

2019

The Bible by Jesus: The Complete Old and New Testament

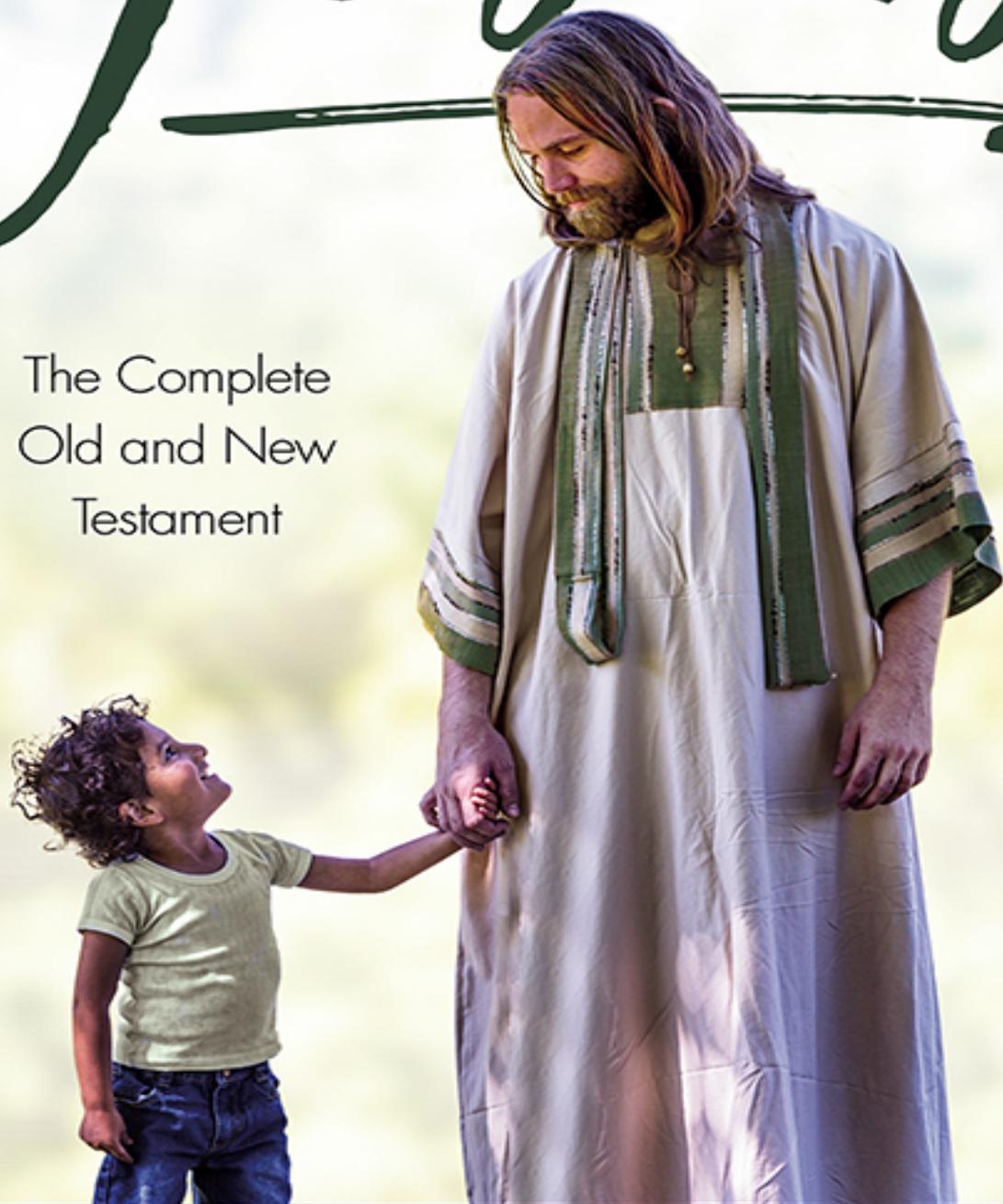
Elmer L. Towns

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The Bible by
Jesus

The Complete
Old and New
Testament



A MODERN PARAPHRASE BY
Elmer L. Towns



THE BIBLE BY JESUS

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Published by Destiny Image
Shippensburg, PA 17257

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Destiny Image
167 Walnut Bottom Rd
Shippensburg, PA 17257

Book Design and Editing: Lee Fredrickson
Cover Design: Renee Grooms

ISBN: 978-0-7684-5133-7
Ebook: 978-0-7684-1992-4

Visit our website at: www.destinyimage.com
Printed in the United States of America



What is the Bible by Jesus?

What if you could sit and talk with Jesus? What if He could tell you the story of His eternity in heaven, creation and His plan of redemption in the Old Testament? What if you could praise the Father with the Psalms so that Jesus is teaching you how to worship the Father, Himself the Son, and the Holy Spirit?

Let Jesus tell you in the first person the story of His birth, ministry, and death for the sins of the world (John 1:29). Then let Jesus tell of His resurrection from the dead. Listen as He gives the Great Commission, then learn how Jesus works through believers and His early church to carry salvation to the ends of the earth.

The Bible by Jesus is a modern paraphrase (a Bible translation is word for word, a paraphrase is thought for thought in modern language). The human author—Elmer Towns—has translated the words and thoughts of Scripture into modern thought as presented by Jesus. It is a companion study of the Bible to help you see the story of the Bible through the eyes and thoughts of Jesus. Listen and learn what is on Jesus' heart. As you touch Jesus' thoughts reading this text, let Him touch you and transform you.

Elmer Towns
Human Editor

About the Editors

Dr. Elmer L. Towns is co-founder of Liberty University and distinguished professor. He received the Gold Medallion award from the Christian Publishers Association in 1995 and has published eleven best sellers. He writes in the field of church growth, theology, and the Christian life.

What Leaders Are Saying

Jesus talked directly to my heart through this Bible. As I read its pages, it was like walking and talking with Jesus. No one else was there, just the two of us. I believe God will use this Bible to get multitudes to listen to Him and follow Him.

—Jentezen Franklin
Senior Pastor, Free Chapel
Author of New York Times Best Seller

This Bible has the power of Jesus talking directly to you. You will feel closer to Him than ever before and realize that He is God, and you should follow Him.

—Pastor David Sobrepena
Word of Faith
Manilla, Philippines
Largest church in Philippines

Elmer Towns has been a close friend for over twenty years. I've often said, "He has no unpublished thoughts," yet, those thoughts have so often been a blessing to me! Now, Lee Fredrickson and Elmer have paraphrased the words of Jesus into the first-person narrative, giving a fresh perspective on the biblical narrative. It will be a blessing to many!

—Ed Stetzer
Billy Graham Distinguished Chair of Church, Mission, and Evangelism

Executive Chair of the Billy Graham Center, Wheaton College
Author, Visiting Professor
Liberty University Rawlings School of Divinity
Liberty University Baptist Theological Seminary

Elmer Towns and Lee Fredrickson have made the words of Jesus more personal than any other Bible version. I felt Jesus was having a personal conversation with me, and I felt a renewed commitment to obey what He was saying.

—Dr. Mark Milioni
President, Baptist Bible College
Springfield, MO

As I read the amazing text, I realized that this book “breaks through the barriers” of the way it has always been. I think I could actually hear the Master speaking and almost feel His joy and His pain. While reading *The Bible by Jesus* I was reminded of the first time I ever heard the song, “Rise Again” by Dallas Holm. Back then I remember thinking, “Can we really sing a song where Jesus is speaking in the first person?” The resounding answer was “Yes! Absolutely!”

This amazing, heart-stirring look at the Savior’s life through His own eyes and in His own words is enthralling!

—Gary McSpadden
Faith and Wisdom Church
Branson, MO

Awesome! Captivating! In a first-person narrative, Jesus seems to be sitting across the table from the reader, looking you in the eyes, and sharing the most exciting story ever told! What a new and refreshing insight with this genre. His story comes alive like never before! The Son is your guide with a word picture beyond anything written in the past. If you read only one book this year, this is the one to read. It’s a page turner and a life changer!

—Robert J. Strand
Best-selling Author of over sixty books

The Bible by Jesus may be Elmer Towns' best/most influential book ever, regarding changing/touching lives. This was a brilliant idea"

—Gary Habermas, PhD
Distinguished Research Professor
Chair, Department of Philosophy
Rawlings School of Divinity

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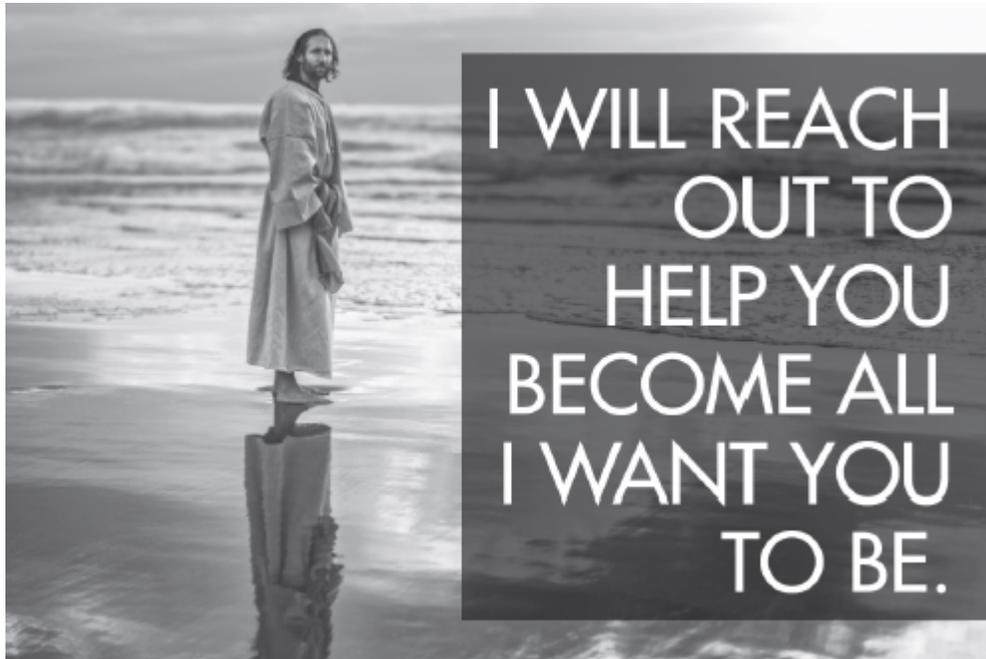
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Introduction

I am Jesus, God the Son. I have always existed with God My Heavenly Father and God, the Holy Spirit. We are three separate personalities. We talk to each other, and We listen to each other, but We act as One because We are One.

We three are equal in nature. I am fully God, so is God My Heavenly Father, and God the Holy Spirit. Our nature is love. We give Ourselves in love. But We are also holy. We are separate from sin and anything that defiles. Out of our love comes the good things We create and give.

We are omnipotent, can do all things that are doable. We are omniscient, knowing all things actual and potential. We are omnipresent, being everywhere present at the same time.

In abilities, We act separately. But We also act together. We are three persons, yet one God. That means We have three different personalities. We each have intellect, We each are omniscient, knowing all things and knowable. We each have emotions, with pure feelings. We each can make decisions based on what We know and what We feel. But, at the same time, We are one—one Person—or one personality. Therefore, what We are

separate, We also are one together. We have different tasks or duties. My Heavenly Father is first in all We do, My work as God the Son was to become flesh so that I might live, minister and fulfill all righteousness, that is, to fulfill all expectations for the human image-bearers. I lived a perfect life, and in My death, I became sin and died for the sins of the world (2 Cor. 5:21).

Because We three are life, We breathed life into the human image-bearers (Adam and Eve), that We created. We gave them limited freedom because Adam was created in Our image and likeness. We are free, so We had to give freedom since Adam was created in Our image. Yet Adam and Eve used their freedom to reject Us and choose contrary to Our expectations. Rather than living with Us, they decided to live opposite of all We wanted them to be and do. They chose separation and death.

Because We three are love, We love all human image-bearers whom We created. But we couldn't arbitrarily overlook their rebellion against Us. We three are law, and breaking any law (whether spiritual, physical, or natural, that is, the law of nature) has its consequences. Because the human image-bearers choose rebellion, they must die. And because We cannot change Our nature to judge the broken law, We had to punish all human image-bearers who broke Our law.

God, My Heavenly Father, sent Me to become flesh, that is, a human image-bearer, to live, minister, and perfectly keep the law. I became the One who was punished in their place. I died so that they might live.

However, I did not stay dead. I arose from the dead with new life, resurrection life. Now I offer My eternal life to those who will believe in Me and accept Our offer of salvation. After My resurrection, I returned to heaven to sit at the right hand of God, My Heavenly Father. Then My Heavenly Father and I sent God the Holy Spirit to deliver all the spiritual blessings promised to new believers. He works in each believer to first convict them of sin, then to regenerate them and give them eternal life. Then the Spirit causes them to grow in spirituality and service.

Today, I ask you to follow Me, just as I asked the fishermen on the shore of the Sea of Galilee to follow Me. I promised they would become fishers of people. I also asked Matthew the tax collector to follow Me. Will you follow Me?

Now as you have read a panorama of My life and ministry, follow Me on a journey from eternity past to eternity future. See the whole plan of My life from beginning into eternity future.

As you reach out to examine My life and ministry from eternity past to eternity future, remember I will reach out to help you become all I want you to be.

~Jesus

A Note from the Publisher

Jesus commands, “I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life” (Rev. 22:18-19, RSV). The editor of *The Bible by Jesus* would never change, delete, or deny the inspired words of God in the original manuscript.

He has purposefully translated this Bible into the words of Jesus. If this was a translation, they would bring the words of the Bible from the original languages of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek into modern English, word for word. An accurate translation of the Bible demands faithfulness to the words of the original manuscript. But this is a modern paraphrase, bringing the words of the Bible into modern English, thought for thought.

Anyone who attempts to describe God must describe Him according to the meaning in the minds of the authors of Scripture if they want to be accurate. Anyone who attempts to explain a verse of Scripture must interpret it according to the meaning in the minds of the authors of the Word of God.

The editor has attempted to express *The Bible by Jesus* according to the meaning of the authors of the Bible according to Jesus’ interpretation of the words of Scripture. Therefore, the title is *The Bible by Jesus* (BBJ).

OLD TESTAMENT



I AM GOD

The Creator

The Book of Genesis

In this book I describe for you not only the fact of an ordered creation, but also My response to Our creation. When all was finished and man and woman were created in Our own image, “I saw everything that We had made, and behold, it was very good.” I took great pleasure when I created the universe with My Heavenly Father and the Holy Spirit. I want you to be stunned and awed by Our work of creation. But not just for the sake of Our creation. I mean for you to always look at Our creation and say: “If the work of God’s hands is so full of wisdom and power and grandeur and majesty and beauty, what must this God be like in Himself?”

Imagine what it will be like to see Me the Creator! Not My works! Not even a billion galaxies will ever satisfy your soul. I Am your soul’s end.

My Days of Creation

1 In the beginning I conceived the idea of the heavens and the earth. Then I created them out of nothing. Before that nothing existed. My creation started the movement of time that will continue for eternity. I created space when I put boundaries and the stars in place.

I created billions and billions of galaxies that contain trillions times trillions of burning stars. One of the smallest is the fiery sun that gives life to the earth where you live. One of the largest stars is a trillion times larger than your sun. I am an infinite God who creates huge things.

In the beginning, I created My abode—heaven—where one day, My Father’s children will live with Me. I also created My throne, and angels who sing “Holy . . . holy . . . holy.”

I, with My Father, and the Holy Spirit, also created the earth; this huge watery mud ball. I created black inky darkness that surrounded all the things I created. God and Holy Spirit hovered over creation infusing everything with life-charged energy.

“Let there be light,” I said. Instantly, light appeared, and I saw that light was good. So I separated light from darkness and named light Day, and darkness I called Night. It was good. Then evening ended the first day.

Then I spoke to separate atmosphere about the earth from the waters on the earth. Instantly there was sky above the waters, and I called it heaven. Then I spoke, “Waters be gathered in one place under heaven.” Instantly there it was, the waters I called seas and oceans. It was good. Then evening ended the second day.

Then I said, “Earth, let growing grass cover your surface, and let it have seed to perpetually grow itself.” I said, “Let trees and herbs produce life-giving fruit, whose seed will reproduce itself and be enjoyable to eat.” I liked what I saw. Then evening ended the third day.

Then I commanded the burning sun in the heaven to divide the light from darkness. “Let there be a perpetual calendar for days and years.” Then I commanded the greater light—the sun—to shine light for the day. I commanded the moon to guide the night. I made the stars to divide night from the day. Then I saw that was also good. Then evening ended the fourth day.

Next, I commanded the waters to abound with living creatures, and let the heavens abound with birds flying across the sky. I saw it was good, so I blessed the birds and sea creatures, saying, “Be fruitful and produce more living creatures like yourself. Let the waters bring forth living creatures and the sky to do the same with winged creatures.” Then evening ended the fifth day.

Then I said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures, each according to its kind.” They appeared, beast according to its kind, cattle according to its kind, and every large and small animal appeared in obedience to My command. When I saw all the living things, I said, “This is good.”

So We, the Godhead, talked among Ourselves, “Let Us make a human man in Our image—one who can think intellectually, feel emotionally, and make decisions. One who will know himself, and will direct himself where he wants to go.” Both man and woman were made in My image.

Then I said, “Be fruitful and multiply. Have dominion over the earth and the creatures in the ocean, the animals on the earth, and the birds that fly in the heavens. They are for you.”

Then I said, “I have created herbs that grow for you to eat. Each herb has a seed that will reproduce itself. The same with trees. You may eat the fruit of each tree, and its seed will reproduce itself. Everything that has life is for you.”

Then I surveyed all I had created . . . it was good. Then the evening finished the sixth day.

First Days in the Garden of Eden

2 Thus, I created the earth and all the heavens. On the seventh day I had finished My creative work, so I rested, not because I was tired. I have infinite energy. I rested as an example so all My children will rest on the seventh day. Not only will they need rest, but they will recognize My creative work. It will be a day for their worship.

This is a history of how I created the heavens, and the earth. I had not caused it to rain, so a mist came from the ground each evening to water the plants of the earth; but no one tilled the ground.

I took dust of the ground, molded it into the shape of what man was to become. It was red clay, so he was called Adam, which meant “red man.” Then I bent over this clay-man lying flat on the ground. I breathed My life into his nostrils. He instantly became flesh, bone, and muscle. He was more than another animal of the earth; he had My life coursing through his body. He didn’t just have a soul, he was a soul.

I planted a garden in the East, in Eden. I put man in the garden and one of every tree and bush that I had created that was good for food and beautiful to the eye. In the middle of the garden I placed the Tree of Life, and the Tree of the Knowledge of good and evil.

A river watered the garden and it separated into four rivers. The first was Pishon, a stream that flows on the edge of the desert where there is gold. The second was Gihom that flows around Cush, which refers to the Chaldeans. The third was Hiddekel that flows to Assyria. This river was also called the Tigris. The fourth is the Euphrates River.

Then I brought all the animals to Adam so he could give each a name. Whatever he called them, that was their name. He named the birds, animals, cattle, and created things. They were male and female, but there was no female for Adam. It's then I said, "Man must not live alone." So I decided to make him a helpmeet.

I put him into a deep sleep and took out a rib. Then I closed up his flesh, and with it I made a woman. Then I brought her to him.

Adam rejoiced, "This is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called *woman*, for she was taken from me."

Therefore I said, "A man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife. They shall be one flesh." They were both naked—the man and woman—but they were not ashamed.

Events in Heaven — Ezekiel 28:12-17

"At one time, Lucifer, you were perfect in wisdom and beauty.

You were in Eden, the garden of God. You wore jewelry made of brightly colored gems and precious stones, including ruby, topaz, emerald, chrysolite, onyx, jasper, sapphire, turquoise, and beryl. They were all set in gold, and were ready for you when you were created. I appointed you as a winged creature to guard My holy mountain where you walked among stones of fire.

"From the day I created Lucifer he was blameless until he started being wicked. So I forced Lucifer to leave My mountain, I caused him to leave the mountain, O guardian winged creature, where he had been among the stones of fire.

"Your beauty led you to be filled with pride, and your splendor spoiled your wisdom. So I tossed you to the ground."

Lucifer is described as "full of wisdom and perfect in beauty" (v. 12).

Since I am perfect, it's the only way I could create an angel, that is, an incorporeal being who could think, feel, and possess free choice. Lucifer was the highest in the order of angels, and is called "the anointed cherub" (v. 14). The word "covereth" (v. 14) suggests Lucifer guarded or protected My throne. Also, as a person's hair that covers the head gives beauty, Lucifer gave beauty

to Me. But, it's impossible to make Me more beautiful, for I am the originator and embodiment of beauty.

Lucifer had access to "the holy mountain" which suggests he entered My actual presence. Lucifer was closer to Me than any other angel. When it described Lucifer "walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire," He could go or carry out decisions I made. Lucifer was in My presence when I was creating the rest of creation. Lucifer is described as "perfect in your ways from the day you were created" (v. 15). Then "iniquity was found in you" (v. 15).

Lucifer's sin was not an outward transgression of turning to evil things, such as prohibited in the Ten Commands. Lucifer's sin was in the free choice he was given to worship Me, but he chose to rebel selfishly to magnify himself and lift himself into My place. This was the first sin, not a thing.

Sin is an act or attitude of rebellion against Me.

Isaiah 14:13-15

Lucifer sinned against Me when he said, "I will ascend into heaven." Then he said, "I will exalt my throne above the stars (angels). I will sit in the mount of the congregation where God sits." Then Lucifer added two more expressions of pride, "I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, seeking my glory and I will be like the Most High." Lucifer wanted My rulership.

I said, "Iniquity was found in you, therefore, I cast you as a profane thing out" (Ezek. 28:15-16).

The First Sin

3 The serpent, Lucifer, was shrewd. He was more clever than all the animals I created. One day the snake asked the woman, "Did God really tell you not to eat the fruit of all the trees of the garden?" She answered, "We are allowed to eat the fruit of every tree in the garden, but God told us not to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, or even touch it. If we do, we will die."

The serpent answered her, “God will not let you die, but God knows the day you eat it, that your eyes will be opened, and you will be as wise as God, knowing good and evil.”

The woman looked at the tree to see its beauty and that it was potentially delicious, and that it would make her as wise as Me. She picked the fruit and ate it. She handed it to Adam and he ate also. Suddenly their spiritual eyes were opened and they saw each other’s nakedness and were ashamed. They sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves.

That evening I came walking in the garden. Adam and Eve hid themselves among the bushes so I wouldn’t see them. But I see everything and know everything. Even so I called out.

“Where are you?” I ask questions, not for My information, but to make them think about what they had done, or what they are about to do.

Adam answered, “I heard You walking in the garden, and I ran to hide myself because I was naked.”

“Who told you that you are naked?” I asked knowing what he had done. “Have you eaten fruit from the tree that I told you not to eat?”

The man replied, “The woman You created and brought to me, she gave me the fruit and I ate it.”

I asked the woman, “What have you done?”

She answered, “The serpent seduced me because I was vulnerable, so I ate the forbidden fruit.”

I turned to the serpent, “Because you did this, you are cursed of all the animals and cattle. You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dirt as long as you live. There will be hatred between you and the woman, between her offspring and yours. Her seed will give you a crushing head blow even as you bite his heel.”

I told the woman, “You will have pain in childbirth when you give birth to a child. Also, you will want to please your husband, and he will be the head of the family.”

I told the man, “Because you listened to your wife, and ate the fruit of the forbidden tree, I will curse the ground from which you get food and it will be hard to grow and harvest food to eat. The ground will spread weeds and thorns. By the sweat of your brow you will toil, working from dawn to sundown. You will work hard until the day of your death. Then you will be buried in the ground. Man was created from dust and he will return to dust.”

Adam named his wife Eve, meaning the mother of all living people. Then I killed an animal sacrifice and brought its skins to clothe the man and the woman. It represented the death of the animal, and blood which I require for cleansing of sin to regain fellowship with Me.

Then I said, “Human beings have become like Us, knowing good and evil. What if they eat the fruit of the tree of life? Then they will live forever.” I decided to put them out of the garden. He will have to till the ground from where he was created. Then, I stationed a cherubim at the entrance to the garden with a flaming sword to make sure no one entered the garden.

Beginning Life Outside Eden

4 Eve conceived when her husband Adam slept with her. She gave birth to a boy baby and named him Cain, which means “acquire.” She told Adam, “I have acquired a man from the LORD.” Then she gave birth to another boy, Abel, which means “breath.”

After the boys grew to manhood, Abel became a shepherd. Cain became a farmer. When it came time for worship, Abel sacrificed the best firstborn from his flock. I respected Abel and his offering of worship. Cain brought the best of his vegetables, but I didn’t approve of his worship offering, because he neglected blood to atone for sin. Cain lost his temper and left in anger.

I asked Cain, “Why are you angry and sulking? If you bring the right kind of worship offering, I will receive it, and then you will be accepted. There is an animal for a sin offering at the door to your house. Offer him and you will be accepted.”

Cain asked Abel to visit his vegetable garden. He had angry words with his brother. Then Cain struck Abel and killed him, burying him in his garden.

Afterward, I asked Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?”

I don’t know,” Cain answered, “am I responsible for my brother?”

I answered him, “What have you done?” I knew he killed Abel, but I had asked a question to bring conviction to Cain. Then I said, “Your brother’s blood cries to Me from the ground where you buried him.”

Then I added, “Now you will be cursed by the ground that you love to till. No matter how hard you try, it will not produce crops. Now you will be driven from the farm you love. You will be a homeless vagabond.”

Cain said to Me, “This punishment is too great. You are sending me away from Your presence. People will find me and kill me.”

I answered, “No, I will put a mark on you to warn people not to kill you. Then I will put a sevenfold curse on any who kills you.” So Cain left My presence to settle in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

Cain’s wife got pregnant after he lay with her. She gave birth to Enoch. Then Cain founded a city and named it Enoch after his son.

Enoch had a son named Irad, who had a son named Mehujael, who had a son named Methushael, who became the father of Lamech.

Lamech had two wives, the first was Adah and the second was Zillah. Then Adah had a son, Jabal, who was the father of those who lived in tents and raised livestock. His brother was Jubah who taught people to play the flute and lyre. Zillah gave birth to Tubal-Cain, who forged iron and bronze, introducing metal tools for work. Lamech told his wives Adah and Zillah,

“Listen to me you wives of Lamech,
I have killed a man who attacked me.
This young man wounded me;
Any who killed Cain were punished seven fold,
Any who kills me will be punished seventy-seven times.”

Adam lay with his wife again and she gave birth to a son. And she called him Seth, which means “*conceive*.” She said I had allowed her to conceive another son in the place of Abel whom Cain killed. Then Seth had a son named Enosh, which means “*mankind*.” Then men and women began worshiping and praying to Me.

From Adam to Noah

5 Adam wrote a family history of his descendants, beginning when I created him in My image, creating them male and female, and blessed the human race. Adam wrote that he was 130 years old when his son was born who was like him. He named his son Seth. For 800 years he had sons and daughters, living a total of 930 years, then he died.

Seth lived 105 years before Enosh was born to him. Then he had sons and daughters for 807 years. He lived a total of 912 years, then he died.

Enosh lived 90 years before Kenan was born to him. Then he lived 815 years and had sons and daughters, living a total of 905 years, then he died.

Kenan lived 70 years and Mahalalel was born to him. He lived 830 years and had sons and daughters. Kenan lived a total of 910 years and he died.

Mahalalel lived 65 years and gave birth to Jared. Then Mahalalel had sons and daughters for 830 years. The total years of Mahalalel were 895 years, and then he died.

Jared lived 162 years, then Enoch was born to him. Jared had sons and daughters for 800 years. His total life was 962 years, then he died.

Enoch lived 65 years before Methuselah was born to him. Enoch had sons and daughters for 300 years. All the days of Enoch were 365 years. Enoch walked faithfully with Me. Then one day I took him, and he was gone.

Methuselah was 187 years old before Lamech was born, and he lived another 782 years. Methuselah lived a total of 969 years, then he died.

Lamech was 182 years old when a son, Noah, was born. He said, "This son will give us relief from hard work of farming the ground that the Lord has cursed." Then Lamech lived another 595 years having other sons and daughters. Lamech lived 777 years and he died.

When Noah was 500 years old he became the father of Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

Wickedness Demanded the Flood

6 People multiplied on the earth, beautiful daughters were being born. Fallen angels were attracted to these women, and took them as wives. I was horrified with this disruption of the human race and said, "My Spirit shall not always call people to Myself. From now on they can expect a life-span of 120 years."

The union of angels and women produced giants. They were formidable and fierce. Human evil was out of control, no one thought about Me. Everyone thought evil continually. I saw that wickedness was great on the earth and I did not like what I saw. I decided to destroy everything on earth, humans, animals, cattle, creeping things and birds . . . everything.

“Noah found grace in My eyes.” He was a good man, worshiped Me and fellowshiped with Me. He had three sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth.

Everywhere I looked I saw violence, evil and hatred. I told Noah, “The earth is filled with corruption; everyone is filled with evil continually. I am going to destroy all people, animals, cattle, creeping things and birds.”

I told Noah, “Build a large boat out of cypress wood, and cover it with tar, inside and out. It should have three floors with stalls throughout for the animals. Make it 450 feet long, 75 feet high and 45 feet wide, and leave an 18 inch opening for a window all the way around at the top of the sides under the roof. Build a door into the side of the boat. The three floors will be three decks, lower, middle and top.”

Then I told Noah, “I am going to cover the earth with a flood that will destroy everything on the earth. Everything that breathes will die. But I will make a covenant with you and your family to save your lives. You—your wife, sons and their wives—will be safe in the boat. Bring two—male and female—from every breathing thing into the ark to be kept alive. They shall be male and female. There should be two of every kind of animals, of cattle, of creeping things and birds. Take food on the boat for your family and the animals.”

Noah did exactly what I told him to do.

The Flood Covers the Earth

7When I saw that everything was ready I told Noah, “Come into the boat and bring your family with you.” Noah had preached about the coming flood destruction but no one believed him. He was the only one on earth that worshiped Me, so he and his family were the only ones I would save.

I also told him, “Bring seven pairs of sacrificial animals—male and females—that I approved for worship. Also bring one pair of all the other animals and birds. This guarantees the survival of life after the flood.”

I told Noah, “Rain would start falling in seven days, and would rain for 40 days and 40 nights until all living creatures on earth were destroyed.”

Noah obeyed everything I commanded. He was 600 years old when he entered the boat with his wife and three sons, and their wives. The animals entered by pairs, just as I commanded, including those I approved for sacrifice, plus all other animals, both large and those that crawled on the earth.

Then I closed the door. After 7 days it began to rain on the 17th day of the 2nd month. Noah was 600 years old.

It stormed for 40 days and 40 nights, torrential sheets of rain fell from blackened skies. Underground rivers of water erupted, covering the earth. For 40 days the flood waters rose higher and higher. As the water surged upwards, it lifted the boat, and it floated magnificently on the waves. The waters continued to rise until they covered the tops of all the mountains.

All living things on earth died. All people, all animals large and small, everything that crawled on the ground died. Everything died that breathed. The only ones who survived were Noah, his wife, their three sons and their wives. The waters covered the earth for 150 days.

The Flood Recedes

8 But I remembered Noah, his family and all the animals with him on the boat. I sent the wind to blow over the face of the waters to evaporate them. I had stopped the torrential storms and shut up the underground rivers. So the flood waters gradually began to go down. Five months from the beginning of the rain—150 days—the boat settled down on Mount Ararat.

The waters continued to go down. Two and a half months later others peaks could be seen. Noah waited 40 days. He opened the window to release a raven that flew back and forth looking for a place to land. Then he sent a dove, but it couldn't find a place to land. He reached out and caught it bringing it back into the boat. Noah waited 7 days, and then sent the dove out again. It returned with an olive branch in its mouth. He waited another 7 days and then sent the dove out again. This time it didn't return.

In Noah's 600th year, the first month, and the first day that the waters were dried up, Noah opened the door to see dry land. By the 27th day of the 2nd month, the earth was dry from the flood.

I told Noah, "Leave the boat, take your wife, sons and their wives with you. Take with you the animals, both large and those that crawl on the ground. Let them produce after their kind so that earth will be repopulated. So Noah did as I commanded. He left the boat with his wife, his sons and their wives. All the animals large and small that creep on the ground left the boat.

Noah built an altar to Me and sacrificed those animals that I approved for worship as a burnt offering. I smelled the aroma and approved. Then I said in

My heart, “I will never again destroy the earth with water, although the thoughts of people are evil from youth onward.”

While the earth lasts,
The cycles of life will continue;
Planting and harvest time,
Cold and heat,
Winter and summer,
Day and night.

My Covenant with Noah

9I put My blessing on Noah and his sons, telling them, “Prosper, have children and populate the earth with people. I am giving you control over every living thing, animals, birds, fish—everything is for you and you are responsible for everything. You can eat living creatures, just as I gave you the fruit of trees and bushes to eat. Except you shall not eat meat with its blood in it, that is prohibited.”

Then I gave protection to Noah and all humanity. “I will avenge any who spills your blood from both animals and people.

“If a person takes a human life, their life shall be taken by others because every person is born in My image and reflects My very nature.

“Murder is a crime against Me.

“I have put you on earth to repopulate it, live righteously and have a fruitful life.” Then I reconfirmed a covenant with Noah and his sons, “I promise you and your descendants and to the animals on the boat—to every living thing—that I will not destroy all living creatures again with a flood.

“I give you and generations to come a sign guaranteeing My covenant. I am placing a rainbow among the clouds when it rains. I will see it when rain clouds appear and remember My covenant to never again destroy all life with a flood.” Then I said to Noah, “The rainbow will confirm My covenant to all life on earth.”

The three sons who came out of the boat with Noah were Shem, Ham and Japheth. From these three sons came all the people of the earth.

After the flood, Noah became a farmer and planted a vineyard. Noah made wine from his grapes and some of it became fermented. Noah became drunk from it and passed out. (He had preached against drunkenness and all types of evil before the flood.) Ham saw his father was naked, but Canaan, his son, did more than his father, and what he did was inappropriate. Shem and Japheth took a cloak and held it behind them, and walked backward to cover their father's nakedness. They made sure not to look on their father's nakedness.

When Noah awoke he learned what his grandson had done. He said, "Canaan will be cursed. He'll be a slave to his brothers. I will bless Shem and Canaan will be his slave. I will bless Japheth, he shall live in the tents of Shem, but Canaan will be his slave."

Noah lived another 350 years after the flood. He lived 950 years, then he died.

Life after the Flood

10 Many children were born to them after the flood.

Children of Japheth

The children of Japheth were Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras.

The children of Gomer were Ashkenaz, Riphath, and Togarmah.

The children of Javan were Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim, and Rodanim. The children of Javan were Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim, and Rodanim.

Their descendants sailed to different countries to live. Each developed their own language, cultures and national values.

Children of Ham

The children of Ham were Cush, Mizraim, Put, and Canaan.

The children of Cush were Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah, and Sabteca. The children of Raamah were Sheba and Dedan.

Nimrod was the son of Cush. Nimrod was a famous warrior. People thought he was the greatest; they would compare others to him. "He is like

Nimrod, the greatest warrior on earth.” Nimrod built a kingdom of Babylon, and founded towns of Babylon, Erech, Akkad, and Calneh. He expanded his control to Assyria, founding the town of Nineveh, Rehoboth-ir, Calah, and Resen.

Mizraim was the father of the Ludites, Anamites, Lehabites, Naphtuhites, Pathrusites, Casluhites, and the Caphtorites. The Philistines came from them.

Canaan’s first son was Sidon, the beginning of the Sidonians. Canaan was also the father of the Hittites, Jebusites, Amorites, Girgashites, Hivites, Arkites, Sinites, Arvadites, Zemarites, and Hamathites. The family of Canaan spread out to include Sidon on the north, Gaza on the south, as far east as Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim, and Lasha. Each developed their own language, culture, and national values.

Children of Shem

Children were born to Shem. His sons were Elam, Asshur, Arphaxad, Lud, and Aram.

The children of Aram were Uz, Hul, Gether, and Mash.

The son of Arphaxad Shelah and his son was Eber.

Eber had two sons named Peleg (which means “division”), because during his life the languages were divided at the Tower of Babel) and Joktan.

Joktan’s children were Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah, Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah, Obal, Abimael, Sheba, Ophir, Havilah, and Jobab. They lived in the area from Mesha to Sephar in the Eastern Mountains. Each lived according to their own language, culture, and national values.

Conclusion

These are the various family groups from Noah’s sons. All future nations descended from these family clans.

I, The LORD, Scatter the Nations

(The events at the Tower of Babel happened before the family genealogy of Chapter 10.)

Everyone Decided Not to Scatter

11 All the children of Noah spoke the same language (God talk). They left Ararat and migrated down the Euphrates River to the flat plains around Babylon and settled there.

In eternity past the We (the Trinity) talked to one another in God-talk. When Adam was created, he spoke “God-talk” and communicated with me in that language. Eve also spoke God-talk. They had a broad vocabulary, for Adam knew everything he had to know. But their children and each succeeding generation had to learn the vocabulary to talk with one another. When they were given different vocabularies and languages at the Tower of Babel, they received new words, and with words came their meanings. Words are not empty sounds; they have meaning, values, and attitudes. At the Tower of Babel I created new cultures and national identities, i.e., new values and attitudes.

They decided to build a city using brick instead of stone and hardened the brick with fire. They built with tar instead of mortar. They didn’t want to inhabit the earth as I had commanded. They said, “Let’s build a powerful city with a pyramid (Zigareth) that will be dedicated to the heavens. We will be farmers and ‘city builders’ and we won’t be scattered all over the earth.”

I came down to see their city and to examine what they were doing. I said, “The people have united together, they can do anything they set their minds to accomplish. They all speak the same language. I decided to give them all different languages and cultures expressed in language. That way they can’t understand one another.”

So I scattered them all over the earth, and they stopped building the pyramid and city. The city is called Babel, which means “confused” because it’s the place every family group received a different language.

The Line of Abraham

Shem was 100 years old. Arphaxad was born to him; Shem had other children and lived another 500 years.

Then Arphaxad became the father of Salah when he was 35 years old. He had other children and lived another 403 years.

When Salah was 30 years old his son Eber was born. He had other children and lived another 403 years.

Eber was 34 years old when his son Peleg was born. He had other children and lived another 430 years.

Peleg was 30 years old when his son Reu was born. He had other sons and daughters, and lived another 209 years.

Reu was 32 years old when his sons Serug was born. He had other sons and daughters and lived another 207 years.

Serug was 30 years old when his son Nahor was born. He had other sons and daughters, and lived another 200 years.

When Nahor was 29 years old he became the father of Terah. He lived another 119 years and had other sons and daughters.

Terah was 70 years old when he became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran. Haran was the father of Lot. Haran died in UR of the Chaldeans while his father was still alive. Both Abram and Nahor married. Abram married Sarai and Nahor married Milcah. But Sarai was barren and had no children.

I had called Abram to go to the land of Canaan. He took his father Terah and his nephew Lot as he left Ur of the Chaldeans. They headed from Canaan, but stopped at Haran and settled there. Twenty-five years later Terah died in Haran, he was 205 years old.

I, the LORD, Direct Abram

My Call to Abram

12I originally called Abram to go to Canaan. I had promised him, “Leave your native land, your relatives, and your father’s father. Come to a land I want you to see.”

“I will make you into a great nation,
I will bless you,
I will make you famous,
You will be a blessing to all,
I will bless those who bless you

I will curse those who persecute you
You will be a spiritual blessing to all families of the world.”

So Abram left just as I commanded. He was 75 years old, when he left Haran and brought his wife Sarai and all their possessions; he also brought Lot with him. They arrived there safely and traveled past Shechem and the Oak of Moreh. But the land was not empty, the Canaanites occupied it.

I appeared to Abram, saying, “Not only have I shown you this land, I will give it to you and your descendants.”

Abram built an altar to Me and worshiped. He continued traveling south through the land, passing between Bethel and Ai. Then he built another altar to Me, and again worshiped. He continued traveling south until he came to the southern desert. There was a severe famine in the land so Abram decided to go to Egypt where he would live as a foreigner.

Abram in Egypt

Abram said to his wife, “You are a beautiful woman, when the Egyptians see you they will kill me to get you. Tell them you are my sister. They will welcome us and let me live.”

When the Egyptians saw how beautiful Sarai was, she was taken to Pharaoh’s palace. Pharaoh gave Abram many gifts as a dowry, that is, sheep, goats, cattle, donkeys, camels, and male and female servants.

I was displeased because I had promised to make Abram a unique nation. I plagued Pharaoh’s household because of Sarai. None of the women or animals conceived to give birth. I let Pharaoh know it was because of Sarai.

Pharaoh demanded of Abram, “Why didn’t you tell me she was your wife? I could have committed a terrible sin. Here . . . take your wife and leave immediately.” Soldiers escorted Abram and his entourage out of the country.

Return from Egypt

13 So Abram went back to the southern desert of Judea when he was thrown out of Egypt. He was much wealthier than when he entered Egypt. He brought Lot with him. He continued traveling north until he came near Bethel.

There he set up an altar and prayed to Me. While in Egypt he didn't set up an altar, nor did he pray to Me, one of the reasons he got into trouble.

Lot also got wealth in Egypt. They had trouble living together because they had too many possessions. Quarrels soon developed between the shepherds of Abram and Lot. This was a terrible testimony to the Canaanites living nearby.

Finally Abram said to Lot, "Let's not fight over land . . . after all we are family. The whole country around us is open land. You choose first and we will separate. If you choose the land to the left, then I will go to the right. If you want it the other way around, I will let you choose first." Abram the older and the family leader should have had first choice.

Lot surveyed the land and desired the green valley of the Jordan River (before I destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah). He didn't want the rugged mountains because of its difficulties. So the uncle let the younger nephew have the best choice. But it wasn't a good plan for Lot. The people of Sodom were evil, they openly rebelled against Me.

I allowed Lot to leave, and then I said to Abram, "Look, I have something for you. Look north, south, east, and west. I will give you everything you see—the whole land—it will be yours and your children's forever. You will have children like the dust around you. Just as you can't count dust, so you will not be able to count your children.

Then I said to Abram, "Let's go walking. Every place your foot steps will be yours. I am giving all this to you." (Abram didn't make a selfish choice like Lot).

Abram moved his family and belongings to Hebron and settled near the grove of oak trees called Mamre. Then Abram built an altar and worshiped Me.

"By faith Abraham obeyed—he went out to a place not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise—dwelling in tents—for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builders and maker is God" (Heb. 11:8-10).

War in the Land

14 About this time four kings from the city states of the Euphrates valley got together to raid the Jordan River valley. It was not to conquer and control, but to gain wealth, in gold, cattle, and slaves. The four were Amraphel, king of Shinar; Arioch, king of Ellasar; Chedorlaomer, king of Elam; and Tital, king of Gomer.

