can step onto this diamond slab into this cell. Follow me back to row one. Then finish reading the book and you can go free!" He returns to row one and steps to the second-farthest drawbridge. When he removes his slab linking row one, the farthest drawbridge is unlocked, just as he figured. The guy climbs over the diamonds from cell to cell up to his drawbridge on row one, waving and calling his thanks. The people behind him follow as soon as he climbs out of each cell, only waiting for him to get out of the way.

Nate repeats this for each of the remaining 999 drawbridges. His is the last. But he's short one slab! His cell in row six is empty, and he does not have any more slabs to reach the seventh row! Nuts! Nate watches the others for a while. They're getting the hang of it. Many have finished the book and moved across their drawbridge. As soon as they're gone, another takes their place. It's working! Those from farther back are able to move up a cell the instant the person in front of them moves out of their way.

Now Nate realizes what he has to do to get his own column moving. He has to climb back down into his cell! That is tough. Row six is a lot hotter than row one. He could just use his drawbridge and escape. But then those behind him may be trapped forever. Nate is a changed man. He does the right thing. He gets back into his cell. That unlocks it, so when he climbs back out onto the slab, the next person can jump into his old cell behind him. Nate returns to row one, frees himself, and stands by the gate encouraging them. Now each of the thousand lines is working in parallel. The freed souls are flooding past him through the gate at the total rate of 2000 a minute.

CHAPTER 78 – THE KINGDOM AGES

Logos asks everyone to assemble for an 'end of the age' speech. "Thank you for celebrating My honeymoon with Me. This last 'year', which to you was a thousand earth-years, was the most joyful that I have ever experienced. Father's Plan of the Ages keeps getting better and better! But that age is past, and now we have much work to do. The ages to come will see more accomplished than ever, for I have many willing workers with Me!

"But first, there are some prophecies to be fulfilled. This is the end of the ages of sin. Father has promised that all sin will finally be cleansed out of My Kingdom and all will bow the knee to Me. That includes everyone from the Abyss. Some heroes there worked very hard to make that happen, and I want to acknowledge them before you all. Ness, I am grateful to you. Yours was the first prayer I heard from the pit, and with Marjah's help, you were the first to solve the puzzle. I honor you for that. Tamil! I am grateful to you. You persisted in reaching out to the others even when the puzzle seemed to have failed. The efforts of you and your 5000 ultimately led to the complete solution of My puzzle. Congratulations! Nell! Your contribution was more than you know. By telling the others what I told you about when your punishment would be finished, you gave them hope. Nate! I am also grateful to you. You discovered that a little work in serving others is really not so bad, after all, though you called it a lot of work at the time. You helped to rescue millions behind you by solving your part of the puzzle. And Ned, it took a long time for you to reach the end of the puzzle. By that time, the hardness of your heart was all burned up, along with your desire for your own power and glory. You released your part of the puzzle when you stepped aside to allow others you considered worse than you to go first, a character trait I greatly admire in you now! Many after you were rescued by the humility you learned in the pit." The accolades continue, until finally:

"Dr. Relt. I commend you! Your many efforts in getting information, figuring out what needed to be done next, encouraging everyone to do his part, and directing the whole operation from the center of the pit was amazing! It was a joy to see you using your many talents to help others. Now you understand that helping others, rather than merely controlling them, always leads to your own benefit as well. Dumuzi! Your valiant catch and brilliant thinking in sending My book of the law out to the edge of the chasm even when your previous master told you to give it to him demonstrates your ability to do what is right in spite of temptation. Eva Braun. Being a vain goddess is not so much fun when you have lost your outward beauty, is it? You've suffered more than most, for your lust for worship of your body seduced many. But when your beauty was gone and you understood the shame of your nakedness, you humbled yourself to recognize the source of beauty. Now you are truly beautiful in the beauty of humility! Now I can shower My love on you as I always wanted.

"I welcome you all to My heavenlies! The penalty of your sin is paid in full by all you have suffered. Plus, you have gained wisdom. Through immense effort you have learned to love Me and My Law, and have come to know some of My nature and My ways. You have bowed to Me in your heart, and acknowledged My authority as King of the Universe, or you would never have escaped the pit. Now there is just this last little formality of the prophecy of Isaiah 45, in which Spirit prophesied that every knee shall bow and every tongue will swear allegiance to Me, thus giving proper praise to YHWH the eternal Father."

The multitude who had been released from the pit (there are more than a trillion of them) gladly fall to their knees before Logos. They gladly shout out their worship and swear their everlasting allegiance. The flames of their punishment has burned up all the hardness of their hearts and destroyed their proud, self-centered natures. That book of the law they had studied for so long and repeated back and forth so many times has straightened out their worldviews and reset their priorities. Now they are bowed, ready to wholeheartedly serve the King. However, two are still left standing. Not surprisingly, they are Satan and his chief demon prince. Logos addresses Wormwood first. "Tell Me, Wormwood, why you do not bow."

"Yes, Lord. I would bow to You, for now I know who You are. But in all good conscience I cannot, for I am sworn to loyalty to my master, and he has not yet bowed."

"That is a good answer, Wormwood, and I admire that loyalty in you. Now My beloved adversary. Tell me why you do not bow. Must we go through it all again? I am fully prepared to do so, for the prophecy will be fulfilled, no matter how many ages pass."

"Lord Logos," Satan begins. There is an audible gasp from the multitude, for this is the first time he has ever addressed Logos so respectfully. "I have bowed my heart to You. I acknowledge that You are the almighty King of the Universe, Lord of all Creation – I was a fool for ever challenging You for that job! Please forgive my arrogance. But I did not bow because… well… You called me Your beloved adversary! I thought maybe You might still need an adversary. I want You to know I'm available for the job. From now on I will serve You however You wish, even as Your adversary. I regret that my fine adversary badge of which I was so proud seems to have burned up in the pit."

At that, Logos starts to laugh. In fact, it is the hardest anyone has ever heard Him laugh. Good hearty laughter is catching, and soon the entire multitude is overwhelmed with the best, loudest, most delightful laughter in history. Satan is left standing there, wondering if they are laughing at him. At one time his pride would have created a huge offense here, but now that all seems to have burned away with the badge. So even he starts laughing. Of course Wormwood then joins in, and for the first time ever, the entire universe is laughing together. It feels good.

It's a long time before everyone settles down. But finally Logos is able to speak. "I thank you, My beloved Lucifer, for being a worthy adversary. You have served Me in ways far deeper than your understanding. It was through your testing that My Bride and I are one. It was through your temptations that My brothers and My servants learned to look to Me for grace and strength! And it was through your murderous hate, violence, and lies that My precious ones learned to treasure kindness, peace, and truth! Your ways of deceit and force created a deep longing in My people for My ways of righteousness and love! During the age of sin you seduced mankind into the pleasures of sin, promising happiness but delivering only suffering or death. Now the universe sees the consequences of your seduction, so the allure of its temptation is gone, forever. The lie is exposed. My precious ones see the truth, and it has set them free."

Satan hangs his head. "I only regret, O Lord, that my assistance to You was unintentional. I see now that I was a fool. I truly thought I could beat You. Perhaps – now that I understand – I could make You a better adversary?"

Again Logos laughs. "No, Lucifer! How could you be My adversary now that you understand? You were only so good at it because it came from your heart. Now all that is burned up. Your lies are exposed for all the universe to see. You can never again deceive yourself, so how can you deceive others? Besides, I no longer need an adversary. But if you choose to bow to Me, I have another task for you…"

You have never in your life seen anyone fall to the ground so fast, not just to his knees, but flat on his face before the King. "Yes, Logos, my Lord, my Master. You and You alone are worthy of My praise! Just say the word. Tell me how I may serve You. Whatever it is, I will do it, even if it is just waiting on tables or washing feet…" He goes on like that for quite a while, for Satan can be rather wordy. But after a time he realizes he's repeating himself and shuts up. A dead silence falls on the heavenlies. He glances over, and sees Wormwood bowing right next to him, loyal to the last. He wonders why everyone is so quiet… *Nuts! They all know him as the liar! He never said anything in his life that didn't have a barb in it somewhere. It was his trademark, and he had been proud of it. Now he is trying to tell the truth and nobody believes him!* He starts again, "Lord Logos! I mean it! I swear it! This time, I'm really telling the truth! I want to serve You…!"

"Oh, I quite believe you, My beloved Lucifer. I'm only waiting for you to stand up so I can get My hug!"

"Hug? Who, Lord? Me? You've got to be kidding!"

"I don't kid. Though I do love jokes, I cannot tell a lie. I've been wanting this hug ever since before the first Adam. Do you think I'll miss My opportunity now?"

Satan looks up. Logos' arms are outstretched, to him! He leaps forward. For the first time in his life, he begins to understand what it means to be loved.

When the hug is finally over (though this hug is never really over), Logos says to the multitude, "He has paid his debt in full. No being ever caused so much suffering; none ever received such suffering in return. Every physical pain, every mental anguish, every wicked thing he ever did came back upon him in full measure. Now he does indeed understand. He is no longer My adversary. He is now My beloved Lucifer. *Never again call him Satan! Satan has been totally consumed in the lake of fire.* Now he is restored as Lucifer, My archangel, third after only Gavriel and Michael. His commission is restored as well, as at the beginning. His task is to govern the physical aspect of My Creation, as before, for I never take back that which I give. I never fail in My plans and purposes. Lucifer, gather your servants. They are still loyal to you. You've still got an earth to care for. It's in pretty rough shape because of the ages of sin, but I'm confident that you can restore it for Me."

Lucifer gathers his demons, his head still spinning from the speed at which he rose from the lowest in the pit to the third highest among the archangels. Wormwood is right beside him. His demonic host had been released from the pit long ago. They had applauded his release, and his bow. Now they gather eagerly around him to get their orders.

"My rebellion is over!" he begins. "I thought I could ascend to the highest heavens as a god. I was wrong. Logos is God. I, like you, am just a created being, here to serve Logos however He pleases. I'm sorry I misled you. I'm sorry I harmed you, and caused you to suffer. I was evil, through and through. I do not deserve to be your leader. In fact, according to my own wager, I deserve to remain in the pit forever and ever! But the awesome grace and mercy of Logos has allowed me to go free. Regardless of what I deserve, Logos has commanded me to lead you, and I will do my best to obey. So follow me to the earth. With your help, we will try to repair all the damage we have caused."

It's a good speech, and surprisingly short for one who has always loved to hear himself talk. His host cheers and claps for him, and lets him know they are all still loyal to him. They return to planet Earth.

It's in terrible shape. Far worse than you or I can even imagine, dear Reader. It was ignored for a thousand years during the honeymoon age. Now, this will startle the die-hard evolutionist, but during that time life did not evolve better and better, and the chaos from this 'Big Bang' did not organize itself into a beautiful, well-ordered solar system. Instead, the Second Law of Thermodynamics proved true, as always, causing everything to decay and disintegrate.

After the righteousness of God had flooded the earth to burn up all the wicked, and after everyone had come before the great white throne and gotten either assigned a place in the heavenlies or a place in the lake of fire, the earth had been abandoned to its doom. Good riddance. Without the Light of Logos, Earth is spiraling down into the extinguished dark star once known as Sol.

Lucifer does a quick survey with Wormwood, his chief prince. It's clearly impossible. Sol has cooled and partially collapsed into itself. It looks like a shriveled black prune. From Earth it's so close that it appears like an evil monster filling the sky. Its nuclear fire was extinguished long ago. If it collapses any more it might blow up, or become a black hole! Mercury has already impacted into Sol. Venus is coming so close as to nearly graze Sol as it screams by each orbit at 500 miles per second. Its doom is certain within the next few orbits. Earth is not far behind. Bits of rock and space debris clutter the system. What happened?

When He had taken the survivors of that last battle with Him into the heavenlies, the planets had been in perfect, resonant orbits, held there during the Millennium by the Light of the World, Logos Himself. But when Logos left on Judgment Day, the resonance collapsed. Without Logos energizing the system, all the planets had fallen from their perfect orbits to begin their inevitable spiral into Sol. For a thousand years the planetary orbits had been tightened by the attraction of the collapsing sun and by the drag from all the space plasma and debris left over from the terrible series of catastrophes at the beginning of the Millennium.

Now at the end of the Honeymoon Age, Earth is zipping around at less than 8 million miles on its closest approach. At that distance, even though Sol has cooled significantly, the gravitational stresses are so huge that the entire crust is molten. Crustal tides reach 200 miles above mean sea level. Surface temperatures exceed 3200° F. Surface water is vaporized. All living things, including the vile vermin and viruses that had plagued mankind, are gone. Every edifice of man is but a distant memory. Even the elements themselves melt in the fervent heat. Half the time, a great electric arc streams from Sol to Earth, generated by the magnetic fields of the two. It bathes the earth in an intense electric fire. Even if anything could survive the heat, it cannot survive the fire. Earth is cleansed and purified.

But as to recovering it, putting it back into a stable orbit, cooling it, restoring the water and soil on its surface, re-igniting Sol… there's just no way. Lucifer has had oodles of experience juggling planets during the Catastrophic Era. With a cold pit in his stomach he remembers how hard he'd tried to force Earth out of its resonant orbit to collide with Sol. He had not been strong enough! Now that he wants desperately to save it from colliding with Sol, he knows that, once again, he is not strong enough.

But Logos expressed confidence in him. Lucifer is in the agony of wanting desperately to succeed on this, his first assignment, and knowing he cannot. He turns to Wormwood. "Bring your host. We've got to save the earth, no matter what it costs us."

"Sir…" Wormwood hesitates. He fears his master, and has never dared to cross him before. But he is a changed master. Perhaps he will listen. "Sir… are you sure that is wise? Are we strong enough?"

In the old days, that would have been enough for Satan to lash out and try to splatter Wormwood's head against a wall. But Lucifer is a different angel now. "No, my friend. We aren't strong enough. But I swore I would serve Logos. Didn't you hear Him? He restored my commission over the physical realm! He said to restore earth. We must save it!"

"Sir, I don't think He wants us to waste our lives in a futile effort to do what is beyond our strength."

"You're right, Wormwood. What do you recommend?"

Old Wormwood nearly drops his dentures on that one. It's the first time his master has ever admitted that he was right or asked for his advice. "Logos might know a way. I think we should just go back and ask Him."

Lucifer hangs his head and nods. This humbling thing is not as easy as it had first seemed. They return to Logos. Again Lucifer bows before Him. "O Lord Logos, we do not have the strength to save Earth, and wouldn't even with all Your heavenly host helping. Please tell me what to do."

Laughing, Logos reaches out to him. "How about another hug? We've got a lot of catching up to do!"

So they hug, and have another good laugh together. Then Lucifer tries again. "You always said Earth was Your favorite spot in the universe. I'd like to save it for You, but I'm not strong enough. I need Your wisdom."

"Just speak the word, My friend."

"Huh? Just speak… Oh. I've seen You do that, but I've always had to do it the hard way."

"That's because you weren't under My authority. Now that you are properly submitted to Me, just speak the word. My power and authority will flow through you in everything I commission you to do." Lucifer just stands there with a blank look on his face. So Logos explains. "When you humbled yourself and bowed to Me, you put yourself back under My authority. Now, whatever I give you to do, anything at all, My power to do it comes with the command. I commissioned you to care for the cosmos. You have the power to do it. Just speak the word. It's really that simple. It always was, but back when you were proud and rebellious, you insisted on doing it your own way, in your own power, the hard way! I'm glad that you finally are learning the easy way!"

"But… but why didn't You tell me?"

"I have told you. You couldn't hear, because that first step, putting yourself under My authority, was so foreign to your thinking. I am pleased that you have now returned to Me for wisdom. Finally you are really ready to hear."

"Yes, Logos. I will go and speak Your word."

"The Father's word," Logos corrects him, laughing. "For I too am under authority. I only say and do what My Father commands, in His perfect Plan of the Ages."

Lucifer and Wormwood return to Earth. They study it together. "I believe Logos would be honored if we restored Earth exactly as it was before the Fall of Adam," Lucifer finally says.

"I agree," Wormwood nods. "He always did say that He never fails in all His plans and purposes. But is that even possible? How are we going to get rid of all this garbage?" He sweeps an arm around the solar system, cluttered with comets, asteroids, and space junk, all on dangerous orbits. "And how are we going to find the two suns?"

"Just speak the word, He said. We speak the word. Remember what He did at the Creation?"

"What He did? Aren't you being a bit presumptuous?"

"Not at all. I'm trying to be obedient."

"Well… Just the same, I think you should test it out on something… uh… really small. An asteroid, maybe."

"No. I swore to serve Him. He said speak the word. We start with something big. Sol!" He calls his angel servants (who used to be called demons) around him and tells them, "Logos wants us to clean up the solar system and return Earth to its original created state. We can't do it, because we're not strong enough. But He told me to speak His word, rather the word of the eternal Father through Him and then through me, and it will be done. I'm going to need all your help, because I've never done this before. I want every one of you to bow right now, not to me, but to Logos in your hearts. Then pray – pray furiously to Father YHWH – that He grant me wisdom and that His perfect will be done through me. With all your prayers, with each of you in agreement with me on this, we might succeed."

As if to punctuate his request, Venus comes screaming up to Sol on its tight elliptical orbit. It grazes the surface. It's spectacular. It digs a long red gash and rebounds away, but it has been slowed. Within minutes it collides again, digging another gash which opens up Sol in a dazzling display. The gashes glow bright crimson on the darkened surface of the sun. On the third hit, Venus is gone forever. Seeing it, they see the end of Earth if Lucifer fails!

"Sol!" Lucifer commands, then stops to draw a deep breath of Spirit. "In the mighty name of Logos, and by the unfailing Word of Father YHWH in Him, I command you to…" he hesitates, unsure of himself. *Is that new thought his own? Or is it from Logos?* Spirit gives him peace. "…collapse further into yourself until you explode!"

Sol's innermost atoms collapse in upon themselves, forming an ultra-dense core. Other atoms follow in chain reaction, like in a 'B' grade horror movie. You may think the impact of Venus was the last straw. But you would be wrong. It was not Venus. It was the Word of YHWH in Lucifer. Venus was only a means He used to accomplish His Word. Sol now looks like it will become a black hole, but Lucifer knows better. It is called faith.

"Back to the heavenlies!" Lucifer commands his host. "I don't know how soon, but it will explode. We could not survive the blast. I'm not even sure Earth can survive the blast! It's only 8 million miles away. But that is what Logos seemed to be telling me. I just hope I heard Him correctly!"

So they all retreat past the veil. There they keep watch to see what happens. Sol continues collapsing for weeks. All that time it is accelerating Earth rapidly toward it in a tightening ellipse. At its perihelion, Earth is only a half-million miles away and moving at 2000 miles per second. It slingshots past, but the next orbit will surely be its last.

Sol explodes. Lucifer is awed. The combined forces of his supernovas of Sol's four nearest stellar neighbors was not even a thousandth this powerful. But Earth is already heading away, so the titanic blast just helps it along, big time, blowing it right out of the solar system. Lucifer takes note of its final speed and direction, and closes up the veil of spirit before the shock wave reaches him. It seems to be headed toward the center of the galaxy at an incredible speed of about 20,000 miles per second!

Logos calls Lucifer and Wormwood to the throne. "Well done, My friends! I commend you! You have saved My Earth. I'm very pleased! Now, isn't it much easier working with Me than against Me?"

"Yes, Sir. Thank You for the privilege of serving You. Now we'll go to begin the restoration."

"Would you be willing to delay a bit? You have yet to join Me in the Dance. I am longing for you to participate. I've always wanted to dance with My three archangels and their princes together!"

"Yes, of course, Logos! Thank You for inviting us!" So the earth is forgotten while Logos dances throughout the universe with all His precious ones. Every time Lucifer thinks about returning to complete his task with Earth, Logos has some other task for him first. His Kingdom in the heavenlies is still expanding. Lucifer's services are needed at each planet, each star and galaxy, to perfect their song and bring them into harmony with the King. Lucifer's abilities as manager of the physical realm thus becomes a blessing to all of Creation. Another thousand years go by before Logos again mentions the new earth.

"Well, My beloved Lucifer. Do you think the earth has cooled yet? Perhaps it is time for you to do as you set out to do when you got rid of Sol."

"Yes, Sir! I've wondered why You delayed me."

"My friend, I wanted you to enjoy with Me the growth of My Kingdom in the heavenlies before we extended it to the new earth. Your rule over the physical aspects of the heavenly realms has been most appreciated. Working in the heavenlies, you have learned much that you will need for the earth. Now it is ready for you and now you are ready for it. So go in My authority, with My blessing."

Lucifer and Wormwood have indeed had a good deal of practice in operating under the authority of Logos. They take their host (now called 'angelic' host just like Gavriel's and Michael's) and move into place above the earth. It is still moving at 20,000 miles a second. It has flown 630 trillion miles closer to the core of the Milky Way Galaxy. That's enough to move it to an entirely new section of the galaxy, where the stars are more numerous and brighter, and the constellations are totally new. "Well, well," Wormwood is glad for the empty space around it. "At least it escaped all the comets, asteroids, and broken planets. Now all we need are the two suns."

But as they get closer to inspect the earth itself, they see that it needs a lot more. It is truly dead, a cold sphere of fused rock covered by miles of water and ice which had condensed after the explosion. Lucifer and his sidekick brood over it for a while, deciding what to do. They have learned much in the last thousand years. "Father YHWH! In the name of Logos the Creator, let there be a sun here!"

Nothing happens. But Lucifer is patient. It's amazing how much he has changed. Now he knows, and he waits. Sure enough, after his faith has been tested a bit, he sees a very dead, cold, dark sun just ahead of the speeding planet. "Hmm. Maybe you should have been a bit more specific, Lucifer, and asked for a sun that was actually lit."

"Father YHWH knows what He's doing!" Lucifer is confident. "Let the earth be captured by the sun!"

The dark sun is very big. The earth slingshots around it and nearly escapes due to its exceedingly high velocity. But eventually, much farther away than they would have thought possible, it begins to circle back. Then they see the reason: another sun, smaller, and very far away. It is also dead and dark. "Ahh!" Wormwood exclaims. "You got two suns for the price of one prayer!" They both chuckle.

"I was just about to pray for the second sun. Sometimes Logos hears our prayers before we pray them. Now, Father YHWH, in Logos' name, lock the two suns together in a binary system, and suspend the new earth between them!"

They watch for a bit. Indeed the two dead suns already seem to be in a far distant binary system. The earth spins around them both for a bit in a big, stretched-out figure eight, slowing all the while. Evidently an immense static charge exists between them, because after only a few orbits the earth completely stops, suspended exactly between the two suns, held by electrostatic forces beyond Lucifer's imagining. It is motionless except for a slow rotation.

Everything is cold and dark. But Lucifer has seen this before. He knows what to do. "Let there be light!" He exclaims triumphantly. "Let the Light of the World come to invade this new earth with His light, His warmth, and His love!" Instantly, the two suns ignite, not with a nuclear fire, but with the presence of almighty God in the Person of Logos, the Light of the World – even on the new earth.

CHAPTER 79 – NEW HEAVENS AND NEW EARTH

Lucifer and Wormwood watch in delight while Logos bathes the new earth in the light and love of His presence, melting the ice. "Thank you!" He tells them. "I am very pleased, both by the location of the new earth and by your faith in placing it here."

"You're welcome, Logos. It is a great joy working with You instead of against You. How could I have missed it before? Now, Father YHWH, by the power and authority of Logos, let the waters below separate from the waters above, and let the dry land appear!"

Again they watch, as the Light of Logos warms the earth from both suns. Soon, the oceans warm up enough for an atmosphere to appear. Then a vapor barrier forms above the earth, further warming the earth with its characteristic greenhouse effect. While they wait, they chat happily, as good friends do. "What is it about the new location that pleases you, Logos?" Lucifer asks.

"That is a very good question, My friend. Do you mind if I share it with the rest?" He calls the multitudes together for a teaching time. "Lucifer asked why this new location for Earth pleases Me so much. My answer is at the heart of My Kingdom and the fulfillment of My promises. The Ages of Sin have passed away. The Millennial Age, testing My brother Israel, is past. My Honeymoon Age is also past. Earth's Restoration Age is now nearing completion. My Kingdom has expanded throughout the heavenlies. In the age to come, My Kingdom will expand to this new earth, with the new heavens surrounding it. Soon, there will be no place in My universe where My Kingdom does not fully extend. So tell Me, what is missing? What have we lost? What has now ceased to exist?"

It's really a rather simple question, but they were trying to make it too difficult. No one could guess. Chuckling at their innocence, Logos gives the answer. "Sin! Iniquity! Already you have forgotten! It is gone! And with it are burned up all the books of the law of sin and death, the books of the damned, the ignorant, and the foolish, Hades, the chasm, the Abyss, it is all burned up! Totally gone! Even the memory of it is fading away. The earth has now been re-formed. The terrible pit that was under the earth, together with the wicked natures that burned in torment there – it is all destroyed to be remembered no more.

"For as I promised, 'I will put My Law within them; on their heart I will write it… And all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest of them; for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.' [Jer 31:33-34] Now there is nothing left, nothing in the entire universe, to remind us of the age of sin with its torment and death."

Logos has always loved the dramatic pause, and He uses it here. Sure enough, Lucifer falls for it. "But Sir, how does that answer my question? What does no more sin have to do with the location of the new earth?"

"Lucifer!" Logos laughs. "You of all creatures should understand about My storybook in the heavens! Don't you remember? Adam and I used to study it every night, before the Fall. He taught it to all his children and his children's children his entire life. It told the story of redemption. It prophesied the age of sin and the coming of the Redeemer. Well, look around you at the stars, the constellations, the galaxies. They are all changed! There is nothing left to remind us of the age of sin. It is gone, as if it never existed.

"In this new location we have a totally new storybook in the heavens. It tells the story of the eternal Father, and the infinite power and authority He gave when He sent Me into this realm of time and space to create a universe. It tells of My ever-growing Kingdom – of its expansion to fill the universe. It tells of My Bride, My brothers, and My servants – each of you My precious ones – and all the mighty deeds we shall do together. It tells of the great glory and honor we all shall receive when the Plan of the Ages is complete and we return it all to Father YHWH at the end of time, when He fills all things. It is a truly incredible story of the victory of My Father's love. I will teach you to read it. Never again will you have to read about sin and death and sacrifice and atonement. The old is past. The new is come.

"I'm sure you've heard Me say before that I and the Word of the eternal Father through Me never fail in all Our plans and purposes. When it seems like We've failed, that is only because there is a greater victory further on. It seems like We failed with the first Adam, but We did not! For the last Adam is far more glorious than the first! When the first Adam fell into sin and the earth was destroyed, it looked like We had failed. But now you will see the new earth become even more glorious than the first! How could it possibly be better than the perfect world I created in the beginning? You'll never guess, so I'll tell you. It is better because the first world, I created all alone. This new world I shall now create with My Bride and each of you helping. Look at it! Lucifer, Wormwood, and I have just begun to form it. But you may help us finish it, if you wish. First, I need a volunteer to begin preparing the soil."

To my surprise, Eva Braun is first to raise her hand. "Lord Logos? I always wanted to work with soils. I never did because I hated to get dirt under my fingernails. But I've always wanted to. Please, may I serve You in this way?"

Logos laughs. "Of course, Eva! I love your humility in asking. Those who exalt themselves are brought down, but those who stoop to serve shall be honored. You are now a good example of both! I commission you as the Queen of Soils! You may have as many workers to assist you as you need. My Word through you shall bring forth mineral-rich, fertile soils all over the new earth!"

"Now, what about a volunteer for all the bacteria and other microbes so necessary for good soil development?" Dr. Relt volunteers for that. He wants to work with Eva. Again, a beautiful humility has been worked in him.

The people love working with Logos. Not only is it a sheer delight seeing the Word of Logos create beauty out of chaos, but to have His Word flowing through them is the height of joy! It is the Word of Reconciliation. (2 Cor 5:19) The earth was terribly damaged by sin. Now they've been given the ministry of reconciliation as ambassadors for Logos. Working together with Him, their job is to restore the beauty, the harmony, the perfection of the earth. But this task is not a hard labor; it is a pure pleasure.

Tina-Terry retains her post as Queen of the Plants, and Tana-Todd is still Queen of the Animals. But they find it quite different from when they worked together as tiny twins in the Garden of God on Mount Zion. For one thing, they didn't have husbands back then. The input from their husbands can have a huge impact on the results. Another difference stems from their source of materials.

Let's start with Tina-Terry. Of course they both love to garden, or they would never have married. But Terry is a sequential. Tina is a random. Terry likes well-ordered, manicured lawns with rows of flowers lined up in beds along the path, backed by flowering cherry, with a separate orchard for the fruit trees. Tina loves a glorious profusion of flowers and flowering trees, even meadows sprinkled with flowers, with fruit trees, bushes, ornamental trees, and towering evergreens strewn randomly in between.

In the Garden of God, Tina had to work with the plants she had. It was very good. The paths wound bewilderingly through wild splashes of color that hinted of the dazzling glory of God even before the dedication. But she was never quite satisfied, because the colors and shapes she really wanted simply weren't available on earth.

However, on the new earth Tina-Terry discovers the unlimited power of the eternal Father, by the authority of the word of Logos. Her imagination, of course, runs wild. Mount Zion had only about sixty acres, but the new earth has over two hundred million square miles of level, fertile soil. When the hydro-cycle crew (led by Sam-Suzy Salizar) finishes, everything is well-watered with lakes, springs, and streams. It's every gardener's dream come true.

Tina wants to spray flowers everywhere – the more exotic and colorful the better. She is no longer limited to what was; now she wants to cover the land with flowers seen only in your wildest dreams, in fluorescent hues and with glorious shapes and sizes to amaze even the stodgy non-gardener. It's good that the husband God gave her is more down-to-earth; even better that Tina has learned to listen to him. Together they cover the ground with lovely meadows, grasses, edible plants, and tasteful groupings of fragrant flowers and groves of trees. When they finish, they find they have compromised on nearly everything. Oh, you'll still find Tina's clusters of exotic neon flowers and shockingly grandiose plants scattered here and there. But most of their creations are useful and relaxing as well as beautiful, and nearly everything has an edible part to it.

It's similar with Tana-Todd and her animals. It was one thing to learn to rule the animals that came to her. Here, under the authority of Logos and by the infinite power of the eternal Father's word through them, she discovers that she can have any kind of animal she wants. Now Tana's tremendous creativity and love of variety comes out in a abundance of wild new animals like you've never even dreamed. But again, her husband Todd is more sensible. He still likes the original animals that Logos designed. He insists that they still have lions, tigers, deer, frogs, dogs, cats, wooly lambs, monkeys, yellow duckies, panda bears, and all the others that are your favorites and mine.

Tana wants immense red dragons with flaming breath, mighty wings, and forked tails. Todd insists on recreating the ancient serpents with iridescent scales, which walk on two legs and have hands like a monkey. Logos is delighted. All their animals eat only grasses, leaves, or fruits. Eating meat in this new earth will be utterly abhorrent to them.

Many others also volunteer for various tasks. Some work with Logos on filling the seas with fish of all kinds. Others work with Him on filling the skies with birds. Then there are the burrowers, the creepers and crawlers… the tremendous variety of creatures remembered from before, but multiplied by the added creativity and brilliance of a multitude of willing workers. Everyone gets a chance to help. The result, like I said before, is the difference between the great pianist and the even greater symphony orchestra. Thus this new earth is filled with all the living creatures of a million Gardens of Eden, and more.

With the high vapor barrier and huge magnetic field, no cosmic radiation can get through. There are no comets, asteroids, rogue planets, or space debris to endanger the new earth. With the thick, warm air, not much sleep is needed. One of the two suns is yellow-white and large. Logos decrees it to rule the daytime. The other is much smaller and more of a pastel blue-white. Logos says it will rule the night. However, Dr. Relt objects to a dim night sun. "Sir. The Revelation says there will be no night there. Of what use is a dim sun? Why not have both suns bright?"

Logos laughs cheerily. "It is the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem we are building in the heavenlies to intersect with Mount Zion on Earth, where there is no night, and no need for the sun or moon. The earth itself will always require a sun, even though I am the one who grants it Light. And while spirit beings have no need of sleep in the New Jerusalem, earth-dwellers will always need some sleep. And besides, I had hoped you would use the extra nighttime hours to study My new storybook in the stars."