For 12 years the kings in the Jordan River valley paid yearly tribute to Hammurabi, but in the 13th year they refused to send him any money. The following year the four kings from the area of the Euphrates invaded and destroyed one town after another as they drove up one side of the Jordan River valley. Then they came back on the other side. The five kings of the Jordan valley prepared for one big battle near the Dead Sea and its tar pits. They were defeated, and many were driven into the tar pits; others retreated into the mountains. The victorious soldiers plundered the defenseless cities, and headed home with wealth, clothing, and slaves. They also captured Lot–Abram’s nephew–and everything he had.

One of Lot’s servants escaped to tell Abram who was not invaded because he lived up in the mountains. Abram mobilized 318 men, including some from neighboring families of Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre. They caught the invaders near the northern end of the Jordan valley. Abram planned a night attack that surprised the enemy. Abram’s men chased them all the way to Damascus.

Meet Melchizedek, the King of Salem

Abram brought back Lot and his possessions along with other captives. When Abram and his victorious troops came through the Valley of Shaveh (called the King’s Valley) that was below a town called Salem (will be re-named Jerusalem), his entourage was met by two kings.

The first was the King of Sodom who said, “Give me my people, but keep my possessions you retrieved. That will be your reward.” Abram replied, “I serve the Most High God, He makes me rich, I will not keep a single piece of your clothes, lest you brag that you made me rich.” Then Abram answered, “I will keep what my warriors have eaten. But you must reward my allies for their part in the battle.”

Next the King of Salem, Melchizedek, My priest who leads worship to Me; came out to meet Abram. He blessed Abram in My name. Then he served bread and wine and pronounced this blessing in My name.

“Blessed be Abram because he serves the Most High God,
The one who created heaven and earth.
Blessed be the Most High God
Who gave Abram the victory over his enemies.”

Then Abram gave Melchizedek a tithe of all the goods he received from the enemy.

I, the LORD, Reaffirm My Covenant with Abram

15I appeared to Abram in a vision, saying, “Do not be afraid of a counterattack from these four kings. I am your shield of protection. Also you gave the reward money from battle to the king of Sodom. Don’t worry, I am your reward.”

Abram told Me, “I don’t need a reward of money; I don’t have a son to receive my inheritance. My money will go to Eliezer from Damascus, he is my only heir.”

I said, “Eliezer shall not receive your inheritance. A son will be born from your own body to be your heir.” Then I took Abram outside the tent, “Look toward the heavens, can you count the stars?” NO, he can’t count them, so I said, “You shall have more descendants than the stars of the heaven.”

I know the hearts of people, so I knew immediately Abram believed My promise. I accepted his faith in Me and declared he was righteous. Then I added to My promise saying, “I am the Lord who brought you here from the Euphrates River valley. I promise I will give you this land for your children. It shall be the Promised Land.”

Abram wanted some reassurance, so he asked Me, “How shall I be sure that I will actually get it?”

I told Abram, “Bring to Me a young calf, a goat and a ram; each three years old. Also bring a dove and pigeon. Sacrifice them to Me, cut the animals in half, and lay each half on the ground, opposite the other half. But don’t split the birds, kill them and put them opposite to each other.” When Abram obeyed, vultures flew in to eat the carcasses, but Abram scared them off.

I put Abram in a deep sleep, like I did to Adam when I took Eve from his side. He had a heavy sense of dark fear. Then I said, “Your descendants will leave this land for four generations to be strangers in a foreign country. They will be slaves, but I will punish the nation that enslaves them. They will leave with great possessions. You will not see it because you will die and be buried. This will not happen for four generations because the sins of those nations that live here do not justify My destroying them yet.”

When the sun went down, I walked between the dead animals by Myself. Usually, two individuals kill the animals and then clasp hands to walk between the blood of the animals as a mutual contract for a human agreement. I walked through the blood sacrifice by Myself to guarantee an unconditional covenant with Abram. I am guaranteeing I will give this land to him from the Nile River to the Euphrates River. He will have the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites, and Jebusites.

The Birth of Ishmael

16 Sarai hadn't produced a child, so she conceived a plan. She told Abram, many tribal leaders have a child by a bond-servant. “I have a young maid named Hagar we got from Egypt.”

When Abram lied about his wife, he got this Egyptian maid as a compromise. Be careful of things you get when backslidden. Why is it that My people don't trust Me but try to do it their own way?

“Sleep with her; maybe we will have a child with her.” Abram thought it was a good idea.

Sarai and Abram had been in the Promised Land ten years when this happened. Abram slept with Hagar and she got pregnant. Immediately Hagar began bragging to Sarai about her baby. Hagar put Sarai down because she could not get pregnant.

Sarai blamed Abram for the tension she had with Hagar. Sarai tried to get Me to work out the problem saying, “God will decide which of us is right.”

But Abram did not get involved, but said, “Sarai, you decide what to do. She is your maid. You suggested this idea.” Sarai fussed at young Hagar and physically abused her.

Hagar ran away. She headed home to Egypt. I sent an angel to help her, who asked, “Hagar, what are you doing here?”

She answered. “I am running away from Sarai because she is so mean to me.”

The angel said, “Go back to Sarai, and submit to her. I will give you more descendants than you can count.” The angel added, “You are pregnant with a son. Name him Ishmael, because God has heard your cry. Your son will be like a wild donkey, no one can tame him. He will always cause problems and fight with Abram’s family.”

Hagar pleased Me, she said, “You are the God who always sees me.” She told everyone, “I saw the God who always sees me.” As a result the angel showed her a spring of water. It was called, “The spring of the One who always sees me,” i.e., Beer-lahai-roi.

Hagar obeyed and gave birth to Ishmael when Abram was 86 years old.

Abram Renamed Abraham

17I waited thirteen years after Ishmael was born before I appeared in a vision to Abram again. His whole life was wrapped up in teaching his boy, Ishmael, about living in tents. Apparently Abram forgot about My promise that he would have a son as his heir. When I appeared, I said,

“I am El Shaddai—Almighty God—obey Me faithfully and live a blameless life. I have made a covenant to give you more descendants than you can count.”

Abram fell on his face before Me. I promised, “You will be a father of many nations. I am changing your name from Abram, ‘High Father,’ to Abraham, ‘Father of many nations.’ Not only people, but many nations will come from you, including many kings.

“I am confirming this covenant between Me and you. It will continue from generation to generation. This is an everlasting covenant. I will always be your God and the God of your descendants. I will give you all the land of Canaan—the Promised Land—to your descendants. You are only a foreigner now, but they will own it and I will be their God.

“I want you to guarantee your part of this covenant; by now, and for your descendants, generation after generation. Circumcise every male by cutting away the foreskin of his male organ. This is an outward sign between Me and you. Do this to every male born to all your children. You must circumcise them on the eighth day after birth. This command extends to every servant born in each house of each descendant. Make sure you do this to your children and those brought into your house from outside. This will be a permanent mark in his body of My permanent covenant with you and your descendants. If the foreskin is not cut off, he has broken My covenant, and he will be cut off from his people.”

I then talked to Abraham about Sarai. “Don’t call her Sarai any longer (name means contentious), but call her Sarah, meaning Princess. I will bless her and give you a son by her. Nations will come from her, including many kings of nations.”

Abraham fell on his face before Me, and laughed. It was not a laugh of unbelief or skepticism. It was a laugh of gratitude. He asked, “Can a 100-year-old man father a son, and can a 90-year-old woman deliver a baby?”

In spite of the awesome news that I just told Abraham, he insisted on hanging on to the flesh. He had spent thirteen years training Ishmael to take over the family. He wanted to hang on to Ishmael. Abraham asked, “Please keep Ishmael alive and give him your special blessing.”

“No,” I told Abraham. “Your wife Sarah will have a son by you. I will confirm My covenant with him. Call him Isaac, which means laughter. You will remember you laughed when I promised you would father a son by Sarah. I will confirm My covenant with Isaac who will be born within a year.”

Then I addressed the issue of Ishmael. “Yes, I heard your prayer for Ishmael, I will bless him just like you asked. He will be a father of twelve princes and he will be a father of a great nation. But My covenant is with Isaac—not Ishmael. Isaac will be born in your line.”

That day Abraham obeyed Me; he took Ishmael, all his male servants and cut off the foreskin, circumcising them just as I commanded. Abraham was 99 years old when he was circumcised, and Ishmael was 13 years old. Both were circumcised the same day along with all the male servants. All were circumcised.

I, the LORD, Promised Abraham a Son

18 I appeared to Abraham again when he was living near the oaks of Mamre. Abraham was sitting in the doorway to his tent at midday and it can get to be 120 degrees at noon. He looked up to see Me standing nearby with two angels. He ran to greet Me and bowed as a man would greet a stranger in that day. He didn't realize I was the Lord.

Abraham said, "Please rest here in my place. Sit in the shade of a tree and I will send for water to cool and wash Your feet. May I prepare food to give You strength for Your journey?"

"Alright," I answered. "Please do as you suggested."

Abraham rushed into the tent, telling Sarah, "Get three cups of flour and knead it into dough. Then bake it into some fresh bread." Then he rushed out to the herd, choosing a tender calf and instructed a servant to cook it for a meal. When the calf was roasted, he brought it with milk and curds and set it before Me and the angels.

The angels asked, "Where is Sarah your wife?" calling her by the new name that I had given her. He answered, "She's in the tent." Actually she was listening to our conversation.

Then I said, "I will return to her the time of life, and she will have a son."

When Sarah heard Me say she would have a son, she laughed. She said to herself, "Shall I have a son when I am past the age of child bearing, and shall my husband also have a son when he is so old?"

I heard her laugh and knew what she said, so I asked Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh?" He didn't answer, so I asked,

"Is anything too hard for the LORD?" At the appointed time, I will give her back the time of life and she will give birth to a son." When confronted, Sarah lied and denied what she had said, "I didn't laugh." She was afraid.

But I corrected her, "Yes, you did laugh!"

The angels went over to look down on the Jordan valley to see the city of Sodom. As we began our journey there, Abraham walked with us. Then I asked the angels, "Should I hide from Abraham My plans for Sodom?" I realized he would be an influential leader of a great nation, and influence all the nations of the earth. I also knew Abraham would train his children to obey Me, live harmoniously with others, and be generous. I knew I could do My work in the world through him.

So I told Abraham, "I have listened to the pleading prayers of victims in Sodom and Gomorrah. The city's wicked sin is so great; I must do something

about it. I'm going down to see if their rebellion is as bad as I have heard."

The two angels left Abraham and Me to head toward Sodom. I remained with Abraham. He approached Me in intercessory prayer asking, "Will You destroy the good people with the rebellious sinners? If you find 50 good people in the city, will You spare it for their sakes?"

Abraham continued his intercession, "LORD, I know You will do the right thing. You will not destroy the good people with filthy sinners. You are the Judge of the whole earth. You will do the right thing."

I answered, "If I find 50 good people in Sodom, I will not destroy the city, but will spare it."

Then Abraham interceded again confessing, "I am only a man created from dust, and I speak to You the Lord of the Universe. If there are only 45 good people, would You destroy them for lack of five?"

I answered, "If I find 45 good people in Sodom, I will not destroy it."

Then Abraham grew bolder, "Will You spare the city for 40?"

I answered, "I will not destroy the city for 40."

Abraham spoke again, "Do not be angry with me because I continue to plead Your mercy. If You find only 30 good people, will You spare the city?"

I answered, "If I find 30, I will not do it."

Abraham was reluctant to continue asking, "I am pushing Your patience, but will You spare the city for 20?"

"I said I would not do it for 20."

Finally, Abraham pleaded, "Don't get mad at me, but I must intercede one more time. If You find only 10 good people, will You spare the city?"

I told Abraham, "I will not destroy it if I find 10." This ended our conversation. I went on My way and Abraham returned to his tent.

I, the LORD, Destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah

19The two angels entered the city of Sodom that evening. Lot was sitting at the gate, because he was a member of the town council. He saw the two, thinking they were strangers and visitors. He met them, and bowed in dignity. At this time he didn't know they were angels.

“Come to my home, wash your feet and be my guests for the evening.” This courtesy was common among the people of that day. Then he added, “You can rise early and continue your journey.”

“No . . . ,” the angels answered, “we will sleep here in the city square.”

Lot wouldn’t hear of it. He took them home, prepared fresh bread and gave them a feast. They ate the meal.

Before they could retire for the night, the men of Sodom—young and old—surrounded the house. They yelled to Lot, “Bring the men out to us so we can have sex with them.”

Lot slipped out the door, locking it behind him. He begged the crowd, “Please don’t do such a wicked thing, these are my guests and I am responsible to protect them. I have two virgin daughters. I will bring them out and you can do what you want with them.”

“GET OUT OF THE WAY,” they shouted. “You are not one of us. You are an outsider, and now you are judging us.” The crowd charged, planning to do to him what they would do to the visitors.

The two angels pulled Lot inside, and barricaded the door. They struck the men blind who were beating on the door. Blindly, they groped in the dark.

The angels asked Lot, “How many family members do you have in this house? In the city? Get them out of this city; we are going to destroy it. The suffering cry of the good people in this city is so great, God has heard and He plans us to destroy it.”

Lot rushed to see his two daughters and the men there were going to marry, “Quick,—get out of this city. The Lord is about to destroy it.” The young men laughed at him.

At day break, the angels warned Lot, “Get your wife and daughters out of this city—NOW—before they are lost in its destruction.” Lot didn’t hurry, so the angels grabbed them by their arms, and pulled them toward safety. Outside the city, the angels instructed, “Run to save your life. Don’t stay anywhere in the valley; hide in the mountains.”

Lot was not yet convinced, “I can’t go to the mountains, disaster would reach me there. Thank you for saving my life. There is a small village over there, let me stay there.”

The angels said, “We will let you go to the little village and we will not destroy it. Go quickly, we will wait to destroy the rest of the valley until you reach the little city (the village was known as Zoah, meaning “little village.”)

Lot arrived in the little village as the sun came up over the eastern hills. Then I poured out fire and burning sulfur from heaven on Sodom and Gomorrah. I destroyed them along with other villages in the Jordan River valley, destroying all people, vegetation—everything living.

Lot's wife was following behind Lot. She turned to look back to see the destruction of all the possessions that were precious to her. A flying gust of burning salted sulfur struck her and she was oxidized.

Abraham got up early the next morning and returned to the place where he interceded to Me. From there he could look out over the Jordan valley. He saw the columns of smoke and ashes billowing to heaven like heat from a furnace.

I had listened to Abraham's intercession by keeping Lot safe.

The Birth of Moab and Ammon

After the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Lot left Zoah because he was afraid of its inhabitants. He lived in a cave in the mountains with his two daughters. The oldest daughter said, "No men are left anywhere, so we can't get married. Soon our father will be too old to have children. Let's get him drunk and have sex with him to preserve our family line."

That night they got him drunk and the older daughter had sex with him, but he didn't realize what was happening. The next morning the older one said to her sister, "Tonight, we'll get him drunk again and you have sex with him." That night they did what they planned, and Lot didn't realize what was happening.

Both daughters got pregnant with Lot, their father. The oldest daughter gave birth to a son named Moab, the Moabites came from him. The younger daughter gave birth to Ammon, the Ammonites came from him.

Abraham Deceives Abimelech

20 Abraham traveled toward the desert and lived between Kadesh and Shur. While Abraham was a foreigner in Gerar, he told everyone that Sarah was his sister. Abimelech, King of Gerar, sent and took Sarah.

I went to Abimelech in a dream and said, "You will soon die because you took a man's wife." Abimelech had not had sex with her. The king said to Me, "Will you destroy a righteous nation?"

He repeated to Me the excuse Abraham gave, “She is my sister” and she said, “He is my brother.” Abimelech answered, “My heart is innocent and my hands are honest.”

I said to him, “Yes, I know your heart is innocent, so I kept you from sinning against Me. I did not let you touch her. Return the woman to the man. He is a prophet, he will pray for you, and you will live. But if you don’t restore her, you and everything you have will die.”

Abimelech got up early and told his men these things. They were afraid.

Abimelech called Abraham and said, “What have you done to me? You have made me and my people commit a great sin; you’ve done something that should not be done.” Abimelech continued, “What made you do this to me?”

Abraham answered, “Because I thought there was no fear of God in this place. I thought you would kill me to get my wife. Actually, Sarah is my sister, she is the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; but I married her. So I asked her when we live among this people, tell everyone you’re my sister!”

Abimelech gave Abraham sheep, cattle, male and female servants and returned Sarah to Abraham. Then Abimelech said to Abraham “Look, my whole land is before you, live where you choose.” To Sarah he said, “I have given a thousand pieces of silver to your brother. Everyone will understand he is your husband.”

Abraham prayed to Me, and I healed Abimelech’s wife and slave girls from their infertility, for I had closed up all the wombs because of Sarah, Abraham’s wife.

The Birth of Isaac

21 I remembered the promise I made about Sarah, that she would conceive in her old age and deliver a son at the time I promised.

Sarah delivered and Abraham called the son Isaac (Laughter). Abraham circumcised him on the eighth day as I had commanded. Abraham was one hundred years old when Isaac was born. Sarah said, “God has given me a good reason to laugh, now everyone can laugh with me. Who would have believed I would nurse a son. Nevertheless I have delivered a son in my old age.”

Isaac grew and when he was ready to be weaned, Abraham gave a great banquet to celebrate the child's weaning. But Ishmael, the son born to Hagar, mocked Isaac and treated him roughly.

Sarah told Abraham, "Kick this slave girl's son, Ishmael, out of the camp. I will not have this slave girl's son living with my son Isaac."

Abraham was upset because of Ishmael his son. But I said to Abraham, "Don't be upset because of the slave girl and Ishmael. Do what Sarah tells you to do, because your descendants will come through Isaac. But, I will make a nation from the son of the slave girl, since he is your descendent."

Abraham got up early in the morning and gave bread and a skin of water to Hagar, and sent her and the son away. She wandered in the desert near Beersheba; when the water was gone, she put her son under a bush, and went about the distance of a bow shot. She cried and said, "I can't stand to see him die." I heard the boy's voice, and My angel said to her, "Don't be afraid, I have heard the voice of the lad. I am going to make a great nation from him." Then I opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. She filled her skin with water and gave to her son to drink.

About that time Abimelech and Phichol, the captain of his Army, said to Abraham, "God is with you in everything you do, now swear to me by your God that you will never deal falsely with me, my son, or my grandson, but you will show me the kindness that I have shown to you as you live as a foreigner among us."

I love everyone and have a plan for their life. I have a plan for everyone. That means I have a special plan for you. Let me show it to you and help you fulfill it.

Abraham said, "I swear it." Now Abraham had complained to Abimelech about a well that was taken from him by Abimelech's servants.

Abimelech answered Abraham, "I don't know anything about the well. I only heard about it today when you told me." So Abraham gave sheep and cattle to Abimelech and they made a covenant about the well.

Abraham had put seven female lambs in a spot by themselves. Abimelech asked, "Why have you put these seven female lambs by themselves?" Abraham said, "You are to accept these seven female lambs as tokens that my

servants have dug this well. To this day the well is called Beersheba, i.e., the well of seven and the well of the oath.”

After they made a covenant, Abimelech and Phichol returned to the land of the Philistines. Then Abraham planted a grove of trees at Beersheba, and there called on Me by My name, El Olam (the Everlasting God). Abraham lived a long time as a foreigner in the land of the Philistines.

Abraham’s Faith is Tested

22After all these things happened, I decided to test the faith of Abraham to see how much he would trust Me. I called to him, “Abraham!” He answered. “Here I am.” I told him “Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Morah. Offer him there as a burnt sacrifice on one of the mountains which I will point out to you.”

Abraham got up early, loaded a donkey with supplies, and took two servants and his son Isaac, along with wood for the burnt offering. They left and went to the place I would show him. After three days, I showed the place to Abraham far off in the distance. Abraham told the servants, “Stay here with the donkey, my son and I will go there to worship God, and then we will come back to you.”

Abraham had Isaac carry the wood, but he carried the fire and the knife. The two of them together went up the mountain. Isaac called to Abraham, “Father;” he answered, “Here I am my son.” Isaac asked, “You have fire and wood for the sacrifice, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” Abraham answered, “God will provide Himself for a burnt offering.” So the two continued climbing.

When they arrived at the spot I showed to Abraham, he built an altar there, and stacked the wood in its place. Then the father tied up his son, and laid him on the wood. Abraham reached for the knife and took it to kill his son.

When I took My Son, the Lord Jesus, up the same mountain, I had Him bound to the cross to die as your substitute. But I didn’t stop the sacrifice, as I stopped Abraham; I allowed My Son to die for your sins.

Just then I spoke to him from heaven, “Abraham—Abraham—!” He answered again the same way, “Here I am.” I told Abraham, “Don’t lay a hand on your son, or do anything to him. Now I know you would obey Me and you trust Me. You didn’t hesitate to place your only dear son on the altar for Me.”

Abraham looked up and saw a ram caught in some bushes by its horn. Abraham took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering in place of his son.

Abram named the place Jehovah-Jireh, (The Lord shall provide), as it is called this day. From then on the mountain was called, “God will provide.”

Then I called a second time to Abraham out of heaven, “Because you have done this and not refused to give Me your son, your only son, I will bless you beyond anything you can imagine. I will give you many children, like the stars of heaven they will flourish and like the sand in all the beaches, you will have so many children you can’t count them. They will defeat their enemies. From one of your descendants I will bless all the people of the earth, simply because you obeyed Me.”

So Abraham and Isaac returned to the two servants just as he promised. They packed up and returned to Beersheba and lived there.

Word got to Abraham that Milcah, the wife of his brother Nahor, had delivered children: Huz his firstborn, Buz the brother, Kemel the father of Aaron, Chese, Hozo, Pildash, Jidlaph, and Bethuel. The important one was Bethuel who bore Rebekah (Isaac’s future wife). There eight were delivered by Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham’s brother. His concubine named Reumah gave him four more sons: Tebah, Gahem, Tahash, and Maacah.

The Death and Burial of Sarah

23 Sarah was 127 years old when she died in Kirjath Arbia near Hebron in the land of Canaan. Abraham came and mourned for Sarah and wept for her. Then he left the body and visited the sons of Heth, the chieftains who ruled the area. He said, “I am a foreigner among you and I am visiting the area to live here. Sell me a plot of ground so I can properly bury my dead wife.”

The chieftains replied, “You are no longer a stranger to us, you are a prince of God. Go bury your wife at the choicest burial place. No one would refuse you the right to bury your wife. Go bury your dead.”

Then Abraham stepped forward, bowed himself to the chieftains, i.e., the sons of Heth. He spoke, “If it is your wish for me to bury my dead out of my

sight, then be kind to what I am asking. Talk with Ephron the son of Zohar for me, that he may sell me the cave of Machpelah at the end of his field. Let him sell it to me for the full price as a place to bury my dead among you in this land.”

Now Ephron was among the chieftains of the sons of Heth. Ephron spoke officially in front of the council to all of them and all who live in the area, “No Abraham, I will give you the field and the cave. It is a present I give to you. It is authorized in the presence of these chieftains and all of the people of this area. Now go bury your dead.”

But Abraham bowed even deeper before the chieftains and the people of the area, speaking to Ephron so all could hear, “If you will give it to me as a present, I will give you the full price for the field. Take the money from me, and I will bury my dead there.”

Then Ephron answer Abraham, “My esteemed one, listen to my proposal. The land is worth 400 shekels of silver but what is that price between us. So go bury your dead there.”

Abraham accepted the price. The property was deeded to him, the field and the cave located there, and the trees on the field and those surrounding the borders became the property of Abraham that day. It was verified by the chieftain, the sons of Heth and all the people that day.

So Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the field in the cave Machpelah, near Hebron in the land of Canaan. So the field and the property became the burial place for Abraham and his descendants because it was deeded to him by the sons of Heth.

I promised the land to Abraham and his seed and one day they will occupy it in peace.

A Bride For Isaac

24Now Abraham was getting old and it was time to find a wife for Isaac. I had blessed Abraham in all areas of his life and he needed a son to have children as Abraham’s descendants.

Abraham told Eliezer, his trusted servant who managed his household, “Give me your hand and swear by God—the God of Heaven and earth—that you

will not let my son marry a wife from the Canaanites, but you will go to the land where I was born and get a wife for my son Isaac from among my people.”

The servant answered, “What if a woman refuses to come to this country, can I take your son back to your home country to get a wife?”

“Oh no!” Abraham answered. “Do not take my son back there, it is not proper. The God of Heaven and earth who led me from the country of my birth promised me, ‘I’ll give you this land for your descendants.’ This God will send His angel before you to get a wife for my son. If the woman won’t come with you, you are released from this oath you swore to me. But under no condition can you take him there.”

So the servant gave Abraham his hand in a covenant pledge. The servant packed gifts for the woman on ten camels. He traveled to the Euphrates River valley to the city of Nahor. Outside the city he made his camels kneel at the well. He waited for the evening time when women came to draw water. He prayed, “O God, Lord of my master, Abraham, please help me be successful today for the sake of Abraham, my master. I am standing at the well where women come to draw water. Lead me to a young woman who can be the bride for Isaac, the son of my master, Abraham. When I ask a young woman, ‘Please draw water so I can drink,’ and she says ‘drink’ and she offers to give water to the camels also, she will be the one you have chosen for Isaac. This way I will know that You have answered my prayers.”

Before the prayer left his lips, Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel, whose mother was Milcah, the wife of Abraham’s brother, came to the well with a water jug on her shoulder. The servant asked, “Please may I have a drink of water from your jug?” When he had enough, she said, “I’ll draw water for your camels also.” She quickly began pouring water in the trough until all 10 camels were filled. The servant was stunned. Was this his immediate answer? He wondered if he had made his trip successful. The servant then gave Rebekah a nose ornament, and two large bracelets for her wrists. Then he asked, “Whose daughter are you? Also, is there room in your house for us to lodge this evening?”

Rebekah answered, “I am the daughter of Bethuel, Milcah’s son, whom she bore to Nahor.” She added, “We have both straw and food and room to lodge.”

The servant bowed to worship Me because I had led him straight to the right place to meet the right person at the right time. He prayed, “Blessed be

my Lord and God of my master, Abraham. Thank You for Your mercy to Abraham. I was just following the path, and You Lord led me to the house of Abraham's brother." Then Rebekah ran to tell her family what just happened.

Rebekah told her brother, Laban, how she had worked to water his camels. "It began when the servant asked me for water to drink and I drew enough for the 10 camels." Then Laban saw the large bracelets and nose rings. He ran to the well to meet the man.

Laban said, "Come to my house you who are blessed by God. Don't stay out here, I've got a house that will receive you and there is a place for your camels."

The servant went home with Laban. The camels were unloaded and given straw and water. Water was brought to wash the feet of Eliezer and his servants. Laban brought out food to eat, but Eliezer said, "I will not eat until I tell you why I've come." Laban said, "Please tell us."

Eliezer said, "I am the servant of Abraham. God has blessed him and he has become a great leader. God has given him sheep, cattle, silver, gold and servants, plus camels and donkeys. Then God blessed Abraham with a son when his wife was too old to have children. His son will have Abraham's entire inheritance.

"My master, Abraham, made me swear not to get a wife for him from among the Canaanites. I was instructed to go to his home land and his family to get a wife for his son, Isaac." I asked Abraham, "What if the woman will not come with me." He said, "The God I have served will send His angel to work out details so that you will bring back a wife for my son from my family and from the house of my father. But if she won't come or if her family won't let her come, I will be free from my pledge."

Eliezer then told Laban that he prayed, "God of my father, Abraham, lead me to the right woman at the right well. When I ask her to please give me a drink of water from her jug, I pray that she will say not only will I give you to drink, but I'll draw enough water for your 10 camels. That will be the woman for my master's son.

"Before I finished praying, Rebekah came to the well with her water jug on her shoulder. I asked, 'May I have a drink of water?' She said, 'Drink and I will draw for your camels also.' So I drank and she gave my camels water to drink also. I asked her whose daughter are you? She said, 'The daughter of Bethuel, Nahor's son, whom Milcah bore to him.' So I gave her the nose rings and put the bracelets on her wrists. I bowed to worship the Lord who had

blessed my master, Abraham, who led me to the house of my master's brother. Now tell me what you will do? If you will let Rebekah marry Isaac, tell me so. If not, tell me plainly so I can go look at another place."

Laban and Bethuel said, "Surely God is leading; we don't know what to say. Here is Rebekah, take her and let her be your master's son's wife. This is God's will."

When Eliezer heard their response, he bowed to the ground and worshiped Me for guiding him to the right family. Then Eliezer brought out jewelry of silver, gold and clothing for Rebekah. He also gave expensive gifts to Laban and her mother.

They all ate, drank, and Eliezer stayed there all night. The next morning Eliezer said to the brother and mother, "Send me home to my master." But the brother and mother said, "Let Rebekah stay with us at least 10 days. Then she can go."

Eliezer answered, "Do not make me wait. Since God has worked out all the details, send me now to my master."

The brother and mother said, "We will call Rebekah and see what she wants to do." When they called Rebekah, they asked, "Are you ready to go with this man?" She said, "Yes, I'll go!"

So they sent Rebekah and her maid with Eliezer and his servants. They blessed Rebekah saying, "May your descendants conquer the gates of those who hate them." Rebekah and her maid got on the camel to follow Eliezer, and he led them out.

Now Isaac came from the south country to Beersheba. He was out meditating in the field at evening. Then he saw the camels coming. When Rebekah saw him she got off her camel and asked Eliezer, "Who is this man walking in the field to meet us?" Eliezer said, "It's Isaac." She quickly covered herself with a veil. Eliezer told Isaac all I had done to lead him to the right spot. Isaac brought Rebekah to his mother's tent. Then he took her to be his wife and he loved her. Isaac found companionship after his mother's death.

The Death of Abraham and Esau Sold His Birthright to Jacob

25 Abraham married Keturah, a second wife. She gave birth to Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah. Jokshan begot Sheba and

Dedan. And the sons of Dedan were Asshurim, Letushim, and Leummim. And the sons of Midian were Ephah, Ephher, Hanoch, Abidah, and Eldaah. All these were from Keturah.

But Abraham gave his entire inheritance to Isaac. He gave gifts to the sons he had with his concubines when he was still living. But he sent them eastward away from his son, Isaac.

Abraham lived 175 years, and then he died at a good old age. He was an old man full of years, and was gathered to his people.

His sons, Isaac, and Ishmael, buried him in the cave Machpelah, which is in Mamre, which is the field he purchased from Ephron, the son of Zohar, the Hittite. He was buried with his wife, Sarah, after his death; I blessed his son, Isaac, who then lived at the well Lahai-roi.

Now this is the genealogy of Ishmael, Abraham's son, who was born to Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's maidservant. His firstborn was Nebajoth; then Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, Mishma, Dumah, Massa, Hadar, Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah. These were Ishmael's sons and these were their names, by their towns and their settlements. They were twelve princes of twelve people groups. These were the years of the life of Ishmael: one hundred and thirty-seven years; and he breathed his last and died, and was gathered to his people. They lived in Havilah (the desert) as far as Shur, which is east of Egypt as you go toward Assyria.

This is the genealogy of Isaac, son of Abraham by Sarah. Isaac was 40 years old when he married Rebekah, the daughter of Bethuel, the Syrian of Padam Aram, the sister of Laban. Because Rebekah was barren, Isaac pleaded with Me for a son. I granted his request and Rebekah conceived. But the children struggled within her womb. She felt, "If this is how it feels to be pregnant, why go on living?" She prayed to Me and I told her,

"Two different people groups are in your womb.

Two men fighting while still in your body.

One will overpower the other, and the older will serve the young."

Rebekah gave birth to twins. The first came out covered with red hair as if covered with a reddish blanket. He was named Esau which means "hairy." The second boy came out with a fist clutching the heel of the first. He was named Jacob, which means "heel." Isaac was 60 years old when they were born.

As the boys grew up, Esau became an expert hunter and loved the outdoors. Jacob was a quiet boy who stayed in the tent. Isaac loved Esau because he was a rugged hunter. But Rebekah loved Jacob.

One day Jacob was cooking a stew. When Esau came in from hunting, he was very hungry. Esau asked, "Give me some red stew, I am starved." As a result, Esau's people were called Edom, which means "red."

Jacob demanded, "First you must give me your birthright." And Esau gave Jacob the right to be the spiritual head of the family. Then Jacob gave his brother bread and stew. He ate it, got up and left as though it were a small thing. Thus Esau despised his birthright to be the spiritual head of the family.

Isaac Deceives Abimelech

26 There was a great drought in the area, like the drought Abraham faced when he came into the land. Isaac left the desert and went to Abimelech, king of the Philistines. Then I appeared to Isaac and said, "Do not go down to Egypt. Stay in this land. I will be with you and bless you, and your descendants. I will give you all this land and I will keep My promise to Abraham your father. I will cause your descendants to multiply like the stars of heaven. I will give this land to your descendants. And through your descendants I will bless all the people of the earth. Why? Because Abraham obeyed My directions and commandments, and followed My teachings."

So Isaac stayed in Gerar with the Philistines.

When the men of the area asked him about Rebekah, he said, "She is my sister." He was afraid they would kill him if he said she was his wife because she was beautiful.

After he had been there a long time, Abimelech looked out his window and saw Isaac fondling his wife Rebekah. The king sent for Isaac and accused him, "Obviously she is your wife. Why did you tell us "She's my sister?" Isaac said, "Because someone might kill me to get her."

Abimelech demanded, "Do you know what you have done to us? One of our men may have slept with your wife. That would have brought guilt on us."

Abimelech gave the orders, "Anyone who touches this man or his wife will be put to death."

Then Isaac planted crops in that land and I blessed him abundantly. He got richer and wealthier. He had flocks, herds, and many servants. The Philistines

became envious of him. They retaliated by stopping up his wells, the ones Abraham's servants had dug.

Abimelech told Isaac, "Leave, you have become too great for us." So Isaac left and encamped in the Gerar Valley. Isaac's servants cleaned out a well dug by Abraham's servants. The well had been clogged up. Since Abraham's death, Isaac renamed the wells the name his father had given them. They also dug a new well in the valley and found running water. The herdsmen of Gerar argued with the herdsman of Isaac's claiming, "The water is ours!" So Isaac called its name *Esek* which means quarrels, because of the quarreling.

Isaac moved farther away and dug another new well. They argued over that well also. So he called it *Sitnah*, which means accusation.

Then Isaac moved far enough that the Philistines could not claim it. He dug another well and called it *Rehoboth* which means wide open space. Then he said, "Now the Lord has made room for us." From there Isaac moved to Beersheba. That same night I appeared to Isaac and said, "I am the God of your father, Abraham. Do not be afraid, for I will be with you. I will bless you and multiply your descendants because of My pledge to Abraham."

So Isaac built an altar and worshiped Me. He made that his encampment. His servants dug wells at Beersheba and they prospered.

Then Abimelech came to Isaac from Gerar with Ahuzzath, a friend, and Phicol, the commander of his warriors. Isaac asked, "Why have you come to visit me since you hate me and have sent me away from your encampment?"

Abimelech said, "We have seen that the Lord is with you and has blessed you. So we have come to swear an oath of a peace pact between us. We want you to swear to not attack us, since we have not attacked you in the past. We have only treated you fairly, and sent you away in peace. We see God has blessed you."

So Isaac prepared a feast and they sat down to eat and drink. They got up early in the morning and swore an oath to one another. Isaac sent them away in peace.

That same day Isaac's servants came to tell him about the new well they were digging. "We found water." So he called it *Shebah* (the well of the oath) and the city had that name permanently, i.e., Beersheba.

When Esau was 40 years old he married Judith, daughter of Beerli, the Hittite, and Basemath, daughter of Elon, the Hittite. They were trouble for

Isaac and Rebekah.

Jacob Steals Esau's Blessing

27When Isaac was old and feeble, his eyes failed and he could barely see. He called Esau, his oldest son and said, "My son!"

"Here am I," Esau answered.

Isaac told him, "I am old and do not know when I'll die. Take your bow and arrow and go hunt some game for me. Cook it with the savory sauce I like. Bring it to me to eat, and I'll bestow on you the family inheritance (the blessing) before I die."

Rebekah was eavesdropping on the conversation. When Esau left to go hunting, she called Jacob saying, "I heard your father tell Esau, 'Kill me some game and cook it in my favorite sauce, and I will bless you with the family inheritance in the presence of God before I die.'"

Rebekah told Jacob, "Go get two choice young sheep from the flock. I will use his favorite savory sauce to cook them, the kind your father likes to eat. Then you take it to your father and he will bless you with the family inheritance."

But Jacob objected, "My brother, Esau, is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man. Father will touch me and he will call me a deceiver. Then he shall curse me instead of blessing me."

Rebekah said, "Let the curse be on me—now obey me and go get the lambs for me." Jacob got the lambs and his mother cooked them in the savory sauce that Isaac liked. Then Rebekah took Esau's best clothes that were in her tent and put them on Jacob. She sewed the skins for gloves and a coat to cover his smooth arms and neck. Then she gave the savory meal with bread to Jacob to carry to his father. He greeted his father Isaac.

"Here I am," Isaac said to his son, "but who are you?"

"I am Esau your firstborn," Jacob answered. "I have done exactly what you told me to do. Here is the meal, eat and bless me."

"How is it you found wild game so quickly?" Isaac asked.

Jacob replied, "The Lord God led the animals to me."

Isaac was not sure. He said, "Come closer so I can feel you, to see if you are really Esau." So the son went to him and Isaac felt his arm and neck. Then

he said, “The voice is Jacob, but the hands are Esau’s.”

Because Isaac couldn’t tell the difference, he blessed Jacob with the family inheritance.

Then Isaac asked, “Are you really my son, Esau?”

“I am.”

Isaac instructed him, “Bring the meal so I can eat the meat you have killed.” So Isaac blessed Jacob. When Jacob brought wine, his father drank it. He asked, “Come near my son and kiss me.” When Jacob kissed his father, Isaac smelled the forest smell and blessed him.

“The smell of my son is like the open forest, be blessed of God. May God give you heaven’s dew and earth’s bounty of food and drink. May many people serve you. May nations honor you. You will be the master of your brother, and your mother’s son will honor you. Those who curse you will be cursed, those who honor you will be honored.”

Shortly after Jacob left his father, Esau arrived from his hunt. He prepared a meal just as his father liked. He took it to his father saying, “Get up and enjoy this meal from your son’s hunt, then give me the blessing of the family inheritance.”

“Who are you?” Isaac asked.

“I am Esau, your firstborn son!”

Isaac began to tremble uncontrollably. “Who is the one who brought me hunted game and brought me a savory meal just as I like? I ate it and blessed him with the family inheritance—he shall be blessed. I cannot reverse it.”

When Esau heard his father, he cried with a bitter voice, “Bless me also, my father.”

Isaac explained, “Your brother deceitfully has taken away your blessing.”

Esau exclaimed, “He is rightly named Jacob, the heel—he is a deceiver. First he took the birthright of spiritual leadership, now he has taken the blessing of family inheritance.” Then he begged, “Do you have a blessing for me?”

Isaac answered, “I have made him your master and blessed him with grain, cattle and wine. I have given him everything. What’s left for you my son?”

Esau begged, “Don’t you have one blessing for me?” Esau cried uncontrollably, “Bless me—please bless me.”

So Isaac said, “You will live from the fatness of the earth, the dew of heaven will always be on you. You shall live by the sword, but serve your brother. When you don’t know what to do, you will break loose and be free of him.”

Esau boiled with anger against Jacob. He kept thinking and told everyone, “My father will die soon and we shall mourn for him. When grieving is over, I will kill Jacob.”

When Rebekah heard what Esau was saying, she told Jacob about Esau’s plot to kill him. She told Jacob, “Leave and go to my brother, Laban. Stay with him until Esau forgets what has happened. Then I will send for you. I’d die if I lost both of you in one day.”

Rebekah told Isaac, “I’m fed up with those Hittite women Esau married. If Jacob married a Hittite woman, I will die.”

Jacob Leaves Home

28 So the father, Isaac, sent for Jacob and blessed him saying, “Don’t marry a girl from the Canaanites. Leave; go to your mother’s family. Find a wife from the family of your Uncle Laban.” Then he added, “May God Almighty bless you. May you have many children and multitudes. May you be a nation of people and may God give you the blessing of Abraham. May you inherit the land which God gave to Abraham, even though you are a stranger in this land now.”

So I led Jacob away from his parents to the Euphrates River valley to Laban, son of Bethuel the Aramean, the brother of Rebekah, the mother of Esau and Jacob.

Esau learned that Isaac had blessed Jacob and sent him to his mother’s home to get a wife with the instruction, “Don’t marry a Canaanite.” When Esau heard that Jacob obeyed his father, then Esau went to Ishmael and married Mahalath, the sister of Nebajoth, and daughter of Ishmael. This was in addition to the wives he already had.

Jacob left Beersheba in the desert and walked through the hills of Galilee. When the sun set and night descended, he laid down to sleep at that spot. He took a stone as his pillow and went to sleep. He dreamed and saw a ladder set on earth with its top reaching to heaven. There were angels going up and down the ladder. I stood at the top of the ladder and said, “I am the Lord God

of your father, Abraham, and of Isaac. The land which you are laying on, I will give to you and your descendants. You will have descendants like the dust of the earth. You will spread out over this land to the west, east, north and south. Through your descendants I will bless all the people of the world. I will go with you and protect you and bring you back to this land. I will be with you until I have done everything I have promised you.”

Jacob woke up and said, “Surely God was in this place and I didn’t know it.” He shook with fear and said, “This is a reverent place. This is the house of God; this is the gate to heaven.”

Jacob got up early the next morning and poured oil on the stone he had used as a pillow. He called the place Bethel (House of God); previously the place was called Luz. Then Jacob vowed, “God if You will be with me and keep me in the place I am going, and give me food to eat and clothes to wear, and bring me back to this place, then You will be my God. The place of this stone will be Your house, and I will give to You a tenth of all that is mine.”

Jacob Arrives in Northern Syria

29Jacob continued his journey toward the Euphrates River valley. He came to a well in an open field with three shepherds sitting around it. This was the community well with a huge stone over the well. When all the sheep from all the community gathered, the shepherds would roll the stone away to water the sheep. After all were watered, they would roll the stone back in place. Jacob met the shepherds and asked, “Where are you from?”

“We’re from Haran,” they answered. Jacob asked, “Do you know Laban, son of Nahor?” They said they knew him and he was doing well. Then they said, “And there is his daughter, Rachel, coming to water her flocks. “Why don’t you roll away the stone?” Jacob asked so the flocks could get water, then go back to grazing. He reassured, “There is lots of daylight left.” The shepherd answered, “We can’t do it until all the sheep are here and there is help to roll away the stone.”

Then Rachel came close to the well. When Jacob saw her, he singlehandedly rolled away the stone so her flock could drink. Then Jacob kissed her and the world stood still. He broke into tears and told Rachel he was the son of Rebekah, sister to Laban.

Rachel ran to tell her father, Laban. When he heard the news that his sister's son was there, Laban ran and embraced Jacob and kissed him. Then Jacob told him the story of everything that happened. "You are flesh and blood, you are family." Laban responded after Jacob had been living there a month, Laban said, "You shouldn't work for me free." He asked Jacob what he should pay him.