"The old earth needed sleep!" Dr. Relt insists. "This new earth is better! With thick air and strong bodies, we'll need to sleep an hour or two at most. Just think how much more productive two suns will be! And since we dwell with You in heavenly realms, we can read Your storybook in the stars anytime."

Surprisingly, Logos concedes. He brightens the blue star to a brilliant sapphire. The earth's rotation is a lazy 32 hours a day: 16 facing the yellow sun and 16 facing the sapphire sun. Logos is a bit shocked, but everyone loves it! The sapphire blue sun is still restful – they call it evening, for the larger stars are visible – but there is no more night.

So with that little detail taken care of, the new earth is ready. "Behold!" Logos shouts, and all His helpers echo His shout, ***"It is all very good!"***

"Now shall the Father's Plan of the Ages come to the fulfillment!" Logos continues. "All that YHWH planned for the first Adam is now coming to pass for the last Adam. This time, Adam is mature, wise, strong, and righteous. This time, no temptation can cause him to fall. This time, he shall take dominion over the earth, and every living creature in it. This time, he shall rule it for Me in perfect justice and holiness. This time, he shall multiply and fill the earth with sons of God to give praise to My Father!"

"Lord? Who will live on the new earth? We all want to stay in the heavenlies with You, in your New Jerusalem. Everyone loves the Dance, the feasting, the glory…"

"Oh, I don't know. Someone will volunteer."

"But Lord, how do we know he can't be tempted? You don't even have an adversary any more. Do You need my help? It seems to me that if Your last Adam is going to try again with a whole new earth, he will need a tempter." Lucifer is totally serious, and he appears very concerned.

Somehow that strikes Logos as amazingly funny. After His laughter stops (although these days His laughter never seems to stop), Logos remarks, "You may try again if you really want – you are free to do whatever you wish here – but I know he won't fail, no matter who volunteers."

"I'll need a new badge. My old one burned up."

"Lucifer! You insist? How can you? Your heart won't be in it. You won't be wanting him to fail!"

"It really needs to be done. For sure nobody else will do it. I'm the only one who knows how!"

"True! Okay, here's your adversary badge. Now let's see who is willing to volunteer for this mock temptation. Who wants to give up the glory of the heavenlies to populate My new earth? Remember, you'll be bound to earth. You'll have to be separated, like Adam and Eve. You'll have to bear children, train them, and instill My Law into their hearts, for it won't be written there as it is in this realm. Do I hear any volunteers?" But they have lived in splendor for too long. No one wants to give it all up and start over.

Dr. Relt has spent a lot of time with Eva Braun as they worked with each other creating the soils. They whisper together. She nods, so Dr. Relt says, "Lord Logos? Eva and I were married on earth, but You never joined us into one person like the others. Are we not married in Your eyes?"

Logos shakes His head sadly. "That is a rather tragic tale. When you and Eva married it was not a real marriage. Marriage is a covenant commitment to each other. But you were committed to self; your alliance was only to further your goals of power and fame and satisfy your lusts. You never married in My eyes. You each were using the other for your own pleasures and ambitions. I never joined you."

"That's about what we thought. But we have changed. We want to marry, for real – Your way. And we volunteer for Your new earth assignment. Sir? It's important to us. We've already lived two entire lives, and failed miserably at both. We are the worst ones here! But if we can succeed on the new earth, if we can overcome Lucifer's temptation and live righteously, committed to You and to each other, that will display to the universe the power of Your grace and the perfection of Your cleansing better than anyone."

Logos chuckles. "Yes, it sure would, wouldn't it! Okay. First let's get your names straight. Most of the lies you were told have been exposed, but I don't think you want to keep the names Satan gave you. Your parents had named you before they died in the 'accidents' Wormwood arranged. Your real names are David ben Judah, and Abby Benjamin.

"Abby, you are no relation to Eva Braun. None at all. You were just an orphan that Satan chose, renamed, and trained for his purposes. However, David, you really were Hitler. Normally, there is no such thing as reincarnation. It is against My nature. I am the Resurrection and the Life. I do restore many to life, but never as a different person! But I gave Satan the power to resurrect one with a fatal wound, in order to fulfill Revelation 13. Satan chose his favorite beast-king: Hitler. After Hitler died, Satan carried his soul to the recently slain fetus, and you were born. Satan inspired and empowered you. He inspired your vow to aid the Jews, in order to bring you to power in Israel. That much of what he told you was true. However, even with Hitler's soul, you were still like a new person. You didn't have Hitler's memories until Satan put them there. You had high ideals. If you had kept your vow and held firm to your principles, Satan would have lost his power over you. Wormwood's insistence that you would cease to exist if you didn't keep your fictitious 'agreement' with him was pure hogwash. You let him play with your mind."

"Thank You, Lord Logos. I always hated the name Relt Ihploda. It just never felt right. But I love the name David! Everybody! Just call me David from now on!" Eva nods. She likes Abby better, too. "But that doesn't change our desire to marry and live in the new earth. Will You wed us now?" Their arms reach around to clasp each other tight.

"Not now, David ben Judah and Abby Benjamin. There is no marriage in this, My realm. All that is, is, in perfect oneness. Nor are there new births in My realm. That's why I wanted a new earth, to fill with children for My Kingdom! But if you are prepared to go there and start anew, I will wed you there." They both nod, big grins on their faces.

David ben Judah awakes. He is a little disoriented and confused. He had a wondrous dream. It seemed so real! But it clearly wasn't. He stomps on the ground. Yep, the flowers crush under his feet. In his dream they did not. He pinches himself and feels the pain. In his dream there was no pain. He jumps up and thinks high in the heavenlies, but falls back to the ground in a heap. He is earthbound!

The earth seems so strange. *What's with the sapphire sun, anyway?* He certainly doesn't remember earth having so many flowers, in such wild profusion! And the animals! They're crowding around as if they're eager to meet him. Some kinds he's never even seen before. *Is this a garden someone has planted?* David spots fruit-bearing trees all around him, and the fruit all looks ripe. He nabs a purple peach-plum the size of his fist to sink his teeth into the sweetest, juiciest fruit he's ever tasted. *Wow!*

It brings back distant memories. There was a garden in his dream. Not as nice as this one, but it had fruit like this. It was growing from a row of trees beside a crystal clear stream – no, two streams rushing down either side of a mountain. Yes, the garden was on top of the mountain – The Garden of God on Mount Zion!

He remembers it now. But looking all around, the land here is level, and the stream he sees is flat and meandering. Ignoring the waiting animals, he runs toward a mountain way off in the distance. It feels good to run. He goes faster, faster, and still has energy to spare. That much is like his dream. But in his dream he could fly. Now, whenever he takes a giant leap he just falls back to earth. What a chore! He's going to have to get to the mountain the hard way.

Along the way, David finds a tiny lake. Hardly thinking, he speeds up and takes a great flying leap. In his dream, he could have crossed it easily. But not here. He falls short, landing with a big splash a hundred yards from the far side. It's just as well. The lake is warm and clear, filled with fish in every color of the rainbow. Like the animals, the fish too seem interested in him, and fearless. But he has to move on. He's got to figure out where he is.

He swims underwater. Though he was running, he has no trouble holding his breath all the way to the far side, as in his dream. The air must have lots of oxygen in it. *This is going to be a delightful place to live.* He leaps up on shore and continues his run. As the mountain looms larger, David is disappointed. It's clearly not the Mount Zion in his dream. Indeed, the gardens he's been running through look more like the garden on Mount Zion than does this mountain. *Where are the two streams lined with fruit trees?* Suddenly he's there – too soon. The mountain is just a hill, and that special garden of his dream is not there. David runs up to the top. It is relatively bare, giving him a 360º view for miles. In all directions he sees low rolling hills, green meadows, lush foliage, spectacular flowers, fruit and ornamental trees, placid streams and rivers, serene lakes, and tall forests, but nothing at all he can recognize.

There's a dragon. I'll ask him, David thinks, and then chides himself. It was only in his dream that dragons were friendly and could talk. But this one seems quite friendly. He almost looks as if he wants to talk. *Oh, wow! He's huge! I'd better stay away. At least until I figure out where I am.*

"Please don't fear me," came to his mind. "I'm only here to help you. You are my king. I await your orders, sir."

A long pause. A remembering. Yes! In his dream the animals did use nonverbal communication. Why is half of his dream true, while the other half falls so far short? "Mr. Dragon! If you can understand me, wink at me."

The dragon gravely winks. "Yes, sir! Would you like me to round up the other animals, too, sir? We were going to greet you after Lord Logos left, but you ran away."

"I see. And I suppose you were able to keep up because you flew right along behind me."

"Yes, sir. Does that bother you, sir? If you are offended that I can fly and you can't, I will never fly again! I'm afraid you weren't made for flying, sir."

David laughs. "Ha! You saw my failed attempts! But I used to be able to fly, in a previous realm. Now, I don't know where I am. Tell me where I am, and tell me about this Lord Logos you mentioned."

"Logos is the Creator. He and His helpers created this world, and all of us, and the plants and fish, too. Then He brought you here. But you were still sleeping. He gave us a message to give you when you woke up. But you ran off before we could tell you."

Logos the Creator. Memories are coming back. Logos was in his dream. He was kind and good. David searches his memory. He had talked with Logos – they had made some kind of a deal. But he doesn't remember. "Well, kind dragon, please give me His message."

"He said to tell you that you are the king of the earth. He said you have a mate to help you rule. He said you and your mate will have offspring. They will ultimately fill the earth. We – all of us animals – are supposed to submit to you and your offspring, and to serve you however you want."

So David ben Judah returns with the dragon and meets all the other animals. Some he knows. But most are new; he makes up names for them. Among them is a tall, beautiful, iridescent snake with hands and feet like a man. He names it King Serpent. It is even more amazing than the dragon. But though he spends months meeting and naming all the animals, he finds none like himself, to be his mate.

But he does learn more about Logos. The more he talks with the animals who saw Logos, the more he remembers from his dream. Now he remembers the deal he had made with Logos. He had volunteered to rule over this world for Logos, and in return, Logos would give him a mate. They would have children and teach them about Logos, too.

David searches for his mate for a year. He asks all the sentient animals. He even gets the dragon to fly him all over the earth. There is no one like him. He is quite sure now that Logos promised him a mate. But neither she, nor the Mount Zion of his dreams, are anywhere to be found. "Mr. Dragon, we're done. The whole earth is just one big garden. Let's return to the mountain." In all his travels over the earth, the big hill he first explored is the tallest anywhere, so he calls it 'the mountain'. Riding on the neck of the great dragon, he realizes how important it is that the dragon uses telepathic speech. At the high speed at which they are flying, they could never communicate any other way, because of the wind rushing past their ears.

Telepathic speech, soul to soul… *maybe spirit to spirit?* In a sudden flash of inspiration, he knows what to do. When they reach the mountain, David jumps off. *If the dragon can hear his requests, surely Logos can, too.* "Logos," he thinks out loud. "Please come to me. I need You."

Instantly, Logos is there, clothed in overwhelming glory and splendor. David falls on his face in panic. This wasn't how he remembered Him! But Logos pulls him up to reassure him with a hug. "Don't be afraid of Me! I'm the same as when we last talked. It is you who've changed. You volunteered to descend to the new earth. Remember?"

Now David looks into Logos' face and remembers. "Why weren't You here? I've looked all over!"

"I've been here all along. I am always with you. But I do not intrude where I'm not asked. I was waiting to be asked. Now, you have a request?"

"Yes, Sir. I've been looking for my mate – the one You promised me. And I was sure there was a Garden of God on top of Mount Zion, but I can't find it, either."

"They are both right here – after a little work. The rest of the new earth is finished, but I intentionally left this special place unfinished, just so I could finish it with you. It is our Garden of Eden. Let's plant it together, you and I. When we're done, your mate will come forth out of the garden where she has been waiting for you all this time."

"Well, okay. But I'm afraid I'm not much of a gardener. Can't You just plant it for me and get it over with?"

"Ahh, but you have unique tastes. How can I plant it until I know just how you like it? You are the king here! You tell me what you would like, and we'll work together."

"Yes, Sir. To begin with, I want two streams coming from the center of the garden and down each side, heading east and west. I think they bubbled up from beneath a big stone altar on top, uh… right there." He points.

"It is done!" There are the streams and the altar from David's dream. Just like that. *Wow. This will be fun!*

"Now plant lots of trees, those ones with twelve fruits, on either side of the streams all the way down the hill."

Again, David hardly says the words when it is done. It is almost like he prophesies them into existence by himself, although he knows that can't be true. David now gets excited. He begins pointing and calling out for flowers, bushes, meadows, trees, paths, and everything else like he remembers the original Garden of God on Mount Zion just before he volunteered for the new earth.

Of course it comes out very different, because David is different. How could he possibly duplicate Tina's wild tastes? He is more logical, more structured and organized. It is still beautiful, but in a different way. To David it looks perfect. Better than perfect.

He walks to the altar. He had forgotten that the original altar was very old and cracked in two. This one looks like it just came off the showroom floor. David is pleased with the results. He kneels at the altar and looks up at Logos. "I'm ready now for my mate. You promised to marry us."

"Do you remember her? Wouldn't you like to meet her first? Get to know her? Are you sure you will like her?"

David tries to remember. Nothing comes up. Finally he admits, "Logos, I remember only Your promise. Nothing else. But it doesn't matter. I remember You! I fully trust you. You are my God and my King. You are good, wise, and powerful. You can fulfill Your promise in any way You like and I will be perfectly content."

"That's a good answer, David. I will honor your faith. She is right here with us, where she's been waiting and watching us all this time. She enjoyed seeing you create this garden!" A tall, radiant being appears beside Logos. He pushes her toward David, who jumps up, startled. "Take her hands and make your vows to her…" Thus Logos performs the wedding ceremony. When it is over, He says, "David ben Judah, you may kiss your new bride."

David has been studying her. She is clothed in splendor like Logos, but with golden hair to her waist and a veil over her face. Now David lifts the veil. He gazes into her face for a few moments, recognition dawning. It is Abby, still just as regal and stunningly beautiful as always, maybe more. Now the full memory returns, as they fall into each other's arms for their first kiss since the age of sin.

"Thank You, Logos! I remember her now! I remember everything! I remember our vow. We will rule this world for You, and raise up children for Your Kingdom, just as we promised. We will bring them all back to You at the end of the age. But what is this glorious dress Abby is wearing? I've never seen her so radiantly lovely!"

"That is her robe of righteousness, like the one I wear. You have one, too, if you bother to look down at yourself. You will retain it as long as you do not sin against Me."

David and Abby glance down at themselves, then back at each other. "It's beautiful!" Abby agrees, beaming. "But Logos, what do You mean by sin against You?"

"Just obey Me and don't do what I forbid."

"But You haven't forbade anything, Logos! You have given no rules at all! We have perfect freedom! Nothing on the whole planet is forbidden us!"

"I have forbidden killing the animals."

"Oh, is that all." David is relieved. "That's pretty easy. The animals are my friends. They're helpful and kind. Why would I ever want to kill any of them?"

"Okay. We'll try a different law then – make it a little tougher. These trees that you wanted all along both sides of the stream – the special ones with the twelve different kinds of fruits. I call them the Trees of Life. They are sacred to Me. I forbid you to eat their fruits or pick their leaves." Logos smiles at them, and is gone.

David is shocked by that. It's his favorite kind of tree! He planted hundreds of them up and down both sides of the mountain, all along the streams. He is disappointed. He was really looking forward to feasting from those trees every day! He should have kept his mouth shut about that first rule. But David really does trust Logos, and is willing to give up the Tree of Life if that is what He wants. So David and Abby put it aside and rejoice in each other. They make their home at the base of the hill near the western stream. On top of the hill near the altar seems a little too sacred. They go up only to worship, meditate, and enjoy the view.

Life is good. The waters of the stream are always sweet and invigorating. There are plenty of other fruits and green plants to eat. The animals all around are soon trained to care for their garden. The nearby lake is filled with colorful fish. The two suns shine every day. It never rains – the ground is watered twice a day from subterranean aquifers due to the pull of the two suns as the earth slowly rotates.

They are both young, strong, and healthy. They can run all day without tiring. They can swim to the bottom of the lake without running out of air. The dragon and his mate love to fly them to other places when they want to explore. The new world is vast and many-splendored. So many people helped restore it that there's nearly infinite variety. David and Abby even spot a few of their own suggestions that Tana and Tina had used in their final design.