Laban had two daughters; Leah was the older and Rachel the younger. Leah had bad eyes, but Rachel was beautiful and shapely. Jacob loved Rachel, so he answered, "I will work for seven years to marry your youngest daughter Rachel." Laban agreed, "It is best I give her to you than someone outside the family. Yes, work for me seven years." So Jacob worked seven years for Rachel, but it seemed like only a short time because he was in love with her.

After seven years Jacob asked, "I have completed my seven years, now give Rachel to me for marriage." Laban invited all the surrounding neighbors to a wedding feast. When evening time came, Laban brought Leah to the wedding tent and Jacob slept with her (Laban also gave Zilpah as a handmaiden for Leah). Jacob woke up the next morning with Leah. He didn't know a switch was made. Jacob confronted Laban. "Why did you lie to me? Why have you done this to me?"

Laban answered, "In our country we do it differently. We don't marry the younger daughter before the older daughter." Then the uncle explained, "Spend the honeymoon week with Leah. Then after seven days I will let you marry Rachel. But you will have to work an additional seven years for Rachel." When Laban gave Rachel to Jacob, he also gave Bilhah as a handmaiden to Rachel. Then Jacob slept with her and loved Rachel more than Leah. But he worked another seven years for Rachel.

I saw that Leah was unloved, so I opened her womb to have children, but closed up Rachel's womb so she couldn't have children. Leah had a son and Jacob named him Reuben which means, I have a son. Leah said, "This boy is a message from God that He has seen my misery and supported me. Now my husband will love me."

Leah became pregnant again and had a son. She named him Simeon, "God Listened to Me." She said, "I told God I was unhappy and he gave me this son, now my husband will love me." She became pregnant a third time and had another son. She named him Levi which means "To Connect." "Now my husband will connect with me." Then she became pregnant a fourth time and

had a son named Judah which means “Praise.” Then Leah stopped having children.

Jacob Works For Laban

30When Rachel realized she wasn’t having any children, she was jealous of Leah. So she said to Jacob, “If you don’t give me children, I’ll die.” This made Jacob mad. He said, “I’m not God. So don’t blame me.” Rachel was frustrated because Leah had children and she didn’t. Rachel’s desire was appropriate, but her motives were wrong; she was jealous of Leah. She should have directed her prayers to Me. Then Rachel said to Jacob, “Sleep with my maid Bilhah. Maybe I can have a family through her.”

So Jacob slept with Bilhah, and she became pregnant and had a son. Rachel named the son Dan (meaning “Justice”) because she said, “God has given me justice and given me a son.” Then Bilhah had a second son, and Rachel named him Naphtali (meaning “My Struggle”) because she said, “I have struggled with my sister.”

Leah realized she could not have any more children, so she gave her maid, Zilpah, to Jacob. She had a son and Leah named him Gad (meaning “Luck”) because she said, “I am lucky to have a son.” Then Zilpah had a second son, and Leah named him Asher (meaning “Happy”) because, as she said, “I am really happy.”

In the wheat harvest, Reuben, Leah’s oldest, found some mandrakes which people thought helped women get pregnant. He took them to his mother, Leah. Rachel saw this and asked Leah for some of them.

Do you ever pray with wrong motives? Have you ever prayed with a jealous motive? Did I hear the content of your prayer to give what you ask, even when you had a deceitful heart? Yes! That was true of Rachel. Rachel seemed to act like a spoiled child to get her way. “I’ll let you sleep with him (Jacob) tonight in exchange for the mandrake roots” (30:15). Rachel prayed for a son and I answered her prayer.

But Leah objected. “You took away my husband, and now you want my son’s mandrakes too!”

“Okay,” Rachel said. “Give me some mandrakes and you can sleep with Jacob tonight.” When Jacob came in, Leah told him about the arrangement. So he slept with her that night. Then Leah became pregnant and had a fifth son whom she named Issachar (meaning “Reward”) because she said, “God has rewarded me.” Then she had a sixth son. She named him Zebulun (meaning “Honor”) because she said, “Because of this precious gift, my husband will now honor me.” Later Leah had a daughter and named her Dinah.

Finally, I answered Rachel’s prayer and enabled her to have a son. She said, “I had removed her shame.” She named him Joseph (meaning “May He Add”) because she prayed, “May God add to me another son.”

Later Jacob told Uncle Laban, “I need to go back home. Let me be on my way with my wives and children. You know I have paid for them by working for you.” But Laban said, “Please don’t leave. I have many blessings because of you. Do you need a raise? Just say so, and I’ll pay it.”

Jacob said, “You know I’ve worked hard for you and your livestock has grown as I’ve cared for them. You didn’t have much when I came, but you are well off now. So now I need to look out for my family.” Laban then asked, “What do I owe you?” Jacob replied, “Nothing. But I have one request. As I continue working for you, let me take from your flocks any sheep or goats that are speckled or spotted and any black lambs, and they can be my wages. Then if you find any of my goats that are not speckled or spotted or any lambs that are not black, you will know I stole them.”

Laban said, “Okay.” So that day Laban separated all his speckled or spotted goats and his black lambs, and put his sons over them. Then he separated them from Jacob by taking them away the distance of a 3-day journey.

Jacob cut branches from various trees and peeled back the bark so that the white inner stripes showed on the wood. He placed the peeled branches near the watering troughs so the animals would see them when they came to drink. The goats mated in front of the branches, and their young were speckled and spotted. He took the young sheep of Laban’s and had them mate only with Jacob’s black sheep. When the stronger females were ready to mate, Jacob made sure they would do so near the branches. But he didn’t place the branches in front of the weak animals. So the weak animals were Laban’s, and the strong ones were Jacob’s. As Jacob’s flocks grew large, he became wealthy with many flocks, camels, donkeys, and servants.

I should not have blessed Jacob because he had a habit of “tricking” people to get what he wanted. His stew got him the birthright. He stole the blessing from his father Isaac. Now he used questionable breeding tricks to prosper and diminish the flocks of Laban. Why would I bless Jacob? It was not because of his deceptive ways. Instead I blessed Jacob for My own sovereign purposes which are not always understood by humans.

Jacob Runs Away From Laban

31 Jacob heard that Laban’s sons were complaining that Jacob got rich off their father. And Laban was not as friendly toward Jacob as he had been. I said to Jacob, “Go back home to your relatives, and I will be with you.” Jacob then told Rachel and Leah, “Your father is no longer friendly toward me, but God has been with me.”

Two things motivated Jacob to return to his family home. First, he heard threatening rumors about his father-in-law, Laban. Second, I told Jacob to return to his homeland. I reminded Jacob, “I am the God of Bethel where you poured oil on a stone pillar and made a vow to Me” (31:13). Sometimes you must be reminded of your vow to Me, then immediately go about keeping your promises to Me.

Jacob instructed his wives and children, they packed up their belongings and left for the Promised Land. Jacob explained, “I’ve worked hard for your father, but he kept changing my wages. However, God hasn’t allowed him to harm me. When he said the speckled flock would be mine, all of them were speckled. And the same was true of the spotted ones. That’s how your father’s sheep and goats became mine.

“Once I dreamed that the angel of God told me to notice that all the male goats were either spotted or speckled. I, the LORD, said, ‘I know what Laban has been doing to you. I am the God of Bethel where you poured oil on a stone pillar and made a promise to Me. So leave and go to your homeland.’”

Rachel and Leah asked, “We will not inherit anything from our father Laban’s estate. He treats us like foreigners and he has cheated us out of our

bride price.”

Then Jacob, his children, and wives left for Canaan with all his livestock and other property. Rachel stole Laban’s family idols. Jacob didn’t tell Laban he planned to leave. But he crossed the Euphrates River and headed toward Gilead.

Three days later Laban learned that Jacob had left. So he pursued him for a week, finally catching up with him in Gilead. In a dream I told Laban not to say anything good or bad to Jacob.

Laban and his relatives camped in Gilead near Jacob. Then he said to Jacob, “Why have you been deceptive and run off with my daughters? Why were you so secretive about it? If you had told me, I could have sent you off with singing and playing of musical instruments. Foolishly you didn’t even let me kiss my grandchildren and daughters good-bye. I could hurt you for this, but God told me to be careful what I say to you. You went off to your homeland, but why did you steal my idols?”

Jacob answered, “I left because I was afraid you would not let your daughters go with me. If you find any one of us has stolen your idols, then that person deserves to die. You can look, and if you find anything that belongs to you, take it.” Jacob did not know Rachel had stolen the family idols.

So Laban went into Jacob’s and Leah’s tents looking for the idols, but he found nothing. Then he went into Rachel’s tent. She had put the idols in her camel’s saddle and was sitting on it. As Laban searched her tent, he found nothing. Rachel said to her father, “Don’t be mad at me for not getting up, but I’m having my period.” Laban kept on searching but could not find the idols.

All this upset Jacob and he said to Laban, “What crime have I committed? You’ve searched everything of mine. But if you have found anything that belongs to you, put it here in front of everyone so we can see it.

“In the 20 years I’ve worked for you, your sheep and goats have not had a miscarriage, and I’ve never eaten one of your male sheep. If a sheep or goat of yours was killed by a wild animal, I paid for it myself, whether it was killed in the daytime or at night. It was hot during the day and cold at night, and at times I couldn’t sleep. Things have been like this for 20 years. I worked for you for 14 years for your two daughters, and six more years to buy your sheep and goats, and you kept changing my wages. If the wonderful God of my father and grandfather had not been with you, you probably would have sent

me away with nothing. But God has seen how hard I've worked for you, so it's not surprising that He has rebuked you."

Laban said, "Leah and Rachel are my daughters, and their children are my grandchildren, and all these sheep are mine too. But I can't do anything about all this now. So let's make an agreement between us." Jacob set up a large rock, and he told his relatives to pile up more rocks. They did and they ate there by the rock pile. Laban named the rock pile Yegar-Sahadutha (which means "Heap of Witness" in Aramaic), and Jacob named it Galeed (which means "Heap of Witness" in Hebrew). Laban said, "This rock pile will remind us of our agreement." And the name Galeed conveyed the same idea. Laban said, "May the LORD watch over us while we are apart.

"If you mistreat my daughters or take other women to be your wives, no one may see you, but I will know. This rock pile and the large rock are witnesses that I will not go past them to harm you and you will not go past them to harm me. The God of your grandfather, Abraham and the God of my father, Nahor, and the God of their ancestors will know if we are keeping the agreement." Jacob agreed to all this.

Jacob offered a sacrifice there, and invited his relatives to a meal. They ate supper, and spent the night on the mountain. Early in the morning Laban kissed his grandchildren and his two daughters good-bye, and then he left for home.

Jacob Sends Gifts to Esau and Jacob Meets Me

32As Jacob was on his way, some angels met him. Seeing them, he named the place Mahanaim (meaning "Two Camps"), because he said, "This is the camp of God." He sent messengers ahead of him to greet his brother, Esau, in Seir also called Edom.

"I, your servant, have been living with Laban. I have lots of oxen, donkeys, sheep, goats, and servants. I am sending these messengers of mine to greet you."

The messengers went back to Jacob and told him, "Esau is coming to see you with 400 men." This scared Jacob, and so he divided his people and livestock into two groups, thinking, "If Esau attacks one group, the others will be safe."

Then Jacob prayed to Me, “LORD, You are the one who told me to go back home. I don’t deserve all Your kindness to me.

“Years ago when I crossed the Jordan on my way to northern Syria, I had nothing. Now I have two large groups of animals and people. Please save me from Esau. I’m afraid he’ll attack me and my wives and children. You told me You would prosper me and make my descendants as countless as the sand.”

After spending the night there, he selected a gift for Esau, including 220 sheep, 1530 camels, 40 cows, 10 bulls, and 30 donkeys. He told his servants to go ahead of him and keep some distance between the herds. “When my brother, Esau, asks who you are and where you are going, and whose animals these are, then say, ‘They belong to your servant, Jacob. He sends them as a gift to you. And he is coming behind us.’” He told the men with the other herds to say the same thing to Esau.

Jacob couldn’t deny his old nature to “trick” his brother again. He separated himself to pray all night, but left his wife and children on the other side of the river. Then he divided his wives, children, flocks (wealth), to meet Esau in successive waves (is this a peace offering to save his life?). In case one group is destroyed, at least Jacob could flee. Was this common sense, fear, or trickery?

“And be sure to tell him I am coming behind you.” He thought, “Hopefully these gifts will please him. Then when we meet, he’ll not be angry.” Jacob’s men sent the gifts to Esau, and Jacob spent the night in the camp.

During the night Jacob got up and took his wives, their maids, and his 11 sons across the Jabbok River, and then had his belongings taken across. That night Jacob was left alone, and I wrestled with him until the breaking of day.

This seems to be “wordless” praying, for sometimes you pray without words. Isn’t prayer a relationship with Me? And sometimes isn’t prayer wrestling with Me? When great issues are at stake, you must wrestle with Me until you get an answer. You need faith to know when to wrestle with Me, and when to surrender to Me.

Seeing Jacob couldn’t be defeated, I threw Jacob’s hip socket out of joint. As we continued wrestling, I said, “Let Me go. It’s almost daylight.” But Jacob said, “I won’t unless You bless me.” When I asked Jacob his name, he

answered “Jacob.” “I am changing your name from Jacob to Israel (meaning ‘One who Struggles with Me’) because you had struggled with Me and won.”

When Jacob asked My name, I said, “Why do you ask?” Then I blessed Jacob. Jacob named the place Peniel (meaning “Face of God”) because he said, “I saw God face to face and I’m still alive.”

As Jacob was leaving Peniel, the sun was coming up and he was limping because of his dislocated hip. Therefore even now Israelites do not eat the hip muscle of any animal.

Jacob Meets Esau

33 Jacob saw Esau coming with 400 men, so he put his children with their mothers. He put the maids, Zilpah and Bilhah, with their sons in front; Leah and her children were next, followed by Rachel and Joseph. He walked ahead of all of them and bowed down to Esau seven times.

Jacob was surprised when Esau ran to him and hugged and kissed him, and they both cried.

This was a volatile situation when Jacob met his brother Esau. They had not seen each other for 20 years. Esau was very wealthy, he had 400 men. Jacob had also become wealthy with wives, and children, servants, and herds. Jacob bowed seven times, then offered him a gift which was probably Jacob’s attempt to repay the “blessing” he tricked from Esau. Technically Jacob didn’t get to receive the “blessing,” because out of fear, Jacob left the family compound with nothing but a walking stick.

When Esau saw the women and children, he asked who they were. Jacob answered, “These are the children God in His grace has given me.” Next Leah and her children bowed down, followed by Rachel and Joseph.

Esau asked about the herds he met on the road. Jacob said, “I wanted you to be friendly with me.” Esau replied, “I have lots of flocks, my brother. Keep these yourself.” Jacob responded, “No, please accept them as a gift. What a delight it is to see your face. It’s like seeing the face of God. Please accept

these gifts. God has been good to me, and I have all I need.” So Esau finally accepted them.

Esau said, “Let’s be on our way. I’ll go with you.” Jacob said, “No need for you to do that. Traveling is hard on children and on younger livestock. If I drive the animals too hard, they’ll die. So you go on ahead, and we’ll go more slowly and meet you in Seir.”

Jacob didn't plan to meet Esau later. He couldn't outrun Esau's army of 400 men, so he tried strategy to disarm Esau. Jacob told Esau to go ahead because of the women and children and herds. Then Jacob went another way. You need forgiveness when blinded by your own selfish urges. You need spiritual eyes to see My plan for your life.

Esau responded, “Okay. But let some of my men go with you.” Jacob said, “No need for that either. Just continue to be friendly.”

That day Esau left for Edom. But Jacob went to Succoth (meaning “Shelter”) where he set up camp and made shelter for his flocks and herds. The place is called Succoth because of the shelters he built there.

Having left southern Syria, Jacob arrived in Shechem and camped outside the city. The land where he camped he bought from the sons of Hamor for 200 pieces of silver. Jacob built an altar there and named the place El Elohe Israel (meaning “The God of Israel”).

Dinah is Raped

34 Dinah, Leah’s daughter, went to visit some of the women in the area. Shechem, a son of Hamor, who was ruler of the area, saw her and raped her. Shechem told her how much he loved her, and he asked his father to get her for him as his wife.

When Jacob heard that Dinah had been raped, he said nothing until his sons came in from herding their cattle. Shechem’s father, Hamor, went to talk with Jacob. Just then Jacob’s sons came in from the fields, and when they heard what happened to their sister, they were grieved and were extremely angry. Shechem had done a terrible thing, something that was a disgrace in Israel.

Hamor told them, “My son truly loves Dinah, and wants to marry her. Why don’t you let your daughters marry our sons, and our daughters can be wives for your sons. Settle here, move about freely, and buy property.” Shechem, Hamor’s son, said to Jacob and his sons, “Please let me have Dinah as my wife, and I’ll do whatever you ask. Set the dowry price or gift as high as you want, and I’ll pay it. I really want Dinah as my wife.”

Jacob’s sons tricked Shechem and Hamor by saying, “We can’t do that because you men of Shechem are not circumcised. That would be disgraceful for her to marry an uncircumcised man. But we’ll let you marry her if you circumcise all the males in your family. Only then can we let your men marry our daughters. And we’ll settle in your land and we can live together. But if you don’t do this, we’ll take Dinah and be on our way.”

Hamor and Shechem liked this idea. Shechem, who was highly respected, quickly went into action. He and his father met with their city leaders and told them their plan. “These men are friendly, so we suggest they settle in our land and let our sons marry their daughters and they marry ours. But there is one condition: our males must be circumcised. If we do this, just think. Their livestock and property will become ours. So let’s agree to the plan, and they will settle among us.”

The city leaders agreed to the plan, and every male in the city was circumcised. Three days later, when the males were still sore, Simeon and Levi, Dinah’s brothers, killed every male there. After killing Hamor and Shechem they took Dinah and left. Jacob’s other sons looted the city, taking everything they wanted, including flocks and herds in the city and the countryside. They also took the women and children, and everything of value in their houses.

Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, “Because of what you’ve done, the Canaanites and Perizzites will hate me. We are so few; they will come and destroy all of us.” But Simeon and Levi replied, “But it wasn’t right for our sister to be raped.”

Jacob Returns to Bethel

35I told Jacob to move on to Bethel, where I had first appeared to him, and build an altar there. So Jacob told his family, “Destroy your idols, wash,

and put on clean clothes. We are moving to Bethel where he will build an altar to God because He has been with me in all my troubles and travels.”

They gave Jacob their idols and earrings, and he buried them under an oak tree. So they started out, and people everywhere were so afraid of Me that they didn't bother them. When they arrived at Bethel (formerly called Luz), Jacob built an altar there and named it El-Bethel (meaning “The God of Bethel”) because that was where I had appeared to Jacob when he was running from Esau.

I changed the name of the place from Bethel to “El-Bethel,” which means “The God of the House of God.” Also I changed Jacob's name. He would no longer be known as “Jacob,” meaning “Trickster or Deceiver,” but I said, “Your name will be Israel,” which means “Prince with God.”

Rebekah's nurse, Deborah, died, and Jacob buried her under the oak tree near Bethel; and named it Allon Bacuth (meaning “The Oak of Weeping”).

Again I blessed Jacob and said, “I am changing your name from Jacob (meaning “Heel Grabber”) to Israel (meaning “One Who Wrestled with Me”).” I added, “I am El Shaddai (meaning “Almighty God”). Have many children, for you will be the father of an entire nation, and kings will be among your descendants! The land I promised to Abraham and Isaac I am giving to you and your descendants.” I then left.

Jacob then took a stone and set it up right where I spoke to him. He poured out a drink offering to Me and then poured oil on the stone pillar. And he called the place Bethel (meaning “The House of God”).

On the way from Bethel toward Bethlehem Ephrath, Rachel was having difficulty in her labor. Her midwife told her not to worry because she was giving birth to another son. As she lay dying, Rachel named her son Benoni (meaning “The Son of My Sorrow”). But Jacob named him Benjamin (meaning “The Son of My Right Hand”).

Rachel died and Jacob buried her by the side of the road to Bethlehem. Over her grave Jacob set up a pillar which still marks her burial place. So Israel moved on and settled near Migdal Eder. While there, Reuben, Jacob's oldest son, slept with his father's concubine. Israel heard about it but didn't do anything. Jacob's 12 sons were these: Reuben, Simeon, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun—six sons born to Leah; Joseph and Benjamin born to Rachel; Dan and Naphtali, sons of Bilhah; and Gad and Asher, sons of Zilpah. These (except for Benjamin) were all born to Jacob in northern Syria.

Finally Jacob arrived in Mamre, near Hebron (also called Kiriath-Arba) where his father Isaac lived and where Abraham and Isaac had been. At age 180 Isaac died, having lived a full life. His sons Jacob and Esau buried him there in Mamre.

Jacob and his household went to Bethel. Perhaps it was fear of retaliation from the surrounding tribes because of the murder of the men of Shechem by Simeon and Levi. First, they repented, which means turning away from sin both inwardly and outwardly. “They gave Jacob their idols and earrings.” Jacob buried them under a tree. Next, they went to Bethel (house of God), a symbol of returning to Me. Third, they sought My presence when they built an altar. “I appeared to Jacob.” Then, in restored fellowship, I left Jacob. Revival is when I pour My presence on My people.

Descendants of Esau

36 This is the record of the descendants of Esau (also called Edom). Esau married three Canaanite women: Adah (daughter of Elon the Hittite), Oholibamah (daughter of Anah and granddaughter of Zibeon, the Hivite), and Basemath (daughter of Ishmael and Esau’s first cousin). Adah had Eliphaz, Basemath had Reuel, and Oholibamah had Jeush, Jalam, and Korah. These were the five sons born to Esau. Then Esau moved away from Jacob with his family, livestock, and belongings. He and Jacob had so much livestock and property that there wasn’t enough room for both of them. Esau (also known as Edom) lived near Mount Seir.

This is the record of the Edomites from Esau. His sons were Eliphaz and Reuel, and Eliphaz’s sons were Teman, Omar, Zepho, Gatam, and Kenaz. Eliphaz had a concubine Timna, and she had a son, Amalek.

The sons of Reuel were Nahath, Zerah, Shammah, Mizzah, grandsons of Basemath. Oholibamah, daughter of Anah, had Jeush, Jalam, and Korah.

Eliphaz’s sons, who were Esau’s grandsons, were chiefs of the clans of Teman, Omar, Zepho, Kenaz, Korah, Gatam, and Amalek. They descended from Eliphaz, son of Esau and Adah. Reuel’s sons were chiefs of the clans of Nahath, Zerah, Shammah, and Mizzah. They descended from Reuel, son of Esau and Basemath. Oholibamah’s three sons were chiefs of the clans of Jeush, Jalam, and Korah. They descended from Oholibamah and Esau, also known as Edom.

Seir, the Harite, had seven sons there in Edom: Lotlan, Shobal, Zibeon, Anah, Dishon, Ezer, and Dishan. These chiefs were heads of clans in Edom. Lotlan's sons were Hori and Heman and Lotlan's sister was Timna. Shobal's sons were Alvan, Manahath, Ebal, Shepho, and Onam. Zibeon's sons were Aiah and Anah. (Anah is the one who found springs in the desert while grazing his father Zibeon's donkeys.) Anah had Dishon and Oholibamah, and Dishon had four sons: Hemdan, Eshban, Ithran, and Keran.

Ezer, Seir's son, had Bilhan, Zaavan, and Akan.

Aishan, another of Seir's sons, had sons Uz and Aran. As mentioned, the Horite clans, Lotlan, Shobal, Zibeon, Anah, Dishon, Ezer, and Dishan were chiefs, all of whom lived in Seir.

The kings of Edom in order were Bela, son of Beor, whose city was Dinhabah, Jobab son of Zerah, Husham from the land of Teman, Hadad son of Bedad, (Bedad defeated the Midianites in Moab), Samlah from Avith Masrekah, Shaul from Rehoboth, Baal-Hanan, son of Acbor, Hadad, whose city was Pau and whose wife was Mehetabel.

The chiefs of Esau were his sons, whose clans lived in various regions: Timna, Alvah, Jetheth, Oholibamah, Elah, Pinon, Kenaz, Teman, Mibzar, Magdiel, and Iram. Each one gave his name to the area where he lived. All were Edomites, whose ancestor was Esau.

Joseph's Dreams

37 Jacob settled in Canaan, where his father Isaac had lived. When Joseph was 17, he was taking care of sheep with his half-brothers who were sons of Bilhah and Zilpah. He tattled on these four to his father about their bad behavior.

Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because Joseph was born when Israel was old. And he had given Joseph a beautiful coat to show he was his favorite son. So his brothers hated him and said nothing good about him.

When Joseph told them a dream he had, they hated him even more.

"Listen to this dream," he said. "we were all in the field tying up bundles of grain. Suddenly my bundle stood straight up and your bundles bowed down to mine." They said to him, "So you think you will be king over us?" Because of this dream the brothers hated Joseph even more.

Then he told them about another dream. “This time the sun, moon, and 11 stars were bowing down to me.” He told his father about this dream, and his father said, “Do you think that I, your mother, and your brothers will bow down to you?” Joseph kept wondering about this dream, but his brothers were jealous.

One day Joseph’s brothers were grazing the sheep near Shechem. Jacob said, “I want you to check on your brothers and the flocks, and tell me how they are.” Going from Hebron to Shechem, Joseph was wandering in the fields when a man asked him what he was looking for. Joseph said he was looking for his brothers who were grazing sheep. “Do you know where they are?” “Yes, I heard them say they are moving on to Dothan.” So Joseph left and found them near Dothan. Seeing him coming, they said, “Here comes our dreamer. Let’s kill him and throw him into a pit. We can tell our father that a wild animal ate him. Then his dreams can’t come true.”

Reuben heard their plans, and said, “Let’s not kill him. Just throw him in this pit here in the desert.” Reuben said this because he wanted to take him back home. When Joseph arrived, they tore off his beautiful robe and threw him in a dry, empty pit. As they were eating, they saw Ishmaelites coming from Gilead to the east. They were going to Egypt to sell spices, balm, and myrrh. Judah said, “We won’t gain anything if we kill Joseph. So let’s sell him to the Ishmaelites. After all, he’s our own brother.” The brothers agreed to this suggestion.

So they pulled Joseph out of the pit and sold him for 20 pieces of silver to the Ishmaelites who took him to Egypt. This so displeased Reuben, that he tore his clothes in grief. He said to his brothers, “Now what do we do?” So they took Joseph’s coat, killed a goat, and dipped the coat in the goat’s blood. They took the coat to their father and said, “We found this. Could it be Joseph’s?” Immediately Jacob recognized it and said, “Yes, it’s his coat. Maybe an animal has killed him and torn him to pieces.”

In grief, Jacob tore his clothes and put on burlap clothing, and mourned for his son for a long time. His sons and daughters tried to comfort him, but it was no use. He said he would mourn till he died, and then he wept.

Meanwhile, the Midianites sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, an official of Pharaoh, in charge of the guard.

I told Abraham that I would send the family into Egypt where it would grow into a mighty people until “the sins of the Amorites will be ready

to be punished.” I used the rivalries and family squabbles to bring about a series of events that led to Joseph being sold into Egypt as a slave. While it seems that evil wins, circumstances are never out of My control. “All things work together for good to those who love Me, to those who are called according to My purpose.” When you complain about circumstances because you don’t see My larger plan for your life, open your eyes to see My “perfect will” for your life, then yield to do My will.

Judah and Tamar

38 Judah left his brothers and sisters and settled near Hirah who was an Adullamite. He married a Canaanite woman, the daughter of Shua. Judah was living in Kezib when his first son, Er, was born; his second son was Onan, and the third son was Shelah.

When Judah’s oldest son, Er, grew up, he married Tamar. Because Er was evil, I allowed Er to die. Judah said to his next son, “Onan, go sleep with your brother’s wife and preserve the family’s line.” Onan knew the child would not count as his (his signet wouldn’t be carved on the family walking stick), so when he had intercourse with her, he spilled his semen on the ground so his brother wouldn’t have children. This was evil in My sight, so I allowed Onan to die also.

Judah said to his daughter-in-law, “Don’t marry but stay in your father’s house till Shelah comes of age, then marry him to carry on the family line.” (But Judah didn’t intend to give Shelah to her because he was afraid Shelah would be killed like his brothers). So Tamar went to live with her parents. After a time Judah’s wife died and he mourned for her. Then Judah went to supervise the shearing of his sheep in Timnah where his friend Hirah lived.

When Tamar heard where Judah went, she took off her widow’s clothes and covered her face like a prostitute and sat at the entrance of a village named Enaim, which Judah would pass on his way to Timnah. Judah saw her and thought she was a prostitute, so he asked her to sleep with him. He didn’t realize she was his daughter-in-law. Tamar asked, “What will you pay me?” He said, “I’ll send a kid from my flock.” She said, “What will you give me to guarantee that you’ll send the kid back?” Tamar asked for the family seal (signet) on a cord that was around his neck, and his family walking stick. So

Judah gave her these things and they slept together. Then she returned to her family and put on her widow's clothes.

Judah asked Hirah to take a kid to the prostitute and get the items he left to guarantee his word. Hirah couldn't find her anywhere, so he asked the men of the city about the prostitute. They said, "There has never been a prostitute here." So Hirah told Judah he couldn't find the prostitute and that the men of the city said there was never a prostitute there.

Judah said, "Let her keep the things. I did my best to find her. This won't make me a liar."

About three months later Judah was told Tamar was pregnant and had acted like a prostitute. Judah said, "Bring her here, and let her be burned alive." She sent a message to Judah, "I am pregnant by the man to whom these belong. Tell me, who is the owner of the signet hanging on a cord and this walking stick?" Then Judah said, "She is more right than I was, because I didn't keep my promise to give my son, Shelah, to marry her." But Judah never had sex with her again.

In due season Tamar had twin sons. As they were being delivered, one reached out a hand and the midwife tied a scarlet cord around its wrist and said, "This one came out first." But the hand was withdrawn and the other child was born first. Therefore, the firstborn was named Perez (breaking out first); then the brother with the scarlet cord was born and given the name Zerah (scarlet).

It seems sin influences sinners as well as My people. Judah and his sons didn't do right. I work in mysterious ways that you don't understand. The Messianic line wasn't blocked, and Jesus came through the line of Tamar and her son, Perez.

Joseph in Potiphar's House

39When Joseph was brought down to Egypt by the Ishmaelites, he was purchased by Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, and a captain of the regiment that guarded Pharaoh.

I was with Joseph and blessed him abundantly as he served in the household of his Egyptian master. Potiphar saw that I, the LORD, was with

Joseph and blessed everything Joseph did. As Joseph pleased Potiphar, he was made manager of the household; and all possessions were entrusted to Joseph's management.

I blessed Potiphar's house because of Joseph, prospering the things in the house and fields. Potiphar gave Joseph complete control over everything he owned. He didn't worry about anything, except to choose what to eat.

Joseph was a handsome and strong young man. Potiphar's wife saw him and invited him to sleep with her. But Joseph refused saying, "No, my master has entrusted me with everything in his house. I have more authority than anyone here. He has withheld nothing from me, but you; because you are his wife. How could I do this wicked thing against him and sin against my God?"

She kept pressuring Joseph each day, but he wouldn't sleep with her or even be with her. One day while he was working alone inside the house, she grabbed his robe demanding, "Sleep with me!" When he ran away, she kept the robe. She began screaming. When the servants gathered, she said, "My husband brought the Hebrew slave to embarrass me, he tried to rape me but I screamed for help. When he ran, he left this robe here."

She kept the robe and that evening she told her husband, "That Hebrew slave tried to rape me, but my screams scared him away. When he ran out of the house, he left his robe."

After hearing his wife's story, Potiphar threw Joseph in prison where Pharaoh's prisoners were kept.

I was with Joseph, and he found favor in the warden's sight. Joseph was made trustee over all the prisoners so that they did what he said. Joseph took care of all the problems so that the warden didn't have any worries. Because I, the LORD, was with him I prospered everything Joseph did.

Joseph Interprets Two Prisoners' Dreams

40At a later time, Pharaoh's chief cup bearer and baker were thrown into the same prison with Joseph. Potiphar, the captain of the guard, assigned them to Joseph. They remained there a long time.

One night, the cup bearer and the baker each had a dream with different meanings. In the morning Joseph saw they were dejected and asked, "Why are you so sad?" They answered, "We both had a dream and no one can tell us what they mean."

Joseph told them I was the One who interpreted dreams. Then Joseph said, “Tell me the dream.”

The chief cup bearer told Joseph, “In my dream I saw a vine with three branches that began budding, then blossoms appeared and finally clusters of grapes appeared. I had Pharaoh’s cup in my hand, so I squeezed the grapes into the cup and gave it to Pharaoh.”

I, the LORD, gave the interpretation to Joseph who said, “Three branches are three days. Within three days you will be restored and you will give Pharaoh his cup as you used to do when you were the cup bearer.”

Then Joseph asked the cup bearer to intercede for him, “Remember me when you return to Pharaoh’s presence to release me from prison. I was kidnapped from my homeland and I have done nothing to be in this prison.”

When the chief baker saw the interpretation was good, he said, “I too dreamed and saw three baskets of white bread on my head, with all kinds of bakery goods for Pharaoh, but birds came and ate them.”

Again, I gave Joseph the interpretation, “Three baskets mean three days and within three days Pharaoh will cut off your life, hang your body on a pole and birds will eat your flesh.”

Three days later on Pharaoh’s birthday, he gave a feast for all his officials where he restored the chief cup bearer who then gave Pharaoh his cup. Pharaoh also had the chief baker impaled on a pole just as Joseph predicted. Nevertheless, the chief cup bearer didn’t remember Joseph, but forgot about him.

Joseph Interprets Pharaoh’s Dreams

41 Pharaoh dreamed two years later that he was standing beside the Nile River. Seven healthy cows came up out of the river and fed on the grass near the river. Next, seven skinny, miserable looking cows came out of the river and ate up the healthy cows. Then Pharaoh woke up, but he went back to sleep and dreamed that seven fully ripened ears of grain grew on a single stalk. Next, he dreamed of seven more ears of grain that were shriveled by a hot eastern wind. The thin ears swallowed the seven fat ears. Then Pharaoh woke up.

The next morning Pharaoh was still upset by the dream so he called his magicians and wise men to interpret it for him. But none could do it.

The chief cup bearer said, “This reminds me of something I should have done earlier. You were angry with me and the chief baker and put us in prison. One night we both had a dream, and each of our dreams had a different meaning. There was a Hebrew slave of Potiphar in prison who interpreted our dream. We told him individually the dream and he interpreted each dream separately and both predictions came to pass. I was restored to my position and the baker was executed.”

Then Potiphar called for Joseph to be brought out of the prison. He was shaved and dressed in appropriate clothes and ushered into Pharaoh’s presence. Pharaoh said to Joseph, “I had a dream and no one can interpret it, but I’ve been told you can interpret dreams.”

Joseph answered, “I don’t have the ability to do it, only God can interpret dreams. He will tell you what it means and set your mind at rest.”

Pharaoh said to Joseph, “In my dream I am standing by the Nile River and seven fat healthy cows come out of the river and they feed on the grass near the river. Next, seven skinny, miserable looking cows come out of the river. I’ve never seen such ugly looking cows. They ate up the healthy cows. After they had eaten, I couldn’t tell they had eaten anything because they were as skinny as before. At this point I woke up. Then I dreamed again that seven fully ripened ears of grain grew on a single stalk. Next, I dreamed of seven more ears of grain that were shriveled by a hot eastern wind. The shriveled ears of grain ate up the seven fully ripened ears. I told this dream to the magicians but none could interpret the dream.”

Joseph said to Pharaoh, “Both dreams mean the same thing. God has told you what He is about to do. The seven fat healthy cows and the seven full ears of ripened grain are seven prosperous years that are coming. Likewise, the seven skinny miserable looking cows and the seven ears of grain shriveled by a hot eastern wind are seven years of famine that are coming. This is what God is about to do.”

Joseph explained, “There will be seven years of abundance all throughout Egypt, and next there will be seven years of famine that will consume everything. Everyone will forget about the good years. The famine will be truly horrible.”

Joseph explained why there were two dreams, “Because God has determined these things will happen soon.” Then Joseph suggested, “Find the wisest men in Egypt and put him in charge of agriculture. Let him receive 20 percent of the produce in the seven years of abundance. He should receive the

produce and store it to be used for food for the cities in the coming years. This stored food will feed the people in the coming seven years of famine so that the nation is not lost.”

The suggestion was readily received by Pharaoh and his officials, and he said, “Can we find a supervisor like this who has the Spirit of God in him?”

Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Since God has revealed this dream to you, and there is no one wiser than you, you will be in charge of all agriculture and everyone must do what you say. Only I will be greater than you and what you say.” Pharaoh said, “You are in charge of all the things grown in Egypt.” Pharaoh took off his signet ring and gave it to Joseph’s hand, and had him clothed in fine white linen with a gold chain around his neck. Joseph rode in the second chariot and they yelled before him, “Bow down!”

Pharaoh passed a law that no one could lift a hand to work without Joseph’s approval. Pharaoh named him Zaphenath-paaneah (Revealer of Secrets) and gave him a wife—Asenath—the daughter of Potiphara, priest of Heliopolis. So Joseph began managing the entire agriculture of Egypt. He was thirty years old when he was appointed by Pharaoh. He immediately began an inspection tour throughout the land.

During the first seven years, the land produced abundantly. Joseph collected grain and stored it in the cities. The grain collected around a city was stored in that city. Joseph collected so much grain—like the sand on a beach—that they couldn’t keep count of its abundance.

Two sons were born to Joseph and his wife, Asenath, before the years of famine came. Joseph named the first Manasseh (“to Forget”), “Because God has caused me to forget all the pain I suffered from my family.” The second child Joseph named Ephraim (“Fruit”), “Because God has made me fruitful in the land of pain.”

The seven years of abundance ended just as Joseph predicted and the seven years of famine came on Egypt. Other nations suffered because of the famine but the Egyptians had food. When everyone began begging Pharaoh for food, he told them to go do what Joseph tells them to do. Since the famine spread everywhere, all countries came to Joseph to buy food and he opened the storehouses to sell them food.

Joseph’s Brothers Come to Buy Corn

42 When Jacob heard there was corn available in Egypt, he said to his sons, “Why are you sitting around staring at one another? There is corn for sale in Egypt, go buy for us so that we will live and not starve to death.” So Joseph’s 10 brothers went down to Egypt, except Benjamin, Joseph’s younger brother. Jacob didn’t send him because he was afraid something might happen to him. The sons of Israel came to buy corn along with others from Canaan because the famine covered the entire area.

Joseph was governor over Egypt and was responsible for selling corn to everyone. When Joseph’s brothers arrived, they bowed before Joseph on the ground.

Joseph recognized his brothers, but didn’t reveal himself to them. Rather, he spoke harshly to them asking, “Where are you from?” They answered, “From the land of Canaan to buy corn.” The brothers didn’t recognize him. Joseph charged them, “You are spies! You’ve come to spy out our weaknesses.” They answered, “Not so, we’re the sons of one man, we’re honest men and we’ve come to buy corn.” Joseph repeated his charge, “No, you’re spies.” They answered, “We are your servants, we are twelve sons of one man, the youngest stayed with our father and the other is no longer.”

Joseph continued his hard questioning, again saying, “You are spies. Here’s how you can prove to me you’re not lying. As Pharaoh lives, you will not leave Egypt unless your younger brother comes here. Send one to get your brother to prove to me you’re telling the truth. Until then, I will keep you in prison. Otherwise as Pharaoh lives, it proves you are spies.” Then Joseph put them all in prison for three days.

After three days Joseph had them brought before him. He said, “If you do what I say, you’ll live, for I fear God. One of you will stay here in prison while the others carry corn back to your homes. But bring your youngest brother back to prove you’re telling the truth, otherwise you won’t see my face.”

The ten brothers spoke among themselves, “We are guilty for what we did to Joseph. We saw the anguish on his face when he begged us not to sell him as a slave, but we wouldn’t listen to him. This is why we are in trouble.”

Reuben answered them, “Didn’t I tell you not to hurt the boy, but you wouldn’t listen to me; now we’re paying the consequences for our sin.”

The ten sons didn’t realize Joseph understood everything they said because an interpreter had been translating their conversation up until then. So

Joseph left the room to weep. When he returned, he ordered Simeon to be put in chains before their eyes and was then thrown into prison.

Joseph ordered their sacks filled and that their money be placed in the sacks and that they be given food for their journey home. Their donkeys were loaded and they left. That night as one of the brothers opened his sack to feed his donkey, he discovered his money, and he cried, “My money is here in my sack.” The ten sons were terrified and they cried, “Why is God punishing us?”

The ten brothers returned to their father and told him everything that happened to them. “The man spoke angrily with us and accused us of being spies. We told him we were honest men, not spies. We told the man we were 12 sons of one father, the youngest is with our father and one is no longer. The man—the governor of all Egypt—told us he was keeping one of us in prison, and to take our grain and go. He told us we wouldn’t see his face again unless we brought our youngest brother next time. The man said that was his way of knowing we were not spies, but honest men. The man said then he would return Simeon to us and we could do business in Egypt. But there is more to the story; each of us had our money returned in our sacks.” When Jacob saw the money in the sacks, he was frightened.

Jacob said to them, “You have destroyed our family unity. Joseph is gone, Simeon is gone, and now you want to take Benjamin away. This will be the death of me.”

Reuben said to his father, “Put Benjamin in my care. If I don’t bring him back, take the lives of my two sons.”

Jacob answered, “Benjamin will not go to Egypt with you. His brother Joseph is dead; Benjamin is all I have left. If anything happened to him, I would die with grief.”

Joseph’s Brothers Decide to Return to Egypt

43 The famine wouldn’t let up in Canaan, so when Jacob’s family ate all the corn they bought in Egypt, Jacob said to his sons, “Go and buy us some more corn.” Judah said to his father, “The man in Egypt told us we couldn’t see his face if we didn’t bring our younger brother. We will go buy corn if you will send Benjamin with us. But if you refuse, it’s useless for us to go there.”

Jacob answered, “Why did you cause this problem by telling him you had another brother?” They answered, “The man interrogated us thoroughly, he

asked if our father were alive and if we had any other brothers. We just answered the questions he asked. How did we know he would demand we bring our younger brother to prove we were telling the truth.”

Judah said to his father, “Please send Benjamin with me so we can go get food, otherwise our family will die. I will personally guard him so he will be safe. I will personally guarantee his safety. If I don’t bring him back to you, I will bear the blame, no one else. If we had not been arguing this matter, we would be there by now.”

Jacob concluded, “If that’s the way it’s got to be, so be it. Take your sacks and go. But let’s bribe the man with some of our delicacies. Take some healing resin, a little honey, sweet-smelling gum, opium, and some almonds and nuts. Take twice the money, enough money to pay for the corn you got last time, and money to pay for the corn we get this time. Take Benjamin also. Go see the man and may almighty God—El Shaddai—cause the man to like you and be gracious to you so that he will release Simeon and send back Benjamin to me. What else can I do, if I lose my children, I’ll just lose them.”