Best of all, Logos comes anytime they call, and always meets with them for fellowship each Sabbath evening, right after the yellow sun sets and the sapphire sun rises. Then Logos teaches from His storybook in the stars. That thrills them. The stars tell the story of the fullness of the Kingdom and the triumph of the Father's Plan of the Ages.

After combining their thoughts, their memory is now restored on nearly everything from before they came to the new earth. Except they don't recall anything at all about Lucifer volunteering to be the tempter. So when beautiful King Serpent comes calling on them one morning, they don't suspect a thing. King Serpent is very pleasant.

"You and Logos have such a good time talking about the stars each Sabbath. It's like the stars make pictures and tell stories! What does it all mean?" King Serpent seems quite interested, so they carefully explain it to him.

When they finish, the serpent responds, "So, the way I understand it, at the end of the ages, the eternal Father, YHWH, gets everything. He becomes all in all, right?"

"Right. That's His Plan of the Ages."

"But what does that leave you?"

"We'll be complete in Him, as I told you. That's what life is all about, growing in oneness with our Creator."

"No, you're not understanding my question. What does that leave you? Yourselves? If He has everything, doesn't that leave you with nothing?"

"Huh?" What the serpent says seems to make sense. They had not thought of it like that before.

"I think I understand what's going on," King Serpent confides. "He tells you His plan like it's the best thing… and it is, for Him! But He doesn't say where you'll end up. Seems a bit selfish, don't you think? Doesn't He love you?"

"Of course He loves us! Look around! He gave us all this! It's a wonderful life!"

"But pretty soon you're going to die. Then you'll have nothing. Maybe that's why the eternal Father's plan has only Him in the end. Everyone else dies."

"What do you mean, dies?! We'll have children, teach them about Logos, and bring them back to the heavenlies with us after the earth is full. That's what He told us to do."

"Oh, I see. And how long will that take?"

"I don't know. Maybe five or ten thousand years."

"That long? The normal human lifespan is less than one thousand years, you know. Then you die."

"I don't believe you. Where did you hear that?"

"In the beginning, none of the patriarchs lived longer than a thousand years. That's because after Adam sinned, God wouldn't let anyone eat fruit from the Tree of Life. Say! Is that the Tree of Life by the stream? It is! I'll be…! Looks like you don't have a problem. Eat fruit from that and you live forever." Lucifer waits. He's very good at this. Not an extra word. He won't overplay his hand.

Abby falls for it. "Logos won't let us eat fruit from the Tree of Life, either. He didn't tell us why."

"What! Not again! It isn't the tree of the knowledge of good and evil – that fruit was like poison. Eating it made Adam and Eve die. But the Tree of Life… eating that fruit is essential to live long enough to complete your mission! Did Logos really forbid the Tree of Life? How could He? I thought you said He loves you. It's just not right!"

"You silly serpent! What could you know of such things! Logos is good. He always has good reasons for what He does. And the Father is infinitely wise. He knows what is best for us. We just trust Him."

"Besides," David adds, "you simply cannot say 'It's not right!' for anything Logos does. Everything He does is the very definition of what's right! You haven't known Him very long, have you."

Realizing he's losing them, Lucifer pulls out all the stops. "Ahh… but that is where you're wrong!" He smiles sweetly. "For I am a being of spirit, just like you, and just like Logos! This serpent's body is just a shell. Like you, I come from the heavenlies. In fact I was with Logos when He created the universe! I was with Him when He laid the foundations of the original earth, when the Morning Stars sang together and the angels shouted for joy! I watched Him mold the first Adam from a lump of clay and breathe into his nostrils the Breath of Life. Yes, I have known Logos for a very long time. And regardless of what He might have told you, I know that you've got to eat of the Tree of Life if you want to live long enough to complete your mission."

David and Abby look at each other, brows furrowed in concern. Abby shakes her head. So David tells the serpent, "This discussion is over! How dare you question what Logos said! He is Truth with a capital 'T'. If you really are a being of spirit like you said, you ought to know that! So spirit, get out of my serpent! Logos gave me authority over the animals. I command you to get out, in Logos' name!"

"Thank you, sir!" the serpent says. "That was the most awful, disgusting thing I can imagine. That spirit was bad! He tricked me, you know. He came to me and showed me this shiny new adversary badge… claimed he had gotten it from Logos Himself. He swore he had Logos' permission to use me to tempt you! What a lie!"

"Actually, he told you the truth." Logos suddenly is there, with Lucifer and all the heavenly host. "Lucifer here felt that you needed to be tested one more time, to prove to the universe that the Father's Plan of the Ages for maturing His sons has been successful." He smiles broadly at David and Abby. "You passed the test, with flying colors. I knew you would, but just the same I am very, very pleased!"

"You were correct, Logos, as always. I'll never make a good adversary again." Lucifer hangs his head. "My heart just wasn't in it. I was terrified that they would fail, the whole time. I'm turning in my adversary badge. Go ahead and destroy it. I'll never need it again."

Logos laughs uproariously. "Actually, My friend, you did far better than I expected! Your heart is changed, but your acting skills are just as good as ever. Why, I think even my archangels were holding their breath out of fear that you might succeed. I commend you for your faith in My promise that they would pass the test. Without such faith, your test would not have been believable."

"Logos," Abby is still concerned. "What did You mean when You said he told the truth? He said that the Father is selfish, and that You don't love us, and that we're not part of the Father's Plan of the Ages! And he said that You were wrong in commanding us not to eat from the Tree of Life, and that because of Your command, we're gonna die!"

"No, no," Logos laughs. "He never actually stated those things. He merely planted the questions in your mind to help you start thinking them. That is why his temptation was so good! Everything he actually said was technically the truth, even the part about the Tree of Life. If you're going to live forever, or even just live long enough to complete your mission here on the new earth, you do have to eat from the Tree of Life, regularly. I would indeed be wrong to keep you from it. Just like Lucifer told you."

"Then… then was Your command to us wrong?"

"Actually, yes. My command was wrong. I hereby rescind it. You may eat freely of the Trees of Life, and use their leaves for healing. I deliberately gave you a wrong command just for your time of testing."

"But that… that's inconceivable! You are Truth! How could You give a wrong command?"

"It's only wrong in the sense of being temporary and partial. Time is for growth and maturing beyond that. I've given many wrong commands in the past. I told the first Adam to kill a lamb, but only to point ahead to My sacrifice that would eliminate the need for animal sacrifices. I told Noah to eat meat. During the Ice Age after the Flood he would have died without the strength that meat provides. But that command is wrong now that you have thicker, warmer air. I told Abraham to kill his own son. Again, it was just for his testing. I would never have let him actually do it! I told the Children of Israel they had to keep My law of sin and death, knowing full well they couldn't keep it. They had to see their hopelessness before they could appreciate My great redemption. The list goes on and on."

"Does that mean we have to… have to question every command You give, to…to be sure it's true, I mean?" Boy, does that one hit a funny bone! Logos howls with laughter, and all the heavenly host join in. But David and Abby are not laughing. "Sir, this is really serious! Are you trying to shake our faith?!"

Logos rubs His eyes and quiets down. "No, no. I don't want to shake your faith. Just the opposite. You have become sons. The servant doesn't understand what his master does; he merely obeys. But the son is of a higher order. He knows his father. He understands his ways, so he can do his father's work. As sons of My Father, you look beyond My outward command to see His purposes behind it. The law is not the letter – it is the spirit. If I say, 'Don't eat from the Tree of Life,' as a son you look higher, to respond, 'OK. I trust Him. If He takes that away now, it means He's got something better for the future.'!"

David and Abby are nodding. They get it. "I think that's what we did. After You gave us that command I was a bit disappointed, but I never fretted about it. I figured You had Your reasons, which You would eventually let us know. I knew You would take care of us and enable us to fulfill Your commission."

"And that is exactly what I mean! That is why I am so pleased at your victory over the temptation. You didn't just stumble into it. Your hearts are truly Mine! You truly do believe! Once again you've demonstrated to the universe that My ways have won the Great Controversy. It's over. Even in the weakness of human flesh that tiny seed of true faith is the most powerful force in the universe! You have fulfilled the ancient prophecy that the seed of a woman must crush the head of Satan – that the devil would be crushed under the feet of My saints. It is now doubled and set. Satan is destroyed; My adversary is gone forever. Now even his memory shall fade away, for the times of testing are past. Now My Kingdom has fully come, even to this new earth. Be fruitful, David and Abby. Multiply and fill the earth. Rule over the fish, the birds, the animals. Bring Me a great harvest for My Kingdom, in fullest peace and joy! Never again will you have to prove yourselves under the burden of temptation." To punctuate His point, Logos holds up the adversary badge so all can see. It ignites in His flaming hand, and its ashes waft slowly away in the breeze.

Before He leaves, Logos allows David and Abby a quick glimpse of the Holy City, the heavenly New Jerusalem. It is nearly finished. It is still right over the top of Mount Zion. Now David understands why he felt that place was too holy for them to build their home there. As before, it is astoundingly huge, extending up and up beyond the sky.

"Yes, it's big. It will have room for all the children You bring Me!" Logos laughs at their bug-eyed expressions. "My saints in the heavenlies are building faster than you can procreate. We will go now, but call on Me anytime." He smiles, a twinkle in His eyes. "I am always with you. However, whenever you need it, I give you your privacy."

David and Abby return to their home at the base of Mount Zion, nearly overwhelmed at the love and praise they have received. They are the victors, king and queen of this new earth. They will never have to endure temptation or testing again. All they must do is bear children for the Kingdom. They stare at each other in their bedroom. *Huh. They don't even know how to do that anymore!*

They both are modestly covered in softly glowing robes of righteousness, beautifully clean and purest white. No reproductive organs are exposed. There is no seduction, no lust, no desire for selfish pleasures. All that remains is the purest love and devotion, coupled with a deep desire to fulfill all that Logos asked of them. Simply take dominion, multiply, and fill the earth! *Yeah, right. All their previous knowledge on what y' gotta do to have kids is out the window.* They stand there, staring at each other.

Abby shakes her head. "David, I want you to come in to me and give me children, but I honestly don't know how to get this thing off. I'm not sure Logos wants us to undress. He called this a robe of righteousness, and implied that only sin would remove it. Does that mean we have to sin to have children? That doesn't make any sense to me. Logos would never command us to sin!"

David agrees. "We just trust Him, Abby. He will never give us a command that we can't fulfill."

"I know! Hugs!" Abby says. "Logos loves hugs. I think everyone who came to the throne after we got out of the pit got hugs. Remember, He even gave one to Lucifer! Several! I heard Him say once that His Kingdom is fueled by hugs."

"Nah. We've been hugging, a lot, every day, ever since we married. Besides, when Logos hugged me, it wasn't sexual or anything. I just sensed this incredible pure love! I'll never forget it. I often feel like I'm still in His arms… like His hug has never ended."

Abby nodded. "Yeah. Same with me. But maybe it will be different when we hug each other and at the same time, think ardently about having children. In Logos' Kingdom, thoughts from the heart seem to be as important as deeds."

David smiles. That makes sense. "Okay, Abby my dear. Give me a hug and a kiss, just like when we stood at the altar before Logos. Except this time, we will both think children. No, no! Just one, just one! A son. We'd better not get carried away quite yet. We might get what we ask for!"

They are nearly the same height. A tall, regal woman and a big strong handsome man. They make a beautiful picture as they reach out and tenderly kiss, then draw each other into their embrace. Abby is correct. This time it is different. Their two robes of righteousness flame up and merge as one. They sense the difference, and lie down on top of the bed. There is no need to slip under the covers, as they are still clothed in blazing splendor. Even as heaven's historian, I bow my head and close my eyes in awe at the holiness of this moment. This is indeed a most intimate and private time, and I cannot see beyond the flames any more than you. As with all the angels, I make no attempt to pry or snoop into things that are none of my business.

However, from the beginning I have hinted at the big difference between bearing and raising children during the age of sin, with all its pains and heartaches, and God's original created design, when He commanded His perfect, sinless 'first Adam' to "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth." So I feel an obligation to my dear Readers to reveal the secret of what God originally intended when He gave that first mandate. Much later, after David and Abby have borne many other children as well, I go talk to them. They tell me the details of what happened that first night as they hugged and lay on their bed. I condensed it and wrote it out. I have their permission to share it with you in the abbreviated version that I have inserted below.

David and Abby told me that their hug was so full of peace and joy that they wanted it to never end. Truly the human sexual experience is but a dim and momentary taste of the glorious oneness they knew. Yet they got sleepy as the evening stars came out. Still locked in their embrace, they fell fast asleep. Their oneness of body and soul extended to their dreams, for they shared the same long and lovely dream.

In their dream, Logos came to them, smiling broadly. "You seek a son," He said simply. They bowed, nodding.

"But you have not specified to Me what sort of son you want. In this, My realm, I always give you freedom of choice." He grinned. "Any characteristic or character you wish." With that, He disappeared.

So in their dream, they spent hours discussing all the characteristics of the son they desired. They even wrote it down. After they had reached agreement, Logos appeared again. He held a tiny spark cupped carefully in His hands. He didn't look at what they had written, but He knew.

"You, David, were concerned that since you both are tall Caucasians, the Black or Oriental races may never be represented in your world. You decided to test Me on this, and chose a short, dark-skinned son with oriental eyes and jet black hair. You, Abby, were more concerned about his health and strength. You chose a stocky, muscular fellow, witty with a good sense of humor, exceedingly strong and fleet of foot, able to leap to prodigious heights and react with the rapid reflexes of a great cat. Both of you wanted the same things in him that I want in My children: attitudes of reverence, gentleness, kindness, love of wisdom, and eagerness to learn and follow My ways. I gladly grant all your requests." Here Logos held out the tiny spark. "David, take your son. He is come fresh from the Father of Lights with whom there is no shifting shadow."

David reached out tentatively, first one hand, then both cupped together like Logos was doing. "But, Logos! What do I do with it… er… him?"

Laughing, Logos lightly dumped the spark into David's outstretched hands. "Right now he is only spirit – a breath of life. Just hold him within your hearts until he is ready to be born into the physical realms." He disappeared.

David looked down in awe at the tiny spark. Then he turned to his wife. "Here Abby… our son… fresh from the Father of Lights…" He didn't know what to say.

But Abby was not quite so overwhelmed. She stepped very near, cupped her hands under David's, stared for a moment at the spark, then pulled his hands to her chest. "In this realm, the thought is the deed," she whispered.

"Ah, yes," David responded, as they both thought "Come into our heart, my son." With a thrill, they knew he had, and sure enough, when they opened their hands, the tiny spark was no longer visible.

The dream went on for several years. Or perhaps time just moves differently in this realm of spirit. Periodically they would peek down to their earth, into their bedroom, and see their physical bodies still locked together asleep in that flaming embrace. After a time it became obvious that the spark had settled in Abby's womb and was growing quite large. Yet her robe of righteousness merely expanded to keep her covered. They wondered how their son could be delivered into that physical realm while they were still living in the spirit realm, but they never got anxious.

Then one day Abby noticed that the bulge in her womb had become uncomfortably large. There was no pain, but Abby knew it must be time. "David! I need your help here, I think… I think it is time, but I don't know how to do this. I still see no way to open up this robe of righteousness."

"In this realm, the thought is the deed," David quoted. She nodded. "Son, it's time. Come forth." At that moment, the bulge in Abby's womb separated from her, much like you've all seen under a microscope when two cells divide. David caught the bundle and held it up. It was their son, tiny, but unmistakably bearing the characteristics they had chosen, and covered with his own bright robe.

"Wow!" Abby exclaimed. "No pain, no blood, no umbilical cord to cut, nothing. Nothing but a total joy and delight! I could get used to this!" The infant smiled at her and reached out his tiny hands. "But David… we forgot to name him. And how am I going to nurse…" She stopped and grinned. Looking into each other's eyes, they both quoted together, "In this realm, the thought is the deed."

Abby took the child and held him up to her breast. As she figured, the glowing robe of the infant merged with her own. Without exposing anything, he was clearly taking nourishment from her. David hugged them as she nursed him. "Seth," he said softly. "Yes. Seth," Abby nodded. They were agreed. Thus the years of their dream passed, with all the joys and none of the pain and sorrow of child-rearing. Seth grew to become all they had hoped for.