The brother prepared for the trip, taking twice as much money, the gift for the man, and Benjamin. Then they traveled down to Egypt and stood before Joseph.

When Joseph saw Benjamin with the 10 brothers, he said to his manager, “Take these men to my home. Prepare a banquet for I will sit with these men at noon.”

The manager brought them into Joseph’s house and the brothers became fearful saying among themselves, “This is because our money was in our sacks, now the man will say we stole the money. The man will take our donkeys and make us slaves.” So they explained to the manager, “Please, we’re telling you the truth, our money was in our sacks when we opened them. We have brought back that money to return it, and we brought more money for more corn. We don’t know how our money got into our sacks.” The manager answered them, “Don’t be afraid, the God you serve, and the God of your fathers took care of you. As far as your money is concerned, I put it in the sacks.”

Simeon was brought out to them. The manager took them into the house and gave them water to wash their feet. Then he fed their donkeys. The brothers got their gift ready to give to the man when he arrived at noon. When Joseph arrived, they gave him their gift and bowed themselves before Joseph on the ground. Joseph asked, “Is your father alive and well, the elderly man

you told me about?” They answered, “Yes, your servant—our father—is well.”

As the brothers bowed in respect, Joseph saw his younger brother, then he asked, “Is this your younger brother that you told me about?” Then Joseph said to Benjamin, “May God be with you, my son.” Then Joseph left the room hurriedly to go weep at his private quarters. When he composed himself, Joseph returned and commanded the meal be served.

They served Joseph separately, the Hebrew brothers by themselves, and the Egyptians that were present were also served separately. That’s because the Egyptians don’t eat with Hebrews, they consider it an abomination.

As they were seated facing Joseph, they were surprised that the firstborn was in the place of honor. Afterwards, each was seated according to his birth. They were all served, but Benjamin was given five times as much as any of the others.

Joseph’s Cup Found in Benjamin’s Sack

44 Joseph directed the manager, “Fill each man’s sack as full of corn as they can carry and put each man’s money in it. Put my silver cup in the sack of the youngest along with his money.”

The brothers left at daybreak with their donkeys, but before they had gone very far, Joseph sent his manager after them and told him to say to the brothers, “Why have you given evil for good? You have stolen the cup my master drinks from, it’s the cup he uses for divination.”

The brothers said to the manager, “Why are you accusing us of evil? We would never do that. To prove what we say, didn’t we bring back the money that was put in our sacks last time we were here? If you find money in any of our sacks, let that one be put to death and the rest of us will be your master’s slaves.”

The manager changed the penalty from death to slavery. He said, “The one who has the silver cup will be my master’s slave, the rest of you will go free.” They all put their sacks on the ground and the manager searched them from the eldest to the youngest, and the cup was found in Benjamin’s sack. The brothers cried in grief, and tore their clothing. Then they loaded their donkeys and headed back to the city. When they arrived at Joseph’s house, he was still

there. Joseph said, “Did you think you could get away with this? Don’t you know I have the power of divination?”

Judah spoke for the brothers, “I don’t know what to say. There’s no way we can prove we are innocent. God has shown us our guilt. We are your slaves, including the brother in whose sack the silver cup was found.”

Joseph answered, “I would not put all of you into slavery, only the one who has the cup. Now the rest of you go to your father in peace.”

Judah approached Joseph and asked to speak to him privately. “You are like Pharaoh and can do anything to us you please. Don’t be angry with us. You said to us, ‘Do you have a father? Do you have a brother?’ We told you we had a father and a younger brother that he loved dearly. You said we would not see your face again unless we bring our younger brother. We told you our father would die if anything happened to the boy, but you insisted. So we told our father what you said. Then when our corn ran out, our father told us to come buy more corn. We answered and said we can’t go unless the younger brother goes with us because the man won’t see our face unless we have the younger brother. My father said, ‘My wife bore me two sons, the first went out and the wild beasts surely tore him to pieces, and if you take the second one to Egypt and something happens to him, I will die.’”

Judah further explained, “If I go to my father without the boy, he will see that his youngest son isn’t with me and he will die, and I’ll be responsible. I personally guaranteed the boy’s safety to my father, so I beg you, take me as your slave instead of my brother. Let the boy go to his father with his brothers. If I don’t have the boy with me when I return, my father will die and I couldn’t live with the grief of causing my father’s death.”

Joseph Reveals Himself to His Brothers

45 Joseph couldn’t control his emotions in front of his servants so he told them, “Leave immediately.” When no one was with him, Joseph revealed himself to his brothers, saying, “I am Joseph, is it true that my father is still alive?” His brothers couldn’t speak, they were filled with great fear for what he would do to them, yet they were truly glad that he was alive.

The servants in the house heard Joseph crying, so did the Egyptians who worked for Joseph. Joseph invited his brother to come close, assuring them, “I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold as a slave. Don’t be afraid or angry

with one another. God sent me ahead to preserve the life of our family and the whole world. There is a world-wide famine; we've had two years of drought, and five years remain. There will be no planting or harvest. God sent me before you to save your lives and to make sure our descendents will survive. You didn't send me into slavery, it was God who sent me here. God has made me a father to Pharaoh, governor of his household, and ruler over all the agriculture of Egypt."

Joseph told his brothers, "Go quickly to my father and tell him I'm alive. Tell him God has made me Lord over the agriculture of Egypt, and I want him to come to Egypt immediately because there are five more years of famine coming. Tell him not to delay because he will live in the land of Goshen, with his children, his grandchildren, flocks, herds, everything he possesses. Tell my father he will live near me in Egypt. He will become poor and starve to death if he stays in the land of Canaan. Benjamin, my brother, will tell my father these things are true. Tell my father about my honor and power in Egypt, I will take care of everyone."

Joseph embraced his brother, Benjamin, and they wept together. Then Joseph kissed each of his brothers and they wept together.

Rumors in the palace reached Pharaoh that Joseph's brothers were there. Pharaoh and the servants were pleased. Pharaoh said to Joseph, "This is what they must do, 'Load up their donkeys and go to the land of Canaan and get your father and your families and come live here in Egypt.'" Then Pharaoh gave a command, "Take our wagons to bring your children, wives and your father to me. I will give property to all of you. Don't worry about bringing your stuff, you shall have everything new in Egypt."

The sons of Israel did what Pharaoh commanded and Joseph gave them wagons. Pharaoh gave them provisions for the journey. To each, Pharaoh gave a set of new clothes, but to Benjamin he gave five sets of clothes, and seven and a half pounds of gold. To Jacob, Pharaoh sent 10 donkeys loaded with the finest things of Egypt, 10 female donkeys loaded with grain, and food for him to eat on the return journey. The brothers were sent back to Canaan. Joseph told them, "Don't quarrel among yourselves on the way back home."

When the brothers got back to the land of Canaan, they told Jacob, "Your son, Joseph, is still alive. He is governor of the agriculture of all Egypt." They reported to him everything Joseph had said. But Jacob was stunned, he couldn't make himself believe. It wasn't until he saw the wagons that Joseph

sent that his faith was revived. Israel said, “This is it, my son, Joseph, is alive, I must go see him before I die.”

Jacob and His Family Go to Egypt

46 Jacob took everything he owned in his journey to Egypt. When he got to Beer-sheba, he offered sacrifices to Me, the God of his father Isaac. That night I came to him in a vision saying, “Jacob, Jacob!” He answered, “I am here.” I said, “I am the God of your father. Go boldly to Egypt and don’t be afraid because it’s in Egypt that I will make a great nation out of you. I will go to Egypt with you and I will bring your descendants back after Joseph buries you.”

The sons of Israel brought Jacob from Beer-sheba to Pharaoh in wagons including his sons and grandsons, daughters and granddaughters, and all his descendants. These are the names of Jacob’s sons whom he brought to Egypt: the sons of Reuben: Hanoch and Pallu and Hezron and Carmi. The sons of Simeon: Jemuel and Jamin and Ohad and Jachin and Zohar and Shaul, the son of a Canaanite woman. The sons of Levi: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. The sons of Judah: Er and Onan and Shelah and Perez and Zerah (but Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan). And the sons of Perez were Hezron and Hamul. The sons of Issachar: Tola and Puvvah and Job and Shimron. The sons of Zebulun: Sered and Elon and Jahleel. These are the sons of Leah, whom she bore to Jacob in Paddan-aram, with his daughter Dinah; all his sons and his daughters numbered thirty-three. The sons of Gad: Ziphion and Haggi, Shuni and Ezbon, Eri and Arodi and Areli. The sons of Asher: Imnah and Ishvah and Ishvi and Beriah and their sister, Serah, and the sons of Beriah: Heber and Malchiel. These are the sons of Zilpah, whom Laban gave to his daughter Leah; and she bore to Jacob these sixteen persons. The sons of Jacob’s wife Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin. Now to Joseph in the land of Egypt were born Manasseh and Ephraim, whom Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, bore to him. The sons of Benjamin: Bela and Becher and Ashbel, Gera and Naaman, Ehi and Rosh, Muppim and Huppim and Ard. These are the sons of Rachel who were born to Jacob; there were fourteen persons in all. The sons of Dan: Hushim. The sons of Naphtali: Jahzeel and Guni and Jezer and Shillem. These are the sons of Bilhah, whom Laban gave to his daughter Rachel, and she bore these to Jacob; there were seven persons in all. All the persons belonging to Jacob, who came to Egypt, his direct descendants, not

including the wives of Jacob's sons, were sixty-six persons in all, and the sons of Joseph, who were born to him in Egypt were two; all the persons of the house of Jacob, who came to Egypt, were seventy (Gen. 46:8-27, *NASB*).

Jacob sent Judah ahead to make sure they found the right way to Goshen. They finally arrived in Goshen. Then Joseph prepared his chariot and went to Goshen to meet his father. He presented himself to Jacob and embraced him and they wept together.

Israel said, "Now I can die because I have seen you one more time and I know you are alive." Joseph told his father and brothers, "I will go tell Pharaoh that my father and brothers have come from the land of Canaan and are here with me. They are shepherds and keepers of livestock. They have brought their flocks, herds, and all their possessions. When you appear before Pharaoh, and he asks, 'What is your occupation?' tell him you're servants and keepers of livestock from your youth, both now and your ancestors. This will guarantee you will live in the land of Goshen because shepherds are abominable to Egyptians."

Pharaoh Welcomes Jacob

47 Joseph went and told Pharaoh, "My father and brothers are here from Canaan with their flocks, livestock and all their possessions, living in the land of Goshen. Joseph presented five of his brothers to Pharaoh who asked them, "What is your occupation?" They answered, "We are shepherds, both now and our ancestors." Then the brothers added, "We have come to live in Goshen because there remains no longer pasture for our flocks in Canaan because of the famine. Please let us—your servants—live in the land of Goshen."

Pharaoh said to Joseph, "The land of Egypt is before your father and brothers. Let them live in the best location, let them live in Goshen. Further, if some of them are especially competent, let them look after some of my livestock."

Joseph brought his father, Jacob, in to see Pharaoh. Jacob blessed Pharaoh, then Pharaoh asked, "How old are you?" Jacob answered, "I have lived on this earth 130 years. My years are few and difficult. They are fewer than my fathers lived." Then Jacob blessed Pharaoh and left. Joseph got land for his father and brothers and gave it to them in the best location in the land of

Rameses as Pharaoh directed. Joseph provided corn for his fathers and brothers, taking care of them.

Because the draught was so severe, there was no food anywhere. As Egypt and Canaan hungered, Joseph collected money in exchange for corn from both Egypt and Canaan depositing the money in Pharaoh's treasury. When there was no money left in Egypt and Canaan, the people begged, "We are going to die, give us something to eat." Joseph answered, "Give me your livestock if you have no money and I will give you corn." So Joseph gave them corn for their livestock, i.e., horses, cattle, donkeys, all in exchange for corn. Then the people came to Joseph again and said, "We are penniless, you have all our money and livestock. We have nothing left but our land and ourselves. Give us food and we will give you our land and be your slaves." Joseph acquired all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh as one by one the landowners gave their land to Joseph and sold themselves as slaves. Only the land of the priests did Joseph not take from them because the priests received provisions from Pharaoh.

Then Joseph announced, "I have acquired your land for Pharaoh. I will give you seed to plant on the land. When you harvest your crops, you will give 20 percent to Pharaoh. Eighty percent will be yours for food and seed for the following year to plant again." The people agreed, "You saved our lives, we will be Pharaoh's slaves." So Joseph made a law that 20 percent of everything was a tax for Pharaoh. Only the land belonging to the priests did Pharaoh not take.

Through Joseph, I enabled Egypt to become the most powerful nation in the world and Pharaoh was its dictator. Then Pharaoh did much good and much evil and Egypt became a factor in the world's politics. If I had not raised up Joseph to power, the course of history would have been different.

Jacob Blesses Ephraim and Manasseh

48 Joseph heard his father, Jacob, was ill. He went to visit Jacob, taking his two sons Manasseh and Ephraim with him.

Jacob heard his son, Joseph, was coming to see him, so Jacob used all his strength to sit up in bed. Then he said to Joseph, "God—El Shaddai—appeared to me and blessed me at Bethel in the land of Canaan. God said to

me, ‘I will make you a multitude of families, you will be fruitful and numerous. I will give this land to you so your people can possess it forever.’”

Jacob claimed the two sons born to Joseph in Egypt were his—he was legally adopting them—the two boys of Joseph would be his as much as were Reuben and Simeon. For the purpose of inheritance, Manasseh and Ephraim would be counted with Jacob’s other sons.

Jacob told how Rachel died when he was traveling through the land of Canaan, and that he buried her on the road to Bethlehem.

When Jacob—Israel—saw the two boys, he asked, “Are these the two boys of yours?” Joseph answered, they were his two sons. Jacob said, “Bring them to me so I can bless them.”

Israel couldn’t see well because of his eyes. Then Joseph guided his sons to his father; Jacob kissed them and hugged them. Then Israel said to Joseph, “I never expected to see you again, but God has allowed me to see you and your children.”

Joseph guided the two boys to stand before their grandfather. Joseph guided Ephraim toward Jacob’s left hand and Manasseh, his firstborn, towards Jacob’s right hand. Then Joseph bowed on the ground in prayer.

Israel put his right hand on the younger Ephraim and his left hand on the older brother Manasseh—he intentionally changed the order of inheritance—even though Manasseh was the older.

The old Jacob blessed them, “May You, Lord, bless these boys, as I have lived all my life in Your presence, as You blessed Abraham and Isaac. You have been a shepherd to me all my days as a shepherd. May You who has guided me bless these boys. May they remember their grandfather—who I am and what I stand for—and may they have an abundance of peoples as an inheritance.”

When Joseph saw his father put his right hand on Ephraim’s head, he disagreed and lifted his father’s right hand to put it on Manasseh’s head. Joseph said to his father, you’ve done it backward, put your left hand on Manasseh’s head; he’s my firstborn.”

Jacob refused to do what Joseph asked saying, “The younger will be greater than his older brother, and his descendents will become great nations.” Then Jacob added for Joseph’s sake, “Manasseh also will become a great people and have many nations come from him.”

That day Jacob blessed his grandsons with this blessing, “The people of Israel will use your two names in their unique blessing saying ‘May God bless you like Ephraim and Manasseh.’” In this way, Jacob put the younger—Ephraim—before the elder—Manasseh.

Jacob told Joseph, “I am dying, but God will be with you and your people will be brought back to the land of our ancestors. But I am giving you the double blessing—two sons will be tribes—beyond the blessing I give to ten other tribes.”

Jacob Blesses His Twelve Sons

49 Jacob called his sons together and told them, “Listen, sons of Jacob, I will tell you what will happen in the future; pay attention to Israel, your father.”

By faith, Jacob leaned on his walking stick where the signet of each son was carved. Each son saw his place in the family lineage (Heb. 11:21).

Jacob blessed Reuben saying, “You are my firstborn, my strength, the fruit of my power. Although you are superior in determination and courage, you are as unstable as water, so your integrity won’t last because you defiled my bed; you had sex with my concubine.”

Jacob told Simeon and Levi, “You are brothers of violence, for in your anger you killed men and destroyed a city. I will not be a part of your thinking, nor bestow my honor on you. I curse your anger, for it is fierce and you have been cruel. I will send you throughout Israel.”

Jacob blessed Judah saying, “Judah, your brothers will acknowledge you and your hand will be on the neck of your enemies. My other sons will bow before you. Judah, as a young lion, you will crouch like a lion and stand victorious over your prey. No one will provoke you. The scepter will not depart from Judah and the lawgivers will come from him until He (Shiloh) comes who will govern His people. He will hitch his donkey to a vine and his donkey’s colt to the tender vine. His eyes will be fiery red in indignation against sin. He will wash his clothes in the blood red wine of judgment, yet his teeth will be white as righteousness.”

Jacob blessed Zebulun predicting, “You will live near the sea, ships will anchor along the coast, all the way to Sidon.”

Jacob blessed Issachar saying, “You will be strong as a beast of burden, who will be as gentle as a sheep. You will see this resting place and you will live in that pleasant countryside. You will bend your back to the burden of work and will be a servant of many.”

Jacob said, “Dan, you will judge one of the tribes of Israel. You will be like a viper lying beside the road who strikes a horse’s foot so that the rider falls off backwards.” Then Jacob prayed, “Lord, I wait for Your deliverance.”

Jacob didn’t immediately bless Gad, but said, “Gad’s name means troop, so a troop will trample you.” Then Jacob blessed him, “But in the end, Gad will ‘troop’ over them.”

Jacob said of Asher, “Your food is rich and will be served to a king.” Then to Naphtali Jacob said, “You are a doe that is free, you will have many fawns.”

Jacob blessed Joseph saying, “Joseph, you are a fruitful plant growing by the water and your fruitful branches spread out to all. Archers have attacked you and wounded you, but your hands remain strong and you are encouraged by the God of Jacob. The Shepherd, the Rock of Israel will help you; El Shaddai (God Almighty) will bless you with Heaven’s blessings, so you’ll have many children, and enjoy the good things from above and beneath. The blessings of my Father will be on you and your blessings are more powerful than anything. May all these be on you, a prince among his brothers.”

Jacob blessed Benjamin saying, “You are a hungry wolf in the morning, you will devour your prey; in the evening you will divide its spoil.”

Jacob declared, “These are the 12 tribes of Israel, and these are my blessings on them. I’ve given to each his appropriate blessing that is their destiny.”

Then Jacob charged them, “I am going to join my fathers. Bury me in the land of Canaan in the cave at Machpelah in the field of Ephron, the Hittite, which Abraham bought from him. That’s the place where Abram and Sarah, his wife, are buried as well as Isaac and his wife, Rebekah, and there I buried Leah.”

When Jacob finished charging his sons, he pulled his legs up into his bed, and breathed his last and was gathered unto his people.

Joseph’s Death

50 When Jacob died, Joseph fell on him, kissed him and cried. Then Joseph commanded the physicians to embalm his father and they did so. They spent 40 days embalming the body according to the tradition of the Egyptians. They mourned for him 70 days.

When the period of mourning was over, Joseph asked the house of Pharaoh, "I would like to carry my father to the land of Canaan to bury him." Joseph continued, "My father made me swear that I would take him to the place of family burial. Let me go and I will return back here."

Pharaoh said, "Go bury your father as he made you swear." Joseph went to bury his father along with Jewish servants and Jewish leaders of Pharaoh's household and Jewish leaders of Egypt. But they left their children, flocks, and cattle in the land of Goshen. Egyptian chariots and horsemen also went with Joseph. They came to the threshing floor in Atod, and there they raised loud lamentations for Joseph's father seven days. When the Canaanites saw the mourning, they said, "How deeply the Egyptians are mourning, therefore the place was called, 'mourning of Egypt.'"

Jacob's sons did as he commanded them, they buried him in the cave Machpelah which Abraham bought from Ephron, the Hittite, as a burying place. And Joseph, his brothers, and all the Jewish people who went with him returned to Egypt after they buried Jacob.

After Jacob's funeral, the brothers were afraid that Joseph would hate them and punish them for selling him into slavery. They sent a message to Joseph saying, "Your father gave us a command before he died that we should tell you, 'Forgive the sin of your ten brothers because they are servants of the God of your father.'" Then the ten brothers prostrated themselves before Joseph and said, "We are your slaves."

Joseph wept when the ten brothers spoke to him. Then he told them, "Don't be afraid, am I in the place of God? You planned evil against me, but God meant it for good so that many people could be saved. I will take care of you and your children." Joseph reassured them of their safety.

Joseph and his father's families continued living in Egypt; Joseph lived 110 years, then he died. Joseph lived to see Ephraim's great grandchildren and Machir, the son of Manasseh; all were brought up by Joseph.

When Joseph was dying, he said, "I am dying but God will remember our family and bring us out of Egypt into Canaan the land God swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Then Joseph made them promise, "God will visit you and take you to the Promised Land. Take my bones with you and bury me

there.” So Joseph died when he was 110 years old; they embalmed him and put him in a coffin in Egypt.

I AM GOD

The Deliverer

The Book of Exodus

The word Exodus means “way out.” This is an exciting story of how I provided a way out of bondage for My people in Israel who were slaves in Egypt. Over 550,000 men, plus their families, walked triumphantly away from their oppressive masters.

Just as I gave past deliverance to My people from tyranny, so today I deliver My people from the bondage to sin. I said, “Whoever commits sin is a slave to sin” (John 8:34). Then I went on to say, “If the Son shall make you free, you’ll be free indeed” (John 8:36). I transformed My people so they can worship Me, serve Me, and live their lives in freedom as a testimony to My power and sovereignty.

Every person on this earth has an enemy, whether they realize it or not. Satan is a roaring lion who seeks to eat you up (1 Pet. 5:8). Satan wants people to worship and serve him, and when he’s finished chewing them up, he’ll throw them on the garbage heap of humanity. He’ll do that to you, just as he tried to do to Israel.

My people entered Egypt in a favored position under Joseph. They were given the choice land in the Nile River delta. They worked as herdsman for Pharaoh, but over the next 300 years, they became the slaves of the Egyptians. Hard, cruel slave drivers beat them mercilessly to build the monuments of Egypt. When My people cried to Me, I sent Moses to deliver them.

But Exodus is not just about old dry history. It’s a picture of your battle today against the powers of spiritual darkness. Just as I delivered Israel from Egypt, I will deliver you from sin’s slavery. How did I deliver approximately three million people from slavery? The same way I do it today! I live among My people to show Myself strong. Today, I want to live in your body to show Myself strong to the world. “Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

Israel in Egypt

1 I led the sons of Israel to Egypt with Jacob. Each son brought his entire household with him: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Benjamin, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, and Asher. There were a total of 70 descendants. Joseph was already in Egypt.

Joseph died as did all the other sons of that generation. I blessed the descendants of Israel, they were fruitful and multiplied abundantly and grew into a powerful minority, and the land became filled with them.

A new king came to power who knew nothing about what Joseph did for the Egyptians. He said, "Look, the descendants of Israel are becoming too large and powerful for us. Let us deal wisely with them, or they will continue to multiply, and when war comes, they will join our enemies to fight against us."

So they put slave masters over the Israelites and forced them into slave labor. Israeli slaves built the cities of Pithom and Rameses. But the more the Egyptians oppressed them, the more the Israelites multiplied until the Egyptians hated and feared the Israelites. As a result, they worked them relentlessly. My people had to dig clay, make bricks, and do all types of field work because the Egyptians worked them mercilessly.

The Egyptian king issued a decree to the Hebrew midwives, "Where you see a Hebrew woman giving birth if it is a boy kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live." The king had given the order to Shiphrah and Puah. But they were God-fearers, so the order of the king was not carried out. The king summoned them and demanded, "Why are the boys allowed to live?" The midwives answered Pharaoh, "The Hebrew women are stronger than the Egyptian women. When they go into labor, they give birth before the midwife arrives."

I prospered Israel, and they continued to grow and became powerful. Because the midwives feared Me, their families grew. Then Pharaoh commanded, "Throw every baby boy into the river that is born, but let the girls live."

A Hebrew Deliverer is Born

2A man from the family of Levi married a woman from the same tribe. She conceived and when a fine son was born, she hid him for three months. When she was no longer able to hide the boy, she took a reed basket and sealed it with tar, put the child in the basket and set it floating among the reeds of the river. Miriam, the child's sister, watched from a distance to see what would happen to him.

The daughter of Pharaoh came to bathe in the river, accompanied by her attendants. When she saw the basket floating among the reeds, she sent a servant girl to get it. When she opened to look inside, the baby wept. She was captured by her compassion for the baby and said, "This must be one of the Hebrew children."

Miriam, the baby's sister, said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Would you like for me to find a Hebrew woman to nurse it for you?" Pharaoh's daughter answered, "Yes." So Miriam called the baby's own mother to do it. Then Pharaoh's daughter told her, "Take this baby and nurse it for me, I will pay you." So Moses' mother nursed the baby, then when the child was grown, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and the boy was raised in the palace as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. She called him Moses (to pull out of the water) explaining, "Because I pulled him up out of the water."

I accomplish My will through the circumstances of life. I used the daughter of Pharaoh to save baby Moses.

When Moses was 40 years old, he went to visit his kinsmen. He saw them straining at forced labor. Then an Egyptian struck a Hebrew. Moses looked both ways, and because no one was watching, he killed the Egyptian and buried the body in the sand.

The following day Moses saw two Hebrew men fighting. Moses separated them and said to one, "Why are you fighting your brother?" The man answered, "Who made you a judge over us? Will you kill me the way you killed the Egyptian yesterday?" Moses was frightened knowing the murder was known. When Pharaoh heard it, he was ready to execute Moses, but Moses fled to the Sinai Desert to live in the land of Midian for 40 years.

One day Moses was sitting at a well when the seven daughters of Reuel, the priest of Midian, came to draw water. They tried to fill the trough with water for their sheep, but some shepherds tried to take their water and run them off. Moses protected the women and watered their sheep. When they got home, Reuel asked, “Why have you come home so soon?” They answered, “An Egyptian defended us from the shepherds, then he drew water for our sheep.” Reuel asked them, “Where is he, why didn’t you invite him to come eat with us?”

Moses stayed with Reuel and eventually Reuel gave Moses Zipporah as his wife. She gave birth to a son, and Moses named him Gershom (a foreigner here). Moses said, “I am a foreigner in a foreign land.”

Eventually, the king of Egypt died, but the Israelites still were persecuted with extreme labor.

I, The Great I Am, Call Moses

3 Moses spent his life tending the sheep of Jethro, his father-in-law, a priest of Midian. As Moses led his sheep to the backside of the desert, he came to Sinai, My special mountain in the Horeb range.

I spoke to Moses through the angel of the Lord in the burning bush where the fire did not consume the bush. Moses went to see why the bush was not burned up. Where I saw that Moses came to examine the bush, I called to him, “Moses, Moses,” He answered, “Here am I Lord,” I said, “Don’t come any closer, this is holy ground. Take your sandals off.”

I said to Moses, “I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” Moses covered his face because he was afraid to look on My face. I said, “I have seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their cry to be released from their task masters. I know their pain. Therefore, I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians and lead them to a large spacious land that flows with milk and honey; now occupied by the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites.”

I told Moses, “The anguish of the people of Israel has come to Me, and I have seen the oppression of the Egyptians, so I am going to send you to Pharaoh to deliver My people out of Egypt.”

Moses said, “I am not a good representative to go to Pharaoh to deliver Your people.” I told Moses, “I will be with you. When you have brought My people out of Egypt, you will serve Me on Mount Sinai—this mountain.”

Moses argued with Me saying, “When I come to the people of Israel to tell them the God of your fathers has sent me to deliver you, they will ask me Your name. What is Your name? What shall I say to them?”

I said to Moses, “I AM THAT I AM,” that is who I AM. You shall say to the leaders of Israel, “I AM has sent me to you.” Then I, the Lord God, told Moses to announce, “The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob has sent Me to you. I AM is My eternal name. This is how you will remember Me from generation to generation.”

When Moses gave excuses to escape serving Me, I told him to use the power of My name. Never give excuses not to follow Me, use the power that is available to you.

I told Moses to go gather together the leaders of Israel and tell them, “Adonai (Master), the God (Elohim) of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob has appeared to me.” This is what He told me to tell you, “I have seen your oppression by the Egyptians. I will lead you to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. It is a land flowing with milk and honey.”

I told Moses, “Get the leaders of the people of Israel to go with you to tell the king of the Egyptians, ‘We want to go three days journey into the desert to sacrifice to the Lord our God.’”

I told Moses, “The king of Egypt will not let the people of Israel go unless he is forced to do so. So I will stretch my hand toward Egypt to do miracles to make him willing to release My people. After that, he will let them go. I will make the Egyptians like the people of Israel so that the Egyptians will not send them away empty-handed. Every woman will ask her Egyptian neighbor for articles of gold, silver, and clothing that will dress the sons and daughters of Israel. That way, you will plunder the Egyptians.”

I, The LORD, Send Moses to Egypt

4 Moses answered Me, “The 12 leaders of the tribes of the Israelites won’t listen to me, nor will they believe me. They will rationalize, ‘God did not appear to you.’”

I asked Moses, “What is in Your hand?” Moses answered, “A shepherd’s staff.” I told him, “Throw it on the ground.” When Moses obeyed, it turned into a poisonous serpent. Moses recoiled. Then I said, “Reach out and take up the snake by its tail.” When Moses obeyed, it became a staff again I told Moses, “This miracle will make the Israelite leaders believe that I—the Lord God of their fathers—has appeared to you, and sent you to them.”

I told Moses, “Place your right hand into your coat.” When Moses obeyed and removed his hand, it was leprous, as white as snow. Then I told Moses, “Place your right hand back into your coat.” Moses obeyed, and when he withdrew the hand, it was restored to healthy flesh. Then I said, “If they won’t believe you because of the first miracle, use the second to convince them. If they won’t believe the two miracles, then take fresh water from a river, pour it onto the ground and it will turn to blood on the dry land.”

Moses still doubted if he could do the task. He gave another excuse, “I am a poor speaker. I stutter. My words come out slowly.”

I answered Moses, “Who made your mouth? Who makes a person dumb, deaf, or blind? Isn’t it I, Your Lord? Go do what I tell you and I will be with your mouth.”

Moses still refused saying, “Please, Lord, send someone else.” My anger boiled against Moses.

I asked Moses, “Don’t you have a brother—Aaron—he is a good speaker. He is coming now to meet you. He will be happy to see you. You will speak to Aaron and give him the words to say. You will be the spokesman for the people. He will be your mouth. You will be My representative to him. Now, take this rod—My rod—for you will need it to do miracles.”

Moses left the sheep and returned to his father-in-law Jethro and asked him, “Please let me go return to my brethren in Egypt to see if they are still alive.” Jethro, said, “Go in peace.”

I reassured Moses, “Go back to Egypt because all the ones who wanted to execute you are dead.”

Moses put his wife and sons on a donkey and headed to Egypt. He had My rod in his hand.

I told Moses, “When you appear before Pharaoh, do all the miracles I showed you. But I will harden Pharaoh’s heart so that he will not let my people go. Then tell Pharaoh, ‘God says, “Israel is my firstborn son, and you will not let my son go to worship Me, but you have refused to let him go. Therefore, I will kill your firstborn son.” ’”

I met Moses at the place of lodging and would have killed him if his wife Zipporah had not taken a sharp stone and circumcised their sons. She threw the foreskins at Moses’ feet saying, “You are a bloody bridegroom because of circumcision.”

I told Aaron, “Go meet Moses in the desert.” When they met, Moses told Aaron everything that I told him to do, including the miracles I had ordered him to do. Then Moses and Aaron gathered all the leaders of Israel. Aaron told them everything that I, their God, had told Moses. Moses then did My miracles for them, and they believed. When the leaders heard that I, their God, was coming to deliver them, they bowed their heads in worship.

Moses and Aaron Speak to Pharaoh

5 Moses and Aaron came to meet Pharaoh and told him, “Here is what the Lord God of Israel says, ‘Let My people go so they can worship Me in the desert.’”

The bottom line is always worship; I want to free you from any habits and sins, so you have a new freedom to worship Me.

Pharaoh replied, “Who is this God that I should obey when He says, ‘Let Israel go’? I don’t know this God, and I won’t let Israel go.”

Moses and Aaron answered, “The God of the Hebrew people has met with us. We must go three days journey into the desert to sacrifice to the Lord our God; otherwise, He may send a plague on us, or strike us with the sword.”

The king of Egypt answered Moses and Aaron, “How dare you take these people away from their work? Get back to work. The population of the land has grown, yet you want them to stop work.” That day, Pharaoh ordered the slave masters and foremen to no longer provide straw for the bricks the Hebrews were making. “Make them gather their own straw, but they must produce the same amount of bricks. They spend too much time doing nothing, that’s why they are begging to go sacrifice to their gods. Give them more work to keep them busy.”

The slave masters and foremen told the people what Pharaoh said. The Hebrews were sent to gather straw wherever they could find it, but their daily quota was not reduced. The slave masters kept pressing them to make their quotas as before. The foremen flogged them when they didn’t meet their quotas.

The leaders of the Hebrews complained to Pharaoh, “Why are you treating your servants this way? No straw was given to us, yet the slave masters tell us to make our quota of bricks.”

Pharaoh told them they were lazy because they asked to go into the desert to sacrifice to God. “Get back to work, no straw will be given to you, now get back to work, yet you must produce the full amount of bricks daily.”

As the Hebrew leaders left, they met Moses and Aaron standing in the road, and said to them, “The Lord will punish you because you have made Pharaoh and his servants hate us. You have put a sword in their hand to kill us.”

Moses went into My presence and said, “Lord, why have You mistreated Your people? Why did You send me to Pharaoh? Ever since I went to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, Pharaoh has treated Your people terribly. You haven’t delivered them as You promised.”

Promise Of Deliverance

6I said to Moses, “Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh. When he feels My mighty hand, he will drive Israel from Egypt. I am the Lord. I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob by the name of God Almighty, El Shaddai, but I did not appear to them by My name Jehovah, I AM I AM. I

have established My covenant to give them the land of Canaan, the land where their fathers wandered about and lived as foreigners. I have heard the groanings of the people of Israel whom the Egyptians persecute. I will deliver them and lead them to the Promised Land.”

I told Moses, “Say to the people of Israel, ‘I am the Lord and will redeem you with an outstretched arm and great judgments. I will take you as My people, and I will be Your God. Then you will know I am the Lord your God who delivered you from the persecution of the Egyptians. I will bring you into the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The land will be your inheritance. I am the Lord.’”

When Moses told the people of Israel what You said, they wouldn’t listen because their spirit was crushed and their slavery was so terrible.

I told Moses to “Go tell Pharaoh, ‘Let the people of Israel leave this land.’”

Moses answered, “The people of Israel haven’t listened to me, why should Pharaoh listen to me? I am a poor speaker.”

I told Moses and Aaron, “Give an order to the people of Israel and Pharaoh that My people—the people of Israel—must come out of the land of Egypt.”

These are the heads of their fathers’ houses: The sons of Reuben, the firstborn of Israel, were Hanoch, Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi. And the sons of Simeon were Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jachin, ZoharShaul, the son of a Canaanite woman. These are the names of the sons of Levi according to their generations: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. And the years of the life of Levi were one hundred and thirty-seven. The sons of Gershon were Libni and Shimi according to their families. And the sons of Kohath were Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel. And the years of the life of Kohath were one hundred and thirty-three. The sons of Merari were Mahli and Mushi.

Now Amram for himself Jochebed, his father’s sister, as wife; and she bore him Aaron and Moses. And the years of the life of Amram were one hundred and thirty-seven. The sons of Izhar were Korah, Nempheg, and Zichri. And the sons of Uzziel were Mishael, Elzaphan, and Zithri. Aaron took to himself Elisheba, daughter of Amminadab, sister of Nahshon, as wife; and she bore him Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. And the sons of Korah were Assir, Elkanah, and Abiasaph. These are the families of the Korahites. Eleazar, Aaron’s son, took for himself one of the daughters of

Putiel as wife; and she bore him Phinehas. These are the heads of the fathers' houses of the Levites according to their families.

I said to Aaron and Moses, "Bring out the people of Israel from the land of Egypt according to their armies." These are the ones who spoke to Pharaoh king of Egypt, to bring out the people of Israel from Egypt (Exodus 6:14-27).

On this day I spoke to Moses, "I am the Lord. Tell everything I say to you to Pharaoh, king of Egypt."

Moses still maintained, "I am such a poor speaker, Pharaoh will not listen to me."

The Rod Becomes A Snake

7I said to Moses, "I have put you in My Place before Pharaoh. Aaron, your brother, will be your prophet. You must say everything I command you to say and Aaron, your brother, will speak to Pharaoh to tell him to let My people—the people of Israel—leave this land. But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, even as I increase the signs and miracles I will do in Egypt. But Pharaoh will not listen to you. Then I will lay my hand on Egypt and judge them so I can bring My people of Israel out of Egypt. Then the Egyptians will know I am the Lord when I stretch out my hand to bring the people of Israel out of Egypt."

Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did as I commanded. Aaron threw his rod down in front of Pharaoh, and it turned into a snake. But Pharaoh called on his magicians and sorcerers, and they also did the same thing using their enchantments. Each man's rod turned into a snake. Then Aaron's rod swallowed up theirs. But Pharaoh didn't listen to Moses because I had hardened his heart.

The First Plague - Water Turns to Blood

I told Moses, "Pharaoh is stubborn, he refuses to let the people of Israel go. Meet Pharaoh in the morning as he goes out to the water. Stand on the riverbank to challenge him with your rod which was turned into a snake."

I told Moses to tell Pharaoh, “The God of the Hebrews commands you to let His people go so they can worship Him in the desert. Until now you would not listen. This will show you that I speak for the Lord. I will take the staff in my hand and strike the water, and it will turn to blood. The fish in the river will die, the river will stink, and the Egyptians cannot drink from it.”

I told Moses to have Aaron stretch his staff over the rivers, canals, pools, and reservoirs so that the water in them would turn to blood. There will be blood throughout Egypt, even in wooden vessels and stone pots.

Moses and Aaron did exactly as I commanded. Moses struck the water in sight of Pharaoh, and his servants and all the water in the river turned to blood. The fish died, and the river stank so that the Egyptians couldn’t drink its water. There was blood throughout the land. The magicians did the same with their enchantments. So Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, and he didn’t listen to them. Pharaoh turned and went back into his palace, and didn’t think about this again.

For the next seven days, the Egyptians dug around the river for water to drink, because they couldn’t drink the water of the river.

The Egyptians worshiped the Nile River as a god, but I was victorious over their god.

The Second Plague - Frogs

8I told Moses to go tell Pharaoh, “Let My people go so they can worship Me. If you refuse, I will smite all of Egypt with frogs. The river will swarm with frogs. They will enter your palace, your bedroom, and your bed. They will enter the houses of your servants and all Egyptians. They will be in your ovens and food preparation places. The frogs will jump all over you, your people and your servants.”

I said to Moses, “Tell Aaron to stretch out his staff over all the rivers, canals, and ponds to bring the frogs out of the waters into all of Egypt.” Aaron stretched out his rod over the waters and frogs overran the land of Egypt.

But the magicians duplicated the feat with their incantations and brought frogs out of the water.

Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron and told them, “Pray to the Lord to take away the frogs from my people and me, and I will let your people go and sacrifice to the Lord.”

Moses answered Pharaoh, “Not only will I pray for the frogs to go away, but you can choose the time when they will leave and stay in the rivers.”

Pharaoh said, “Tomorrow.”

The world is so quick to seek physical relief from sufferings but slow to seek relief for spiritual sufferings. You must be quick in confessing sin, and just as swift to seek My presence.

Moses answered, “It will happen at the time you suggested, so you will know that the Lord our God has no equal.”

Moses and Aaron left Pharaoh’s presence, then Moses cried to Me for the frogs to leave.

Moses prayed, and the frogs died in the houses, courtyards, and fields. The Egyptians gathered them in piles, and the land of Egypt stunk. But Pharaoh hardened his heart toward Me when he saw relief from the frogs. He would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as I had said.

The Third Plague - Lice

I told Moses to instruct Aaron to reach out his staff to strike the dust of the ground so that it became lice throughout all Egypt. Aaron did as Moses told him, and lice swarmed on the people and animals. Lice came from dust throughout Egypt. The magicians tried to use the incantations to produce lice, but they couldn’t do it. Lice were everywhere, on the people and animals. They told Pharaoh, “This is the finger of God.” But Pharaoh hardened his heart toward them, just as I said he would do.

The work of My finger is so obviously apparent that everyone should realize that only I do miracles.

The Fourth Plague - Insects

I told Moses, “Get up early in the morning to stand before Pharaoh as he goes to the water and tell him, ‘God said, “Let my people go so they can worship Me. If you don’t I’ll send swarms of insects on you, your people and your servants and into your houses. Your houses will be full of insects, but I will set aside the land of Goshen where my people live. No swarms will be there, so you will know I am the Lord as I venerate Myself in this land. I will separate your people from my people and this sign will occur tomorrow.” ””

I did it just as I promised. The following day, terrible swarms of insects went into Pharaoh’s palaces, and into the homes of all the Egyptians. The insects ruined the entire land of Egypt.

Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron to tell them, “Go sacrifice to your God in Egypt.”

Moses replied, “We can’t sacrifice in Egypt because the animal we sacrifice to God is an abomination to the Egyptians. They would stone us and kill us if we worship with an animal they consider abominable. No! We must go three days into the desert to sacrifice as the Lord our God has commanded us to do.”

Moses didn’t compromise doing what I ordered. May you always worship Me in the way I ordered.

Pharaoh told Moses, “I will allow you to go sacrifice to God in the desert, but don’t go very far. When you get there, pray for me.”

Moses answered, “I will leave you and intercede to the Lord so that tomorrow the swarms of insects will leave you, your people and your houses. But don’t be deceitful and keep us from going to worship the Lord.” Moses left Pharaoh and interceded to the Lord.

I did what Moses asked and removed the swarms of insects from Pharaoh, his servants, and the Egyptians. Not a single one remained, but Pharaoh again hardened his heart and refused to let My people go.

The world only thinks of removal of suffering; may your motives always be pure in worship, may you always seek My glory in your worship.

The Fifth Plague – Sickness

9I sent Moses to tell Pharaoh what I said, “The God of the Hebrews says for you to let His people go so they can worship Him. If you refuse, His hand will fall on all the livestock—on horses, donkeys, camels, cattle, and flocks. They will catch a serious sickness, and many will die. But He will distinguish between the animals of the Egyptians and the people of Israel. None of Israel’s animals will die. Tomorrow He will do this at the same time.”

The following day I did it. The livestock of Egypt died, but none of the animals belonging to the people of Israel died. Pharaoh sent and found out none of the animals belonging to the people of Israel died. But still, Pharaoh’s heart was hard. He wouldn’t let the Israelites go.

The Sixth Plague - Boils

I told Moses and Aaron, “Take a handful of ashes from a furnace and throw them into the air in front of Pharaoh. The ashes will become dust that will turn into sores on people and animals throughout Egypt.”