On the new earth, David and Abby awake the next morning, still embracing on top of the bed and still filled with the rapturous joy of their shared dream. As they talk about it, they discover a warm bundle between them. It is a sleeping boy! He appears to be about two years old, and wears nothing but a robe of righteousness.

"Seth!" Abby whispers. They get up quietly, but before they can go Seth awakens and spots them. His whole face lights up. "Daddy! Mommy!" he cries as he leaps up and sails into their open arms for his first hug in our realm.

"Wow!" Abby observes, holding him close. "Not one minute old, yet so strong, so mature! And he knows us! Already we're bonded together in love. That was no dream we shared, David. It was God's way of transporting that tiny spark of the breath of life from His realm to ours. Thank You, Logos, for sending Seth to live with us!"

CHAPTER 80 – THE KINGDOM ENDS

The next months are a dizzying dance of questions, trying to satisfy this brilliant young fellow's thirst for knowledge about himself, his purpose, and the God from whom he came. Seth is eager to listen and heed, respectful, honest, caring, obedient – all the character qualities that were so difficult for youngsters to learn in the age of sin.

Abby is delighted. "I knew childbirth wouldn't be as painful as it used to be on the old earth, but I had no idea it would be this easy!" she exclaims. "No birth pangs at all! And just think. No colicky crying or messing with diapers or potty-training. We never even had to teach him to talk!"

David laughs. "Those are easy. He was born with a robe of righteousness. We didn't have to train Seth to know good from evil. He loved wisdom and righteousness from his first day! He never had a sin nature or a temptation."

"Maybe that's why there's no tree of the knowledge of good and evil in this realm," Abby responds. When you love righteousness, you don't need to know about evil. All you need is to learn about God and His Law."

"What are you two talking about?" Seth asks. "Most of what you tell me I understand perfectly, but all that stuff you just said kinda flew swish, right over my head."

"Wow! Logos' words are coming true! He said that sin, and the law of sin and death, are fading away, burned up in the pit, and that even their memory would soon be gone."

"What is sin? What is the law of sin and death? What is the pit? What is temptation? What are good and evil? And why is knowledge of it a tree?" Seth is insatiably curious.

"Seth, look at me." David puts on a stern face. "I'm sorry we mentioned them. They are all from an age gone by, never to return. I will answer most of your questions as thoroughly as I can. But for your questions about sin and death, about evil and the pit, I'll just give you this answer. They are from a dark age that has passed away. Be glad they are gone! They are the opposite of all you enjoy here with us. Instead, I'll teach you about Logos and His Law. It is like light and darkness. Logos is the Light. Facing Him, the darkness of sin is just gone! There simply isn't any!"

"Thank you, Dad. I think I understand. I won't ever try to make darkness. I love the light! I want to know Logos."

David and Abby break into smiles. It is clear that the 'terrible twos' are gone. "Good answer, Seth, my boy. You'll be a man in no time with that attitude!"

"What is a man? Why is it different from a boy?"

"Well, when you're a man, you can get married, like your mom and me, and have children of your own…"

Abby laughs. "Sounds like he's already becoming a man. We're going to have to have more children soon, David, before Seth starts thinking about such things!"

Thus the new earth is populated. David and Abby spend their time raising and training their children and children's children, while the animals do most of the work tending the gardens. Now David is glad he planted so many of the Trees of Life along the two streams. They pick the fruit and send it to their descendants all over the world. As easy as it is to have children in this age of righteousness, in one thousand years the new earth is filled with trillions of joyous people. After all, there is no death, you know.

Logos meets with them every Sabbath and on all the Feast days, as always. Every time He comes He seems even more pleased with them. All over the world He comes to them, and never seems to want to leave again. The whole earth is filled with His glory. He teaches them the Dance – at least the earthbound version of it – and enjoys it with them every Sabbath morning. So it's not at all surprising when Logos comes to David and Abby to say, "Thank you, My beloved. You've succeeded in all that I commissioned you to do. It is time! Time for you to come Home."

"Oh! Is this the time that we return to the heavenlies and bring all our children to You – to Your Holy City?"

"Yes, bring them all to Me!" Logos beams. "But not just to My Holy City in the heavenlies, to our eternal Home! This is the end of the age and Father is calling us all Home. Our real Home. For the final Feast of Tabernacles."

David and Abby are so impressed, they are speechless. So Logos continues. "Tell everyone that when they come to Mount Zion to celebrate Sukkot, they will not return. The Feast is fulfilled, as is My purpose for the new earth. We're going Home!" They have never seen Him so excited. This seems to be a big thing for Him. They wonder how often He has actually been Home with the eternal Father.

"But Logos," Abby asks. "I thought You said You were finishing up Your New Jerusalem, Your Holy City in the heavenlies, for us to live with You there?"

"I thought so, too, Abby. My Holy City is finished, just today, with places for all of you. But I don't know. Father sometimes likes to surprise Me. I was really not expecting Him to call us Home so soon. But aren't you eager to go? This is what we've been working toward all our lives, throughout all the ages! This is Father's Plan of the Ages, finally completed! This is where I turn over My Kingdom to Father so He may be all in all! All we've been, all we've built, all we've ever done… Can anything else matter?!" Logos is literally bouncing with excitement.

So they pass the word. Everyone is told to wrap up his earthly affairs and come to the Feast prepared to join the Father in eternity. Of course they will have to say good-bye to all their animal friends. Though animals now populate both the heavens and earth, they don't have eternal souls and won't be able to enter the Father's realm. Everyone is sorry about that. This world has been so perfect, it is going to be tough to leave it behind. A few even express regrets.

On the first day of the Feast, before it really begins, Logos shouts the good news. "Today Sukkot is fulfilled! All the Feasts and all the prophecies have been fulfilled. Time is no more. We're going Home to the eternal Father! Finally you shall see His face, as I promised." He then calls, "Father! It is done! We are ready to come Home!"

There is a momentary blur as Logos, His Bride, and all His brothers and servants evacuate this bubble called space-time. It quickly passes, for our true Home is not so far away as we've been told. Now they're with the Father in that mystic realm called eternity. It is a realm which we time-dwellers cannot comprehend. A realm where all is known, all is settled, and there is no possibility of change, for all is perfect. You could not understand such a realm, dear Reader, any more than I can explain it to you, but we must try. There are no words, but I must put it into words, to give us an inkling of what 'is' there (for in the realm of eternity, there is no 'was' or 'will be', only the eternal 'is').

Logos is saying, "Father! I come as You asked. I have completed all that We planned. I've not only won My Bride without losing a single one, but now I've won everyone else as well! Meet My brothers and My servants! They have all bowed the knee in willing submission to Me. Satan is destroyed – he and all the sin and death he fathered are no more. All You sent forth in immaturity, I return mature and perfected, that You may be all and in all. Now I subject Myself to You as You subjected all these to Me."

Father laughs. "My risk paid off! I risk My Son, and get back an entire family! Well done, My Son! I couldn't be more pleased with You! Welcome Home! You've returned totally victorious. My Plan of the Ages has worked out in every minutest detail. You have honored My holy name.

"So tell Me," He chuckles. "Have You successfully 'abolished all rule, authority, and power'?" (1 Cor 15:24)

"Yes, Father. The last was David and Abby and their descendants ruling the new earth. They've given up their rule, said good-bye to their animals, and are here with Me. There is no more rule, authority, or power anywhere in the universe. Everything is in perfect harmony with Me."

"Good! And did You ever finish Your Holy City, the heavenly New Jerusalem above Mount Zion?"

"Yes, Father. I even made places for everyone who was living on the new earth, though it looks like we won't be needing them now that we're all Home."

"What about You? Was it worth the pain and sorrow? Are You happy with Your Bride? Are You satisfied with the way My Plan of the Ages has worked out? Are You ready to return to the oneness We enjoy as God of all and in all?"

"Oh yes, Father! More than satisfied. Delighted beyond measure. Thank You for sending Me into time. I am deeply moved, enriched, by the changes I was able to experience. You have no idea what a joy it is to live within time!"

"Ahh… I've not been as distant as it may have seemed at times, My Son. I have a very good idea what it is like, for I hold every moment of time within the palm of My hand. Do You think I didn't enjoy the Dance, the Feasts, through You? But tell Me one last thing. You've ruled a glorious universe. Is it difficult for You to give up all that rule, power, and authority to submit Yourself back to Me?"

"No, Father, it's not difficult. I am of the same essence as You. Our essence is self-giving love! All I gave for My precious ones is just as easy to return to You. It came from You and belongs to You. I only give back what is Yours."

"No regrets?"

"Regrets? Father! I am blessed beyond measure!"

"Aren't You just a teeny weeny bit sad that it's all over? Maybe just a slightest wish that You still had it before You to enjoy the process all over again?"

"Father! You speak as if You enjoyed the process as much as I! But no. I have no desire to do it over again. The risk for You is too great! The temptations I suffered in the flesh… You've no idea! You almost lost Me there in the desert! And in the Garden of Gethsemane when all had forsaken Me… I shudder to think how close I came to just calling it all off and commanding the angels to yank Me out of there! How did You bear the suspense? I would not put You through that again for all the joy in the world. I have no regrets that time has now reached its end. There can be no regrets, since Your Plan of the Ages has been perfectly fulfilled. I am at peace."

Father smiles. "Good answer, My beloved Son. Now I truly know You have won the victory. Your selfless love for Me perfectly reflects Mine for You.

"Now, before You and Your blood-bought saints join Me here in eternity, I have a little surprise gift for You."

"Gift for Me, Father? But You've already given Me everything! What more could You possibly give?"

"Ha! I've given You nothing except all You've just returned to Me. Lucifer's last temptation was valid! If You return it all to Me, You are left with nothing for Yourself. But I love to give, just as much as You love to return it. So tell Me, what is the best gift any father can give his son?"

"His approval. And You've already given Me that…"

"No, even more than that, his time. Now that You have given Your all for Me, I give You My time."

For once, Logos is stumped. "Your time? But, Father, You are eternal. Changeless. Complete. And perfect in every way. You cannot enter time lest You change! How can You possibly give Me Your time?"

"Well, well. Perfect. Complete. Changeless. Have You forgotten almighty? That almighty part is important, too. Oh, and don't forget all-knowing and all-wise."

CHAPTER 81 – THE AGES YET TO COME

It only takes a moment for Logos to check with every member of His Bride, for they are one. It's obviously a riddle, but no one can figure it out, at first.

Then David hatches an idea. "Sir? I've been thinking about Lucifer's last temptation. He implied that we would all be just swallowed up into the eternal Father, to not exist anymore as individuals, even You! But that doesn't seem right. I don't think Father will do that. He truly is all-wise and all-powerful, as He just said. I think He can figure out a way to be all in all, yet still leave us as individuals. He can come here and dwell within us by His Spirit like You do! Like Your Bride is one with You, yet still many members."

"Impossible," Logos replies. "Father dwells in eternity. Time can never touch eternity, no matter how many ages roll by. And Father sure cannot enter time, lest He change! There is just no way. You who are bound by time cannot understand. You will, only when you fully enter eternity."

"Is anything impossible with God?" It is Abby, who has just caught the same vision as her husband.

"Yeah!" Tana agrees, lighting up. "If Father YHWH comes here instead of us going to eternity with Him, then we can be one with Him and still enjoy the New Jerusalem You've built for us. And then we could still visit our animal friends on the new earth!" She gets excited by that idea.

"You don't understand," Logos repeats. "Time itself is come to an end. It's the end of the ages. Father's Plan of the Ages is finished. Done. Wrapped up, tied up with ribbons and a bow on top. We return to eternity, where YHWH is all there is – all in all! Just as prophesied. Right, Father?"

"Right…" Father responds slowly, with this huge grin all over His face. "Only You and I can possibly understand. Now that we've finally got that all settled, I still have that little gift for You, My beloved Son. Will You receive it?"

"Of course, Father. I gladly accept whatever You wish to give Me, so I may return it to You, so You are all in all and the ancient prophecy is finally fulfilled."

Father gives Him a cheery package wrapped in brightly colored party paper, tied in ribbons and a flowery bow on top. "Go ahead, Son. Open it. It's for now." He sits back, folds His arms across His chest, and grins like a schoolkid.

Logos behaves like anyone who grew up too soon. His eyes grow big, He carefully takes the package, admires its big bow, tips it up and looks underneath, shakes it holding it up to His ear, then meticulously begins the unwrapping process, being careful to save the bow. When He finally gets inside, He discovers an ancient scroll. "Why, Father! It's Your Plan of the Ages, all wrapped up like I just said. But why are You giving it to Me? We've finished it now, haven't We? This is everything that I just returned to You."

The Father sits there grinning and stroking His beard.

So Logos looks again at the scroll. The title reads, 'God's Plan of the Ages'. Underneath, in small letters, is '*Revised*'. Logos gasps. "Father! What's this little 'Revised' here for? I've never heard of any revision to Your Plan of the Ages. It's already perfect, from beginning to end. There is no possibility of revision, even a little one!"

Father laughs heartily, then smugly says, "I told You I had a little gift for You. That little 'Revised' is My gift."

Logos is utterly mystified. Father is still laughing. "Maybe You should read it, Son."

So Logos goes through the ancient scroll. It's exactly as He remembered it, from back before the beginning of time. Not a single change or addition. All the way to the last chapter, when the Kingdom ends and everything returns to the eternal Father, that He may be all in all. *But wait!* There seems to be another chapter at the end that He never saw before. It is titled, "The Ages Yet to Come." It begins, "This chapter is added as a gift to My beloved Son, upon His triumphal return Home with His Bride and His saints."

Logos shakes His head. "You've got to be kidding, Father! This is impossible! You're just pulling My leg."

"I don't kid. And I specialize in the impossible, as You know. That's why they call Me the Almighty. And all Your creativity? You got it from Me. But You've been away far too long. I am Your Father, Son! Like any father, I want to spend some time with You. Some good, quality time!"

"But… but You are eternal! Outside of time! It's Your nature, Your very essence. You cannot change. For You to step into time, why… time itself would have to change! The entire structure of the universe would be altered."

"Very true. Is that a problem? They don't call Me 'the Almighty' for nothing, You know. Shall We go?" He stands.

Logos stands beside Him, putting His hand into His Father's hand, as trillions of the heavenly host cheer and clap and scream their delight. Together they take a step – it is just a small step, mind you, for eternity always was very close to time – into the realms of time and space. Logos gapes in joyous astonishment. Father always did like to surprise Him, but this takes the cake. Time and space have indeed adapted to allow the invasion of the eternal Father. You and I, dear Reader, though we are time-dwellers, have never known it like this. For one thing, that ancient Law of Entropy, the law of wearing out, running down, moving inexorably toward chaos, the dread law of decay and death, that infamous old Second Law of Thermodynamics, has been abolished. No longer will mankind need to eat continually of the Tree of Life to live forever.

This affects other laws as well. For example, the laws of celestial mechanics are altered. Planets are fixed in perfect orbits. Suns, whirling around in their galaxies, will whirl so forever. In this new realm of eternal time, eternity has captured time, forever fixing the dynamics of the cosmos.

The very nature of suns burning up their mass to give off light and energy is changed. Just as when the Light of the World invaded the two dead suns of the new earth, now the eternal Father invades every atom in the universe, replacing the nuclear energy which can decay with a whole new form of energy: the eternal Father Himself. His energy is infinite. It cannot decay or burn up or explode. The stars are now stable and will burn forever in all their splendor.

Logos is awed as He surveys the "Revised" universe with His Father. *How can everything still be moving and yet be fixed, changeless in their very movement?*

"Do You like it, My Son?" The Father is smiling.

"Oh yes, Father! It's magnificent! How did You do it? By definition, time had a beginning and must have an end, but You have changed the very definition itself to permit endless time! It seems impossible!"

"Ahh… You are the one who made it possible!" Father laughs and claps His Son on the back. "In the universe You originally created, You allowed for the possibility of sin to mature Your Bride. As long as there was any possibility of sin, of course I could not enter Your realm of time and space. But after the ages of sin, You cleansed the universe to remove not only all traces of sin and even the memory of it, but also the possibility of sin! Your victory was perfect and complete. It was Your absolute success over sin that allowed Me to do what I've always wanted to do, that is invade Your realm. Can You imagine the monumental tragedy if You had failed, and left some insignificant sin or possibility of sin somewhere in the universe, and I came here? Why, with My eternal Word broken and My holiness so compromised, I would cease to be God, which would cause You and Your universe to cease to exist! So You see, it is Your own victory that prepared the way for Me!"