So Moses did as I told him and threw the ashes into the air in front of Pharaoh and sores broke out on people and animals. The magicians couldn’t even stand before Moses. They had sores just like the other Egyptians. But Pharaoh wouldn’t listen to Moses and Aaron because I had hardened his heart, just as I told Moses I would do.

My hand of judgment never completely destroys you. I allow pain to push you to the point of desperation. Let Me reveal My glory through your sufferings because one utterance of praise, while you suffer, is greater than a thousand words of praise when you are well.

The Seventh Plague - Hail

I told Moses to get up early to stand before Pharaoh and tell him, “The Lord says, ‘Let My people go so they can worship Me. I am sending plagues on

you and Egypt, so you will know there is no one like Me on earth. By now I could have stretched out My hand with such severe plagues that you would have been destroyed from off the face of the earth. But I have allowed you to live so you can see My power and My name will be recognized throughout the world.

“Since you are challenging My power, tomorrow at this time I will send a heavy hailstorm, unlike anything Egypt has ever experienced. Quickly go and get all your livestock indoors, and everything else you want to preserve, for hail will fall on every animal and human being left outside, and they will die.”

Those among Pharaoh’s servants who feared Me escaped because they brought their livestock indoors. They also sought protection from the hail. Those who didn’t regard My word left their servants and livestock in the field where they died.

I told Moses, “Stretch forth your hand toward the sky so hail will fall throughout Egypt, falling on people, animals, and everything growing throughout Egypt.”

Moses did what I commanded, and I sent rain, thunder, lightning, and hail on the land of Egypt. It was the worst hailstorm in the history of Egypt. The lightning struck throughout Egypt and the hail fell on everything in the field—people, animals, and plants, and broke the trees. But in the land of Goshen where Israel lived, there was no hail.

Pharaoh called for Moses and Aaron and said, “This time I have sinned. The Lord is righteous, my people and I are wrong. Pray to the Lord; we can’t take this thunderstorm and hail any longer. I will let you go; you don’t have to stay here any longer.”

Moses answered, “When I leave to go out into the city, as soon as I spread my hands to the Lord, the thunder and hail will stop. Then you will realize that the Lord owns the earth. But, I know you, and your servants still won’t fear the Lord.”

The flax and the barley were destroyed because it was time to harvest them. But the wheat and rye were not hurt because their harvest is much later.

Moses left Pharaoh to raise his hand to Me. The thunderstorm and hail stopped raining. When Pharaoh saw the thunderstorm end, he sinned by

hardening his heart again against Me and refused to let the people of Israel go, just as I told Moses he would do.

I send rain into your lives to make you appreciate sunny days; while you consider rain oppressive and restrictive rain gives life to the food you eat. I send you rain within My plan and providence, so you will see My purpose and submit to My will.

The Eighth Plague - Locusts

10I said to Moses, “Go tell Pharaoh that I have hardened his heart and his servants by manifesting the signs among the Egyptians so you and all Israel can tell your children and grandchildren what I did in Egypt. That way everyone will know that I am the Lord.”

Moses and Aaron told Pharaoh, “The Lord wants to know how much longer you will refuse to yield to Him? He wants you to let His people go so they can worship Him. If you refuse to let them go, tomorrow about this time, He will send locusts into Egypt. They will be so thick you can’t see the ground. They will eat everything the hail didn’t destroy, including the trees. They will fill your houses plus the houses of your servants and all the Egyptians. This plague of locusts will be worse than anything seen by your fathers and grandfathers. It will be worse than anything seen in Egypt.” Then Moses turned and left Pharaoh.

The servants said to Pharaoh, “How much longer will Moses torment us; don’t you realize Egypt is being destroyed?”

Sin destroys the good things of life; look beyond My arm of judgment to see the reason why bad things happen.

Moses and Aaron were brought before Pharaoh who said to them, “Go worship the Lord Your God, but I want to know who is going?”

Moses said to Pharaoh, “We will go with our young and old, our sons and daughters, our flocks and our herds, for we will celebrate a feast to our Lord.”

Pharaoh answered, “Let the Lord go with you, but I will not let your children go with you. It’s clear you are planning evil. Only the men may go to worship the Lord. That’s what you want.” Then Pharaoh drove them out of his presence.

I said to Moses, “Stretch forth your hand over Egypt so that locusts may swarm over the land to eat every green leaf the hail hasn’t killed. When Moses reached out his rod, an east wind from the Lord blew over Egypt all day and all night. The locusts covered the land of Egypt more severely than it had ever been before. The locusts were so thick the ground looked black. They ate every growing leaf and fruit left from the hail. Not anything was left.

Pharaoh quickly summoned Moses and Aaron telling them, “I have sinned against the Lord your God and against you. I beg you, intercede to the Lord so He will take away this deadly plague.”

Moses left Pharaoh to intercede to Me. I answered so that a strong wind blew toward the west blowing the locusts into the Red Sea. Not one locust remained in Egypt. Even then Pharaoh hardened his heart as I had said and he wouldn’t let the people of Israel go.

I am the God of the winds. I allow the winds to blow good things to you. I also let the winds blow evil across your path. Look for My plan in all things.

The Ninth Plague – Darkness

I said to Moses, “reach your hand to the sky. There will be thick darkness over the land of Egypt. So thick and black it can be felt.” Moses did as I commanded and a thick blackness covered Egypt for three days. No one could see anything, nor could they travel anywhere. But I the Lord, provided light in the home of the people of Israel.

Pharaoh called for Moses and told him, “Go worship the Lord, take your children with you, but leave your flocks and herds behind.”

Moses answered, “No, we must have our flocks and herds with us. We will not leave a hoof behind. To worship properly, we must have

our herds and livestock with us because we don't know which one meets the qualification for sacrifices and burnt offerings."

But Pharaoh hardened his heart as I had said. He would not let them go. Pharaoh commanded them to leave and said they would see his face no more because if they saw his face, they would die.

Moses answered, "I will do as you say, I will see your face no more."

There are many people today who are like Pharaoh, they know the truth of My word, but they will not obey Me or believe in Me. Pray for those who are like Pharaoh that I would convict them of their sin, and bring them to saving faith.

The Tenth Plague – Death of the Firstborn

11 I said to Moses, "I will send one more plague on Pharaoh and Egypt, after that he will let you leave. But more than that, Pharaoh will make you leave. Tell the people for every one of them to request gifts (overdue wages) from their neighbors, gold, silver, and jewelry."

Moses said to Pharaoh, "The Lord says at midnight He will go throughout Egypt and all the firstborn in Egypt will die from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sits on the throne to the firstborn of a slave girl doing the most menial task, including the firstborn of the livestock. There will be a terrible wailing throughout Egypt, nothing like anything that's ever been heard before. No one will hate Israel, not even a dog will growl against them. Everyone will realize that the Lord has made a difference between Israel and the children of Egypt. Your servants—those who serve Pharaoh—will come bow before me saying, 'Please leave, you and all the people of Israel.' When Israel leaves, I will go out with them." Then Moses angrily left the presence of Pharaoh.

I reinforced Moses, "Pharaoh will be stubborn so that more of My power will be shown in the land of Egypt."

Moses and Aaron had done all of these wonders and signs before Pharaoh, but he wouldn't let the people of Israel go because of his hardened

heart.

Taking the life of the firstborn seems cruel, but not when you consider the greatness of evil that pushed Me to that judgment. I gave the life of My Firstborn—Jesus Christ; His suffering seemed so severe for the Sinless One, but not when I consider the greatness of evil.

The First Passover

12I told Moses and Aaron that from now on, their calendar would begin with this event, i.e., the Passover and Israel’s deliverance from Egypt. I told Moses, “On the 10th day of this month, each man must take a lamb for his family—one per household—but if the family is small, a family may share with another family in their neighborhood.”

I described the Passover process, “It must be one year old, either a male sheep or goat, with no defects. They must keep it until the 14th day of the month, then each family must slaughter its own lamb. They are to take some of its blood and smear it on both sides of the doorposts and on top of the door frame of the house where the lamb will be eaten. The lamb must be roasted in fire with bitter herbs and unleavened bread (matzah). The meat must never be eaten raw or boiled, but roasted in fire. Roast it with its head, legs, and internal organs. Don’t let any of it remain till the morning. If it is not entirely eaten, burn it up completely.”

I spoke in pictures through the Passover lamb to help you see the LAMB who takes away your sin. When you celebrate the Communion Table, look beyond bread and the cup to see My Son, Jesus.

I told them how to eat the Passover, “Eat it with your belt tightened, your shoes on, and your walking stick in your hand as though you’re going on a long trip. Devour it for it is the Lord’s Passover.”

I declared, “That night I will pass through the land of Egypt to execute judgment against the gods of Egypt. I will kill the firstborn of all families,

both men, and animals. I am the Lord. The blood you have smeared on your doors will be a sign. When I see the blood, I will pass over you. The plague of death will not touch you.”

I commanded, “From now on you will celebrate this day as a Passover feast to Me. For seven days you must eat only bread made without yeast (matzah, unleavened bread). On the very first day of Passover, remove all yeast from your houses. Anyone who eats bread baked with yeast from the first to the seventh day is cut off from Israel. On the first and seventh day have an assembly set aside to worship Me. Do not work on these days except what must be done, including the preparation of food.”

I wanted My people to celebrate the feast of Passover to remind them of the power I used to bring Israel out of Egypt. This festival was to be a permanent feast to be celebrated from generation to generation. From the evening of the 14th day until the evening of the 21st day, they were to eat unleavened bread. During the seven days, no trace of leaven must be found in their homes. This requirement is for both foreigners and those born in their homes. I emphasized, “Eat unleavened bread at Passover wherever you live.”

Moses gathered the leaders of Israel and told them, “Have each family select a lamb and set it apart. Then slaughter it and drain its blood into a basin. Then take a cluster of leaves and dip it in the blood, and sprinkle it on both sides of the door frame and on its top. No one must go out the door until morning for the Lord will pass through to kill the firstborn in each Egyptian family, but when He sees the blood on your house, and over the door, He will not allow the death angel to enter your home.”

Those died who were not covered with the blood; therefore make sure your sins are covered by the blood of Christ. Many reading this book will die needlessly because their sins are not covered.

I told My people, “Keep these instructions forever. When You come into the land, I have promised you, continue to celebrate this feast. When your children ask, ‘What does all this mean?’, tell them, ‘It is the celebration of the Lord’s Passover, for when the Lord visited the homes of the Egyptians with death, He passed over our homes. Though God killed the firstborn of the Egyptians, He spared our families.’”

When the people heard My instruction, they bowed their heads in worship. Then they did just as Moses had instructed them.

At midnight, the Lord killed the firstborn of all the land, from the firstborn son of Pharaoh who sat on the throne to the firstborn of the prisoner in the dungeon. Pharaoh and his officials and all the Egyptians awoke during the night when excruciating cries were heard. There wasn't any home without someone dead in it.

I will judge the unsaved in Hell because they refuse to believe in Me. Pray for the unsaved so intensely that you shed tears so the unsaved won't shed tears throughout eternity.

Pharaoh sent for Moses and Aaron during the night, "Leave immediately," he demanded, "both you and all your people, go sacrifice to the Lord as you requested. Take your flocks and herds and get out of here." Then Pharaoh had one last request, "But bless me before you go." All the Egyptians urged the Israelites to leave quickly, exclaiming, "Before we're all dead."

Israel took their dough from their mixing bowls before it became leaven, wrapped it in cloth and carried it with them when they left. The people did as Moses instructed and asked their neighbors for articles of clothing, gold, and silver. This moved the hearts of the Egyptians, and they gave them the equivalent of unpaid wages for all the work Israel did for the nation. So like a victorious army, they plundered the Egyptians.

The people of Israel left Rameses and headed for Succoth. There were about 600,000 men (families) walking on foot, not counting the wives and children. Many people, not fully Israelites (Gentiles who married into Israel) went with them, plus flocks and herds. When they stopped to eat, they baked bread from the unleavened dough they brought with them. The Israelites had lived in Egypt 430 years, and they left on the last day of the 430th year. This was the night I set aside to bring My people out of Egypt, so Israel celebrates Passover throughout the generations.

I gave the commandment that no foreigner may eat the Passover lamb, but any foreigner who is circumcised may eat it. They will be treated as those born in an Israelite family. But no uncircumcised male may ever eat

the Passover. The people followed My instructions and that very day I began leading them out of Egypt, tribe by tribe.

My victory always comes to those who wait. Be patient in times of persecution, knowing I will eventually reward My servants.

Remembering the Passover

13I said to Moses, “In contrast to the firstborn of Egypt that was killed on Passover night, you must dedicate the firstborn of every Israelite family to Me because they are Mine. I want their life to serve and worship Me.”

Moses then said to the people, “Also, remember this day that we leave the slavery of Egypt because the Lord by the might of His hand has delivered you from bondage (do not eat any bread with yeast). Also, remember when the Lord brings you into a land flowing with milk and honey that He promised to our ancestors, that day must be celebrated as an anniversary of our exodus. In the month of Abib (March or early April), we will eat only unleavened bread for seven days, and on the seventh day, we will celebrate with a great feast to the Lord. During that week we must have no yeast in our houses.”

Moses commanded, “On that day each year explain to your children why you celebrate in the way you do. Remind them the Lord delivered us from slavery in Egypt. This visible reminder will be like a sign branded on your hand or between your eyes so that you keep the Lord’s instruction (Torah) in your minds and on your lips.

“During these celebrations, all firstborn sons and firstborn animals must be dedicated to the Lord with the sacrifice of a lamb. As an illustration, you can dedicate a firstborn donkey by sacrificing a lamb in its place. But if you don’t do it, you must break the animal’s neck.

“If during these celebrations, a child asks, ‘What does this mean?’ Remind him that with a mighty hand I redeemed you out of Egypt, out of the bonds of slavery. When Pharaoh refused to let you go, I killed all the firstborn of Egypt, humans, and animals. These actions will be the sign that reminds you I delivered you.”

After Pharaoh let the people of Israel go, I did not lead them on the king's highway that ran along the sea toward the Promised Land. The war-like Philistines were there, and if Israel faced war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt.

I led My people to take a right hand turn into the desert toward the Red Sea. The people of Israel left Egypt like a victorious marching army.

Moses took the bones of Joseph with him because Joseph had made the sons of Israel swear they would take his bones with them when they left Egypt. Joseph knew one day I would lead Israel out of Egypt to the Promised Land.

Israel traveled from Succoth to Ethom and set up camp on the edge of the desert. I guided them by a column of clouds (Shekinah) during the day and a column of fire at night. That way they could travel in the daylight or at night. The Shekinah cloud did not leave their sight.

Crossing the Red Sea

14I told Moses, "Have the people march toward Pi Hahiroth and set up camp between Migdol (towering rock) and the sea, near Baal-Zephon (Baal, god of typhoons). Pharaoh will think the people of Israel are lost and have been trapped between the sea and the desert. I will harden Pharaoh's heart so that he will chase you with his army. I will glorify Myself at the expense of Pharaoh and his army. Finally, the Egyptians will realize I AM THE LORD."

Pharaoh received word that the Israelites were not planning on returning, Pharaoh had a change of heart toward the Israelites and said, "Why did we let them go, they no longer do our slave work?" So he prepared his 600 best chariots, each with a commander and his soldiers. He chased after the Israelites who had left so boldly. The Egyptians charged after them, the chariots, cavalry, soldiers, and caught up with them as they were camped on the shore of the Red Sea, near Pi Hahiroth and Baal-Zephon.

The people of Israel could see Pharaoh and his army approaching in the distance, and they panicked and cried to Me for help. They complained to Moses, “Did you bring us to die in the desert because there were not enough graves in Egypt? Didn’t we tell you to let us alone? Wouldn’t it have been better to be slaves in Egypt than to die in the desert?”

Moses told the people, “Quit being afraid. Just stand steadfast and watch the Lord deliver you. You see the Egyptians today, but you’ll never see them again. The Lord will fight for you. He will deliver you!”

I said to Moses, “Tell the people not to cry to Me but go forward. Lift the rod out over the sea and divide it in two. A path will open through the sea. Then all the people will walk through it on dry land. I will harden the heart of Pharaoh and the Egyptians this last time. They will follow you, the Israelites, into the sea, where I will be glorified at the expense of his chariots and army. When Pharaoh, the chariots, and army are drowned, then all Egypt will know I AM THE LORD.”

I protected Israel. The pillar of clouds moved from in front of the people to the rear, placing itself between the Israelites and the Egyptians. As night approached, the pillar of clouds became a pillar of fire lighting the Israelite camp but became thick blackness so the Egyptians couldn’t find the Israelites.

Moses lifted his hand over the sea, and a strong east wind (Sahara sandstorm) opened a path through the sea. The east wind blew all night turning the sea into a path of dry land. So, the people of Israel walked through the sea on dry land, a wall of water on each side.

The Egyptians charged into the bottom of the sea—the chariots, horses, and army—all following Israel.

I look down from the Shekinah cloud early in the morning to see the Egyptians following Israel. I made the Egyptians panic. Their chariots sank in the sand. It was impossible for them to move. The Egyptians shouted, “The Lord is fighting against us. Let’s retreat.”

I said to Moses, “Stretch your rod over the sea, and the waters will return to drown the Egyptians.” Moses did as I commanded, and the waters rushed back to their former place. The Egyptians tried to escape, but I swept over them with the sea. Not one Egyptian escaped.

The people of Israel walked on dry land with a wall of water on their right and left side. I saved Israel, and after that, Israel saw the dead bodies of

the Egyptians washed up on the shore. Then Israel believed in Me when they saw My mighty miracles I did against the Egyptians.

I lead My people into danger so they will trust Me for deliverance. I will lead them every day of their life. Don't ask Me not to lead you into danger because then you wouldn't experience My deliverance.

A Song of Deliverance

15 Moses and the people of Israel sang a joyful song of victory that praised Me for their triumph over Pharaoh and the Egyptians. They sang to Me with their whole heart for I triumphed gloriously over Pharaoh; I destroy their horses and riders in the sea.

I am your strength, so sing to Me
For I give you victory.
I am your God you shall praise Me;
I am your father's God; I will deliver you.
I am a warrior;
Yes, your Lord is your defender.
I have destroyed Pharaoh's chariots and armies
By covering them with the sea;
The very best of Pharaoh's officers
Have been drowned in the sea.
The deep waters of the Red Sea
Have covered them as they sank to the bottom.
My right hand is sublimely powerful,
It is glorious in victory.
My right hand
Has smashed the enemy to pieces.
My awesome majesty

Brought down My enemies;
My anger flashed like fire,
I burnt them up like stubble.
My breath blew like a blast,
The waters piled up on either side;
The depth of the sea stood straight up like a wall,
It stood firm until you passed through.
The enemy said, "I will chase them and overtake them,
I will capture them and plunder their goods,
I will draw my sword and destroy them."
But My breath blew the water back over them,
They sank like lead in the angry water.
Who is a mighty God like Me
Who is glorious in holiness for you?
I am awesome in majesty
As I work miracles for you to see.
I, your Lord, reached out
To swallow My enemies.
With unfailing love, I led you,
I guided you to My holy presence,
You are My people whom I have redeemed.
The gentle nations heard what I did,
Fear overcame the Philistines;
The leaders of Edom are terrified,
All the people of Canaan melted in fear;
Terror and dread gripped them all.
By My mighty power, My people pass by
And the nations have nothing to say
Because the people I redeemed paraded by them.
I will bring them into the Promised Land,

I will plant them on their own mountains
The place I choose as their home.
The Promised Land will also be My home,
The place where I will plant My sanctuary.
I will reign forever and ever
Because Pharaoh's horses, chariots, and soldiers
Rushed into the bottom of the sea.
I brought the waters crashing down on them
But you—My people—walked through on dry land.

Miriam, the prophetess, Aaron's sister, danced with a tambourine, leading all the women in dancing. She led them saying, "Sing joyfully to the Lord, for He triumphed mighty, He threw both rider and the horse into the sea."

Moses led the people of Israel away from the Red Sea into the Sinai Desert. For three days they didn't find water. When they got to the oasis at Marah (bitter), they couldn't drink the water because it was alkaline water. The people grumbled against Moses demanding, "We need water to drink!"

Moses cried to Me for an answer. I their Lord, showed Moses a small tree. When Moses threw it into the water, it became good to drink.

I tested their faithfulness at Marah, then I told the people, "If you will listen intently to My voice and do My commands and directions, you will not suffer the diseases of the Egyptians. I am Jehovah-Rapha, the God who heals you."

When the people of Israel left Marah, they came to Elim where there were 12 springs and 70 palm trees.

The Shekinah halted, and they camped there beside the spring.

Bread From Heaven

16All the people of Israel left Elim and traveled into the Sin Desert toward Sinai and arrived on the 15th day of the second month (one month after leaving Egypt). The people grumbled against Moses and Aaron,

“We wish we were back in Egypt, where we had pots of meat boiling and plenty to eat. Why didn’t God kill us there? Now we will starve to death in this desert.”

I said to Moses, “I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each morning to gather as much as they needed for that day. I will test them to see whether or not they will obey My Word. Tell them to gather twice as much on the sixth day of each week so they will have food on the Sabbath.”

Moses and Aaron gathered the people and said, “Now you will realize the Lord who brought you out of Egypt can provide for you. In the morning you will see the Lord’s glory. The Lord has heard your grumblings against Him. Your complaints are not against us but against Him. What I am telling you will happen this evening. The Lord will give you meat this evening and bread tomorrow morning.

Moses said to the entire community of Israel, “Here is the Lord’s reply to your complaints.” As Aaron was speaking, the people looked toward the desert, and My glory appeared in a cloud, and I said to Moses, “I have heard your grumblings. At dusk, you will have meat, and in the morning you will have bread. Then you will realize I am the Lord.”

I was gracious to give Israel food to eat after they wanted the fleshpots of Egypt.

I have been good to Israel, even when they’re unappreciative of My goodness; I show My love by grace and not judgment.

Quail covered the camp that evening and the next morning the desert was wet with dew. When the dew disappeared, a fine flake of something like frost covered the ground. When the people saw it, they ask, “Man ha?” which is interpreted, “What is it?” and pronounced it manna. Moses answered, “This is bread which the Lord has given you to eat. The Lord has commanded each person to gather according to what he can eat. Gather two quarts for each person. The people did this; some gathered more, some gathered less. But when they got back to their tents, those who gathered much had none left over, and those who gathered too little had enough. Each family had what they needed.

Moses told the people, “Don’t keep any of it until the next day.” But some didn’t listen; they did it anyway. But what they kept had a terrible smell and was filled with maggots.

The bread you need today is not physical bread; you need spiritual strength to overcome your stubborn will. You need to be strengthened by My Holy Spirit to grow strong in the inner person. You need daily strength for each day. Trust Me to supply all your needs.

The people gathered manna each morning according to My command; day by day, each family gathered according to its need. As the sun became hot, the manna melted and disappeared. On the 6th day, they gathered twice as much as on other days, i.e., four quarts per person.

When the leaders of the people came to Moses, he said, “The Lord has set aside the 6th day to provide for the Sabbath. You are to consecrate that day unto the Lord. Bake some of it or broil some of it for the Sabbath, because you won’t find manna in the fields on the Sabbath.” Even then, some people went out to look for manna, but it was not there.

I said to Moses, “How long will these people doubt Me and refuse to do what I have told them to do? Do they not realize I have given them the seventh day to rest? That is why I have given them twice as much manna on the 6th day so there will be food on the Sabbath. On the Sabbath, you must rest and stay in your tent. Do not try to pick up manna on that day.” So the people rested on the Sabbath. The people began calling it manna. It was like a white coriander seed and tasted like honey.

I told Moses, “Take two quarts of manna and keep it for generation to generation so they can see the bread that I fed my people in the wilderness when I brought them out of Egypt.”

Moses told Aaron, “Get a container and pour two quarts of manna into it and store it in a sacred place to be a lesson to future generations.” Aaron did exactly what I commanded (eventually it was kept in the Ark of the Covenant). The people of Israel ate manna for 40 years until they came to the land of Canaan where they were able to eat the crops of that land.

The Battle Over Water

17The whole multitude of the people of Israel left the Desert of Sin and followed My Shekinah cloud to the oasis at Rephidim and camped there. But the oasis was dry; there was no water. The people grumbled, demanding of Moses, “Get water for us!” Moses answered them, “Why are you fussing at me? You doubt the Lord who promised to provide for us.”

The people grew thirstier, so they grumbled again to Moses, “Why have you led us into the desert from Egypt so that we will die in the desert for lack of water, along with our children and livestock?”

I had miraculously led Israel through the Red Sea, and I had miraculously provided water at Marah; why couldn't they trust Me to do the miraculous again? Sometimes you are just like the people of Israel in the desert; you doubt My leading even when I have provided in the past.

Moses cried to Me saying, “What shall I do, the people want to stone me?” I answered him, “Go stand before the people and take with you the leaders of every tribe. Also, take your rod, the one you used to divide the waters of the Red Sea.”

I told Moses, “Stand with Me before the people of Israel upon the great rock at Horeb. Strike the rock with the rod and water will gush out of it for the people to drink.”

Moses did as I commanded and water gushed out of the rock. After that Moses called the rock Massah (burden) and Meribah (contention) because the people of Israel doubted Me, their Lord, saying, “Is the Lord with us or not?”

Amalek, a fierce warring tribe, came to attack Israel over water rights. There was no contention until Israel found water.

Moses told Joshua to enlist able-bodied men to fight Amalek. Moses said, “I will intercede for you with the rod of God in my hand on the top of the hill.” So Joshua gathered his army and Moses went to pray at the top of the hill, with Aaron and Hur.

When Moses lifted his arms in intercession, then Israel prevailed in battle. But when Moses' arms got tired, he dropped them, and Amalek prevailed. So Aaron and Hur sat Moses on a stone and held his hands up in prayer, one on one side and the other on the other side. They continued until the sun went down, and Israel prevailed.

I told Moses, "Write this in a book and read it constantly to remind Israel of the hatred of Amalek for Israel. They will continually battle Israel and Me from generation to generation."

Moses built a monument to remind the people of Israel of their victory over Amalek and named it JEHOVAH-NISSI (the Lord our Banner).

My banner is waving over you in all your trials and tribulations remember, "There is victory" to those who trust in Me; rally to My banner when difficulties come.

A Lesson in Leadership

18 Jethro came to meet Moses and the people of Israel after they arrived at Mount Sinai. Jethro—Moses' father-in-law—had heard all the miracles that I had done for Israel in delivering them from Egypt. Moses had left Zipporah and their children with Jethro when he confronted Pharaoh. Moses named his first son Gershom ("I have been an alien in a strange land") and the second, Eliezer ("God is my help"), because I had delivered Moses from the death warrant of Pharaoh.

Moses went out to greet his father-in-law and bowed before him, then they embraced and asked each other about their welfare. Then they went into a tent. Jethro said, "I have brought your wife and two sons to you."

Moses rehearsed for Jethro all the miracles and plagues that I did against Pharaoh and Egyptians to deliver them. Then Moses told Jethro about the problems of the people of Israel after they left Egypt.

Jethro rejoiced in all I had done for Israel. He said, "Blessed be the Lord who has delivered you out from the hands of the Egyptians and from Pharaoh. Now I know the Lord is greater than the gods of Egypt for He was

victorious over them.” Then Jethro sacrificed a burnt offering to Me. Next, Aaron and the elders came for a big banquet with Jethro.

Remember there is a demonic spirit behind idols, and the plagues were a battle between satan and Me. Trust in Me and do not fear demons because “Greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world.”

Moses sat the next morning as the judge for the people to arbitrate their problematic issues. He was hearing different cases from early morning until the evening.

Jethro saw all that Moses did. He then asked Moses, “Why are you the only one who arbitrates these cases? The people are standing in line from morning till evening.”

Moses answered, “Because I know the laws of God and can talk to God about these matters. They come to me when they have a disagreement, and I tell them what God says.”

Jethro said, “What you’re doing is not good. You will eventually break down, both you and the people who wait for you. You can’t do this thing alone.”

Do not become so egotistical that you think you are the only one who can solve problems. Leave the wisdom of delegation to those qualified to do the job. You do what only you can do; delegate to others who do it better than you.

Jethro then told Moses what to do, “Teach the leaders and the people the commandments of God and explain to them how to live and how to serve God. Then choose the best-qualified men to counsel the people about their problems. Choose men who fear God, live by the truth and are not greedy.

“Moses, you spend your time talking to God and serving Him and intercede to God about the people’s problems. Then delegate qualified men over groups of 1,000s, 100s, and 10s. Let them solve all the cases. They can

take care of small matters, and you take care of the big problems. That way, they can help bear the burden of leadership.”

Jethro concluded, “If you delegate your responsibility, you won’t wear out, and the people will be happier.”

Moses did what his father-in-law suggested. He chose qualified men and made them heads over 1,000s, and 100s and 10s. They arbitrated the problems but brought the difficult ones to Moses. Then Jethro left and returned to his own land of the Midianites.

You don’t need a Bible verse to solve some problems; just do the common sense thing. Be wise enough to know when to look in the Bible and at other times use your good judgment to solve the issues of life.

I, the LORD, Pay a Visit to My People

19The people of Israel arrived in the desert at the foot of Mount Sinai three months after leaving Egypt. They camped at the foot of Sinai.

Moses went up into the mountain to meet Me. It was there I met him and said, “Go tell the descendants of Jacob, remember what I said to the Egyptians and how I carried you on eagles’ wings to bring you out of Egypt. Now, therefore, remember the earth is mine. If you will obey My voice and keep My commandments, you will be a unique people that I will treasure more than all other people. You will be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”

Moses came down and called the elderly leaders of the tribes together and told them what I had said.

The people answered, “We will do everything the Lord tells us to do.”

Moses went back up the mountain to tell Me what the people said. I said to Moses, “I came to you in a thick black cloud so the people can hear and believe when I speak. Go tell the people to sanctify themselves today and tomorrow. Tell them to wash their clothes because on the third day I will come down to Mount Sinai so they can see Me. Put ‘no trespassing’ signs around the mountain. Anyone who goes on to the mountain or touches it will

die. If they barely touch it with a hand, stone them, whether the violator is a person or an animal. Tell them to come to the foot of the mountain when they hear the sound of the trumpet.”

Expect smoke when I appear because the Bible says I am a consuming fire. You will never see Me with your eyes, but you can see Me in your heart.

Moses went down to tell the people to get ready by sanctifying themselves and washing their clothes. He told them not to have sex with their wives until after the third day.

On the third day in the morning, a thick black cloud descended on the mountain with thundering and lightning, and a trumpet sound was so loud that it scared the people, so they shook with fear. Moses led the people to the backside of the mountain to meet Me. Sinai was covered with smoke because I descended there and the smoke arose in a giant column into heaven as it came from a giant fire. The mountain shook with an earthquake. The trumpet got louder and louder. Then I called Moses to come up into the mount.

I said, “Go, command the people not to come up here or try to see Me because they will die if they try. Tell the priests to sanctify themselves lest they die when they sacrifice to Me. Go down to the people, but make sure they, nor the priests, try to come up onto the mountains for they will die if they do it.”

Moses went down to tell the people what I said.

I want those who come to worship Me to be clean on the inside and outside. I will cleanse your heart by the blood of Christ. You must clean up your speech, thoughts, and life, you must also clean up your outward person.

The Ten Commandments

I gave these commandments to Moses saying, “I am the Lord your God, and have brought you from bondage in Egypt.

20 “You shall not have any of the world’s gods before Me.

“You shall not make any carved images or likenesses to represent Me, it should not look like anything in heaven, nor anything on earth, nor anything under the water. You shall not bow down to any images or sacrifice to them. For I am a jealous God and will judge people to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me. But I will show mercy to those who love Me and unto thousands and beyond.

“You shall not wrongly use My name, because those who speak My name falsely will be guilty of sin.

“You shall observe the Sabbath as a holy day because it was then that I, the Lord God, rested. You shall do all your work in six days, but the seventh day is a day of rest. You shall not work on the Sabbath, neither shall your son, daughter, including menservants or women servants who work for you, plus your animals. For in six days, I, the Lord, created the heavens, earth, sea, and everything in it. Then I rested on the seventh day and blessed it and made it holy.

“You shall honor your father and mother so you’ll live a long time.

“You shall not kill individuals.

“You shall not have sex with anyone who is not your spouse.

“You shall not steal.

“You shall not lie to another, or about another.

“You shall not be greedy. You should not lust after your neighbor’s house, his wife, his servants, his animals, nor anything that is your neighbors.”

Response

The people were frightened by the thunder, lightning, smoke and loud trumpet blast, so they moved away from Mount Sinai and stood a long distance away. They said to Moses, “Speak to the Lord for us and we will listen to you, but we will die if God speaks directly to us.”

Moses said to the people, “Don’t be afraid. God came down to Sinai to test you to see if you would fear Him, and separate yourself from sin.” Then

Moses came close to the thick clouds of Sinai where I was.

I said to Moses, “The people know that I have talked with you, so tell them not to make gods of gold or silver. They shall sacrifice to Me on an altar that sits flat on the ground made of regular field stones. Don’t use your tools to carve any special stones for an altar. Your altar should not be on a pedestal.”

Consequences of Actions

21 I told My people how to treat their servants, “If you buy a Hebrew servant, that servant must serve you for six years. However, that servant must be released on the seventh year, and be free. If you got that servant as an unmarried man, then he must leave you by himself. If you got him as a married man, then his wife will leave with him. But if you gave him a wife and she gave birth to sons and daughters, then the wife and children belong to you, the man must leave by himself. But if the servant says, ‘I love my master, my wife, and my children—I don’t want to be free,’ then you must certify this by a local judge, then take him to the door-post of your house and pierce the servants ear with an awl, and that servant will serve you the rest of his life.”

I said, “When someone hits another so that he kills someone, the offender must be put to death. But if that person did not intend to kill, and it was an accident, there will be a place to which he can run for safety. However, if someone cleverly plots to kill another, do not recognize his place of safety. If he has run to the altar for safety, take him away and execute him. If anyone hits his father or mother, he must be put to death. If anyone kidnaps another, whether to sell them or hold them captive, then the kidnapper must be put to death. The one who curses his father or mother must be executed. If two men get into an argument and one hits the other with a rock or his fist, but does not kill him, though the wounded man is incapacitated, the man who hit him will not be executed but must pay for losses until the wounded man is fully recovered. If a man hits a male or female servant with a stick and the slave dies, then he must be punished. But if the slave lives, then he will not be punished because the slave is his property.”

Because I value life, those who kill another must be punished according to My word. Because I value obedience in the home, the disobedient child must be dealt with severely. All must learn obedience to Me, to parents, and to your employers.

“If two fight and they hurt a pregnant woman, causing her to have a miscarriage, but there is no additional injury, then the one hurting the woman must pay the damages that are demanded by the woman’s husband. However, if there was further injury, then the penalty is “a life for a life, i.e., an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.” If you put out the eye of your male or female slave, then you must let that slave go free. If you knock out the tooth of a male or female slave, you must let that slave go free.”

My law protects the life and property of individuals, let it guide how you should treat others, and how they must treat you. Learn to live within the constraints of law, and serve Me within that freedom.

“If a bull gores a man or woman to death, then the bull must be stoned. The owner of the bull will not be held responsible unless the bull had a habit of attacking people and the owner had been warned, but the owner did not keep the bull penned up. If the bull kills someone, then stone the bull to death, and also execute the owner. However, the owner can redeem his life by paying what is demanded of him. If a bull gores a male or female slave, then the owner of the bull must give 30 shekels of silver to the owner of the slave, and the bull must be stoned to death.

“When a man digs a hole in the ground and leaves it uncovered if a donkey or bull falls into it, then the man must pay damages to the owner of the animal. The man must pay for the animal, but the carcass belongs to him. If a man’s bull hurts another man’s animals, the bull must be sold and the money divided. If it is common knowledge that a bull was dangerous—a habit of goring—the owner must pay the full price of damages.”

You are responsible for whatever belongs to you, keep from hurting another with your possessions.

Protection of Property

22 I said, “If a man steals a bull or a sheep and kills it or sells it, then he must pay the owner back—five cattle for one bull, or four flock animals for 1 sheep. If he does not have anything, then he must be sold into slavery to pay for his robbery. If the stolen animal is found alive in his possession, whether it is a bull, a donkey, or a sheep, then he must pay back double. If the robber is caught while breaking and entering in the dark, and he is hit so hard that he dies, the owner is not guilty if he acted in self-defense in darkness. Then no murder charges may be made. However, if this break-in occurred during the daytime, then the owner may be charged with manslaughter.”

You must be satisfied with your possessions, then you won't covet the possessions of another, and you will never become a thief.

I said, “If a man allows his animal to run free and graze in another man’s field, then he must pay back what is lost from his good field or vineyard. If a fire breaks out and spreads into another man’s field, in such a way that the sheaves of grain or the standing grain, or the field itself is completely destroyed, then the one who started the fire must pay for the whole thing.”

I said, “If a man delivers money or goods to his neighbor to hold for him, and it is stolen from the second man’s house, then, if the robber is caught, the robber must pay back double. If the robber is not caught, then the owner of the house must approach the local judges to decide whether the one holding the property was the one who stole his property or not. For every case of illegal possession, whether it is for a bull, a donkey, a sheep, clothes, or any other lost property, which one claims is his; the case for both parties must come before the local judges. The one whom the judges found guilty will pay back double to his neighbor.”

I said, “If a man delivers a donkey, a bull, a sheep, or any animal to his neighbor to hold for him, and the animal dies, gets hurt, or is taken without anyone seeing it, then the second man must take an oath by the Lord to verify that he did NOT steal his neighbor’s goods. The owner of the animal must accept this oath, and the second man will not have to pay anything. If the animal was torn to pieces by a wild animal, let the second man bring the

carcass as evidence. He will not have to pay for what was torn apart. If a man borrows an animal from his neighbor and it gets hurt or dies while its owner is not present with it, then the borrower must surely pay in full. But if its owner is present, then the borrower does not have to pay. If the animal was rented, then the money paid for it covers the loss.”

I said, “If a man seduces a virgin girl who is not engaged and goes to bed with her, then he must certainly pay a dowry for her to be his wife. However, if her father absolutely refuses to give her to him, then he must pay the usual bride-price for virgins.”

I said, “You must not allow a sorceress to live among you. Whoever has sex with an animal must certainly be put to death.”

I said, “The person who sacrifices to any god must be completely destroyed. Sacrifices can only be made to Me.”

Fully obey every command I give, do not compromise or dabble with sin. There are many consequences to sin, I give these commands to protect you. You must keep My commandments to please Me and be protected from harm.

I said, “You must not do wrong to a foreigner or persecute him because you also were once foreigners in the land of Egypt. You must not take advantage of any widow or orphan. If you give them any trouble at all, and they cry out to Me in any way, then I will surely hear their cry for help. I will become very angry and arrange for your death. Your wives will become widows and your children will have no father. If you lend money to any of My people who are poor among you, then you must not act like a creditor to that person. You must not charge him interest. If you ever take your neighbor’s robe as a guarantee, then you must restore it to him before the sun goes down, because that is the only covering he has for his body. What else will he sleep in? Whenever that person cries out to Me, I will hear it, because I am merciful.”

I said, “You must not blaspheme Me or curse a ruler of your people. You must not delay giving an offering to Me from your harvest or from the overflow of your vats. You must dedicate your firstborn sons to Me. You must do the same with your bulls and with your flock animals. The animal

that is born first must stay with its mother for one week. On the eighth day, you must give it to Me. You must be holy to Me. Therefore, you must not eat any meat that was torn in pieces by wild animals in the field. Throw it to the dogs.”

Justice

23I, the LORD, said, “You must not spread a false report. Do not help an evil person by giving false testimony. You must not follow a mob to do evil. When you give testimony in a lawsuit, do not twist justice by trying to be on the side of the crowd. You must not give any special favors to a poor man in his lawsuit. If you happen to meet your enemy’s bull or his donkey as it wanders around, then you must certainly return it to him. If you see the donkey of the one who hates you lying helpless under its load, then don’t leave it. You must certainly help it get up. You must not twist what you say in a lawsuit. Keep away from a false charge. Do not put an innocent man or an honest person to death. I will hold the guilty party personally responsible. You must never take a bribe. Bribes have a way of causing people to look the other way. They twist the words of righteous people. You must not persecute a foreigner, because you know what it feels like to be a foreigner. You were once foreigners in the land of Egypt.”

Truth is important. It's the way things are. Keep yourself from lies, and tell the truth so you can honestly serve My Son, Jesus, the truth.

I said, “You are allowed to plant seed in your field for six years and gather its harvest. However, on the seventh year, you must let your land rest and remain unplanted, so the poor may glean your field in the sabbatical year so they have something to eat. Whatever they leave can be eaten by the wild animals. You must do the same thing for your vineyard and olive trees.”

I said, “You will do your work for six days, but you must rest on the seventh day so that your bull and your donkey can rest. The son of your slave-woman and the resident foreigner need to get their rest, too.”

I said, “Be careful about everything that I have told you. Don’t even mention the name of other gods. Don’t let their names be heard from your mouth!”

I said, “Each year, you must celebrate the following three festivals to Me: (Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles). Observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread—Passover—for seven days as I have commanded you. Observe it in the month of Abib, the month when you came out of Egypt. During the month of Abib, you must eat bread which does not contain any yeast. No one will be allowed to appear in My presence empty-handed, but you must bring a gift. And, you must observe the Feast of Spring Harvest—Pentecost. And, at the end of the fall harvest, you must observe the Feast of Ingathering, also called the Feast of Tabernacles. Celebrate it from the 15th through the 22nd day of the 7th month (usually about mid-September to mid-October) after you gather in the autumn crop of your labors from the field. All of your males must appear in My presence these three times each year.”

I said, “You must not offer the blood of the Passover lamb with yeast. The part of the Pascal Lamb that is not eaten must not remain overnight until morning.”

I said, “You must first bring into Me the very best of what your land produces. You must not cook or boil a young goat in its mother’s milk.”

A mother’s milk was intended for life, not death; I did not want My people to be heartless. They must understand the difference between what is sin, what is unhealthy, and what is inappropriate, such as boiling a young goat in its mother’s milk.

I said, “Listen, I am sending an angel ahead of you to protect you along the way. He will bring you to the place that I have prepared. Pay attention to him and listen to what he says. Do not rebel against him, because he will not forgive your violations since My name is in him. However, if you will truly listen to what he says, and you do everything that I say, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and I will oppose those who oppose you. My angel will go ahead of you and bring you into the land of your people.” I said, “You must NOT bow down to their gods, or worship them, or act like these heathen people. Instead, you must completely destroy them and smash their so-called ‘sacred’ posts in pieces! Instead, you must worship Me, your God. I will bless your bread and your water. I will take away sickness from

among you. In your new land, your women will not be sterile or have miscarriages.