Logos laughs. "Father, do You realize – this is the first time I have ever heard You talk in anything but the present tense. Everything in eternity is always present, yet You just used the past tense, the future tense, and even the past and future perfect tenses. You really are here within time!"

"First time this… first time that… everything I do here will be a first time for Me, for I've not dwelt in time before. This is going to be fun! May I join the Feast and the Dance with You? I've always wanted to, You know."

So this becomes another glorious feast celebrating the wedding anniversary of Logos and His Bride. First, all who had been married on the new earth get their resurrection bodies and are united with their wives. Then they dance together and with the heavenly host. Father dances with Logos and His Bride, and then with each of His brothers and servants. The Dance extends throughout the galaxies. It's the greatest dance the universe has ever known. Finally they feast together in fulfillment of the Feast of Sukkot, in which even the eternal Father YHWH now dwells with His people. Their joy is truly beyond description.

This new eternal-time realm is the fullness of which everything before was a dim picture. Now nothing is ever really finished; everything now has a continuing aspect. It's rather like those hugs that were never really quite over. Now it's all like that. The Dance is never really over. The Feast is never really over. It's the party that goes on and on, getting better and better, and you never have to go home, crash into bed, and wake up with that dreaded hangover.

In the midst of all this partying, Father hushes everyone to give a speech. God's dialog with His people is nonverbal, Spirit to spirit, so everyone gets the full impact directly to his mind. But I'll put it into words for the sake of any of my dear Readers who've not yet mastered nonverbal Kasdan.

"We're celebrating My Son's victory and return Home with all the saints. Logos – My eternal Word whom I sent out at the beginning of time – has finished His perfect work and returned it all to Me. He has thoroughly cleansed His universe from even the slightest taint of sin, and from any possibility of unholiness. Satan and all his evil works are destroyed. Logos has overcome, and all His enemies are vanquished. The Light of the World has finally banished all darkness. The law of sin and death, and the lake of fire which it spawned, is gone. Even that last terrible enemy, death, is no more. Therefore, I have the joy of invading this, His space-time universe, with eternity. No longer are there two separate realms; now only space-eternal-time exists. This is His reward for a job well done! Logos no longer needs to depend on Our Spirit to bring Him My perspective from the realms of eternity. No, now Our Spirit has brought Us back together in perfect oneness, as We were from before time began. And now My Holy Spirit dwells in fullness within each of you, too. So you are free! Totally free! You all have My wisdom, My knowledge, My understanding, My love, My joy, My authority and power, and My motivations and desires welling up within by My Spirit. I'm safe here in you! You know Me, and I know you. My nature and character dwell in you in the perfection of holiness. Thus My ways can never be compromised, no matter what you desire, no matter what you do, for you've all seen in full the consequences of choosing any way in opposition to Mine. You have all partaken of the divine nature. Now nothing is impossible for you!"

The myriads of angels and people shout and sing praise to YHWH and Logos, and rejoice in the amazing freedom they now have. They have no more disease or pain. War, strife, anger, and rebellion are abolished, since everyone is filled to the fullest with the Spirit of YHWH. Everything, even trees, flowers, rocks, animals, birds, and fish are in perfect harmony with the Father. Now everyone can do whatever he pleases, as all are filled with the knowledge and wisdom of God. They love all that God loves, and hate what He hates. No longer children who must have rules, they understand God's ways and devotedly walk in them. Isaiah's prophecy that 'every knee shall bow' is more than fulfilled, as every heart is in tune with the Father's heart.

I will try to describe the new heavens and the new earth to you, dear Reader, as most of you have not been there yet. When the eternal Father invaded time, a lot changed, as I said. For one thing, all barriers are gone. Access is total, for anyone, anytime, from the lowest realms under the earth (there are no hells) to the very highest heavens. With but a thought and a step, anyone can enter the physical realm or the throne room or any place in between. Even the lowest servant of God can travel with a thought to the most beautiful planet of the brightest star of the grandest galaxy and live there as long as he chooses. And there are plenty of these most beautiful places to go around!

The needs of the physical body forced limitations on primitive man – much of his time was spent sleeping or working for food, shelter, and security. All that is gone. Man as perfected by the divine nature has no needs. He eats and drinks for the pure fellowship of it (with no need to use the bathroom). He breathes for the joy of smelling the fragrances, but has no need of air. With his fully redeemed body, he is filled with eternal Life. Every cell, every atom in his body is fully alive and cannot die or turn against the body. Nothing can harm him, because every atom in the universe is also filled with the eternal Father, eager to only bless him and be his constant delight. So, for example, someone can play in the mud and never get dirty, walk on the sun and not be burned, or do acrobatics in the airless coldness of outer space and not freeze or suffocate.

Man is like the angels, like God Himself, a perfect blend of male/female characteristics with no need for sex and no need to procreate. Husbands and wives are joined by God into a complete person, like Adam before Eve was taken out. But before you find yourself disappointed, you must realize that the joy of sexual union was but a dim picture of the satisfaction and joy each perfected person now feels continually. More than that, as I said, the heavenlies are fueled by hugs, and they are granted to everyone, often! People like Marjah who never married are not left out. Her husband always was Logos. Her resurrection body has now been completed and perfected by Him so she lacks nothing. If possible, she enjoys His hugs even more. No longer does anyone greet with a stiff handshake and a formal 'how-do-you-do'. Now you greet with a warm hug and a holy kiss, with not the slightest fear that you might be accused of infidelity or immorality.

This glorious realm has no ownership. There is more than enough of every good thing for everyone to have as much as he wants, with no possessiveness, greed, or lust. No one wants to accumulate stuff anyway. Relationships are what really matter. In the old earth, if you took my home I might be upset, for I worked hard to make it nice. But in the new earth, there is no labor in that sense. I can create a home by speaking the word, and if you like it, I am glad to let you have it and create a better one elsewhere. Oh, things are still fun, but all covetousness is gone. Everyone gladly shares everything in harmony and joy.

But in talking of 'home', I must be careful to not mislead you, dear Reader. There are two kinds of homes and they are very different. The heavenly homes where everyone dwells are not at all 'mansions in the sky' as some imagine. They are dwelling places for individuals within the many-membered Bride or within the body of the 'last Adam'. Each has his place and his function within the body, with Logos as his Head. This New Jerusalem appears in the physical like a fabulous golden city, with streets of gold, foundation of jewels, gates of pearl, and topped with the glorious throne of God, but to the spirit dwellers it is more like a body of living cells. Everyone lives there all the time, in spirit, each with his specific place and function.

This Holy City, this New Jerusalem, is our heavenly 'Home', the center of God's government in the universe, where God dwells with, in, and through His people. So it is rather like a bridge between the highest heaven and the physical realms, though this bridge is made of people. The new heavens and the new earth are but a step down, where they can enjoy their animal friends or romp through the heavens with their relatives and loved ones and with Logos in the Dance. It is but a step up to the highest heavens, where Father YHWH's throne sits in matchless splendor. There people often go to get a hug, or to bow in worship and tell Him again how much they love Him and how grateful they are for this wondrous eternal life. YHWH's children are continually flowing up and down this bridge, for there is no night and the 'last Adam' never sleeps.

With the barrier, the veil, between the spiritual and the physical realms gone, this Holy City remains visible above the Garden of God on the renewed earth. It is the point of contact for the entire physical realm. Though one in spirit, the last Adam is still made of many members, and they are still physical individuals! Though spiritually dwelling in unity in the Holy City, each member is still free to move about the universe. So now we must talk about that second kind of 'home'. The physical realm, though redeemed and perfected, is still physical! It's much easier to care for now that Lucifer and his host are doing their jobs under Logos' original commission. They maintain the created order in perfect harmony, displaying God's glory throughout the physical realm. So each person (using his redeemed and perfected physical body) is free to create his physical home any way he likes and anywhere he likes – on the restored earth, or on any of a zillion other earth-like planets.

It is these physical homes that I'd like to describe. It might surprise you to learn that human creativity (we are in the image of God, remember) is nearly unbounded. Now with each individual totally free to create whatever his heart desires, you would be amazed at what comes up. The activities we enjoyed on earth are not gone – they are only purified. For example, those who loved to play golf can create an entire world of golf links, which they can play with their friends without ever getting tired, and with each hole more spectacularly beautiful than the last.

Those who loved the arts can create a mansion with a million rooms, with fantastic works of art on every wall and glorious statuary down every hallway. One who loved stately southern plantations can create a manor with tall columns just like in the movies, and find no end of people who love to work his fields of cotton or dance the Viennese waltz with him across his grand ballroom. One who loved the railroads can have an entire world crisscrossed with tracks and filled with steam engines puffing around at his command. One who loved the fine old cars can have a world of roads and racetracks, on which they drive their own classic Bentley or Duesenberg or race in their own Indy 500 with their own Maserati or Ferrari. Those who love music now find they can play any instrument they choose, with a home that is a big amphitheater and any number of others who love to join their orchestra or band. Forest worlds fill with hiking trails and pristine campsites, though some prefer living in a city highrise surrounded by all the comforts of home and with vast 'shopping' malls within easy walking distance. However, I must admit that the nature of things like 'shopping' and 'competition' are different, since everyone loves to serve each other.

This doesn't mean that everyone is treated equally. Equality is a myth perpetrated by mediocre souls who hate it when others achieve excellence. Nor is this communism or socialism, in which an elite few live off the backs of the impoverished masses they control. No, this is what God wanted all along: rule from within each heart. Each person is delighted with his place in the 'last Adam', without any jealousy or pride, because he knows and loves the King. Yes, Logos is still the King, but it's a Kingdom of love! Logos doesn't 'rule' anyone, as everyone is self-ruled out of love. I'll list the four general classes in this '**last Adam**'.

The lowest class is the **servants of God.** It includes the majority of humanity. These are all who rejected God and lived only for self during the age of sin. Now they serve continually, gladly, eager to do anything for others out of pure gratefulness that their King burned up their wicked natures in the fires of the Abyss and redeemed their true natures to be all that He created them to be. Some of these did some good deeds, and all good deeds are rewarded. But during the age of sin true selfless good deeds were rare among the servant class; now they're a way of life. They aren't the creators of those physical homes – they love to serve the others, as workers, drivers, dancers, musicians, or even 'competitors' in a friendly race or game of golf.

The next higher class is the **brothers of Logos / sons of God** – all who served Him in selfless devotion during the age of sin. They worked for Logos, giving their lives in His service as a missionary, pastor, social worker, handyman, parent, caregiver, maid, teacher, or a million other ways. They served because they cared. They did it out of love for their Lord and Savior. During the age of sin, they took the lowest place as servants, so now they are elevated to places of honor in the Kingdom and served by the lowest class.

Among the sons of God is an even higher class. They didn't just serve Him during the age of sin. They knew Him, walked with Him, followed the leading of His Holy Spirit, and enjoyed sweet fellowship with Him and His saints. Theirs was not a labor of love; it was a love relationship. They had entered the Kingdom even during the age of sin. Theirs was not obedience to the law; it was the freedom of the Spirit. Theirs was not merely a hopeful faith or a choice to determine to believe despite the circumstances; theirs was a fully knowing faith, a trusting faith independent of circumstances. They had walked in the Sabbath rest even while the rest of the world suffered the bondage of heavy labors. They had ruled over small things; now they are given the highest place as **kings and priests** unto God and commissioned to rule with Him over all Creation.

Some of these ruling sons of God were martyrs during the tribulation: 720,000 husband/wife pairs overcame unto death. They are not really a higher class than the kings and priests. But theirs is a different relationship, more female than male. They are the **Bride of Logos.** She dwells in the highest heaven in oneness with her husband the King, shares His throne as His queen, and helps convey His thoughts and desires to the other kings and priests.

The **Kingdom of God** is the relationships of all these people to one another and to Logos their Head, for the Kingdom of God is relationships. They are not equal, but each is equally precious, regardless of his gifts and calling – separate, yet bound together into one body by love. It's almost impossible for us time-dwellers to wrap our minds around this, but we must try. Start with this. There is only one God and He is one, totally, perfectly one, truly "all in all." (1 Cor 15:28) This one God is manifest to our realm in three aspects: the Father, His Son, and His Holy Spirit, in a tri-unity already beyond our comprehension. And now the Son also is manifest to our realm in three aspects: the Head (Logos), His body (the last Adam), and His Bride (now the 'heart' or 'soul' of His body). Be careful when you take these apart! They are all unified in God, who is all and in all, as I said. It is the relationships that hold them all together – love relationships, for God is love.

From the beginning I insisted that God, being love, must have a beloved. Now He has His beloved: the many-membered 'last Adam', now simply called **God's family.** These are the 'servant-sons of God', for even the highest started out as His servants. Regardless of class or status, this love relationship binds them together. It is really only one body filling the universe – a many-membered body – with each member ruled not in power from above, but in a love response to the Head from within each heart. Each one freely does whatever he or she pleases, yet this love keeps him or her in perfect harmony with the rest of the body. This last Adam is physical, living in a physical realm, yet he is also divine, for now the human has now partaken of the divine nature. In bowing to Logos as a bondservant, 'Adam' has now been lifted up to perfect freedom.

As I said, everyone is free to come and go as he pleases. Some choose to go elsewhere, to inhabit other planets, other galaxies, or to explore the many glories and infinite variety of the universe. It's easy, and again, it is but a step to return to the Dance or the Feast or the Throne to renew their relationships and refuel their lives with more hugs. Different people like different things, and this perfect realm provides all that anyone could ever want.

Seth-Selena is one of those honored sons. Now he's filled with hugs, worship, and fellowship, so he steps off to the edge of the universe. Please understand, dear Reader, that the universe is much larger than you may have been taught, and this is very, very far out. No one has ever been here before, for the universe seems almost limitless even during the Dance. But as with anything in the created space-time realm, even the universe has its boundaries. Seth-Selena is there. He stares out into the blackness beyond. "It just doesn't seem right!" he says. "Even here, the darkness must flee before King Logos, the Light of the Universe. Let Him speak through me. **Let there be light**!"

Nothing happens. Spirit within instructs him, "I am already here, My son, even in the darkness of empty space. However, you cannot see Me in the physical realm without an angel or a light bearer of some sort."

"Oops. Let there be two light bearers, a hot red one and a cool blue one, circling each other. And let the Light of the World shine through them!" The new stars blaze forth, beyond the edge of the universe, which quietly expands to include them. It turns out pretty good, for an amateur.

So he begins refining his new solar system. Logos gives him the freedom to make it as he wants; nearby in case He's asked, but not interrupting. Seth-Selena winds up with a lovely earth-like planet suspended between the two suns. But this new world is not just level, fertile soil watered by hidden underground aquifers. No, this new world is more like the old earth during the age of sin, as his parents, David and Abby, described in childhood bedtime stories.

However, Seth-Selena was born on the new earth. He'd never seen the old earth. He'd never even seen pictures. When David and Abby had told him what it was like, they'd used a bit of hyperbole in the telling. Or perhaps the hyperbole was in Seth's own mind – his vivid imagination running wild. So his new world has humongous mountain ranges in it, with majestic snow-covered peaks towering ten miles above the fruited plains. It has torrential rivers, raging down over mile-high waterfalls. It has picturesque valleys nestled amongst the high crags, gaping chasms and expansive caverns, volcanoes blasting lava high in the sky, vast waterless deserts, dark rainforests where light never reaches the ground, and continents with ice and snow piled high at the poles. The storms, even the seasons, can get really extreme! The planet is half covered by oceans, dotted with lovely atolls and tropical island paradises, and plumbed with undersea canyons ten miles deep.

Seth-Selena finishes each area with plants. Again, he goes for the exotic: flowering seaweed flowing up from the deep trenches, weird cactus and lichens in the deserts, twisted, struggling pines and junipers high in the Alpine regions, and wild profusions of flowers, bushes, and fruit and ornamental trees in all the oddest places.

Finally it looks like the pictures he carries in his mind. Now for the birds, fish, and animals. He doesn't just want the tame, helpful ones, he also wants some wild and fierce ones like his father described. Creating them is a fair bit tougher than it looks, dear Reader. I suggest you not try this at home. Seth-Selena is patient. He works on them for years. His whales and dinosaurs are huge. His mammoths, sabertooth tigers, and dragons are astonishing!

All this work takes a long time. In fact, it is sixty years before he is satisfied with it. He is rather awed that Logos by Himself did the whole thing from nothing in six days. Finally Seth-Selena is pleased with the results. "Logos, I need Your help in this last step," he calls. "Please, separate me into male and female, like Adam and Eve. We want to procreate a race of people to fill and rule our new planet."

"Are you sure? You'll be earthbound, limited, no longer able to freely join us in the Dance or the Feast or step up to My throne. You'll be limited to the second heaven, the realm coinciding with your earth's atmosphere (the first heaven). Only spirits or resurrection bodies can reach the highest heaven. Are you quite sure this is what you want?"

"Yes, Logos. I'm willing to accept those limitations."

"What is your motivation?"

"You know, Lord! You know my heart!"

"Yes, but I don't pry, and I love to hear your words!"

"There is no procreation dwelling in the heavenlies. But Your Kingdom must ever grow – not just expand in size but in numbers, too. I am committed to raising up new sons for Your Kingdom, to bring back to You!"

"And your motivation for making your world so rugged? The first earth was not made that way. It only became tortured and twisted because of sin."

"I know, Lord. The close passes of the planets made the old earth a dangerous place to live. But don't You agree that the steep mountain peaks with lovely little valleys nestled in between, the rushing rivers and waterfalls, the mighty ocean waves, the abyssal deeps, the island hideaways and colorful coral reefs, and even the dry painted deserts, have a special beauty all their own? I love that rugged beauty!"

"And the danger that goes with it? Do you take for granted your resurrection body, which now flies above the physical realm and its dangers? A physical body is subject to physical laws, such as the law of gravity pulling you down to fall from those mountain peaks, or your need for air when exploring those undersea coral gardens."

"It is a theoretical risk only. There is no real risk as long as we maintain right attitudes, for Your angels will always protect us. Besides, haven't You ever done anything with a little risk? That's part of the thrill of it!"

"Ahh! I see." Logos frowns, eyebrows furrowed. "It is a thrill to do something dangerous, not knowing whether the outcome will be good or bad. No. I never have. I always knew the outcome would be good, even for something very risky like offering My life, for I had perfect faith in Father's Plan of the Ages. However, Father understands! He did something very risky. He sent Me into the world to die, not knowing whether I would be victorious or not!"

"Serious? I thought Father knew everything."

"He does. But on that one thing, Father told Me I could have failed. I could have sinned. If I had sinned, even once, I would have had to die for My own sin, and Father would have lost Me forever, and everyone else, too. Our plan of redemption would have failed. It was a risky plan."

"That's like me, Logos! If I go to my new world as a man, and climb those mountains with a proud or rebellious heart, Your angels will not be able to protect me. If I fall, I could kill myself. Like You, I must remain holy to avoid the risk. But You did it! You kept Yourself perfectly holy! And now that all Creation has seen the full consequences of sin, You said there's no possibility of us falling into sin again."

"True. But I eradicated all temptations and reminders of sin. Even redemption's storybook in the stars is gone. Now you've built reminders of sin back into your world."

"What?! No, Lord! I didn't put the ruggedness back into my world to remind people of the age of sin! Now I think I understand what Your problem is. You created a non-risky, benign world, with level land, shallow lakes, gentle streams, and friendly animals. All the risk came from Adam's sin. But Lord, You were creating a safe and secure playpen for Your first babies! We are no longer babies! We don't need the playpen! From this day forth all Creation will no longer look at the rugged beauty to think of sin and its consequences. No! They will see a vast world with tremendous variety and creativity, with many things to see and do, no longer a playpen, but an adult place to live with zillions of exciting and delightful choices!"

"You win, My beloved. Truly My babies have grown up. Beyond even what I ever imagined. I concur. From this day forth I decree that any 'dangerous' rugged beauty shall remind mankind no longer of the sin of My first Adam, but of the maturity of My last Adam!"

"And that is the purpose of the 'Revised' chapter of My Plan of the Ages!" Father YHWH joyfully interjects, for being in and through everything, He cannot help but hear their conversation. "Now My children are grown up, fully mature and free to be and do all their hearts' desires. Now nothing is impossible for them!"

So Seth-Selena is separated to be king and queen of their new world. They build a home, a town, a kingdom, and an empire, bearing many children to fill the land. Childbirth is just as easy, painless, and fun as it was when Seth was born of David and Abby. Raising such brilliant and good-natured children into mature adults is just as easy, too, since they're no longer born with that bent toward sin. Those beautiful robes of righteousness protect them from the teenage rebellion so common during the age of sin. Their desire from birth is toward God and His wisdom and knowledge. They live their lives with their focus directed upward. Their parents train them faithfully. They eagerly learn the laws of God and the ways of His Kingdom in joyous anticipation of the day when they, too, will receive their perfected resurrection bodies, complete their earthly missions, and be called 'Home'. There they will kneel before the throne in the highest heaven and then jump up to receive their first hug from the high King. This time there are no doubts, no temptations. The perfect is come. The universe is filled with perfect faith.

Thus the children of God step out of the playpen. Not just Seth-Selena, but many sons of God move through the universe to the edges. There they discover the infinite creativity of the eternal Father dwelling in them as they create new worlds, each more fantastic than the last. Thus the universe expands and the Kingdom of God grows.

During the age of sin, many rejected the gospel message because they loved the excitement of their self-centered earthy pleasures and presumed heaven to just be a boring place of forever plunking a harp and bowing in worship to the Almighty. Now even the least of God's servants agrees that the heavenlies are beyond incredible. It is exciting and satisfying beyond anything they could ask or imagine. The eternal gospel – the good news of the Kingdom of God – has always exceeded our fondest daydreams.

Indeed, the only reason I must end my tale at this point is that I have run out of words. All the words in the English language cannot do justice to the glory of the successive ages beyond Seth-Selena's first amateurish attempt at creating a new world. Words simply cannot express…

Logos and His Bride laugh about it with the Father. "Oh, My Father! I am so honored that You are able to fill My realm, to be all and in all here, and to change My realm with Your infinite and changeless nature."

"It is all very good!" He responds. "All Your efforts and sacrifices to build Us a Kingdom from time and space have paid off. Thank You! I am honored to dwell here with You in Your realm, now Our realm of endless time and limitless space. This is what I've always wanted, an ever-expanding universe full of sons in My image, beholding My face, knowing Me fully, eager to receive and return My love!"

Laughing with them, the Holy Spirit responds, "Amen and amen! So it is. So it will ever be."

THE END (Although this story never really ends…)

Note: This historical fiction story is the final volume of a five volume set:

The Feasts of Israel: God's Plan of the Ages ~ Volume One – This is not actually part of the fiction story, but rather an adult Bible study presenting the theological and historical background necessary to understand the story of God's Plan of the Ages

God's Plan of the Ages Volume Two ~ The Beginning of Time through Moses

God's Plan of the Ages Volume Three ~ Joshua through King Jotham

God's Plan of the Ages Volume Four ~ King Ahaz to Messiah

God's Plan of the Ages Volume Five ~ Messiah through the End of Time

Other books by (or co-authored by) the same author:

The Seven Spirits of God from *Kingdom Bible Studies in End Time Revelation* by the Lord Jesus Christ through J. Preston Eby, as rewritten and amended by Paul A. Lindberg

The Gospel of the Kingdom by the Lord Jesus Christ through his servant-sons who are learning to walk together in his kingdom

Seek First the Kingdom – An adult class in how to walk by the leading of the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ the King

The Day I Bought the Farm – A compilation of short stories, poems, and essays by Paul A. Lindberg

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I'm sorry, but I am unable to index the last half of this volume to the Scripture references, as it pulls together thousands of scriptural prophecies of the End Times from all over the Bible and combines them into one chronological story.

Timeline for Volume 5

Date BC	The Time of the four Gospels		
Jun 25, 04	Yochanan conceived of Zacharias and Elishiva	Apr 14, 31	Sabbath in Perea. Ministry to the Pharisees
Dec 20, 04	Yashua conceived of Yoseph and Mariam	Apr 15, 31	The rich young ruler turns away
Mar 31, 03	Yochanan (John the Baptist) is born	Apr 16, 31	Blind Bartimaeus. Zaccheus under a sycamore
Sep 11, 03	Great sign in the heavens (Rev 12:1 ff)	Apr 17, 31	The seventy return a week before Passover
Sep 25, 03	Yashua (Jesus) is born in Bethlehem	Apr 18, 31	Yashua arrives Bethany six days before Passover
Jun 7, 02	Magi set out from Babylon for the Levant	Apr 19, 31	Mary anoints Yashua for burial
Dec 22, 02	Magi find Yashua in Ramah, worship Him	Apr 20, 31	Yashua's triumphant entry into Jerusalem
Dec 25, 02	Herod kills babies in Ramah and Bethlehem	Apr 21, 31	curses fig tree; drives merchants from temple
Jan 19, 01	King Herod murders his son Herod Antipater	Apr 22, 31	Yashua grilled by Pharisees. The seven woes
Jan 24, 01	King Herod dies		Discourse on the end of the age. Judas leaves
Date AD		Apr 24, 31	The upper room prepared for Passover
Apr 8, 11	Yashua is "lost" at the temple after Passover		The Passover meal. Garden of Gethsemane
Spring 12	Yoseph dies in the insurrection of Barabbas	Apr 25, 31	The betrayal. The trial. Yashua is crucified and
Apr 1, 28	Yashua's baptism - led into desert, tempted		put into the grave Wednesday 7:00 PM
May 22, 28	Yashua begins His ministry at Shavuot	Apr 26, 31	Yashua's tomb is sealed. Roman guard is set
shortly after	He chooses five disciples. Wedding at Cana	Apr 27, 31	Spices are purchased for anointing the body
Oct 4, 28	Yashua rejected in His hometown after Sukkot	Apr 28, 31	The Resurrection three days later. Sat. 7:00 PM
Apr 17, 29	Yashua drives the merchants from the temple		The disciples are resting for Shabbat
Spring 29	Levi / Matthew becomes the sixth disciple	Apr 29, 31	The women discover He is risen early Sunday
Jun 6, 29	Heals lame man on Sabbath at Pool of Bethesda		morning. Firstfruits. Road to Emmaus
Summer 29	Sermon on the Mount. Last six disciples chosen	Apr 29, 31	Yashua appears to disciples in the upper room
Early Fall	Yashua calms the storm. Gadarene demoniacs		He promises to send the Holy Spirit
Fall 29	Twelve apostles sent out shortly before Sukkot	May 1, 31	Yashua meets with doubting Thomas
	Yochanan slain shortly after Sukkot	May 4, 31	Disciples begin trip to Galilee. Sabbath in Perea
Mar 23, 30	Apostles gathered back together in Capernaum	May 7, 31	Disciples reach Galilee. Yashua not there
	Feeds the 5,000 at Bethsaida. Walks on water	May 23, 31	Disciples go fishing. Catch nothing all night
Apr 5, 30	Peter's confession of faith just before Passover	May 24, 31	Yashua meets them. "Apostle of Love"
Spring 30	Feeding the 4,000 at Decapolis after Passover	May 27, 31	Final Sermon on the Mount - to the 500
May 29, 30	The Transfiguration at Shavuot	Jun 7, 31	the Ascension, 40 days from Firstfruits Sunday
May 30, 30	Yashua begins journey to Jerusalem for Sukkot	Jun 17, 31	Pentecost, 50 days from Firstfruits Sunday
Oct 7, 30	Last Great Day of Sukkot. "I am Living Water."	Spring, 93	John is imprisoned on Patmos by Domitian
Oct 8, 30	Woman caught in adultery. "I am the Light of	Fall, 93	John finishes writing the book of Revelation
	the World." Healing of man blind from birth	Spring, 98	John finishes his second Gospel
Oct 20, 30	The seventy sent out - Final ministry campaign		John is taken 'home' in victory at age 100
Apr 12, 31	Final Ascent to Jerusalem. Ten lepers cleansed	AD 120	First generation believers are all passed away.

Ch.	AD 2000+	Timeline of the Book of Revelation and Beyond to the Ends of the Ages (Mk 13:24-3
	Reminder: This book is fiction. I have invented these dates just to frame my story.	
34	Tishri 1, 21	Cain duplicates John's vision of Revelation
35	Spring, 22	Alan Benson finds the ancient scrolls
36	Spring, 23	Steve Saxon meets Mike Mason; gets saved
37	Spring, 23	Joe Johnson meets Jesus, joins His army
38	Spring, 23	Sharon Yoder first prays for a husband
39	Spring, 23	Joe first meets Alan
40	Fall, 23	Dr. Relt's deal to divide the temple mount
41	Spring, 24	Steve pays for new church for Paster Mike
	Spring, 24	Steve buys the farm, pays back taxes
42	Spring, 24	Joe begins reading the old scrolls
43	Summer, 24	Joe begins reading Peter's prophecy
	Fall, 24	Good harvest. Annual taxes paid on farm
	Fall, 24	Peter's prophecy sent out to many pastors
44	Fall, 24	Steve engaged and married
45	Tishri 1, 26	**Dr. Relt Treaty w/Israel. Temple begun**
	Fall, 26	Great Tribulation begins w/persecution
	Jan, 27	President Wildemann takes office in USA
46	Spring, 28	Peter's prophecies finally all mailed out
	Spring, 28	Alan and Joseph fly to Israel
48	Fall, 29	New Temple completed in Israel
	Fall, 29	Michael arises. Two witnesses empowered
49	Fall, 29	War in heaven. Satan cast out
50	Fall, 29	Moses 1st plague; Elijah prophesies no rain
51	Fall, 29	Dr. Relt and the dragon are possessed
52	Fall, 29	Dr. Relt announces he is messiah
	Fall, 29	**The abomination of desolation**
53	Fall, 29	Dr. Relt takes over the government of Israel
54	Fall, 29	Dr. Relt unveils statue. David flees to Petra
55	Winter, 29	Dr. Relt begins SeeNet; requires the 'mark'
	Winter, 29	Christians flee to "Green Pastures"
56	Spring, 30	The Great Tribulation. Capt. Pepper saved
	Spring, 30	The warnings of the three angels
	Spring, 30	Hitler/Astrapte idols are possessed
	Spring, 30	Captain Pepper goes to Steve's Green Pasture
57	Spring, 30	**Dr. Relt breaks treaty, stops sacrifice**
	Summer, 30	Satan's plan. Dr. Relt's 2nd decision to obey
	Summer, 30	Dr. Relt orders killing Jews who don't have
		the mark. His ten armies mobilized
	Summer, 30	Sixth Seal. Dr. Relt's orders go worldwide
	Summer, 30	'Stars' (asteroids) fall
	Summer, 30	Earthquake. Four supernovas. Sun goes out
58	Summer, 30	Day of YHWH begins - overview 2.5 years
	Summer, 31	Seventh Seal
59	Summer, 31	First through Fourth Trumpets
60	Summer, 31	Fifth Trumpet - First Woe
	Summer, 31	Sixth Trumpet - Second Woe
	Summer, 31	Hitler orders Jews exterminated. 4th Reich
	Summer, 31	Hitler fails "final exam." Begins decline
	Summer, 31	Seven Thunders - call to Israel
	Fall, 31	Global nuclear warfare. Islam is dead
61	Fall, 31	Prophecy warning of the Third Woe
	Fall, 31	Two witnesses slain – Dragon freed
	Fall, 31	John born of Steve and Sharon
	Tishri 1, 31	The rapture at the "former' (early, fall) rains
	Tishri 1, 31	The Third Woe – Israelites left behind
62	Fall, 31	The wrath of God
	Fall, 31	The seven bowls of wrath
	Fall, 31	Satan possesses the dragon a second time
63	Spring, 32	Hitler marries Eva Braun. Begins temple
	Tishri 1, 33	Hitler's coronation. Eva's temple dedication
64	Tishri 10	Israelites hidden in Azel
	Tishri 10	Armageddon. Hitler and his armies slain
65	Tishri 15	The Wedding Feast, Yashua and His Bride
	Tishri 21	Satan cast into the pit. Dragon freed again
	Tishri 21	Wrath of God is finished. Babylon destroyed
66	Tishri 22	30-day Reclamation begins
	Heshvan 22	45-day Restoration begins. Bema Judgment
68	Fall, 2033	The Garden of God on Mount Zion begins
71	Fall, 2033	The Millennium *[may start as late as 2060]*
70	Spr, 2034	The Highway of Holiness - the Invitation
71	Sum, 2034	The Garden of God on Mt. Zion finished
	Fall, 2067	King David retires. Solomon II becomes king
72	Fall, 2600	Some Israelis emigrate to other nations
	Fall, 3023	Satan released after 990 years. His wager
73	Fall, 3033	The Last Battle
74	Fall, 3033	Judgment Day – The Great White Throne
77	Fall, 3033	The Honeymoon Age (Earth left to decay)
76	Fall, 3040	The first prayer heard from the Abyss
78	Fall, 4033	The next Kingdom Age – Prophecies fulfilled
79	Fall, 5033	Last Adam sent to New Heavens and Earth
80	Fall, 6033	The New Earth is fully repopulated
81	Fall, 6033	The ages yet to come – Eternal time begins

ENDNOTE 1 (page 15): The relationships of Jesus and John the Baptist.