“I will help you live out your full lifetimes. I will send My terror ahead of you. I will throw all those people whom you meet into confusion. I will cause all of your enemies to run in retreat from you. I will send the wasp ahead of you to drive out the Hivites, the Canaanites, and the Hittites from your path. I will not drive them out all at once. If I did, the land would become too empty, and the wild animals would outnumber you. I will drive them away from your path little by little until you are strong enough in number and you can inherit the land.

“I will set your borders from the Red Sea all the way to the Philistine Sea and from the Arabian desert to the Euphrates River. I will put those who live in that land under your control. You will drive them out of your way. You must NEVER make any covenant with them or with their gods. They must NOT live in your land. If they do, they will cause you to sin against Me. If you worship their gods, it will certainly be a trap for you.”

I wanted My people to separate themselves from the sins and evil of worldly people. That is still My standard for today; live among evil people, but do not live like heathen people, nor worship their gods.

Moses and the Elders Worship Me

24I told Moses, “Come up in the mountain to Me. Bring with you Aaron, Nadab, Abihu and 70 of the leaders. Don’t let them come too close to Me. You, however, may approach by yourself. Let the others worship at a distance. The people of Israel are not to set foot on the mountain.”

Moses told the people all the commands I had given him. The people answered, “We will do everything the Lord commands.” Moses carefully wrote down all the words I gave him.

He woke up early in the morning and set up an altar at the foot of the mountain. Then he set in place 12 large stones to represent the 12 tribes of Israel. He sent some young men to sacrifice burnt offerings and peace offerings to Me. He sprinkled half the blood on the altar, and the other half

he put in basins to sanctify the people. Then he read to the people out of the book of the covenant.

The people responded, “We will do everything the Lord has spoken.”

The shed blood is always the beginning place; you may ask Me to forgive you by the blood of Christ. Praise Jesus for His blood shed for you, from it you get cleansing, strength, power, and life.

Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu and the 70 leaders went up to the mountain. They saw My glory manifested and underneath there seemed to be a pavement of sapphire as clear as the sky. Even though they saw My glory, I did not destroy them. They even ate a meal together in My presence.

I said to Moses, “Come up into My mountain where I will give you stone tablets inscribed with the 10 Commandments. From these, you can teach the people.”

Moses and Joshua climbed My mountain. Before he left he said to Aaron and Hur, “Wait here, take care of any problems while I am gone.” Moses went into the cloud that covered the mountain. The cloud was My Shekinah glory that covered Sinai. The people of Israel at the foot of the mountain saw the awesome sight that looked like a burning fire. Moses climbed higher and stayed there 40 days and nights.

Furniture in the Tabernacle

25I told Moses how to prepare a sanctuary for the people of Israel to worship Me. I said, “Here are the things the people may bring to Me; gold, silver, bronze, blue, purple and red yarn, fine cotton linen, goat’s hair to make into cloth, leather that is tanned and acacia wood. They should give olive oil for lamps, spices for anointing, and fragrant incenses. Also, they should give onyx and other precious stones to be set in the priest’s vest.”

I said, “I want the people of Israel to make a tent so I can dwell among them. This tent of meeting will be called a tabernacle. You are to furnish it according to the design I will show you. It will reflect the plan of the heavenly sanctuary.”

I said, “Make an ark (box) of acacia wood—the most sacred piece of furniture—it will be 3 feet long, 2 ¼ feet wide, and 2 ¼ feet tall. Cover it with pure gold inside and out, then put a solid gold crown around the outside top. Cast four gold rings and attach them to the four feet of the box. Make two poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. These are the carrying poles. Place them in the rings and leave them there permanently. When you are finished, put the stone tablet inscribed with the 10 Commandments into the box.”

I want the best—pure gold—for My seat on earth; this means you must give your best to Me every day, everything; you give Me all that you have. Only pure gold is good enough for Me, not 14k, or even 22k, but pure gold. Never offer Me second best or half-hearted service; give the best of all you have to Me.

I said, “Make a top for the box of pure gold. It will be the place of atonement. I will come sit there among My people, it will be called the Mercy Seat or the Seat of Atonement. It must be 3 ¾ feet long and 2 ½ feet wide.”

This is the most holy place in all Israel for My Shekinah glory cloud will sit on the Mercy Seat. This is where My presence sits among the people. You must come symbolically to the Holy of Holies to bow in My presence and worship My majesty.

I said, “Sculpture two cherubim (angels) and place them at each end of the Seat of Atonement. Hammer them out of one piece of gold making it one piece. The cherubim are to face each other with bowed heads, looking down on the Mercy Seat. Their wings will spread out above the ark. Place inside the ark the two stone tablets inscribed with the 10 Commandments. Then put the cover—the Mercy Seat—on the Ark. I will meet with you there above the commandments I have given.”

The two cherubim are the two closest to Me on earth; they are made of pure gold to represent purity. May you all live a pure life, so I can

be close to You. Two cherubim are sculpted from beaten gold; blows from hammers made them what they are. I, the Divine Sculptor, have used hammers on you to fashion in you discipline and character. May you learn from trials and tribulation in this life so you can draw near to Me as the cherubim.

I told Moses, “You are to make a table of acacia wood, 3 feet long, 19 inches wide and 18 inches high. Cover it with pure gold, and place a pure gold crown around the top. Make four gold rings and attach them to the four corners by the four legs. Make two poles of acacia wood, cover them with gold and use them to carry the table. Also, make bowls and pitchers. Put the bread of My presence on the table in My presence. It is to be there always.”

I told Moses, “Make a candlestick (menorah) and sculpture it by hammering all of it out of one piece of pure gold, i.e., its base, shaft, and legs to hold the light. It will have six branches, these will come out of each side of the center shaft. The light for each of the six branches will have a cup shaped like an almond blossom, with both buds and petals. The light for the center shaft will be decorated with four almond blossoms with buds and petals. Everything must be of one piece of pure gold that is hammered into shape. Make 7 lamps for the one candlestick (menorah) and set them so light is reflected toward the front. The tongs and trays also must be made from pure gold. It will take 66 pounds of gold to make the menorah. Do it according to the heavenly pattern I showed you here on Mount Sinai.”

I didn't ask you to worship Me in the dark, but I put a light in the tabernacle for sight. In the same way, I never ask you to worship Me in ignorance, I have shown you how to believe, live and worship. Worship Me according to My light. There were three lights on each side, and one light on the center pole making seven lights that gave illumination. You are just one light among many lights, in harmony, shine with other lights so others can worship Me as a testimony to the world.

Preparing the Tabernacle

26 I instructed Moses, “Make an inside ceiling for the tabernacle roof with 26 sections of finely woven sheets of linen. Embroidery representations of cherubim from blue, purple and red yarn on the ceiling. Each section of cloth must be the same size, 42 feet long and 6 feet wide. Attach 5 sections together for one side of the tabernacle and 5 sections for the other side. Put loops of blue yarn on the edge of the outside section. Fifty loops on the edge of one section of cloth will match the 50 loops of the other section. Then make 50 gold clasps to fasten the two sections together, making it a single unit.”

I then instructed, “Make a covering for the outside roof of the tabernacle tent. Make heavy sheets from goat’s hair. There must be 11 sections, each 45 feet long and 6 feet wide. All 11 sections must be the same size. Join 5 sections together to make one set and the other 6 to make the other section. The 6th section of the longer section will double over the front opening. Attach 50 loops together with 50 gold clips as before, to fasten the two together. Because the outer coverings are bigger than the inner more beautiful cloth, the edge will hang over to protect it from the elements. Then cover it with tanned ram skin and on top of that, a covering of goatskin leather. These four coverings are the roof of the tabernacle.”

I next instructed Moses to make a frame using posts from acacia wood for the tabernacle. Each post was to be 15 feet high with a 2-foot connector. There will be 2 places on each post to connect it to the other posts. Twenty posts will support the south side, and 20 posts will support the north side. Make 40 silver braces—2 for each post to tie them together. There will be 6 posts on the rear of the tabernacle, i.e., the west side. There will be special posts for each corner. These are double posts held together by gold rings. There will be boards on the ground for all the posts to set on. The boards will have silver sockets to hold the boards in place. Make crossbars of acacia wood to run across the 5 crossbars for the north and 5 for the south. Also, make 5 crossbars for the rear or west side of the tabernacle. Overlay the posts and the crossbars with gold. Always set up this tabernacle according to the heavenly plan I have shown you.

I instructed Moses to hang a special curtain (the veil) on the inside to separate off the Holy of Holies from the Holy room. They were to skillfully embroidery into the cloth representation of the cherubim using blue, purple and red yarn. The veil was to be hung on gold hooks, and to be held up with 4 poles made from acacia wood, covered with gold. The posts were to fit

into silver sockets on boards. This curtain is to separate the most Holy of Holies from the Holy Room.

I said, “Place the Ark of the Covenant behind the veil. Then place the Mercy Seat on top of the Ark of the Covenant behind the veil. Place the Table of Showbread of My presence and the Golden Candlestick (Menorah) outside the veil in the Holy Room across from each other. The Menorah must be on the south side and the table on the north side. Make another curtain of fine linen at the entrance into the Holy Room. Embroider it with blue, purple and red. Hang this curtain from the 5 posts at the entrance.”

I consented to come dwell among My people, I didn't dwell among the world, nor did the world recognize My condescension. I also came to live in your heart. Carefully prepare a place for Me as the Israelites carefully prepared the tabernacle.

The Brazen Altar and Courtyard

27I told Moses, “Make an altar where you can sacrifice to Me. Make it 7 ½ feet long, 7 ½ feet wide and 4 ½ feet high. Put horns on the four corners so you can tie the animals to it. Cover it with bronze. Make utensils out of bronze to service the sacrifices; meat hooks, fire pans, pots to remove ashes, and shovels. Make a bronze grate netting with bronze hooks on the four corners. Hook it half way under the top of the altar. Make two acacia wood carrying poles and cover them with bronze. Put the poles in the rings on the 4 corners to carry the altar. The altar will have a large open space for the sacrifices. Make the altar just like the heavenly pattern I showed you.”

I had the Israelites take an altar because they sinned daily and needed a place of cleansing daily.

You are no different from the Israelites; you sin daily and need daily cleaning. As you walk in the light, may the blood of Jesus Christ cleanse you from every sin.

I told Moses how to lay out the courtyard for the tabernacle, and enclose it with curtains, 150 feet long, 75 feet wide and 7 ½ feet high. I said, “Prepare sections of fine cloth 150 feet long. It will be hung from 20 bronze posts that are set into 20 bronze bases. The curtains will be draped from a silver curtain rod, attached by silver hooks. Both sides will be identical, i.e., 150 feet. The west end will be 75 feet long with 10 posts, the curtains will be supported just like the others. The entrance (door) will be on the east with 2 sections of cloth on either side of the door, i.e., 22 ½ feet on the right side and the same for the left entrance. The entrance (door) will be made from fine linen cloth 30 feet long, embroidered in blue, purple and red yarn. It will be hung from a silver curtain rod attached to four bronze posts.”

I commanded, “Make all the tent pegs of bronze that are used to support the courtyard curtains and tabernacle.”

I told Moses, “Tell the people to bring pure olive oil for the candlestick (menorah) so it will be kept burning continually. The menorah will be outside the veil in the Holy Room. Aaron, his sons—all the priests—must keep it burning in My presence day and night. This is a requirement for future generations.”

The menorah is 7 lights that make up “one” light, add your testimony to other believers so you can be “one” light to unsaved people. Just as the menorah was kept burning constantly, may you be a continuous testimony burning constantly to Me.

Clothes for the Priests

28I said to Moses, “Invite your brother Aaron to separate himself from among the sons of Israel, along with his sons—Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar—so that they may serve Me as priests. Make special holy clothes for your brother Aaron that are beautiful and glorious. Tell all those to whom I have given skills to make clothes that they must make clothes for Aaron to set him apart so that he may serve Me as the High Priest. These are the clothes which they are to make: a vest with a pocket, a robe, a woven coat, a turban, and a belt. They must make holy clothes for both your brother Aaron and his sons, so that they may serve Me as priests. Have them use

gold thread, and blue, purple, and red yarn, as well as fine-spun cotton. They are to make the vest with gold thread, plus blue, purple, and red yarn of fine-spun cotton. The vest must have two shoulder straps attached to two of its corners, so that it may be joined together. The vest's waistband must be sewn just like it—all one piece and sewn with gold thread, and with blue, purple, and red yarn from fine-spun cotton.”

I said, “Take two onyx stones and engrave upon them the names of the twelve sons of Israel in the order of their birth—six of their names on one stone and the remaining six names on the other stone. Engrave the names of the sons of Israel on the two stones in the same way that a jewel-cutter engraves a seal. Then mount the stones in delicate gold settings and put a stone on each shoulder strap of the vest as jewelry, so Aaron will carry their names into My presence. Make delicate, gold settings for the stones, then make two, pure-gold, braided chains like a rope, and attach them to the settings.”

Aaron carried the names of his brethren into My presence just as you must carry others to Me in prayer.

I told Moses, “You must also make a chest-pocket for the vest. It is from this chest-pocket you will understand My plan. Let the skilled craftsman make it like the vest—use gold, blue, purple, and red yarn, and make it from fine-spun cotton. It must be square—9 inches long and 9 inches wide and folded double, forming a pocket for the Urim and Thummim. Then, you must mount stone settings on it, four rows of jewels: the first row will be a topaz, ruby and a beryl. The second row will be a turquoise and a sapphire, and an emerald. The third row will be a jacinth, an agate, and an amethyst. The fourth row will be a chrysolite, an onyx, and a jasper. Mount them in delicate, gold settings. There are to be twelve jewels, one for each of the names of the sons of Israel. Each jewel will be engraved like a seal-ring with the name of one of the twelve tribes.”

Then I said, “Braid pure-gold chains like a rope for the chest-pocket. Make two gold rings for it and attach them to the two corners of the chest pocket. Join the two gold chains to the two rings which are at the corners of the chest pocket. Attach them to the shoulder straps of the vest at the front.”

I also said, “Make two more gold rings and attach them to the bottom of the shoulder straps of the vest. This is near the seam, which is just above the elaborate waistband of the vest. Let them tie the rings of the chest-pocket to the rings of the vest with a blue cord, connecting it to the waistband, so that the chest-pocket cannot separate from the vest.”

I said, “Whenever Aaron goes into the Holy Place, he will be carrying the names of the sons of Israel over his heart on the chest pocket. This will be a constant reminder of My presence. Put the Urim and the Thummim in the chest pocket. These will be used to determine My will. They will also be over Aaron’s heart when he goes into My presence. In this way, Aaron will always be carrying the instrument for Israel to understand My will.”

I said, “Make the robe all blue. It will have an opening in the center. Sew a re-enforced hem around the collar so that it will not get torn. Around the lower hem of the robe embroider pomegranates from blue, purple and red yarn, with golden bells between them all around. There should be a golden bell interspersed by a pomegranate all the way around the lower hem of the robe. Whenever Aaron is serving as the High Priest, he must wear this robe. When Aaron goes into My presence in the Holy of Holies, the sound of the bells will be heard, so you will know he is alive and has not died.”

I said, “Make a crown of pure gold and engrave this phrase upon it as on a seal: HOLINESS TO YAHWEH. Attach it to a blue cord and put it on the front of the turban. Aaron must wear this crown which represents his responsibility for the holy things of worship. This crown will always be worn by Aaron so that I can always accept your gifts.”

I said, “Weave the blue coat from fine-spun cotton symbolizing purity. Make a turban out of the same material. The sash must be made by a needle-worker. Make the coats, belts, and turbans beautiful and glorious for Aaron’s sons. Put these clothes upon your brother Aaron and his sons. Ordain them and make them holy by anointing them with oil, so that they may serve Me as priests. Make cotton shorts reaching from the waist to the thighs to cover their nakedness. Aaron and his sons must wear them when they go into the Tent of Meeting or when they approach the altar to serve in the Holy Place so that they may not incur My wrath and be killed. All priests must continually do this.”

Dedication of Aaron and His Son

29 I said to Moses, “Now this is what you must do to Aaron and his sons so that they may serve Me as priests: Take one young bull and two rams which have no defects, bread which contains no yeast, and cakes mixed with oil and wafers brushed with oil; all unleavened. You must make them out of fine wheat flour. Put them in a basket and present them to Me along with the bull and the two rams. Then bring Aaron and his sons to the doorway of the Tent of Meeting and wash them with water in the laver. Dress Aaron with the priestly clothes and put on him the coat and the vest and the chest pocket. Wrap the waistband around his waist. Place the turban upon his head, and put the holy crown on top of the turban. Then take the special anointing oil and anoint his head.”

The word “anointed” means “Christ,” this is why the High Priest is a type of Jesus Christ. Jesus fulfilled the three-fold anointed office. Jesus was anointed to High Priestly intercession. Jesus was anointed as King to rule our lives. Jesus was anointed as a prophet to deliver My message to you.

I said, “After this, bring the sons of Aaron and put caps upon them. Then you must bring a bull to the front of the Tent of Meeting. Aaron and his sons will place their hands upon the bull’s head and kill the bull in My presence, at the doorway of the Tent of Meeting.”

When anyone laid their hands on the head of an animal to confess their sins, they were transferring their guilt onto the animal. When the animal was put to death, that was a symbolic act that their sins were judged instead of them. Your sins were transferred to Jesus Christ and He died for the forgiveness of your sins.

I said, “Take some of the bull’s blood and put it upon the horns of the Brazen Altar with your finger. Then pour out all the rest of the blood at the base of the altar. Take all the fat which covers the internal parts, the best part of the liver, and the two kidneys, with the fat that is on them, and burn them

upon the Brazen Altar as an offering to Me. But you must completely burn its hide and its waste outside the camp. It is a sin-offering.”

I said, “Also, take one ram and have Aaron and his sons place their hands upon its head. Then you will kill the ram, take some of its blood, and sprinkle it around the Brazen Altar. Then you must cut up the ram into pieces and wash its internal parts and legs. Burn them with its head and other pieces upon the Brazen Altar. It is a burnt-offering to Me. I will accept it as a sweet aroma. Then you must take the other ram and have Aaron and his sons place their hands upon its head. Kill the ram, take some of its blood, and put it upon the right ear-lobe of Aaron and the right ear-lobes of his sons, upon the thumbs of their right hands, and upon the big toes of their right feet. Sprinkle the rest of the blood around on the altar. Take some of the blood that is on the Brazen Altar and some of the special anointing oil and sprinkle it upon Aaron and upon his sons. So, Aaron and his sons will be consecrated to Me. Also, take some of the ram’s fat, the tail, the fat which covers the internal parts, the best part of the liver, the two kidneys, its right thigh, also one loaf of bread, one cake of bread with oil, and one wafer from the basket of unleavened bread and put the whole thing in the hands of Aaron and his sons. Wave them as a wave-offering in My presence. After they wave them before Me, then take them and burn them upon the altar, along with the burnt-offering, for a sweet aroma in My presence.”

Just as the priests waved their offering in My presence, symbolic of giving it to Me, you offer your whole body, including your hands, feet, eyes, ears, mouth, and nose. I will accept them and use you.

I said, “After you wave the breast of the ram for Aaron’s ordaining, it will be your share, set aside as the priests’ portion, so their family may eat it. That food will belong to Aaron and his sons as their regular share.”

I said, “Aaron’s holy clothes will belong to his sons who follow him, who will be anointed in them and to be ordained in them. The son who takes Aaron’s place as High Priest will wear them for seven days, whenever he goes into the Tent of Meeting to serve in the Holy Place. Remove the ram of ordination and cook its meat in a separate place. The replacement will eat the ram’s meat and the bread that is in the basket at the doorway of the Tent of Meeting. In this way, they eat those things which cover sins when they

are ordained. However, no outsider is allowed to eat from it, because that food is holy! If any of the meat from the ordination or any of the bread remains until morning, then you must burn the leftovers. It must NOT be eaten, because it is holy!”

I said, “Ordain Aaron and his sons, according to everything that I have commanded you. During a period of seven days, each day offer a bull as a sin-offering to cover sins. Also, you must purify the altar making it holy. Then the altar will be holy. Whatever touches the altar will be holy.”

I, the LORD, said, “Now offer a two-year-old lamb upon the altar each and every day. Offer one lamb in the morning, and offer the other lamb at twilight. With the first lamb offer one-tenth of a bushel of fine flour mixed with one quart of crushed oil, and one quart of sweet wine for a drink-offering.

“Offer the other lamb at twilight. Offer it according to the grain-offering and drink-offering of the morning as a sweet aroma to Me. It shall be a continual burnt-offering throughout your generations at the doorway of the Tent of Meeting in My presence. I will meet with you and speak with you there. I will also meet with the sons of Israel there. The Tent of Meeting will be made holy by My glory and presence. Then, I will live among the sons of Israel, and I will be their God, and they will know that I am their God. I brought them out of the land of Egypt so that I could live among them and be their God.”

My presence comes to dwell with you only after the blood cleanses you from sin and makes you holy in My sight. It is an inestimable privilege of knowing Me and having My protective presence in your life.

The Altar for Burning Incense

30I said to Moses, “You must also make the Altar for Burning Incense to represent continued prayers coming up to Me. Make it from acacia wood. It will be 1 ½ feet long and 1 ½ feet wide (18 inches square). It will be 3 feet high. The horns on its four corners will be made from one piece of pure gold. Also, put a crown around the top of it. Below the molding, make

two gold rings. Attach them to its two opposite sides. Make two carrying poles from acacia wood and cover them with gold. They will go through the rings to carry the Altar of Burning Incense. Put this altar in front of the curtain that hides the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies. Aaron must burn incense of sweet-smelling spices upon this altar every morning when he trims the lamps. Again when Aaron prepares the lamps each evening, he will again burn incense as a symbol of My continual presence throughout your generations. Offer no unholy incense, burnt-offering, or grain-offering upon that altar. Also, do not pour any drink-offering upon it.”

I said, “Aaron is to make atonement upon its horns once a year throughout your generations. Offer the blood of the sin-offering on the Day of Atonement once a year.”

The Altar of Burning Incense stands for your prayers that must continually be offered to Me. I said the sweet-smelling incense will please Me. May your prayers be precious to Me.

I said to Moses, “When you take a census of the sons of Israel, each one must pay a gift for his life. This will prevent a disaster from happening when they are counted. Each one who crossed over the Red Sea must give a half-shekel. This includes everyone who is 20 years or older. The rich people will not give more than a half-shekel, and the poor people will not give less when they give an offering to Me. This represents an atonement for their sins. Take the atonement money and set it aside for the maintenance of the Tent of Meeting.”

I said to Moses, “You must also make a reflective laver as well as its bronze stand. Place it between the Tent of Meeting and the Brazen Altar, and fill it with water. Aaron and his sons will wash their hands and feet before they sacrifice to Me so they will not die. Also, whenever they approach the Brazen Altar to burn an offering by fire to Me, they must wash their hands and feet so that they will not die.”

Then I said to Moses, “Take 15 pounds of fine spices: of free-flowing myrrh, seven and a half pounds of sweet-smelling cinnamon, and again seven and a half pounds of cassia and one-quart olive oil. Mix these into a very special holy anointing oil, a fragrant blend which is the work of a perfumer. This is the sacred anointing oil used to anoint the Tent of Meeting

and the Ark of the Covenant, the Table of Showbread of My presence, the (menorah) Golden Lampstand, the Altar of Burning Incense, the Brazen Altar of Burnt-offering, and the laver and its stand. Anointing consecrates them in such a way that they are holy, and whoever touches them will become holy.

“Anoint Aaron and his sons and make them holy, so that they may serve Me as priests. Tell the sons of Israel, ‘This will be My holy anointing oil throughout your generations. It will not anoint the bodies of ordinary men. You must never make anything like it for yourselves. It is holy and you must treat it holy. Whoever mixes anything like it or anoints an outsider will be cut off from his people!’”

Then I said to Moses, “Take these sweet-smelling spices—stacte, onycha, and galbanum and pure frankincense all in equal amounts, and make a fragrant blend of incense. It is to be salted; pure and sacred. Grind some of it into powder and place it on the Altar of Burning Incense in the Tent of Meeting where I will meet with you. It will be holy to you. Do not use this formula to make any incense for yourselves. It will be holy to Me. Whoever makes anything like this sweet smell will be cut off from his people!”

Workers Chosen to Make the Tabernacle

31 Then I said to Moses, “I have chosen Bezalel from the tribe of Judah to be the general foreman. He is the son of Uri and the grandson of Hur. My Spirit has filled him with talent, understanding, and knowledge. He has special skills in making artistic designs for work in gold, silver, and bronze, in cutting and setting jewels, in carving wood, and in doing all kinds of craftsmanship. Along with Bezalel, I have also selected Oholiab, the son of Ahisamach, from the tribe of Dan. He will work with Bezalel. I have prepared the hearts of all those who have the same ability, so that they may make everything that I have commanded you: the Tent of Meeting, the Ark of the Covenant, and the Mercy Seat, all the equipment of the tent, the Table of Showbread of My presence with its tools, the Golden Lampstand (menorah) with all of its tools, the Altar of Burning Incense, the Brazen Altar of Burnt-offering with all of its tools, the laver and its stand, the finely-woven clothes for Aaron and the clothes of his sons, so they can serve

as priests, the special anointing oil, and the incense of sweet-smelling spices for the Holy Place. They must make everything exactly as I told you to make it.”

Then I said to Moses, “Also, tell the sons of Israel to truly observe My Sabbaths, because this is a sign between Me and Israel throughout your generations. This is how you will demonstrate that I am the Lord who makes you holy. Therefore, you must keep the Sabbath, because it is holy. Everyone who profanes it will certainly be put to death! Anyone who does any type of work on the Sabbath will be cut off from among his people! Work for six days of the week, but the seventh day is a Sabbath rest. It is holy to Me. Whoever does any kind of work on the Sabbath day will certainly be put to death! Therefore, Israel must keep the Sabbath day, observing the Sabbath throughout their generations as a permanent covenant with Me. I created the universe in six days, but I ceased working on the seventh day. And, I was refreshed.”

After I finished talking with Moses upon Mount Sinai, I gave Moses the two tablets of stone which were written by My finger! I gave the Sabbath to Israel as a gift of rest and as a covenant between Me and them. When they broke the Sabbath, they disobeyed Me; Jesus came and kept the Law with His perfect life. In His death, He fulfilled the Law and justified every lawbreaker who repented and believed in Him. Those who believe in My Son and trust Him for salvation may live to please Me and serve Me.

The Golden Calf

32The Israelites were troubled because Moses had been on the mountain for such a long time. They gathered to Aaron and said, “We don’t know what happened to the man—Moses—who brought us out of Egypt. Get busy to make us some gods to lead us to the Promised Land.”

Aaron said to the people, “Have your wives, daughters and sons strip off their gold earring and bring them to me.” The people did as he commanded. Aaron received their earrings and melted them down and molded it into the

shape of a calf. He said, “Here is your god who brought you out of the land of Egypt.”

Aaron built an altar for sacrifice in front of the golden calf and announced, “Tomorrow we will have a feast to the Lord.” Early the next morning the people got up and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. Then the people celebrated with eating and drinking. Then they indulged their lust in heathen revelry.

I said to Moses, “Get up quick. Hurry down to the camp. Your people that you led from Egypt are corrupting themselves. They have already backslidden from the way I told them to live and worship. They have made a golden calf, worshiped it and sacrificed to it. They have said, ‘Here is our god who brought us up out of Egypt.’”

I continued to speak to Moses, “I have seen that they are a stubborn and rebellious people. Now leave Me alone so I can burn my judgment against them. Then I will make out of you—Moses—a great nation to take their place.”

Moses pleaded with Me, “Why are You going to destroy the people You brought out of Egypt with miracles by Your hand? If You do that, the Egyptians will say, ‘God was evil to bring His people out of Egypt to slaughter them in the desert and wipe them off the face of the earth.’ Remember Your promise to Your servants Abraham, Isaac, and Israel. You swore by Yourself that You would give them as many descendants as the stars of the heavens. You also promised that they would inherit the land to possess it forever.” So I didn’t carry out My threat against the people.

Joshua heard the people shouting in the camp and said, “It sounds like soldiers fighting in the camp.”

Moses replied, “It is not the shout of victory or the cry of defeat. I hear people celebrating.” As Moses got near the camp he saw the golden calf and dancing. Moses erupted in anger. He threw down the two stone tablets, shattering them on the ground. He took the calf and melted it in the fire, then ground the gold into a fine powder and spread it on the water and made the people drink.

Moses demanded of Aaron, “How did these people make you commit such a terrible sin?” Aaron replied, “Don’t get mad at me, you’re my master. You know these people are hard headed and are committed to sin. The people were afraid because you stayed such a long time on the mountain.

They didn't know if you were alive. So they asked me to make them gods to lead them. I asked that anyone with gold strip it off and give it to me. I threw it into the fire and out came this golden calf."

Moses saw that the people were completely out of control because Aaron had allowed them to dance without inhibition—to the laughter of their enemies—then Moses stood to shout, "WHOEVER IS ON THE LORD'S SIDE, COME STAND BY ME." All of the descendants of Levi rallied to Moses. He told them, "This is what the Lord wants you to do, strap on your sword, go throughout the camp killing everyone who is in obvious sin associated with the golden calf. You must kill your friends, kinsman, and neighbor." That day 3,000 died.

Moses told the Levites, "You have separated yourselves to the Lord this day because you have stood with God against your friends, kinsman, and neighbors. Because of your faithfulness, God will now ordain you into His priesthood."

Moses said to the people the next day, "You have done a terrible sin. I will go back to intercede for you on the mountain. Perhaps God will forgive you."

Moses said to Me, "Please forgive their sins, these people have committed a terrible sin. They made a god out of gold. Now please forgive their sin—if You won't, then blot me out of Your book."

I replied, "I will blot out only those who sinned against Me. Now go lead these people into the Promised Land. My angel will lead you. The time will come when I will punish these people for their sin." A plague struck the people because they worshiped the golden calf (Exod. 32:30-35).

Moses Asks to See Me

33I said to Moses, "You have delivered the people from Egypt, now go from here toward the land I promised to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and to their descendants. I will send an angel before you to drive out the Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites. It is a land flowing with milk and honey. I will not go with you because of your stubbornness. If I went with you, I'd probably destroy you on the way."

The people mourned when they heard these harsh words and no one wore ornaments. I had previously told Moses, “Tell the people to remove their ornaments until I decide what to do.” So from Mount Sinai on, the Israelites didn’t wear jewelry.

Moses pitched a tent outside the camp where people who wanted to pray to Me would go. It was called the Tent of Meeting, where I met My people. When Moses went to the Tent of Meeting, the glory cloud would descend on the entrance of the tent. Each man would prostrate himself in prayer at the entrance of his tent. I, the LORD, spoke with Moses face to face as a man speaks to his friend. Afterward, Moses would return to his tent, but his young assistant, Joshua, the son of Nun, remained in the Tent of Meeting.

Moses said to Me, “You have told me to take these people to the Promised Land, but you haven’t told me who You will send with me. You have said, ‘I know you by name’ and You said, ‘I have found favor in your sight.’ If this is so then tell me what You intend to do, so I can follow You. But don’t forget, these are Your people.”

Then I answered, “I will go before you. You will find your rest and peace.”

Moses answered, “If Your presence doesn’t go with us, do not let us go into the Promised Land. There is no other way for us—I and Your people—to know that we’ve found favor in Your sight than for You to go with us. Your presence is the difference between other people on earth and us.”

I answered, “I will do what you ask me to do because you have found favor in My sight. You are My friend.”

Moses requested, “Please let me see Your glory!”

I answered, “I will let My goodness pass before you, and I will say My name in your presence, but you can’t see My face, because no human can see Me and live (Exod. 33:14-23). I will show favor on whom I will and show mercy on whom I will. Here is a place, stand on this rock, when My glory passes by, I will put you in the crevice of the rock and when I pass by I will protect you with My hand. Then I will remove My hand and you will see My backside, but you can’t see My face” (Exod. 32:30-35).

Moses’ Face Shining

34 Moses cut two tablets from stone, just as I told him. They were just like the first ones. I said, “Write on them the same 10 Commandments that were on the ones you broke. Climb up the mountain (Sinai) in the morning and appear before Me on the top of the mountain. Don’t bring anyone with you, and no one can come near the mountain, not even the flocks or herds to graze there.”

Moses cut two stones like the first ones and got up early and climbed the mountain as I told him to do. He took the two stones with him.

I came down on the mountain in a cloud and called out My name, “The LORD.” I passed before Moses to proclaim, “I am the Lord, I am the Lord, the merciful and gracious God, slow to anger, rich in love and truth, showing grace to thousands of generations, and forgiving every kind of sin and rebellion. But I will not overlook rebellious sin, but will punish children for the sins of their parents to the third and fourth generations.”

Moses bowed his head to the ground, lying flat before Me, saying, “If I have found favor in Your sight, Lord, please go with us to the Promised Land, even though the people are rebellious and hard headed. Forgive their sin. Make us Your own special people” (Exod. 34:6-9).

I said, “I will make a covenant in front of My people. I will do miracles for them, such as have not been seen by any other people or nation. All the nations will see these miracles, which will be awesome. Here are the commands you must do. I will drive out the Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites.

“Do not make covenants (treaties) with those who live in the land where I am leading you. That way they won’t be a snare when you possess the Promised Land. You must destroy their pagan altars, smash their religious pillars and cut down their sacred poles (trees). Don’t bow down to any idol, since Adonai (My very name stands for jealousy) is a jealous God.

“Do not make any covenant (treaty) with those who live in the Promised Land because it will make you wander from Me to go after their idol gods and sacrifice to them. If you make a covenant with them, they will invite you to eat their sacrifices. Then you will take their daughters as wives for your sons; their daughters will prostrate themselves to their idols and your sons will commit spiritual adultery against Me.”

I said, “You must celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Passover) for seven days, at the appointed time each year in the early spring. That

symbolizes your coming out of Egypt.”

Then I said, “Everything that comes first from the womb is mine. Set aside the first born males of the cattle and flocks. Redeem the first born donkey with a lamb. If you won’t do it, then break its neck. Do the same with your first born son, redeem him with a lamb.”

I said, “Celebrate the Feast of the first Harvest (sharuot) with the first gathering of grain and celebrate the Feast of the Final Harvest at the end of harvest.”

I said, “Three times a year all males will appear before me. I am going to drive out your enemies. No one will attack you or harm you when you come up to worship Me. They will not covet your land if you come up three times a year to appear before Me.”

I said, “Do not offer leavened bread when you sacrifice to Me. Eat all the sacrifice lamb, do not leave any until the morning. Bring the best of your harvest to sacrifice to Me.”

Give Me the best of your time, energy, and thoughts; then I will give you the best of everything for your life.

I said to Moses, “Write all these commandments, for they represent the covenant I make with Israel.” Moses was on the mount 40 days and nights, and he fasted; neither eating or drinking. Then the LORD engraved the 10 Commandments on two stone tablets.

When Moses came down the mountain with the two tablets engraved by his hand, he didn’t realize his face was radiating because he had been in My presence. When Aaron and the people saw Moses’ face, they were afraid to come near him and ran away. Moses called to them and Aaron and the leaders returned, where they talked together.

May your life shine with My radiance when you have spent time talking to Me in My presence.

Moses then gave the people the instruction that I, the LORD, gave him on the mountain. When Moses finished speaking, he put a veil on his face

because of the people. When Moses went into the tent to worship Me, he took off the veil until he came out. Then Moses would tell the people what I — their LORD—told him. The people would see his face aglow. So he would put the veil back on until he returned to speak with Me.

Gathering Materials to Construct the Tabernacle

35 Moses gathered all the people of Israel and told them, “Work for six days but the Sabbath is a holy day to the Lord. You must rest unto the Lord. Whoever does any work on the Sabbath will be put to death. That means don’t kindle any fires in your dwellings.”

Moses told the gathering a second thing. “Take up an offering for the Lord from those who have a willing heart to give Him gold, silver, and bronze. This offering includes fine linen that is blue, purple and red; goats’ hair, tanned hides of rams and fine leather. Also bring acacia wood, oil for the light, spices for anointing oil and sweet incense. Don’t forget onyx stones and other jewel stones for the priest’s vest.”

Moses continued telling the people, “Let all the gifted craftsmen come to fashion everything the Lord commanded, i.e., the tent for the tabernacle, its covering for inclement weather, fasteners, planks, curtain rods, poles, and footings; plus the utensils for the table for showbread, plus the candlesticks, menorah with cups for light, and oil for light. Also, we must construct the altar for burning incense, that has the anointing oil and fragrant incense, and we must construct the curtains for the entrance into the larger room. We must construct the Brazen Altar for Burnt Offerings, its utensils, and basin. We must make the curtains for the outside walls of the tabernacle courtyard, including poles, pegs, ropes, and curtain rods.”

Moses added to his instruction noting, “We must make the garments for ministering in this holy place, the holy garment for Aaron—the High Priest—and garments for his sons to wear as they minister for us.”

The whole congregation of Israel left to go to their tents. Then those hearts which were stirred and willing returned with gifts to build the tabernacle and to make the holy garments for the priest. Both men and women brought jewelry, belts, and gold as offerings to the Lord. Some

brought fine linen, blue, purple and red, yard and tanned leather. Some brought acacia wood. Women who could spin yarn into cloth brought fine linen. Others used their skill to spin goats' hair into coverings. The leaders brought the onyx stones, plus spices for fragrance and oil to make light.

The people of Israel brought a freewill offering to Me, all those who had a willing heart brought their gifts.

Moses told the people, "God has called Bezalel to be our workman. Bezalel is filled with the Spirit of God, is wise, and has knowledge and skilled talents. He can design the gold, silver, bronze, plus he can carve jewels and wood for us. Also, Aholiab has the same skills."

Moses challenged the people, "God has filled them with the ability to guide all our work. He can lead the designers, tapestry makers, and the weavers of blue, purple and red thread into fine linen."

I give different talents—spiritual gifts—to different people; be grateful for the gifts you've been given. Yield them to Me just as those who constructed the tabernacle; use your gifts to glorify Me, and I will use you.

Beginning Construction of the Tabernacle

36I commanded, "Bezalel and Oholiab are to do the work exactly as I command. Every competent person to whom I have given talent should work with them to accomplish the work of constructing the sanctuary."

Moses called for Bezalel, Oholiab, and every talented individual, whose heart the Lord had stirred to come do the work. Moses gave these persons all the gifts of money and supplies that the people brought to accomplish the construction of the sanctuary. The people continued to bring more and more free-will offerings to Moses every morning. All of the talented men who were working on the sanctuary left their jobs to go tell Moses, "The people are bringing too much to do what God told them to do."

Moses gave an order, and it was spread around through the camp, "No one should bring any more contributions for the sanctuary!" What they

already had brought was plenty; it was more than enough to accomplish the work.

The talented persons doing the work made 10 curtains. They were made of fine-spun cotton with blue, purple, and red yarn. Angel-like figures were embroidered on them for the ceiling of the tent. Each curtain was 42 feet long and 6 feet wide. All the curtains were the same size. Bezalel joined 5 curtains to one another, and then joined the second 5 curtains to each other. He put blue loops upon the edge of the outside curtain of the first and second sets. He made 50 loops in the first curtain and 50 loops on the edge of the second curtain. The loops were opposite one another. He made 50 gold clips to join the curtains to each other so that the Holy Tent was a complete unit. Bezalel also made 11 curtains of goats' hair for an outer layer to go over the blue curtains. Each curtain was 45 feet long and 6 feet wide. The 11 curtains were all the same size. He joined 5 curtains by themselves and the other 6 curtains by themselves. He also made 50 loops on the edge of the outside curtain in the first set and 50 loops on the edge of the outside curtain in the second set. He made 50 bronze clips for joining the covering together so that it would be a complete unit.

Next Bezalel made an outside covering of goats' hair to go over the blue linen ceiling; then he covered it with the tanned hides of rams.

Bezalel made the upright frames for the Holy Tent out of acacia wood. Each frame was 15 feet long and 2 1/4 feet wide. Each frame had 2 joints for attaching itself to the other frames. This is what he did for all the frames of the Holy Tent. He made 20 frames for the southern side of the tent, plus 40 silver bases to go under the 20 frames—2 bases under each frame for its 2 joints. Then, for the northern side of the tent, he made 20 frames and 40 silver bases. For the back side of the tent toward the west, he made 6 frames. He also made 2 frames for the corners of the Holy Tent on the back side. There were 8 frames with their silver bases, 16 bases with 2 bases under each frame. Then Bezalel made cross-bars out of acacia wood: 5 cross-bars for the frames on one side of the Holy Tent, and 5 cross-bars for the frames of the other side of the tent, and 5 cross-bars for the frames of the back side of the tent, toward the west. He also constructed the middle cross-bar to pass through in the center of the frames from one end to the other. He covered the frames with gold and made gold rings for them as holders for the poles. He also covered over the cross-bars with gold.

Bezalel also made the curtain out of blue, purple, and red yarn, and finespun cotton. Skillful workmen embroidered it with angel-like figures. He made 4 posts of acacia wood and covered them with gold. Their hooks were made out of gold, and he cast 4 silver bases for them. A needle-worker made a flap for the doorway of the tent out of blue, purple, and red yarn, and finespun cotton. The flap was hung on 5 posts and hooks. Bezalel covered their tops and bands with gold, but their 5 bases were made out of bronze.

Constructing the Ark of the Covenant

37Bezalel made the Ark (box) of the Covenant out of acacia wood. It was $3\frac{3}{4}$ feet long, $2\frac{1}{4}$ feet wide, and $2\frac{1}{4}$ feet high. He covered it over with pure gold, inside and out. And he put a gold crown around the top. He cast 4 rings of gold, two rings on one side, and 2 rings for the other. He made poles out of acacia wood and covered them with gold. He put the poles through the rings on the sides of the Ark of the Covenant to carry it. He also made the mercy seat—lid—out of pure gold. It was $3\frac{3}{4}$ feet long and $2\frac{1}{4}$ feet wide. He made 2 gold angel-like figures—cherubs. He sculptured them out of hammered gold, to be placed at both ends of the mercy seat. One cherub was on one end, and the other was on the other end. These cherubs had their wings spread toward Me as they sat on the mercy seat. And their wings covered the mercy seat. Their wings and their faces were toward each other. The faces of these cherubs were downward, in the direction of the mercy seat.

Bezalel also made the Table of Showbread of His presence out of acacia wood. It was 3 feet long, $1\frac{1}{2}$ feet wide and $2\frac{1}{4}$ feet high. He covered it over with pure gold and put a gold crown around the top. He made a rim of about 9 inches all around it and made a gold molding for it too. Next, he cast 4 gold rings and put the rings through the 4 corners which were on its 4 legs. The rings were put close to the rim to hold the poles that were used to carry the Table of Showbread. He made the poles for carrying the Table out of acacia wood. Then he covered them with gold. The utensils for the Table of Showbread (its dishes, pans, bowls, and jars for pouring out drink-offerings) belonged on top of the Table. He made them out of pure gold.