Besides their close relationship in the Spirit, we know that Jesus was a blood relative of John the Baptist by Luke 1:36, in which the angel tells Mary, "…your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age…" The King James Version actually uses the word "cousin" here, though it is not required by the original Greek text.

This does present a bit of a problem, since Mary is of the tribe of Judah in the line of King David, while Elizabeth is clearly Zechariah's "wife from the daughters of Aaron," and thus of the tribe of Levi like her husband. (Luke 1:5)

The problem is slight. Tribal lineage always went through the male. Females often married outside their own tribe, especially between Levi and Judah. My solution, which is just a guess, but a reasonable guess, is as follows:

Mary's parents Heli and Rachael were both of the tribe of Judah through their fathers, but Rachael's mother was of the tribe of Levi. Her sister was Elizabeth's mother and Rachael's aunt. Thus Rachael and Elizabeth were first cousins. Mary therefore is Elizabeth's first cousin once removed. This allows them to still be cousins even though Elizabeth is a generation older than Mary.

Thus Mary's Son Jesus and Elizabeth's son John were also first cousins once removed. I'm sure you've lost a lot of sleep over that. You're welcome.

ENDNOTE 2 (page 37): Eternal Life – 'The Life of All Ages'

'Eternal life' is a difficult concept for most, because in our modern culture, eternal means forever. That's it – going to heaven when we die and living forever and ever with Jesus.

But in Jesus' mind when He used the term, it meant more – a lot more. He said, "I am the Resurrection and the Life…" (Jn 11:25) He said, "This is eternal Life, that they may know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou has sent." (Jn 17:3) Scripture affirms, "…God has given us eternal Life, and this Life is in His Son. He who has the Son, has the Life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the Life." (1 Jn 5:11-12) These precious promises are not just for the future; they are present tense!

Sure, it will get better and better once we see Jesus face to face and are glorified with Him, but He wants to be our eternal Life right now, too! It is only as we abide in Him as a branch on the vine, letting His Life flow through us, that we become fruitful for His Kingdom. (Jn 15) This is 'the Life of All Ages', according to God's created design, as Spirit breathed into Adam and Eve before sin entered the world. Notice my capitalization of this special kind of Life.

That is why I sometimes use other terms for the Biblical 'eternal life', such as 'the Life of All Ages', 'Abundant Life', 'Life from God's Spirit realm', or simply 'Life of Spirit'.

ENDNOTE 3: The relationship between Jesus and John the Beloved / John the disciple.

I truly hate to mention this, because it is not even on the radar of the vast majority of my dear Readers.

However, with many of America's political and academic leaders defending or even encouraging sexual perversions and despising traditional Christian moral values, a few have brought it up. Those who hate God and His Law are quick to accuse Jesus and John the beloved disciple of having some sort of homosexual love relationship.

The Scripture is clear that they loved each other. John calls himself "the disciple whom Jesus loved." (Jn 19:26; 21:7) Further, at the last supper, John "leaned back on Jesus' breast." (Jn 13:23, 30; 21:20) There is no question but that Jesus and John shared a very deep and abiding love.

But I have a major problem with turning this into any kind of a sexual desire. The Scripture also very clearly takes a stand against homosexuality. It is called "an abomination" (Lev 18:22), a "detestable act" (Lev 20:13), "degrading passions" (Rom 1:26-27), and one of "the unrighteous [who] shall not inherit the Kingdom of God" (1 Cor 6:9). In Jesus' day nobody accepted homosexuality as normal. Sexual desires outside of divinely sanctioned marriage between a man and a woman is a form of lust, which is condemned by Jesus as just as bad as adultery. (Matt 5:28)

While temptation to lust is not a sin, yielding to it, or encouraging lust in others, certainly is. For Jesus and John to live together for three years while harboring this kind of relationship would be sin. Even if Jesus never had lustful thoughts for John, He would be wrong to allow such thoughts to grow in John - even to the point of allowing John to "lean on His breast" at the last supper. Accusing Jesus of such indiscretion is worse than blasphemy – it is fatal to the entire plan of salvation, which we have only on the basis of the sacrifice of a perfectly sinless Savior.

Those who love to nurse their lusts will no doubt argue this, just as every sinner does handstands and backflips attempting to justify his sin. But this is how I see it:

Those trying to accuse Jesus of homosexuality do so because they have sex on the brain. It is a demon spirit of sexual perversion, clouding their minds. They see (and even encourage) homosexuality everywhere they look. Two boys playing in the park are 'obviously homosexual' if they happen to bump together. Or so they want to think.

Deep and abiding love does not require sexual desire. Though our culture has worked hard to change the definition of love to always include sex, that is not its highest and best meaning. Two guys (or two gals) can have the closest friendships, with a lifetime of deepest love, and with never a thought of any kind of sexual relationship.

So shame on you who try to degrade the pure love between Jesus and John the Beloved to anything less.

ENDNOTE 4 (pages 92, 98): Timing of the Passover Feast.

Some controversy has raged around the date of the slaying of the Pascal lambs and the celebration of the Passover Seder. Both at the time of Christ and today, the majority opinion (which in this case is wrong), is that both Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread are supposed to begin on Nisan 15. But the Scripture says, "…on the 14th day of the month at twilight is YHWH's Passover." (Ex 12:6; Lev 23:5) It is easy to speculate how the Hebrew mind (remember that evening comes before morning in Hebrew culture) could understand that to mean, "…on the 14th day of the month, at twilight *[when the sun sets and it becomes the 15th],* is YHWH's Passover."

Thus, as in my story, most Pascal lambs at the time of Jesus were actually slain on the afternoon of Nisan 14 so they would be ready for their traditional Passover Seder that evening – which begins Nisan 15.

This is actually reasonable. "You shall also observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for on this very day I brought your hosts out of the land of Egypt. Thus you shall observe this day throughout your generations as a permanent ordinance. In the first month, on the 14th day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread, until the 21st day of the month at evening. Seven days there shall no leaven be found in your houses…" (Ex 12:17-19) This seems to require that the Passover be the first day of the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread. And since the 14th through the 21st is eight days, not seven, it is quite easy to imagine that the Scripture says to start preparing on the 14th during the day, but to actually celebrate that evening, after sunset, which begins the 15th through the 21st.

However, we know that is wrong, for two reasons. First, Jesus Himself clearly refuted that custom. He celebrated the Passover with His disciples on the correct day, the evening which began Nisan 14, just as the Scriptures require. Thus His Passover Seder was eaten the evening before His death, making it possible for Him to die just as the last Pascal lamb was slain for the nation of Israel, which occurred about 3:00 PM on the afternoon of the 14th.

In Jesus' day, celebrating Passover on the 14th was not uncommon. From the times of the Diaspora many Jews began the Passover over two days, the 14th and 15th, out of uncertainty of the dates. To differentiate the two, they would call the first date "The First of Unleavened Bread" and the next "The First of the Feast of Unleavened Bread," and they would celebrate for eight days, through the 21st. Jesus' disciples surely understood this, and had no trouble celebrating the evening before the majority of the Pascal lambs were slain. Indeed, many Jews even ate a festal meal on both evenings. In my fiction story, I have called only the second 'majority' meal the 'hagigah'. This term means 'festal meal' but specifically refers to the sacrifice offered to God, of which a portion is then returned to the offerer for him to eat with his family as they celebrate the Feast.

However, there is a second reason we can know the truth (and see that Jesus did it right).

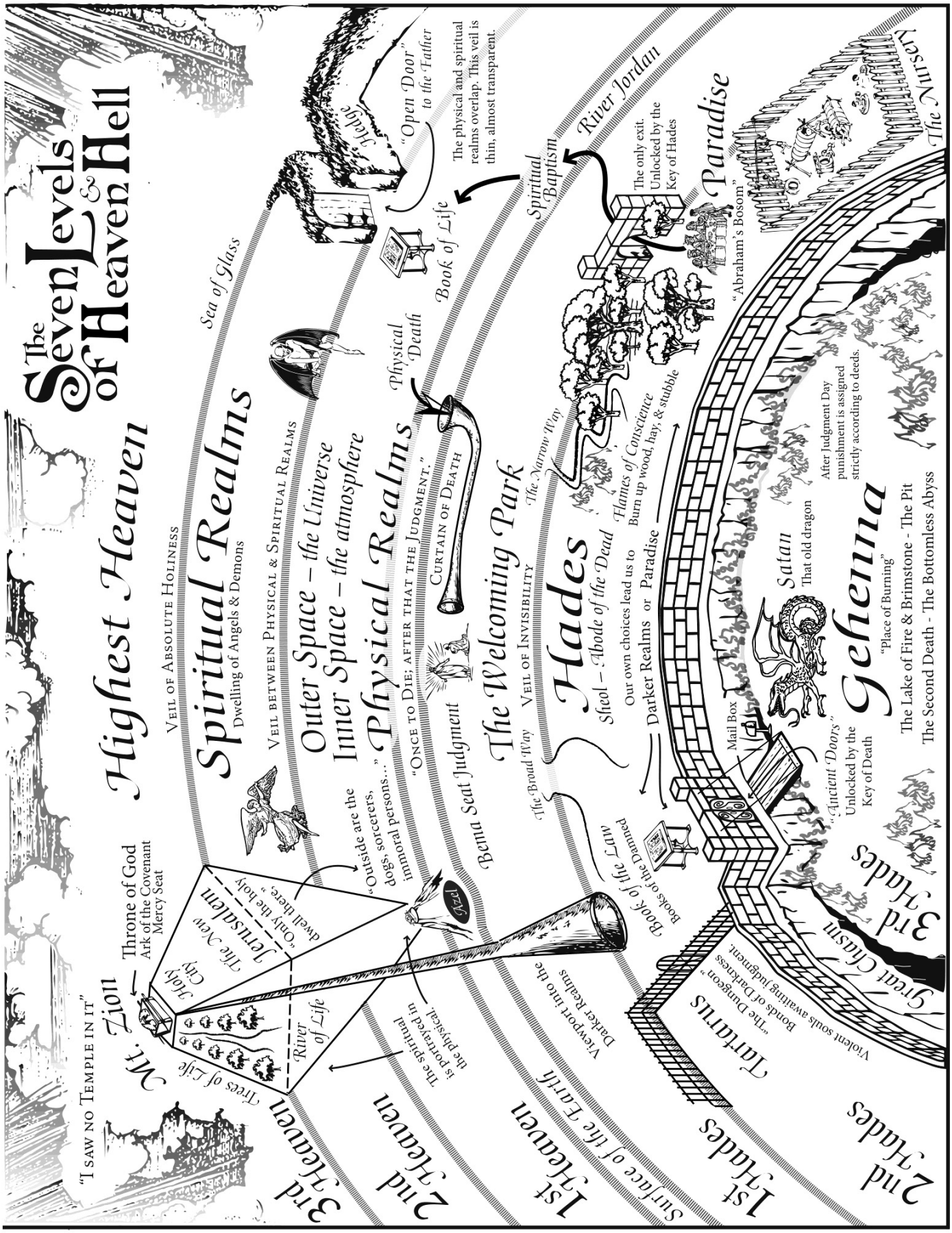
Study the pattern, the first Passover, in Egypt. On the morning of Nisan 10, there was no dawn. Nisan 10 began the three days and nights of the plague of darkness. It was also the day the Hebrews were required to bring the Pascal lamb into the home, anoint it with oil, and inspect it for blemishes. The lamb was kept in the home for four days, until twilight on the 13th, when it was slain and the blood put on the doorposts of the house. Though it was soon night, the plague of darkness ended when the blood was applied. The Passover meal (the first seder) was then eaten in haste that very same evening, which began Nisan 14 (the exact time Jesus ate the Passover with His disciples). At midnight on the 14th, the death angel passed over the land, slaying the firstborn of all who had no blood on their doorposts. (That is very likely the time Jesus was captured by the Roman soldiers in the Garden of Gethsemane.)

All the 'next' day, still the 14th, the Hebrews gathered at Succoth for their escape. They had eaten unleavened bread at their Passover meal, but that was only because of the commandment, not out of necessity. Then at dawn on the 15th, they started their seven-day flight across the desert, when, because of their haste, they had no time to leaven their bread and let it rise. Now unleavened bread became a necessity, laying the pattern for the Feast. Thus the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread actually starts on the 15th. They crossed the Red Sea on the 21st, the last day of Unleavened Bread, and ate their first leavened bread after sundown, the 22nd of Nisan, when the Feast was past.

This perfectly fits the timing as Moses wrote in the Torah. The Passover is celebrated beginning on the evening of Nisan 14th, and the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread begins the evening of the 15th, beginning and ending with a high Sabbath, just as the Scripture says. "In the first month (Nisan), on the 14th day of the month, at twilight is YHWH's Passover. Then on the 15th day of the same month there is the Feast of Unleavened Bread to YHWH; for seven days you shall eat unleavened bread." (Lev 23:5 and 6) [See Volume 1 for more details.]

Thus there is perfect correlation between Jesus eating the Passover alone with His disciples and then dying precisely as the last Passover lamb was slain the next day, before the majority ate their Passover hagigah. Indeed, it is the only way the Bible story can make sense. It shows that God in His infinite wisdom can make even mankind's mistakes and failures a part of His plan.

A final confirmation that Nisan 14th is the correct date involves the Hebrew lunar calendar. Assuming the dates are properly correlated to the lunar cycles, the full moon always comes the night of the 14th, the brightest night of the month. This completes the symbolism of the Passover being on the brightest day, the day of YHWH's wondrous deliverance from Egypt/sin and into His Kingdom.


The Seven Levels of Heaven & Hell
Highest Heaven
Veil of Absolute Holiness
Spiritual Realms
Dwelling of Angels & Demons
Veil between Physical & Spiritual Realms
Outer Space – the Universe
Inner Space – the atmosphere
Physical Realms
"Once to Die; after that the Judgment."
Curtain of Death
The Welcoming Park
Veil of Invisibility
Hades
Sheol – Abode of the Dead
Our own choices lead us to
Darker Realms or Paradise
Gehenna
"Place of Burning"
The Lake of Fire & Brimstone - The Pit
The Second Death - The Bottomless Abyss
After Judgment Day punishment is assigned strictly according to deeds.
Satan
That old dragon
Flames of Conscience
Burn up wood, hay, & stubble
Paradise
"Abraham's Bosom"
The only exit. Unlocked by the Key of Hades
Spiritual Baptism
River Jordan
The Nursery
"Open Door" to the Father
The physical and spiritual realms overlap. This veil is thin, almost transparent.
Ledge
Book of Life
Sea of Glass
Physical Death
"I saw no Temple in it"
Mt. Zion
Throne of God
Ark of the Covenant
Mercy Seat
Holy City
The New Jerusalem
"Only the holy dwell there."
Trees of Life
River of Life
"Outside are the dogs, sorceres, immoral persons..."
Pazzel
Benu Seat Judgment
The Broad Way
The Narrow Way
Book of the Law
Books of the Dammed
Mail Box
"Ancient Doors"
Unlocked by the Key of Death
Great Chasm
3rd Hades
Violent souls awaiting judgment.
"The Dungeon"
Bonds of Darkness
Tartarus
Viewport into the Darker Realms
Surface of the Earth
3rd Heaven
2nd Heaven
1st Heaven
The spiritual is portrayed in the physical.
1st Hades
2nd Hades

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