Bezalel also made the Golden Lampstand out of pure gold that was hammered. Its stand, its shaft, its cups, its buds, and its flowers were all

sculptured from one piece of gold. There were 6 branches projecting from its sides: 3 branches of the Golden Lampstand out of its one side, and 3 branches to its other side. Three cups were made like almond blossoms on one branch—1 bud and 1 flower—and 3 cups. The same was made for all 6 branches which projected from the Golden Lampstand. On the Golden Lampstand itself, there were 4 cups shaped like almond blossoms with their buds and flowers. Their buds and their branches were all sculptured from one piece of gold. The entire menorah was hammered from one piece of pure gold. Bezalel made its 7 lamps, along with its wick-trimmers and its trays, out of pure gold. He made it and all of its utensils from 1 talent of pure gold.

Bezalel made the Altar of Burning Incense from acacia wood. It was square—1 ½ feet long and 1 ½ feet wide. It was 3 feet tall. The horns were made of one piece of gold. He covered the top, surrounding sides and the horns of the Altar of Burning Incense with pure gold. He also made a gold molding for it all around. He put two gold rings for it under its molding, upon its two sides, two rings on opposite sides. The rings were holders for the poles to carry it. He made the carrying poles out of acacia wood and covered them with gold. A perfumer also made the holy anointing oil and the pure incense of sweet-smelling spices.

Constructing the Brazen Altar

38 Bezalel made the Brazen Altar of Burnt-offering from acacia wood. It was square—7 ½ feet long and 7 ½ feet wide. It was 4 ½ feet tall. He put horns upon its 4 corners; they were all constructed of one piece of bronze. He covered the altar with bronze. Then he made all of the utensils for the altar—the buckets, the shovels, the pans, the meat-hooks, and the fire-pans—out of bronze. He made a grill out of bronze for the altar beneath, under the ledge that was located half-way up. He cast 4 rings on the 4 ends of the bronze grill as holders for poles. He made the carrying poles out of acacia wood and covered them with bronze. He put the poles through the rings on the sides of the altar to carry it.

Bezalel also made the laver and its stand out of bronze. The bronze came from the metal mirrors of the women who helped to serve at the doorway of the Tent of Meeting.

Bezalel also made curtains for the courtyard. For the southern side of the courtyard, the curtains were long, made of fine-spun cotton. There were 20 posts and 20 bases made out of bronze. But the hooks of the posts and their bands were made out of silver. And, for the northern side, the curtains were 150 feet long, made of fine-spun cotton. There were 20 posts and 20 bases which were made out of bronze. The hooks of the posts and their bands were made out of silver. For the west side, the curtains were 75 feet long, along with 10 posts and 10 bases, but the hooks of the posts and their bands were made out of silver. Finally, for the eastern side, the curtains were 75 feet long. The curtains for one side of the entrance were 22 ½ feet wide, along with their 3 posts and 3 bases.

It was the same for the other side. Next to the entrance to the courtyard—there was a 22 ½ foot long curtain, along with their 3 posts and 3 bases. All the curtains of the courtyard were made of fine-spun cotton. The bases for the posts were made out of bronze, but the hooks of the posts and their bands were made out of silver. The tops of them were plated with silver. All the posts of the courtyard were also banded with silver. The flap for the doorway of the courtyard was made by a needleworker of blue, purple, and red yarn, as well as fine-spun cotton. It was 30 feet long and 7½ feet high, the same height as the curtains of the courtyard. Their 4 posts and 4 bases were all made out of bronze, but their hooks were made out of silver. The tops of them and their bands were plated with silver. All the tent pegs for the Holy Tent and for the surrounding courtyard were made out of bronze.

The following are the amounts of metal used for constructing the Holy Tent which Moses ordered to be counted by the Levites under the direction of Ithamar, the son of Aaron, the High Priest. Bezalel, from the tribe of Judah, made everything that the Lord had commanded Moses. He was the son of Uri and the grandson of Hur. Oholiab, from the tribe of Dan, helped Bezalel. Oholiab was the son of Ahisamach. He was a craftsman and a designer. He was also a needle-worker in blue, purple, and red yarn, and in fine-spun cotton.

The total amount of the gold that was used for the work of constructing the sanctuary was a little more than 1 ton. The total amount of the silver received from all those in the congregation was 3 ¾ tons. These gifts were received from each one who was 20 years old or more and who crossed over the Red Sea—603,550 men. The 3 ¾ tons of silver were used for casting the

bases of the sanctuary and the bases of the curtain. There were 82 ¼ pounds for each base.

Bezalel made hooks for the posts from the shekels he received. He plated the tops of them with silver, and he made bands for them. The total amount of the bronze from the contribution was 603,250 pounds. Bezalel used that to make the bases of the doorway to the Tent of Meeting, the Bronze Altar with its bronze grill and all of its utensils. The bases of the surrounding courtyard, the bases of the entrance to the courtyard, all of the tent pegs of the Holy Tent, and all of the tent pegs of the surrounding courtyard.

Making the Priests' Clothes

39The workers made finely-woven clothes from blue, purple and red yarn for serving in the Holy Place. They also made holy clothes for Aaron, just as I commanded Moses. Bezalel made the vest with gold thread from blue, purple and red yarn, and from fine-spun cotton.

Then skillful workmen hammered out the gold into thin plates and cut it into threads to be woven into the blue, purple and red yarn, and into the fine-spun cotton. They made shoulder straps for the vest, joined together at the upper ends. They made a skillfully-woven waistband with gold thread of one piece with the ephod. It was made of blue, purple, and red yarn and from fine spun cotton, just as I had commanded Moses. They mounted the onyx stones in delicate, gold settings, engraving them like a seal with the names of the sons of Israel. Bezalel put the jewels on the shoulder straps of the vest to remind everyone about the sons of Israel, just as I had commanded Moses.

Bezalel made the chest-pocket with the same skillful craftsmanship as the vest. It was made of gold thread, blue, purple, and red yarn, and finely spun cotton. When doubled, it was square—1 span or nine inches. They set four rows of jewels in it: in the first row there was a ruby, a topaz, and a beryl. The second row had a turquoise, a sapphire, and an emerald. The third row had a ligure, a jacinth, and an amethyst. The fourth row had a chrysolite, an onyx, and a jasper. They were mounted in delicate settings. There were 12 stones, one for each of the names of the sons of Israel. Each one was engraved like a seal with the name of one of the 12 tribes. On the

chest pocket, they put braided chains of pure gold, like ropes. They made two delicate, gold settings and two gold rings. And, they attached the two rings to two of the corners of the chest pocket. They attached the other two ends of the two braided chains, attaching them in front to the shoulder straps of the vest. Then they made two gold rings and attached them to the two corners of the chest-pocket on its inside edge, next to the vest. Then they made two gold rings and attached them in front to the bottom of the shoulder straps of the vest, next to the seam, just above the skillfully woven waistband of the vest. They tied the chest-pocket by its rings of the vest with a blue cord so that it connected with the skillfully woven waistband of the vest, so that the chest-pocket would not come loose from the vest, just as I had commanded Moses.

Bezalel also made the robe for the High Priest completely of woven blue cloth. It had an opening in its center, like a re-enforced collar. A band was around this opening so that it would not get torn and embroidered pomegranates designed of blue, purple, and red yarn around the hem of the robe. They also made bells of pure gold and put them between the pomegranate designs all around the hem. Each bell was followed by a pomegranate design all the way around the hem of the robe. It was worn when serving as High Priest, just as I had commanded Moses. They also made finely woven coats of cotton for Aaron and his sons, a fine cotton turban, cotton decorated caps, cotton underwear from fine spun cotton, and a belt made from fine-spun cotton, and blue, purple, and red yarn, the result of a needleworker, just as I had commanded Moses. They made the plate for the holy crown from pure gold and they wrote an inscription upon it like the one on a seal: HOLINESS TO YAHWEH. Then they tied a blue cord to the crown to hold it tightly to the turban, just as I had commanded Moses.

This is how all the work of the Holy Tent of Meeting was finished. The sons of Israel did everything exactly as I had commanded Moses. Then they brought the Holy Tent to Moses: The tent with all of its furniture, clips, frames, cross-bars, posts, bases; the covering of the tanned hides of rams, the covering of dolphin skins, the covering of the flap, the Holy Ark of the Covenant with its carrying poles and the mercy seat, the Table of Showbread, with all its utensils and the holy loaves of bread (the bread of the presence), the Golden Lampstand with its lamps all set in order, all of its utensils, and the oil for light; the Golden Burning Altar for Incense, the special anointing oil; the sweet-smelling incense; the flap for the door-way

of the tent; the Brazen Altar with its bronze grating, its carrying poles, and all of its utensils, the laver with its stand; the curtains for the courtyard with their posts and bases; the flap for the entrance of the courtyard with its ropes, tent pegs, and all of the tools for the maintenance of the Holy Tent; the finely woven clothes for those serving in the Holy Place, the holy clothes for Aaron the High Priest, and the clothes of his sons for serving as priests.

The workmen did all the work exactly as I had commanded Moses. Moses examined all the work. When he saw that they had done it exactly as I had commanded, he blessed them.

Putting the Tabernacle Together

40I told Moses, “Get the tabernacle ready by the first day of the new year—Passover—when you will remember your deliverance from Egypt. Place the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies behind the veil. Then place in the Holy Room the Table of the Bread of My presence. Next, bring in the menorah and light the lamps. Then place the Altar of Burning Incense at the center of the veil in the Holy Room. Then hang the curtain that is the entrance into the tent.”

Then I told Moses, “Hang the curtain that surrounds the courtyard. Next place the Brazen Altar at the entrance into the tabernacle so that all who enter come will make a blood sacrifice to Me. Set the laver between the Brazen Altar and the tent, and fill it with water.”

Then I told Moses, “Anoint the tent and all its furnishings to separate them to Me. They must be absolutely holy.”

Then I told Moses, “Bring Aaron and his sons to the front of the tent. They must be washed with water to symbolize their cleansing. Cover Aaron in sacred clothes, then anoint him, symbolizing he is separated as My priest. Do the same with his sons. Present them in their tunics and anoint them as their father was anointed. They and their sons will serve Me forever as priests, from generation to generation.”

Just as I commanded, Moses set up the Tabernacle for celebrating the Passover.

Just as I commanded, Moses set the foundational boards in place, attached the sockets, inserted the poles and attached the crossbars. Then he

spread the various coverings over the frame of the tent.

Just as I commanded, Moses placed the two stone tables inscribed with the 10 Commandments into the Ark of the Covenant. He placed the lid—the mercy seat—on top of it. He inserted the carrying poles in place and hung the veil so the people couldn't see in.

Just as I commanded, Moses placed the Table of Showbread on the north side of the Holy Room, and then he arranged the Bread of My presence on the Table.

Just as I commanded, Moses hung the entrance curtain over the way into the tent. Moses then brought in the menorah and set it across from the Table of Showbread. Then he lit the lamps in My presence. Next Moses brought in the Altar of Burning Incense and placed it in front of the veil. Then he burned incense, symbolic of prayer, going up to Me.

Just as I commanded, Moses placed the laver between the tent and the Brazen Altar. He filled it with water so the priests could wash themselves before the sacrifice and the Brazen Altar at the entrance of the tabernacle.

Just as I commanded, Moses hung the curtain around the courtyard that surrounded the tabernacle and the altar. Then he hung the curtain that was the entrance into the courtyard. So, finally, Moses completed the task, just as I commanded him to do.

Then My Shekinah glory cloud settled over the tabernacle, and My glory filled the place. Moses couldn't go into the tabernacle because My glory filled the tabernacle.

From then on, when My cloud lifted from over the tabernacle, the people prepared to march. Wherever the cloud led them, the people followed. When My cloud did not lift up from the tabernacle, the people remained where they were. My cloud surrounded the tabernacle, at night a burning fire was seen in My cloud.

My presence filled the tabernacle because Moses obeyed; may you be just as obedient to prepare your life, may you be filled with My glory, as I filled the tabernacle. I settled among My people, and I led My people. Let Me settle in your life with My presence; let Me lead you daily as I led Israel.

Exodus Epilogue

The Academy Award-winning movie Exodus tells of Jewish peoples' struggle to find a homeland in Palestine after the Holocaust and Hitler's prison camps in World War II. It was so named because the movie reflected the struggles of My people to throw off the shackles of slavery in Egypt. And still today the struggle continues between Israel and the surrounding Arab nations.

Why has Israel had so many persecutions throughout history? It's because of unseen spiritual warfare. Israel is the "apple of My eye." I chose Abraham and promised to bless his descendants (Gen. 12:2-3). Satan knows My ultimate plan with the Jews, so Satan will do everything possible to eliminate the Jewish people.

The book of Exodus is that window in history when I win because I deliver My people from slavery and begin preparing them to live in the Promised Land.

I AM GOD

The Holy One

The Book of Leviticus

Exodus ends with My presence filling the tabernacle, now Leviticus tells how My people must worship Me. The major theme is that I am holy and My people must be holy to worship Me, have fellowship with Me, and obey Me. My people are to be separate from the world, even though they live in the world. Therefore they must bring a blood sacrifice at the beginning of worship, and constant cleansing is necessary for their continued walk with Me.

Just as the Mosaic Law made Israel distinct from other tribes and nations, so today's believer must be separate today from sin and separated to Me. Follow close to Me so you will keep yourself separate from sin.

The Burnt Offering

1 I called Moses from the tabernacle and gave him these instructions to give to the Israelites. “Bring sacrifices to Me from your own flocks and herds. If you bring a burnt offering, bring a bull with no physical defects, and bring it to the tabernacle entrance so that it will be accepted by the Lord. Lay your hand on its head, and I will accept it as a substitute payment for your sins.”

Just as the worshiper identified his sin with the animal, so confess that you are a sinner and identify with Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, who died for your sins.

“The man bringing it will then kill it, and Aaron's sons will sprinkle its blood on each side of the altar. Aaron's sons will then skin the animal and

cut it into pieces, and build a fire on the altar. They will then place the animal's head and fat on the fire, and wash the internal organs and legs, and burn the entire animal. I will be well pleased with the offering.”

The bull symbolizes Christ, the Servant who was patient and enduring.

“If you offer a sheep or a goat, it must be a male and with no defects. The man who brings it is to kill it on the north side of the altar, and Aaron's sons will sprinkle its blood on each side of the altar. The man will cut it, and the priests will lay the pieces including the head and fat on the fire on the altar. The offerer is to wash the internal organs and legs, and the priests are to burn the entire animal. I will be pleased with the sacrifice.”

The sheep signifies Christ the Innocent Lamb who became poor and obedient for your sake.

“If you bring a bird as a burnt offering, it may be a dove or a pigeon. The priest will take it to the altar, wring its neck, and burn the head on the altar. He will then drain its blood out on each side of the altar, and remove the crop and throw it on the ash pile on the east side of the altar. The priest will then tear the bird almost completely apart by pulling on its wings and then burn the bird on the altar. This too will be pleasing to Me.”

The burnt offering typifies Christ offering Himself without blemish or spot—perfect—for sin.

The Meal Offering

2“A grain offering is to consist of fine flour, olive oil, and incense. One of Aaron's sons will take a handful of this mixture and burn it on the altar, and I will be pleased with this offering.

“Give the rest of the offering to the priests, but all of it is a burnt offering to Me.

“If you bring baked food as a grain offering, it must consist of fine flour and olive oil but with no yeast. On it may be wafers without yeast and with olive oil spread on it. If you cook a grain offering on a grill, it too must be made of fine flour and olive oil but with no yeast. Break it into pieces and pour oil on it. If you cook a grain offering in a pan, it too must be made of fine flour mixed with olive oil.

“Bring your grain offering to the priest who will take it to the bronze altar and present it to Me your LORD. He is to burn part of it as an offering to Me, and I will be pleased. Give the rest to the priests, though I will view all of it as a holy offering to Me.”

The absence of leaven typified no sin in Christ; the oil typified Christ's perfection. The oven typified Christ's suffering.

“Never include yeast or honey in any of your grain offerings. You may include yeast or honey in the first offerings you bring at harvest time, but never with burnt offerings. Include salt in every grain offering, because salt will remind you of My faithfulness.”

Salt typified My enduring quality of Me that I will preserve you and keep you secure.

“If you offer a grain offering to Me your Lord from the first crops of your harvest, roast kernels in a fire, and put olive oil and incense on it. Then the priests are to burn part of the grain with olive oil and all the incense as an offering to Me.”

The Peace Offering

3 “For a fellowship offering, offer a bull or a cow with no physical defects. The man offering the animal must lay his hand on the animal's head and kill it at the Tabernacle entrance. Then Aaron's sons are to

sprinkle its blood on each side of the altar. All the fat on the animal's insides, the kidneys, and the liver is to be removed and burned on the altar by Aaron's sons, and I will be pleased with the offering."

The fellowship offering (also known as the peace offering) typified the whole sacrifice of Christ; He made peace between the sinner and Me, satisfying My judgment against sin.

"If you offer a goat or sheep as a fellowship offering, it may be a male or female, but must have no physical defects. If you offer a sheep, present it to Me by placing your hand on its head and killing it at the Tabernacle entrance. Then Aaron's sons are to sprinkle its blood on each side of the altar. Cut out the fat of the animal's tail, the fat around the internal organs, two kidneys, and liver, and burn them on the altar as an offering to Me.

"If you offer a goat, lay your hand on its head, and kill it at the Tabernacle entrance. Then Aaron's sons are to sprinkle its blood on each side of the altar. The fat around the internal organs, the two kidneys, and the fat around them, and the liver and kidneys all this is to be burned on the altar to Me the Lord. I will be pleased with this offering because the fat belongs to Me.

"Never eat any fat or blood. This law is for you and all your descendants for generations to come."

The Sin Offering

4 Then I the LORD gave Moses additional instruction for Israel. "Tell the people what to do if they sin unintentionally by doing something I told them not to do. If a priest sins, he makes everyone guilty. So he must offer a bull with no physical defects. He must bring it to the tabernacle entrance, place his hand on the bull's head and kill it. He must then take the animal's blood into the tabernacle, and sprinkle the blood seven times in front of the curtain that separates the holy place from the most holy place. Then the priest is to put blood on the horns of the incense altar and pour out the rest of the blood at the base of the bronze altar of burnt offering near the tabernacle entrance.

Christ typifies the sin offering because His death covers any sins committed ignorantly.

“The priest must remove the fat around the internal organs, the two kidneys, and the liver, and burn them on the altar of burnt offering: just as is done with the bull or cow sacrificed as a fellowship offering. The bull’s skin, flesh, legs, and internal organs must be taken outside the camp and burned.”

The sin offering typified the work of Christ as your advocate who intercedes for you on behalf of your sin (1 John 2:1).

“If the entire nation sins and doesn’t realize it, everyone is guilty. So the leaders are to bring a bull to the tabernacle entrance, place their hands on the bull’s head and kill it in My presence. Then the priest is to take some of the bull’s blood into the tabernacle, and then he is to sprinkle it’s blood seven times in front of the curtain that separates the holy place from the most holy place. Then he is to put blood on the four horns on the incense altar and pour out the rest of the blood at the base of the bronze altar of burnt offering near the tabernacle entrance. Then the priest is to remove all the fat and burn it on the altar. This is the same procedure as with the sin offering. In this way, the animal is a substitute payment for sin. The priest will burn the bull outside the camp. This will pay for the sin of the nation.

“Suppose one of the leader’s sins and doesn’t realize it. He will be guilty. As soon as he realizes it, he is to take a male goat with no defects, place his hand on its head and kill it as a sin offering. Then the priest is to sprinkle blood on the horns of the altar of burnt offering and pour out the rest of the blood at the base of that altar. The priest is to burn all the fat on the altar, in this way paying for the leader’s sin. And the leader will be forgiven.

“Or suppose an ordinary Israelite sins without realizing it. He will be guilty. As soon as he realizes what he has done, he is to take a female goat with no defects. He is to place his hand on its head and kill it by the altar of burnt offering. Then the priest is to sprinkle the blood on the horns of the

altar of burnt offering. The priest is to burn all the fat of the goat. This will please Me for the goat will be a substitute payment for sin.

“If the man prefers to offer a lamb instead of a goat, it must be a female with no physical defects. Bringing it to the altar of burnt offering, he is to place his hand on its head and kill it. Then the priest is to sprinkle blood on the horns of the altar of burnt offering and pour out the rest of the blood at the base of that altar. As with a fellowship offering, the priest is to burn the animal fat on that altar as a substitute payment for sin, and the man’s sin will be forgiven.”

These animal sacrifices had no intrinsic value in themselves; they prefigured the value in the sacrifice of Christ for you. Thank Christ for suffering for you to forgive all your sins.

Sin Requiring a Sin Offering

5“If you refuse to testify in court about something you know about, you are responsible. You are guilty if you accidentally touch a dead unclean animal or insect. Or you are guilty if you accidentally touch human waste.

“If you make a promise and then realize that it was foolish, you will be guilty.”

This sacrifice deals with the consequences of sin; when you are guilty of injuring another, you must bring a sacrifice that deals with injury. You must first get forgiveness for your personal guilt, and second, you must deal with the injury you caused. Then you can come worship Me.

“When you become aware of having committed any of these sins, you must confess your sin and then bring to the LORD a female lamb or goat. This animal will be a substitute payment for your sin, and you will be forgiven. If you can’t afford a lamb, then bring two doves or pigeons, one as a sin offering and one as a burnt offering. The priest will offer one of them as a sin offering by wringing its neck and sprinkling some of the blood on

the side of the bronze altar and draining out the rest of the blood at the base of the altar.

“Then the priest will offer the other bird in the same way as a substitute payment for your sin.

“If the man can’t afford the birds, then he must bring two quarts of fine flour. Because it is a sin offering, he must not mix any olive oil in it or put any incense on it. He must take it to the priest who will burn a handful of it on the altar. This will be a substitute payment for sin, and the man will be forgiven. The priest is to get the rest of the flour, as a grain offering.”

I said to Moses, “If anyone unintentionally sins against My holy objects, he will be guilty. He must bring a ram with no defect and one that is of the proper value. He must pay for the loss plus 20 percent. Then the priest will accept these as substitute payments for sin as a guilt offering, and the man’s sin will be forgiven.

“If anyone breaks My command without intending it, he will be guilty. When he realizes what he did, he must bring the priest a ram as a payment for sin. The animal must have no physical problems. The guilty person will then be forgiven of this offense against Me.”

Sin Requiring Sacrifices

6I said to Moses, “If anyone sins against Me by stealing something a neighbor entrusts to his care, or cheats him in some way, or lies about something he found, he must return the item, plus a 20 percent fine. He must then take the priest a ram with no defects as a guilt offering, and the priest will accept it as a substitute payment for sin, and the man’s sin will be forgiven.”

I said to Moses, “Give Aaron and his sons these instructions about the burnt offering. Leave the fire on the altar overnight, and keep the fire burning. Then in the morning, the priest is to put on his special linen garments and underclothes and is to clean out the ashes and put them next to the altar. Then he is to change to his everyday clothes and take the ashes outside the camp.”

The priest typified Jesus' offering outside the camp; "Jesus—sanctified the people with his own blood, suffered outside the gate" (Heb. 13:12). Jesus not only became our sin but He also suffered for you. "I will go forth unto Him without the camp where He bore my reproach" (Heb. 13:13, AMP).

“He is to keep the fire on the altar burning, putting wood on it each morning. He is to put the burnt offering on the altar and arrange on it the fat of the fellowship offerings. The fire on the altar must be kept burning and never go out.

“These are instructions about the grain offering: Standing in front of the altar, the priest is to take a handful of flour mixed with olive oil and incense and burn it on the altar. I will be pleased with the offering. The rest of the flour mixture will be food for Aaron and his sons, to be baked without yeast and eaten in the courtyard. All of it is very holy, just like the sin offerings and guilt offerings. Only Aaron’s male descendants may eat of the grain offering; this is their share of the offering to Me. Whoever touches these offerings will be holy.”

I said to Moses, “When Aaron and his sons are dedicated; they are to bring to Me a grain offering of two quarts of flour, mixed with olive oil, half in the morning and a half in the evening. They are to cook it on a grill, and then break it into pieces and offer it to Me to please Me. Each of Aaron’s descendants is to offer this sacrifice as My share. It is to be burned completely and none of it eaten.”

Then I said to Moses, “These are instructions about the sin offering. The animal for this holy sacrifice is to be killed in My presence where burnt offerings are made. The priest must eat it in the tabernacle courtyard. Anyone who touches the meat will be holy. And if any of the animal’s blood gets on the priest’s clothing, he is to wash it off in a holy place. If the meat is boiled in a clay pot, the pot must be broken, or if the meat is cooked in a bronze kettle, the kettle must be thoroughly cleaned. Only males of the priest’s family may eat of this offering, for it is holy. However, none of the meat may be eaten if blood from the animal was taken into the tabernacle as a substitute payment for sin. In this case, the animal must be burned.”

Because blood is a carrier of the disease, I instructed the priests to wash the old blood away. I told them to break the porous clay pots where the disease might hide, lest they eat out of that pot and expose themselves to viruses or diseases.

The Guilt Offering

7“These are instructions about the guilt offering, which is very holy: The guilt offering animal is to be killed where the burnt offerings are killed, and its blood is to be sprinkled on the altar. All the animal’s fat is to be offered, including the tail, the fat on the internal organs, the two kidneys, and their fat, and the liver. The priests will burn them on the altar. Only males of a priest’s family may eat the animal meat and in a holy place.

“The same applies to the sin offering. The priest who performs this sacrifice may eat the animal’s meat. The priest who offers a burnt offering may keep the skin of the animal. When a grain offering is given to Me, it belongs to the priests, regardless of how it was cooked. All grain offerings, whether with olive oil or not, are to be shared by the priests.”

I have provided food for the priests who served Me. You should gladly tithe to My church knowing some of that money goes to those who serve Me full-time in ministry.

“These are instructions about fellowship offerings: If you give an offering of thanks include with it some wafers without yeast spread with olive oil, some bread made by flour and olive oil, and loaves of bread with yeast. After the loaves are presented to Me, give them to the priest who is to sprinkle the altar with blood from a sacrificed animal. The animal meat must not be left until morning.

“If someone brings an offering to fulfill a promise or give Me something, the meat may be eaten that day and the next. But any meat left over on the third day must be burned. If any of it is eaten on the third day, it will not be accepted, and the offerer will be guilty. I will despise it, and the offerer will be held accountable for his sin.

“If any meat comes in contact with something unclean, it may not be eaten; instead burn it. The other meat is to be eaten only by people who are ceremonially clean. If a priest is ceremonially unclean and he eats the fellowship offering, he must be cut off from the people. If anyone touches something that is unclean and then eats meat from an offering, he must be cut off from the people.”

Be clean inwardly and outwardly; I want you to be holy in every area of life so you will glorify Me in all you do.

I said to Moses, “Tell the Israelites never to eat the fat of cattle, sheep, or goats. Don’t eat the fat of an animal found dead or killed by a wild animal, though it may be used for other purposes. Don’t eat fat from an offering given to the Lord, or you will be cut off from your people. Also never eat the blood of birds or animals. If you do, you will be cut off from your people.”

Then I the LORD said to Moses, “Tell the Israelites that when they present a fellowship offering to Me, they should bring it with their own hands. They should wave the animal’s fat and breast to Me. Then the priest will burn the fat, and the breast will belong to Aaron and his sons. The right thigh will be a gift to the priest who will sprinkle the blood and offer the fat to the Lord. The breast and right thigh are to be the priests’ share of the fellowship offerings. These are their share, portions to be set apart for Aaron and his sons from the day I appointed them. This requirement is to be followed for all future generations.”

These were My instructions for the burnt offering, grain offering, sin offering, guilt offering, dedication offering, and fellowship offering. I gave these instructions to Moses on Mount Sinai, so he would tell the Israelites how they were to offer sacrifices to Me, their God in the Sinai Desert.

There are five major offerings that the Levites brought to Me. First, the burnt offering was a picture of Christ’s perfect obedience whereby He offered Himself to Me as a propitiation or satisfaction of your sins. The second was the meal offering in which bread and oil were perfectly blended before being offered to Me. This is a

picture of Christ's perfectly blended divine and human nature—the union in which He is completely God and completely man at the same time. The meal offering presented Christ as the Bread of Life. The third offering was the fellowship or peace offering, which is a picture of worship or praise to Me. The death of Christ was the basis for your peace with Me, and the indwelling presence of Christ becomes the basis of your internal peace with Me. The fourth was the sin offering, which shows Christ as the one who became sin for you (see Rom. 8:3), "For He made Christ who knew no sin [to be] sin for you, that you might become My righteousness in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21). The fifth was the guilt offering which indicates Christ's atoning work for your sins after you are saved. Christ the Mediator prays to keep you from sin (1 John 2:1-2).

Aaron and His Sons are Anointed

8 I said to Moses, "Bring Aaron and his sons with their priestly garments, anointing oil, a bull for a sin offering, two rams, and bread baked without yeast, and have all the Israelites gather at the Tabernacle entrance." When all the people were gathered there, Moses said, "The Lord has told me what I am about to do."

Moses washed Aaron and his sons, and then put on Aaron the priestly tunic, robe, and sash. Then he put on him the vest with its embroidered belt. Next, he put on him the chest piece and put the Urim and Thummim inside its pouch. Moses then placed on Aaron's head the turban with the strip of gold as the Lord had commanded.

Then Moses sprinkled the anointing oil on the tabernacle and everything in it, to dedicate them to Me. He sprinkled the bronze altar of burnt offering seven times, and he sprinkled the altar utensils and also the tank and its base, to dedicate them to Me. He then poured anointing oil on Aaron's head to dedicate him to Me. Then Moses put tunics and sashes on Aaron's sons as I had commanded.

Moses brought the bull for the sin offering, and Aaron and his sons placed their hands on its head. Moses killed it and put some of its blood on the altar and its four horns, and then poured the rest of the blood at the base

of the altar. This made the altar holy so that sacrifices could be made on it. He burned on the altar the fat around the internal organs, the liver, the two kidneys, and their fat. He burned the rest of the bull, with its hide and dung, outside the camp as I had commanded.

Moses then brought the ram for the burnt offering. Aaron and his sons placed their hands on its head, and Moses killed it and sprinkled its blood on all sides of the altar. He cut the ram in pieces and burned them and the head and fat. He washed the ram's inside organs and legs and burned them on the altar too. This pleased Me, and all this was done as I had commanded.

Then Moses presented another ram, the one for the priests' dedication. Aaron and his sons placed their hands on its head, Moses killed it, and put some of its blood on Aaron's right ear, right hand, and right big toe. Moses then did the same with some blood on Aaron's sons. And he sprinkled the rest of the blood on the sides of the altar. Moses took the fat, the tail, the fat around the internal organs, two kidneys with their fat, and the right thigh. On top of these, he placed a wafer without yeast, a thin wafer with olive oil, and some bread. He gave all of these to Aaron and his sons who waved them as an offering to Me. Moses then burned all these on the altar as part of the burnt offering, and I the Lord was pleased.

Moses then waved the breast to Me, as part of the dedication ram, as I had commanded.

Moses sprinkled anointing oil and blood from the altar on Aaron and his sons and their clothes to dedicate them to Me. Moses told Aaron and his sons, "Boil the meat at the tabernacle entrance and eat it there with the dedication bread you cooked. Burn any leftover meat. Stay at the tabernacle entrance for a week, the time of your dedication. This command from Me is payment for your sins. Don't forget to stay at the tabernacle entrance for a week. If you don't, you will die." So Aaron and his sons did all that I told Moses.

Just as My servants were anointed with oil for tabernacle service, today seek the anointing of the Holy Spirit so you can serve Me in wisdom and power.

Aaron Offers Sacrifices

9 After the week-long dedication, Moses got Aaron and his sons and Israel's leaders together. He told Aaron, "Take a bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering and offer them to Me.

"Tell the Israelites to offer a male goat as a sin offering and a calf and year-old lamb as a burnt offering to Me. Also, have them bring a fellowship offering of a bull and a ram and also a grain offering mixed with olive oil. I will appear to you today."

The people brought these things and stood at the tabernacle entrance before Me. Moses told them, "After you have done these things, the Lord will appear in His glory."

It's important for you to gather with other believers to worship and serve Me. In the Old Testament, the gathering place was My Temple. In the New Testament and today it is My Son Jesus' church.

Moses said to Aaron, "Offer the sin offering and the burnt offering to be substitute payments for you and the people." So Aaron killed the calf as a sacrifice for his sins. His sons took the calf's blood to him, and he put some blood on the four horns of the altar and poured out the rest of it at the base of the altar. He burned the bull's fat, kidneys, and liver, as I had said to do. Then Aaron burned the meat and skin outside the camp.

Then Aaron killed the animal for the burnt offering. His sons brought him the blood, and he sprinkled it on four sides of the altar. As they brought him the pieces of the animal, including the head, he burned them on the altar. He washed the insides and the legs and offered them up as a burnt offering.

Next Aaron sacrificed the goat for the people just as he had offered the calf as a sin offering for himself. Then he brought the ram as a burnt offering, as I had said to do. Then he brought the grain offering, burning a handful of it on the altar in addition to the morning burnt offering.

Then Aaron killed the bull and ram as the fellowship offering from the people. Aaron's son took the blood to him, and he sprinkled it on all four sides of the altar. Then he took the fat from the animals' tails, internal

organs, kidneys, and liver, and placed them on the animals' breasts and burned them. Aaron then waved the breasts and right thighs to Me, as Moses had said to do.

Aaron spread out his hands toward the people and blessed them. Then having made the sin offering, the burnt offering, and the fellowship offering, he stepped down from the altar. He and Moses went into the tabernacle. When they came out, they blessed the people, and I appeared in My glory. My fire burned up the burnt offering and the fats on the altar. The people saw this, shouted and fell to the ground in worship.

It's important that I accept the offering of your life. Then the fire of My presence will fall on your life to burn up all sin and chaff. May your life be reverent and focused on Me; may your life be a gift offering to Me.

Nadab and Abihu Were Killed

10 Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu disobeyed Me by burning incense in their fire pans. So I sent fire on them, and it burned them to death. Moses told Aaron, "This is why the Lord said 'I will show Myself holy to anyone who approaches Me, and I will be glorified before everyone.'" But Aaron said nothing. Then Moses told two of his cousins, "Take the bodies of those relatives of yours outside the camp away from the tabernacle entrance." So they carried them out by their tunics. Moses told Aaron and his two sons Eleazar and Ithamar, "Don't mourn by letting your hair hang loose or by tearing your clothes. If you do, you will die, and God will be angry with all the people. But others may mourn Nadab and Abihu. But you as God's anointed ones are to stay here in the tabernacle, or you will die." So Aaron and his sons did as Moses said.

Learn to fear Me. May you never take My Word and commands lightly. I am a burning fire that consumes all sin. Separate yourself from everything known as sin. Be holy which is acceptable to Me.

I told Aaron, “You are not to drink wine or any other alcoholic drink before going into the tabernacle. If you do, you will die. This rule is for every generation. Know the difference between what is holy and isn’t, and what is clean and unclean. Teach the people all the commands I gave them through Moses.”

Moses told Aaron and his sons Eleazar and Ithamar, “Take the leftover grain offering, be sure it has no yeast, and eat it, for it is a holy offering. Eat it in the holy place; it is your share of the people’s offerings. The breast and thigh that were waved to Me may be eaten anywhere so long as it is a ceremonial place. They are for your family as their share of the fellowship offerings. The breast and thigh are to be waved to Me with the fat portions of offerings. When Moses asked what happened to the goat of the sin offering, he learned that it had been burned. This made Moses very angry, and he said to Eleazar and Ithamar, “Why didn’t you eat the sin offering in the courtyard? This holy offering was to be a substitute payment for the people’s sins. Since you didn’t take the blood into the holy place, you were to eat its meat in the courtyard, but you burned it instead.”

Aaron said to Moses, “Yes, my sons offered both the sin offering and the burnt offering today to the LORD.” Moses was satisfied with his response.

Clean and Unclean Foods

11 I told Moses and Aaron to tell the Israelites, “You may eat the meat of any animal that has divided hoofs and chews the cud. But if an animal chews the cud but doesn’t have divided hoofs, you are not to eat them. They include camels, rock badgers, and rabbits. The pig has divided hoofs, but it doesn’t chew the cud, and so you are not to eat it. Don’t even touch the dead bodies of these animals.”

I am concerned with your inner physical health, as well as your outward spiritual testimony. You please Me with the things you eat that will make you physically strong and free from sickness. I want your inner private life to influence the outer so that you can be a testimony for Me.

“You may eat anything that lives in water, whether fresh water or salt water and has fins and scales. You are to detest the idea of eating any other thing that lives in water. You are not even to touch their dead bodies. I repeat, don’t eat any marine animal that does not have fins and scales.

“These are the birds you are never to eat: eagles, vultures, buzzards, kites, falcons, ravens, ostriches, owls, seagulls, hawks, little owls, water birds, great owls, desert owls, ospreys, pelicans, storks, herons, and bats.

“Do not eat flying insects that have four legs, except for those that jump with their hind legs, including locusts, crickets, and grasshoppers. Any others that fly and crawl are not to be eaten.

“If you touch the dead bodies of these off-limits insects, you will be ceremonially unclean all day. If you touch the dead bodies of any of these animals, you must wash your clothes. You will also be unclean if you touch the dead body of any animal that has divided hoofs but doesn’t chew the cud. You will also be unclean all day if you touch the carcass of a four-legged animal that has paws. If you touch the carcass, you must wash your clothes, and you will be unclean all day.

“Mules, rats, lizards, geckos, mice, snails, chameleons are unclean. If you touch the dead body of one of these, you will be unclean all day. Suppose one of them dies and its dead body falls on something made of wood, cloth, leather, or sackcloth. That object must be washed and will remain ceremonially unclean all day.

“If one of these dead animals falls into a clay pot, the pot must be smashed, and anything in the pot will be unclean. If the water that is used to clean an unclean object touches food, the food will be unclean.

“If the dead body of an animal touches any object, that object will be unclean. If a dead body falls into a spring or well, the water will not be unclean, but anyone who removes the carcass will be. If a carcass falls on seeds to be planted, the seeds are still clean. But if the seeds are wet when the carcass falls on it, the seeds are ceremonially unclean.

“If an animal that may be eaten dies and you touch it, you will be unclean all day. If you eat any of its meat or carry the carcass away, you must wash your clothes; you will be unclean all day.

“Don’t eat any animals that crawl, including reptiles or creatures with many legs. Don’t touch or eat any of them. Because I, the LORD your God,

am holy, you are to be holy. So don't make yourselves unclean by touching or eating crawling creatures. I brought you out of Egypt. You are to be holy because I am holy.

“These are My instructions about which animals, birds, fish, and crawling things you may and may not eat, which ones I consider clean and unclean.”

Why Dietary Laws? I listed many animals that the people of Israel couldn't eat. There was one common denominator with them all; they couldn't eat predator or scavenger animals. This included certain types of animals that are livestock, fish and seafood, rodents, birds, and insects. With the sin of Adam and Eve, death came and with it decay, germs, disease, and bacteria. Every dead body produces an enormous amount of potential disease and was life-threatening in some cases. A scavenger animal eats garbage, and dead animals spread diseases. As an example, many insects feed off garbage, feces, and food that is spoiled, rotten, or contaminated. I didn't want My people ingesting animals that possibly had disease in their bodies. The clean animals were vegetarians. Those that eat the leaves of trees, grass, or bushes do not normally have bacteria in their system as do scavenger creatures. The issue was much more than eating an unclean creature or eating things that seem repulsive, poisonous, or obnoxious. I wanted My people to be holy in their bodies or total lifestyle. The issue was holiness of mind and body as well as health and physical wholeness. The dietary laws protected My people from sickness and disease. When I promised, “You won't get any of the diseases I sent on the Egyptians” (Exod. 15:26), their health involved obedience to all of My dietary instructions about removing garbage and anything that would defile them physically or spiritually. When I did away with the dietary laws (Acts 10:9-16; Col. 2:14-17), I allowed humans to eat those creatures previously called “unclean.” Usually, cooking the creatures over 220° will kill any bacteria and make the food safe to eat today. Eat good food to strengthen your body that will make you healthy. Eat good food and refrain from food that is harmful to your health.

Cleansing After Childbirth

12I told Moses, “Give these instructions to the Israelites. After a woman gives birth to a son, she will be ceremonially unclean for a week; just as she is during her monthly period. On the eighth day, the boy must be circumcised. For another 33 days, she will be unclean because of loss of blood. So during that time she must not touch any object dedicated to Me and must not enter the tabernacle. After a woman gives birth to a daughter, she will be unclean for two weeks. Then she will be unclean for another 66 days.

“When these days are completed for either a son or daughter, the mother must take to the priest at the tabernacle entrance a year-old lamb as a burnt offering and a dove or a pigeon as a sin offering. The priest will offer them to Me on her behalf, and the mother will be completely clean again from her loss of blood during childbirth. If she can’t afford a lamb, she must take to the priest two doves or two pigeons, one as a burnt offering and one as a sin offering.”

Luke’s birth story of Jesus of Nazareth includes the special ceremonies given in Leviticus 12. Prophetically I was revealing that the baby Jesus was human and that He would live and grow by human laws.

The Rules About Skin Diseases

13I said to Moses and Aaron, “If anyone breaks out with sores, boils, or a rash, and the hair in the area has turned white, Aaron or one of his sons must examine the skin. If the priest sees that the area is white and the sore is more than skin deep, the priest is to state that the man is a leper and is ceremonially unclean.

“But if the spot is not white and is only skin deep and the hair has not turned white, the priest is to have him quarantined for a week. Then if the spot has not spread, the priest is to quarantine him for another week. If the spot still has not spread, the priest will say he is clean, and the man will only need to wash his clothes. But if the spot spreads, the man must see the

priest again. And if the priest sees that the spot has spread, he is to say the man is a leper and is ceremonially unclean.”

There is so much disease in this sinful world. I want you to protect yourself. May your body be a clean temple where I live, and I am glorified.

“Anyone with a skin disease must be brought to the priest. If the priest sees the spot is white and swollen with hair in the spot, he will state that the man is a leper and is ceremonially clean and need not be quarantined. If the skin is white with scars and no sores or rash, the priest is to say that the man is clean. But if open sores appear, the priest is to say the man is a leper and is ceremonially unclean. But if the sores heal and turn white, the man is to go again to the priest. He will examine the man, and if the skin is completely white, the priest is to say that the man is now clean.

“If someone has a sore on his skin that healed but then swelled and turned reddish-white, he must see the priest. If the priest sees that the sore is more than skin deep and the hairs in the sore have turned white, he is to say the man is unclean. But if the spot has no white hairs and the spot is not skin deep, the priest is to quarantine him for a week. If the infection spreads during that week, the priest is to say he is unclean because the disease is contagious. But if the spot hasn’t spread, it is a scar from the sore, and the priest is to say he is clean.

“If someone is burned and a spot on the skin turns reddish-white or white, the priest must examine it. If the hairs in the spot are white and the spot is more than skin deep, the priest is to say he is unclean because the infection is contagious. If no white hairs are in the spot and it is not skin deep, and the color is fading, then he is to be quarantined for a week. If after seven days the burned area is spreading, the priest is to say he is unclean because the disease is contagious. However, if the area is unchanged and has not spread and is fading in color, and is clear from the burn, the priest is to say he is clean.

“If someone has an open sore on his head or chin, the priest is to examine it. If it seems more than skin deep and the hairs in the sore are yellow, the priest is to say he is unclean because the sore is contagious. But

if the sore does not seem to be more than skin deep, and there are no black hairs in it, then he is to be quarantined for a week. Then if the spot is only skin deep and the hairs are not yellow, he is to shave except for the diseased area, and he is to be quarantined for another week. If after that week the spot has not spread and does not seem to be skin deep, the priest is to say he is clean, and the man must wash his clothes. But if later the problem spreads, the priest need not look for yellow hairs, for the person is unclean. But if the sore seems unchanged and the hairs in it are now black, the man is clean.

“If a person has white spots on his skin, and the spots are dull white, this is not leprosy; it is a rash, and that person is clean. If a man becomes bald, that doesn’t mean he is a leper. If he simply has a bald forehead, he is clean. But if a reddish-white sore appears on his head or forehead, that means he has an infectious disease. If the priest sees that the sore is swollen and is reddish-white, then he is a leper, and the priest is to say he is unclean. The person must wear torn clothes, not comb his hair, cover the lower part of his face, and say, ‘I am unclean.’ While he has the infection, he must live alone and outside the camp.

“If a green or red spot appears on clothing made of linen or woven or knitted material or leather, it must be shown to the priest. After examining it, the priest is to set it aside for a week. Then if the green or red spot has spread, the article is unclean, and the priest must burn it. But if the priest finds that the spot has not spread, he is to have the item of clothing or leather washed and isolated for a week. Then he is to examine it again, and even though it hasn’t spread, he is to say it is unclean and is to have it burned whether it was affected on the inside or outside. But if the spot faded after the item was washed, the priest is to tear out that spot. If the spot appears again somewhere on the item, it must be burned. But if the item is okay after being washed, it should be washed one more time, and it will be ceremonially clean.

“These are the instruction for determining if clothing with an unusual spot on it is clean or unclean.”

I give these preventive measures to keep you from disease and sickness.

Cleansing From Skin Disease

14I gave Moses these instructions for a person who thinks he is healed of leprosy. “He is to go to the priest who is to examine him outside the camp. If the priest considers him healed, he is to take two birds, cedar wood, red yarn, and a hyssop branch. He is to have someone kill one of the birds over fresh water in a clay pot. Then he is to dip the other bird, the cedar, the red yarn, and the hyssop in the blood of the first bird. Then the priest is to sprinkle the blood of the dead bird seven times on the person who had the disease and to say, ‘You are clean.’ Then the priest will let the live bird fly into the open field.

“The man who is cured must then wash his clothes, shave himself, and bathe. He may then live in the camp, but he must stay outside his tent for a week. On the seventh day, he must again shave, wash his clothes, and bathe. He will then be ceremonially clean. The next day he must take to the priest two rams and a year-old female lamb, all with no defects, along with five quarts of flour mixed with olive oil, and half a pint of olive oil. The priest is to present to the Lord the man and his offerings at the Tabernacle entrance.”

Medical technicians have demonstrated with good reason laws of cleanliness and uncleanness given by Me; were not superstitious taboos. I wanted the Israelites to be in the best health possible in their physical bodies with a strong intellect, emotion, and will. That meant they had to exercise self-discipline in their diets and hygiene habits.

“The priest is to take one of the rams and the oil and wave them to Me as a guilt offering. He is then to kill the lamb as a sin offering. This guilt offering is to be given to the priest for food. This is a very holy offering. The priest is to put some blood from the guilt offering on the man’s right ear, his right thumb, and right big toe.

“The priest is then to pour some of the olive oil in his left hand, dip his right finger into the oil, and sprinkle it seven times to Me. The priest is then to put some of the oil on the man’s right ear, right thumb, and right big toe. He is then to pour the rest of the oil on the man’s head as a substitute payment for his sins.”

The blood of Jesus must be applied first to your life to cleanse you from sin. Then the oil of the Holy Spirit must anoint you for a refreshing, spiritual illumination, power, and assurance.

“The priest is then to offer the sin offering and the burnt offering on the altar with a grain offering. All of these are to be substitute payments for sin. Then the person will be ceremonially clean.

“If the person being cleansed can’t afford two lambs, then he is to bring a ram as a guilt offering to wave before Me as a substitute payment for sin, along with a half pint of olive oil and five quarts of flour mixed with olive oil for a grain offering. He is also to offer two doves or two pigeons, one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering. He is to take them to the priest at the tabernacle entrance on the eighth day. The priest is to take the lamb for the guilt offering and wave it and the olive oil to Me.

“Then the priest is to kill the other lamb and put some of its blood on the person’s right ear, right thumb, and right big toe.

“The priest is to pour some of the olive oil in his left hand, dip his right finger into the oil, and sprinkle it seven times to Me. He is then to put some of the oil on the person’s right ear, right thumb, and right big toe, the same places where he is to put the blood of the guilt offering. He is to pour the rest of the oil on the person’s head as a substitute payment for sin.

“Then the priest is to offer the two doves or two pigeons, along with the grain offering. One bird is for a sin offering, and the other is for a burnt offering. These are what the person must do if he has leprosy and can’t afford the offering normally required.”

I told Moses and Aaron to tell the people, “When you are in Canaan, some of your houses may have mildew. The owner of the house is to tell the priest, ‘I may have mildew in my house.’ The priest is to have the house emptied, and then he is to inspect it. If he finds green or red spots on the walls and they seem to be behind the wall’s surface, he is to lock up the house for a week. Then he is to see if the mildew has spread. If it has, the stones are to be removed and dumped in an area outside of town. Then all the walls must be scraped, and other stones brought in, and the walls plastered again.

“But suppose the mildew reappears. Then the priest is to inspect it again. If the mildew has spread, the house is unclean, and it must be torn down and the stones, wood, and plaster must be carried out of town to an unclean place. If anyone goes into the house when it is closed up, he will be ceremonially unclean the rest of the day. And if anyone eats or sleeps there, he is to wash his clothes.

“However, if the priest inspects the house and finds that mildew has not reappeared after the walls were replastered, the house is ceremonially clean. To complete the cleansing process the priest is to kill a bird over a water-filled pot and dip a piece of cedar wood, red thread, and a hyssop branch into the bird’s blood. The priest is also to dip a live bird into the blood of the killed bird and then sprinkle the blood on the house seven times. After purifying the house, the priest is to let the live bird fly away into open fields.

“These are the instructions to follow for dealing with contagious skin diseases or mildew in one’s clothing or house, or a sore or a swollen area of his skin. These instructions will help you know if something is ceremonially clean or unclean.”

I had the health of My people in mind because they had not recognized the airborne diseases caused by mildew in their houses. I do this to protect your health even when you didn't understand what you were doing.

Rules About Unclean Discharges

15I gave Moses and Aaron these instructions to give to the Israelites: “If a man has a genital discharge, he is unclean, whether it continues flowing or is blocked. Any bed he lies on or chair he sits on will be unclean. And if anyone touches his bed, his chair, or even the man himself, he is to wash his clothes and bathe. He will be ceremonially unclean all day. If you are spit on by the man, you are to wash your clothes, bathe, and be ceremonially unclean all day. Any saddle or seat the man sits on will be unclean that day. And even if you pick up those items, you are to wash your clothes, bathe, and be unclean all day. If he touches you before first washing

his hands, you are to wash your clothes, bathe, and be unclean all day. If he touches a clay pot, it is to be broken, and any wooden utensil he touches is to be washed.”

I am deeply concerned about people who are guilty of sexual sins, therefore, be sexually pure.

“During the week after the discharge stops, he is to wash his clothes and bathe, and he will be ceremonially clean. Then on the eighth day, he is to give the priest two doves or two pigeons for the Lord at the Tabernacle entrance. The priest is to offer one of the birds for a sin offering and one as a burnt offering as substitute payments for sin.

“If a man emits some semen, he is to bathe, and he will be ceremonially unclean all day. If the semen gets on any clothing or leather, that item is to be washed, and it will be unclean all day. After intercourse, the husband and wife are to bathe, and they will be unclean all day.”

Sex is not dirty, but is holy between a husband and wife (Heb. 13:4). Keep My commands and bring glory to Me in all things.

“During a woman’s monthly period, she will be unclean for a week, and anyone who touches her will be unclean all day. Anything she lies on or sits on will be unclean. If anyone touches her bed or anything she sits on, whether her bedding or any piece of furniture, he is to wash his clothes and bathe, and he will be unclean all day. If a man has intercourse with a woman in her monthly period, he will be unclean for a week, and any bed he lies on will be unclean.

“If a woman’s menstrual flow lasts longer than normal or if she has some other ongoing discharge of blood, she will be ceremonially unclean during the flow. Any bed she rests on or chair she sits in will be unclean. And if anyone touches them, he is to wash his clothes and bathe, and he will be unclean all day.

“A week after the woman’s monthly discharge stops, she will be ceremonially clean. Then on the eighth day, she is to give the priest two

doves or two pigeons at the Tabernacle entrance. The priest is to offer one of the birds as a sin offering and one as a burnt offering to the LORD as substitute payments for sin.

“In this way, you will keep the Israelites separate from things that would make them unclean, and thus avoid death by making the tabernacle unclean. These are the regulations for men with a genital discharge or emission of semen, for women in their monthly period or a discharge, or for a man who sleeps with a woman during her period.”

These Old Testament laws are done away in Christ, but continue to obey the principles so you can be healthy and disciplined in body.

The Day of Atonement

16 After Aaron’s two sons Nadab and Abihu died, I said to Moses, “Tell Aaron not to go whenever he wants into the most holy place where I appear in a cloud over the lid on the sacred chest. If he does, he will die.

“Before entering the most holy place, Aaron is to offer a bull as a sin offering and a ram as a burnt offering. Then he is to take a bath and put on the special priestly garments, including the tunic, linen undergarments, linen sash, and linen turban.”

You must be clothed with the garments of righteousness to come properly into My presence.

“The people are to bring him two male goats for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering.

“The ram is for a sin offering for Aaron and his family. Then he is to present the two male goats to Me at the Tabernacle entrance. He is to cast lots to see which goat is to be offered to Me and which one is to be the ‘scapegoat,’ that is, to be sent away. One goat is to be offered to Me as a substitute payment for sin, and the ‘scapegoat’ is to be sent into the desert. It too is to be a substitute payment for sin.

“Aaron is to offer the ram for himself and his family as a substitute payment for sin. Then he is to take a fire pan with coals from the altar of burnt offering, with incense in each hand, and go behind the curtain that separates the holy place from the most holy place. He is to put the incense on the coals so that the smoke will cover the chest and so he won’t die. He is then to sprinkle some of the animal’s blood in front of the lid and then seven times on the lid itself.

“Aaron is then to kill the goat as a sin offering and to sprinkle some of its blood as he did with the ram’s blood. This will remove the sins that make the most holy place and the people unclean. Aaron is to do the same for the entire tabernacle. When Aaron is in the most holy place, no one is to be in the tabernacle.

“Then Aaron is to sprinkle some of the ram’s blood and some of the goat’s blood on the horns of the altar of burnt offering. By sprinkling it seven times, he will cleanse it from Israel’s sin and rededicate it to Me.

“Then Aaron is to take the live goat, place his hands on its head, confess the people’s sins, and send it away into the desert led by someone chosen for that task. By being released, the goat will carry Israel’s sins far away.

“Going back into the tabernacle, Aaron is to remove his priestly garments and leave them there, to bathe and put on his everyday clothes. Then he is to offer the burnt offering for himself and the burnt offering for the people, burning the fat of the sin offering on the altar.

“The man who sent the goat into the desert is to wash his clothes and take a bath before he returns to the camp. The ram and goat given as sin offerings are to be taken outside the camp and burned. The man who burns them is to wash his clothes and take a bath before he returns to the camp.”

The scapegoat tells you I have separated your sins, as far as the east is from the west.

“Every year on the tenth day of the seventh month (October) you are to fast and not work. This includes foreigners living with you. On this day a substitute payment for your sins will be made in My presence. This is to be a day of complete rest just like the Sabbath; something you are to do to every year. In the future generations, the sacrifice will be made by a priest

serving in Aaron's place and wearing the priestly garments. The sacrifice will be for the most holy place, the tabernacle, the altar of burnt offering, the priests, and all Israel. This is to be done every year as a substitute payment for the people's sins." Moses did as I commanded.

You must fast on the Day of Atonement to identify with cleansing for your sins. When the high priest atoned for the sins of all Israel, it did not apply to a faithless Israelite. You demonstrated your faith by fasting.

The Importance of Blood

17I told Moses to tell Aaron, his sons, and all the Israelites these commands: "If anyone offers a cow, lamb, or goat anywhere except at the tabernacle entrance, he will be as guilty as if he shed someone's blood and he will no longer be part of the nation. The offerings are not to be made in open fields; they are to be brought to Me at the tabernacle entrance and sacrificed as fellowship offerings."

Just as it was important for an Israelite to bring a sacrifice to Me in the tabernacle, so it's imperative for you to meet with other believers in a local church every Sunday.

"The priest is to sprinkle blood on the altar of burnt offering and to burn the fat, and I will be pleased with the offering. Never offer any sacrifices to demons in the fields."

The blood was applied to your sin when you accepted Christ as Savior. "The blood of Jesus Christ My Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).

"Don't forget: Any Israelite or foreign resident who offers a sacrifice anywhere except at the tabernacle entrance will no longer be part of the

nation.

“Also I will be against any Israelite or foreigner who eat or drinks blood from a sacrifice, and he will no longer be part of the nation. Life of any animal is in the blood, and I have provided you the blood as a substitute payment for sins. That is why you are not to eat or drink an animal’s blood. If you kill an animal or bird while hunting, drain out the blood and cover the blood. The life of every living creature is in the blood, and that is why you are never to eat or drink it. So anyone who does will no longer be part of the nation. If you eat an animal that died naturally or was killed by a wild animal, you are to wash your clothes and take a bath, and you will be unclean all day. But if you don’t wash your clothes and bathe, you will suffer the consequences.”

I knew all about germs and infections long before scientific discovery told you disease is transferred by blood and resides in fat. So do not drink the blood or eat the fat. I didn’t want any type of potential health threat to be ingested by My people.

Laws About Sexual Practices

18I told Moses to tell the Israelites these words: “I am the LORD your God, so don’t live like the people of Egypt where you used to live or like the people of Canaan where I am taking you. You must obey Me because I am the LORD your God and by obeying My laws you will live.

“Don’t have sex with a close relative, including your mother, any of your father’s wives, your sister or stepsister, your granddaughter, half-sister, aunt (whether sister of your father or sister of your mother, or wife of your father’s brother), daughter-in-law, or sister-in-law.

“Don’t have sex with both a woman and her daughter; this is a terrible sin. Don’t marry two sisters; they will be in conflict all the time. If your wife dies, then it is okay to marry her sister. Don’t have sex with a woman during her monthly period. Don’t have sex with another man’s wife; that would make you ceremonially unclean. Don’t sacrifice your children by burning them on an altar to the false god Molech, because I am your true God, the LORD. Don’t practice homosexuality; it is a deplorable sin.

“Don’t have sex with an animal.

“People in other nations do these disgusting things, but I am going to force them out of the land. The entire country where you are going is so guilty of these sins that I am going to vomit them up.

“You must obey My laws; don’t do any of these awful things. The people in the land where I am taking you have done these things continually and have corrupted the land. If you do these things, I will vomit you out of the land just as I will do with the nations there now.

“Anyone who does any of these things will no longer be a part of my people. Keep My laws, and don’t do any of the disgusting things of these people. Remember that I am the LORD.”

Commit yourself to be sexually pure. Do not violate your sexual purity, nor the sexual purity of another person.

Simply Obey My Laws

19I told Moses to tell the Israelites these things: “Be holy, because I, your God the LORD, am holy. Respect your parents, and always observe my Sabbath of rest. Don’t trust in idols or make idols of metal; I am the LORD your God. When you offer a fellowship offering, follow My instructions so it will be accepted. Eat it on the day you offer it or the next day, but burn any of it left over on the third day. If you eat any of it on the third day, I will not accept the sacrifice, and you will be guilty of disregarding My holiness, and you will no longer be a part of the Israelite people.

“At harvest time leave some grain by the edges of the fields, and don’t pick up what falls on the ground. Also, leave some grapes on your vines, and don’t pick up grapes that fall to the ground. Leave them for the poor and foreigners living with you, remembering that I am the LORD your God.

“Don’t steal, lie, or cheat others. Don’t misuse My name in making false promises, remembering that I am the LORD your God. Don’t rob or cheat anyone, and pay your hired workers at the end of the day, don’t wait overnight to pay them. Show your respect for Me by never cursing a deaf

person or tripping a blind person, remembering that I am the LORD. Judge fairly, whether the person is poor or rich. Don't gossip, or do anything that will harm someone's life, remembering that I am the LORD.

“Don't hate anyone. Yet if someone does something wrong, let him know it; otherwise, you will be guilty. Don't be angry or hold grudges. Love your neighbor as much as you love yourself, remembering that I am the LORD.”

I gave you certain instructions on how to treat others. Always treat others as you want them to treat you. Follow the rule of love, by loving others as you love yourself.

“Obey My commands, including never breeding your animals with other kinds of animals, never planting two kinds of seeds in the same field, and never wearing clothes made from two kinds of material. If a man sleeps with a slave girl who is engaged to be married, he must pay a fine, but they are not to be put to death because she is still a slave. The man is to bring a ram as a guilt offering at the Tabernacle entrance. The ram will be a substitute payment for his sin, and so his sin will be forgiven.

“When you arrive in the land of Canaan, and you plant fruit trees, don't eat the fruit for the first three years. Then the fourth-year crop is to be offered in praise to Me, and the fifth-year crop will be yours, as you remember that I am the LORD your God.

“Don't eat the blood of any animal, and don't be involved in witchcraft. Don't trim your hair on your temples and trim the edges of your beard. As you mourn for the dead, don't cut yourself and don't put tattoo marks on your skin. Remember that I am the LORD. Don't let your daughters be prostitutes because that will lead others to do the same, and it is a terribly wicked thing.

“Keep the Sabbath and respect the tabernacle because I am the LORD. Don't go to mediums or psychics; you will be badly influenced by them. Show respect for older people just as you do for Me, remembering that I am the LORD. Don't mistreat foreigners in your land; treat them as one of your own and love them just as you love yourself, remembering that I am the LORD your God.

“Use honest scales when measuring anything of length, weight, or volume. Also, containers for measuring dry items or liquids must be accurate. Remember that I am the LORD your God who brought you out of Egypt. Obey all my laws and instructions, remembering that I am the LORD.”

I have rules and expectations for life. Always follow My principles; be a testimony to others and show them that Christ lives in you.

Punishment for Disobeying My Laws

20I told Moses to tell the Israelites these things: “If anyone of you or a foreigner with you has any of his children burned to death on an altar to the false god Molech, he must be put to death by stoning. Giving his children to Molech means he has corrupted My tabernacle and dishonored Me, so he is no longer to be a part of the Israelites. If you ignore this and don’t stone him to death, I will separate him from My people and any others who worship Molech.

“If anyone goes to mediums or psychics, I will separate him from being a part of My people. So dedicate yourselves and be holy because I am the LORD your God. You are to obey my laws because I am the LORD who makes you holy.

“Anyone who curses his parent is to be put to death because he stands guilty before God.

“If a man has sex with another man’s wife, both the man and the woman are to be put to death. If a man has sex with his father’s wife, both the man and the woman are to be put to death. If a man has sex with his daughter-in-law, both of them are to be put to death. What they have done is terrible, and so they are guilty before God. If two men have sex together, they are to be put to death because what they have done is repulsive. If a man has sex with a woman and her mother, all three are to be burned to death for this terrible sin. If a man has sex with an animal, he and the animal are to be put to death.

“If a woman has sex with a male animal, she and the animal are to be put to death for this terrible sin.

“If a man has sex with his sisters, this is a disgrace. So both of them are to be separated from My people, and he will be responsible. If a man has sex with a woman during her monthly period, both of them will no longer be a part of the Israelites. If a man has sex with a sister of his father or mother, he will be punished. If a man has sex with his uncle’s wife, neither of them will have children. If a man marries his sister-in-law, neither of them will have children.

“Obey My laws so that the land where you are going will not vomit you out.”

My laws are exact, and when you break them, My punishment is sure. But the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses you from all sin and delivers you from future judgment.

“Don’t follow the customs of the people in the land where you are going. I have promised that that land is rich with milk from cows and honey from bees. Remember that I am the LORD your God, and that I have made you distinct from all other nations.

“Be sure to distinguish between ceremonially clean and unclean animals, birds, or creeping creatures, and don’t eat any of them I have said are unclean. Be holy because I am holy. I have set you apart from other nations to be My people. Mediums or psychics must be put to death by stoning because they are guilty before Me.”

Rules for the Priests

21 I, the LORD, told Moses to give the priests these instructions: “Don’t touch a dead person, because it will make you ceremonially unclean. However, exceptions are your close relatives, such as your mother, father, son, daughter, brother, or an unmarried sister who is dependent on you because she has no husband. Because you are a leader, you are to avoid becoming ceremonially unclean.

“Don’t shave part of your heads or beards or cut your bodies as non-Israelites do. Be holy, and don’t dishonor My name because you are the ones who present offerings to Me. Don’t marry someone who has been a prostitute and don’t marry a divorced woman, because you are holy to Me. You are set apart to offer sacrifices to Me, so you are to be holy because I the LORD am holy.

“If you have a daughter who becomes a prostitute, she is to be put to death by burning. If you are the high priest, anointed with the anointing oil and wearing the priestly garments, you are not to let your hair be unkempt and you are not to tear your clothes in mourning for the dead. Don’t go near a dead body, even if it is that of your father or mother. Don’t desecrate the tabernacle by leaving it to attend a funeral.

“You as high priest must marry a virgin who is of the tribe of Levi. You must not marry a divorcee or a former prostitute. This will keep you from giving your descendants a bad reputation. Remember that I am the LORD, who has set you apart to Me.”

I told Moses to give these words to Aaron: “No descendant of yours can ever serve as My priest if he has any physical defect, or if he is blind or lame, disfigured in some way, is crippled, is a hunchback or a dwarf, has a disease of the eye, or has running sores or damaged testicles. No descendant of Aaron can offer sacrifices to Me if he has any of these defects. He may eat from the sacrifices, but because of his defects he may not go into the most holy place or go near the altar of burnt offering. He must remember that I am the LORD who makes priests holy.”

Moses relayed these instructions to Aaron, his sons, and the Israelites.

The rules for priests were more strict than the rules for average Israelites. I want My servants to be holy so they can wholly serve and glorify Me.

Be Holy

22I told Moses to tell Aaron and his sons these words: “Show respect for the offerings the people bring to Me because I am the LORD. If any of

your descendants is ceremonially unclean when approaching an offering, he can no longer serve as My priest. No priest is to eat some meat from a sacrificed animal if he has a skin disease or bodily discharge, or touches a corpse, or had an emission of semen, or touches an unclean crawling creature, or touches a ceremonially unclean person. If he does, he will be unclean all day, and so he is to bathe before eating of the offerings. At sunset, he may eat some of the food. He is not to eat the meat of an animal that died naturally or was killed by a wild animal because this would make him ceremonially unclean. Remember that I am the LORD. Tell the priests to follow these instructions so they won't die. Remember that I am the LORD, the one who makes them holy.

“No one may eat of the sacrifices if he is not a member of the priest's family or if he is a servant. However, slaves a priest has purchased or who have children may eat some of the sacrificed meat. If a priest's daughter marries someone, not of the tribe of Levi, she may not eat of the food. But if she is widowed or divorced and has no children and lives with her father, she may eat of the food.

“If someone eats some of the sacrificed meat without realizing it, he is to pay the priest for the food plus a 20 percent fine. The priest must not make the offering unholy by allowing anyone of a non-priestly line to eat of the sacrifices. If he does, he will be guilty before Me. Remember that I am the LORD, who makes the sacrifices holy.”

I instructed Moses to tell Aaron, his sons, the Israelites, and foreign residents these words: “Any burnt offering brought to fulfill a promise or to be a freewill offering must be a male animal with no defects from the cows, sheep, or goats. Any animal with a physical defect won't be accepted.

“When someone brings a fellowship offering to fulfill a promise or to be a freewill offering, the animal must have no physical defects. Any animal that is blind, injured, or has a growth or open sore must never be offered to the Lord. If an ox or a sheep is deformed, it may be offered as a freewill offering but not to fulfill a promise. And never offer to Me an animal with bruised testicles. Also, don't accept from foreign residents any animals with defects because I will not accept them.”

I then told Moses, “When an ox, sheep, or goat is born, leave it with its mother for a week. Only after the eighth day will I accept it as an offering. Don't kill a newborn animal and its mother on the same day. When you

bring an offering of thanks, be sure to do it in the right way. Eat the meat of the sacrificed animal on the day it is offered without keeping any until the next day. Remember I am the LORD your God.

“Be sure to obey My laws because I am the LORD. Don’t treat Me with disrespect, and don’t disgrace My name. Remember that I am the LORD, the one who set you apart and brought you out of Egypt to be My very own people and so that I may be your God.”

The priest had strict rules for the animals they brought as a sacrifice to Me. This was a prediction of Christ who was a perfect fulfillment of these types; Christ was the Lamb of God who took away the sins of the world.

The Festivals

23I, the LORD, told Moses to tell the Israelites, “Each year you are to celebrate several festivals in which you are to worship Me. You are to work six days each week and then rest on the seventh day and assemble for worship.”

The fourth festival, the Festival of Trumpets, represents the coming rapture of Christ. The last two festivals in the calendar refer to Israel and are yet to be fulfilled.

“The festivals you are to observe each year include the Passover, which is to start on the evening of March 14 at sundown. Next is the Festival of Bread without Yeast, from March 15 to 22, when you are to eat bread cooked without yeast. Assemble for worship on the first day of this festival and do not work on that day. For the next seven days offer sacrifices and on the seventh day assemble again and don’t work.”

The Passover predicted Jesus’ death for your sins, and the sins of the whole world.

I, the LORD, then told Moses to say to the people, “When you are in the land I will give you, and you have your first harvest, take to the priest the first bundle of wheat. He is to wave it to Me on the day after the Sabbath, and that same day you are to sacrifice a year-old lamb with no defects. Also, offer a grain offering of four pounds of flour mixed with olive oil; when it is burned, I will be pleased with it. Also, include a drink offering of a quart of wine. Don’t eat any bread or grain until you bring this offering to Me. This permanent law is not to be changed.”

The Lord Jesus was raised on the Sunday after Passover. His resurrection is the first fruits of all those who will be resurrected after Him.

“The day after you wave the first bundle of wheat to Me, count off 50 days and then bring to Me two loaves of bread as a wave offering. The bread is to be made with yeast and four pounds of flour. Also include seven-year-old male lambs with no physical defects, and a bull and two rams. These will be a burnt offering to Me, and I will be pleased with the sacrifice. Also, offer a male goat as a sin offering and two-year-old lambs as a fellowship offering.

“The priest is to wave to Me the two lambs and the bread. These are holy to Me and are food for the priests. That same day assemble the people who are to do no work then. This law too is to be carried out from generation to generation.

“At harvest time leave some crops by the edges of the fields and don’t pick up what falls on the ground. Leave them for the poor and foreigners living with you, remembering that I am the LORD your God.”

Fifty days later Pentecost was fulfilled when the Holy Spirit came on the Day of Pentecost to fill every believer.

I then told Moses to tell the Israelites, “The first day of September is to be a day of rest. Call the people together to the Festival of Trumpets by blowing trumpets. Do no work on that day, but bring offerings to the altar.”

The Festival of Trumpets predicts the return of Christ when He returns with the sound of a trumpet.

I, the LORD, told Moses, “The tenth of this seventh month is the Day of Atonement. Assemble the people, have them fast, and make an offering on the altar to Me. Don’t do any work that day, and if someone does not fast, he is no longer to be a part of the Israelites. And the same is true if someone does some work on that day. This law is to be followed by every generation. Again you are to rest and fast from the ninth day of the month until the following evening.”

I told Moses to tell the Israelites, “The Festival of Shelters is to be from the 15th day of October to the 22nd. On the first day, everyone is to assemble and do no work. Then, offerings are to be made each day for a week. On the eighth day, the people are to assemble for worship and offer a sacrifice to God.

“At these annual festivals, the people are to bring burnt offerings, grain offerings, and drink offerings. These are in addition to the Sabbaths, and when you bring gifts or make a sacrifice to keep a promise to Me, the LORD, or to give a freewill offering.

“Beginning on October 15 celebrate the Festival of Shelters for seven days, with the first and the last days of the Festival being days of rest. For each of the seven days pick choice fruit from fruit trees, along with palm-tree branches, and leafy branches, and be joyful before Me. Celebrate this festival every year for a week in October for generations to come. For the week every Israelite is to live in a shelter. This is to remind you and your descendants that when I rescued you from Egypt, I had you live in shelters. Remember that I am the LORD, your God.”

Then Moses told the people about these six festivals.

The Festival of Shelters looks back to My deliverance of Israel from the land of Egypt. It also looks forward to the coming millennium when Israel will live in the Promised Land and enjoy My special presence in peace.

Care of the Lamps

24I, the LORD, told Moses to tell the people to bring clear olive oil for the lampstand to keep it burning all the time. “Aaron is to take care of the lampstand in the holy place so that it burns continually from evening till morning. Also, he is to tend each of the seven lamps on the lampstand.”

Let your light shine in a dark world for Me as a constant testimony so others will see Christ in you.

“Aaron is to bake 12 bread loaves, using four quarts of flour for each loaf. They are to be placed on the gold table before Me in two rows of six loaves each.

“Put some incense by each row as an offering to Me. Every Sabbath put out fresh bread loaves as an agreement between Israel and Me. Aaron and his sons are to eat the bread in a holy place; it is part of their share of the offerings given to Me.”

Fellowship constantly with Me, through Jesus the Bread of Life. He is your strength.

One day a man whose mother was an Israelite and whose father was an Egyptian got into a fight with an Israelite. In the fight the son of the Israelite woman cursed Me, and so they brought him to Moses. (His mother’s name was Shelomith, daughter of Dibri of the tribe of Dan.) He was held in jail till My will was known on what they should do. Then I said to Moses, “Take him outside the camp and have everyone who heard him curse Me put their hands on his head. Then everyone must stone him. Tell the people that anyone who curses Me will be punished. He is to die by stoning, whether he is an Israelite or a foreign resident.”

Guard your speech, so you don’t blaspheme Me. Be a good testimony with your speech so others will glorify Me.

“Murderers are to be put to death. Anyone who kills someone’s animal must replace it. And if you injure someone, you must be injured in the same way: a broken bone for a broken bone, an eye for an eye, or a tooth for a tooth. If you kill someone’s animal, you must replace it, but if you murder someone, you must die. This law applies to foreign residents as well as Israelites because I am the LORD your God.” Moses took the man who cursed the Lord outside the camp, and the people stoned him just as I had said to do.

The Year of Solemn Rest

25When Moses was on Mount Sinai, I gave him these instructions for the Israelites: “After you enter the land I’ll give you, you must let the land rest every seventh year. You may plant your fields, prune your vineyards, and harvest your crops for six years. But let the land have a rest every seventh year as a Sabbath in honor of Me. Don’t plant crops or trim your vineyards that year. And don’t harvest anything that grows from your crops, for the land is to have a year of rest. But if something grows of itself, it may be eaten by yourselves, your servants, hired workers, and foreign residents as well as your livestock and any wild animals in the land.

“Every fiftieth year, blow the trumpets loud throughout the land on October 10, the Day of Atonement. Dedicate that year to Me as a year of liberty for everyone. Everyone is to go receive back his original property, as well as his clan. Don’t plant or harvest crops or gather crops, because this is a holy year. Eat only what grows on its own. That year everyone is to return home to his original property.

“If you sell or buy land in the preceding 49 years, don’t cheat each other. Determine the price based on the number of potential crops from that time to the Year of Jubilee. If the Jubilee is many years away, the price to be higher; or if the Jubilee is only a few years away, the price is to be lower. What you are really buying is the number of crops. Don’t cheat. Respect Me because I am the LORD your God.

“To live safely in the land, obey My laws. If you do, you will have abundant crops and plenty to eat. You might wonder how you will have food to eat in the seventh year since you won’t be planting or harvesting that year. Don’t worry; I will give you such a bumper crop in the sixth year

that it will last for three years—year six, seven, and eight. In the eighth year, you will eat from the sixth-year harvest, until the ninth-year crops are harvested.

“Because the land is Mine and you are My tenants, don’t sell any land permanently. When you sell a property, you must stipulate that it can be redeemed at any time. If someone becomes so poor that he must sell some of his property, his nearest relative must buy back what the poor man sold. But if there is no one to buy it and later the man has enough money, then he can buy it back at a price determined by the number of years left till the Year of Jubilee, and the owners must return the land to him. But if he doesn’t have the money to buy it back, it will be returned to him in the Year of Jubilee.

“If someone sells a house in a walled city, he has only a year in which to buy it back. If he doesn’t buy it back in that year, then it is the permanent property of the buyer, and it can’t be returned in the Year of Jubilee. But a house in an un-walled village can be bought back or returned in the Year of Jubilee. Levites have the right to buy back their houses. And any houses they don’t buy back will be theirs in the Year of Jubilee. However, pastureland owned by Levites is never to be sold.

“If anyone of your people becomes so poor he can’t support himself, help him as you would any foreigner living in your land. Don’t charge him interest on a loan, respect Me and let him continue to live where he is. And don’t sell him food for a profit. Remember that I am the LORD your God, who rescued you from Egypt to give you the land of Canaan and be your God.

“If one of your people becomes so poor he sells himself, don’t think of him as a slave. Treat him as a hired worker or a foreign resident, and then he will be released in the Year of Jubilee so he and his children can return to their clan and property. Because the Israelites are My servants whom I brought out of Egypt, they are not to be sold as slaves or treated harshly. Remember to respect Me.

“You may buy slaves from other nations, or from foreigners living in your land. You may pass them on to your children, but don’t treat your slaves cruelly.

“If one of you becomes so poor that he sells himself to a foreign resident, he has the right to be set free by a relative, such as an uncle or a

cousin or other close relative. Or he may redeem himself if he gets enough money. He and his buyer are to determine the price by counting the number of years he would still be a slave till the Year of Jubilee. If many years remain, he must pay a larger amount, but if only a few years are left, the amount would be smaller. He is to be treated like a servant hired on a yearly basis. If he hasn't been freed in any of these ways, he is to be set free in the Year of Jubilee. Remember that I, the LORD your God, brought you out of Egypt to be My servants."

I blessed My people with rest in the Sabbatical year and the Year of Jubilee. Now Sunday is your day of rest, the day you worship and serve Me.

Blessings of Obedience and Curses of Disobedience

26“Don't make or worship idols, images, or shaped stones, for I am the LORD your God. Respect the Sabbaths and honor My tabernacle, for I am the Lord. If you obey My laws and commands, I will send you rain every year, and you will have abundant crops, and your trees will have plenty of fruit. You will be harvesting grapes even after you have harvested other crops, and you will be harvesting grapes until it is time to plant crops again. You will have plenty to eat, and you will be safe in the land. I will give you peace, and you will sleep without fear. I will remove wild animals from the land, and chase down your enemies. You will chase your enemies and kill them with your swords, even if there are only five of you against a hundred of them, or a hundred of you against ten thousand of them.

“I will favor you and increase your numbers, and I will keep My promises to you. You will have so many crops that you will need to get rid of leftovers to make room for the new harvest. I will live among you in My tabernacle, and I won't reject you. I will walk with you and be your God, and you will be My people. Remember, I am the LORD your God who rescued you from being slaves in Egypt. I broke the chain of your slavery so that you can now hold your heads high in confidence.

“If you will not listen to Me and obey Me, and if you reject My laws and break my covenant here is what I will do: you will experience panic, terrible disease, and fever that will affect your eyesight, and your life will slowly ebb away. Your enemies will eat the crops you plant. I will be against you, and your enemies will defeat you and rule over you, and you will be so afraid that you will run even when no one is chasing you.

“If you won’t obey Me, I will punish you seven times over for your sins. I will destroy your pride, make the sky like iron in holding back rain, and the ground will be hard and dry like bronze. You will waste your time in your fields because you will have no crops or fruit.

“If even then you won’t obey Me and listen to Me, I will punish you seven times more than your sins. Wild animals will kill your children and your cattle, and there will be so few of you that your roads will be deserted. And if you still are against Me, I will be against you, and as I said, I will punish you seven times more than your sins deserve. If you break my agreement, enemies will come against you. When you escape to your cities, you will have terrible diseases, and your enemies will defeat you. You will have so little bread that women will be able to bake in one oven enough bread for ten families. With your small amount of bread, you will still be hungry.

“If you are still against Me, then I will be very angry with you, and I will punish you seven times more than your sins deserve. You will be so terribly hungry that you will even eat your own children. I will destroy your pagan shrines and incense altars, and pile your dead bodies on top of your idols, and I will despise you. I will wipe out your towns and destroy your places of worship, and the aroma of your offerings will no longer be pleasing to Me. Your land will be so devastated that your enemies will be shocked. I will scatter you among the nations, chasing you with My sword. Your land will be deserted, and the cities in ruins. Then while you are in captivity, the land will enjoy its missed Sabbath years. By lying in ruins, the land will rest, making up for your failure to give it rest every seventh year.

“When you are captives, you will be living in such fear that even the rustling of a leaf will frighten you, and you will run as if someone with a sword is chasing you, and you will fall even though no one is after you. Even though no one is chasing you, you will stumble over each other. Many

of you will die in other lands and be destroyed by your enemies, and others of you will waste away because of your sins and the sins of your ancestors.

“However, if you will confess your sins and the sins of your ancestors in betraying Me and you humble yourselves, I will remember My promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I will remember the land. The land will enjoy its Sabbaths as it lies deserted when you are in captivity being punished for rejecting My laws and despising My rules.

“But I will not completely reject My people or destroy them completely. I am the LORD your God. I will keep the promises I made with your ancestors when I rescued them from Egypt as the nations looked on. I am the LORD.”

These are the laws and regulations the Lord gave Moses when he was on Mount Sinai.

Learn from the disobedience of Israel and keep My commands of instruction; I will forgive your sins and the sins of My people.

Laws About Gifts Offered to Me

27I told Moses to tell the Israelites, “If someone wants to dedicate a person to Me, based on a vow he made, he may do so by paying these amounts: 50 shekels of silver for men between the ages of 20 and 60, or 30 shekels of silver for females, 20 shekels of silver for males between 5 and 20, 5 shekels for males between one month and 5 years and 3 shekels for females between one month and 5 years, or 15 shekels for males 60 years of age or older, and 10 shekels for females 60 or over. If anyone is too poor to pay the amount, he is to present the person to the priest who will set the fee.

“If someone vows an animal as an offering to Me, that animal is holy. If he tries to substitute a good animal for a bad one, or a bad one for a good one, they will both be holy and will belong to me. If the animal is ceremonially unclean, he must take it to the priest who will determine its value. If the man wants to buy it back, rather than have it sacrificed, he must pay the price plus an additional 20 percent.

“If someone donates his house to Me, the priest is to set the price. But if the man decides to buy it back, he must pay the price plus an additional 20 percent. If someone dedicates some of his land to Me, its value is to be determined by the bushels of barley seed needed to plant in the land. Fifty pieces of silver are the price for every six bushels. If he dedicates the land in the Year of Jubilee, the value stays as determined, but if he dedicates it later, the priest is to determine the value based on the number of years till the next Year of Jubilee. If the man decides to buy it back, he is to pay the price set by the priest plus an additional 20 percent. If he sells it, he can’t buy it back. When the field is released in the Year of Jubilee, it will be holy and will become the property of the priests.

“If a man dedicates to me a field he has bought, the priest is to determine its value based on the number of years till the Year of Jubilee, and the man is to pay the priest that amount. Then in the Year of Jubilee, the field will return to its original owner from whom it was purchased. Every price is to be set by the standard tabernacle shekel.

“No firstborn of an ox or sheep can be dedicated to Me because they are already Mine. If someone promises an unclean animal to Me, he may buy it back for the price set by the priest plus an additional 20 percent of its value. If he doesn’t buy it back, the priest may sell it to someone else at the price he sets.

“Anything you dedicate to Me—whether a person, an animal, or land—can be sold or bought back for they are holy to Me. Also no one who is sentenced to die can be bought back; he must be put to death. A tenth of your grain and fruit is holy and is to be given to Me. If someone buys back some of this grain or fruit, he must add 20 percent to its value. One of every ten animals is to be holy to Me. If a person picks out a bad animal to give Me and substitutes one animal for another, both animals will belong to Me and cannot be bought back.”

These are some of the many instructions the LORD gave to Moses on Mount Sinai.

I AM GOD

A Guide through the Desert

The Book of Numbers

“And My anger was kindled against Israel, and I made them wander in the wilderness forty years until all the generation that had done evil in My sight was consumed.”

The book of Numbers gets its name from the two censuses (chapters 1 and 26) at the beginning and end of Israel’s wilderness wanderings. My people were counted to determine how many there were. I promised to lead them to a land flowing with “milk and honey,” but Israel rejected Me and refused to enter the Promised Land. Therefore I allowed all people age 20 and older to wander in the wilderness until they died there.

But even in Israel’s failure, My faithfulness is seen in the ways I continually provided for them. You see a picture of their sinfulness in Numbers as they attempt to walk for Me and serve Me, but even then I was faithful to punish and bring them back to Myself.

The Israelites Are Counted

1 On the first day of the 13th month after the Israelites left Egypt, I the LORD spoke to Moses in the tabernacle when they were in the Sinai Desert. I said, “Find out how many people are in each of Israel’s clans and families. List the numbers of every man 20 years of age or older who are able to serve in the army. Get a man from each tribe to help you, including these: Elizur, son of Shedeur from the tribe of Reuben, Shelumiel, son of Zurishaddai from Simeon, Nahshon, son of Amminadab from Judah, Nethanel, son of Zuar from Issachar, Eliab, son of Helon from Zebulun, Elishama, son of Ammihud from Ephraim, Gamaliel, son of Pedahzur from Manasseh, Abidan, son of Gideon from Benjamin, Ahiezer, son of Ammishaddai from Dan, Pagiel, son of Ocran from Asher, Eliasaph, son of Devel from Gad, and Ahira, son of Enan from Naphtali.” These tribal leaders were chosen by the people.

Moses and Aaron with these 12 leaders called the Israelites together that same day and counted the people by their clans and families as I, the LORD, commanded in the Sinai Desert. The number of men 20 years of age and older from each tribe was as follows: 46,500 from the tribe of Reuben, Jacob's oldest, 59,300 from Simeon, 45,650 from Gad, 74,600 from Judah, 54,400 from Issachar, 57,400 from Zebulun, 40,500 from Ephraim, 32,200 from Manasseh, 35,400 from Benjamin, 62,700 from Dan, 41,500 from Asher, and 53,400 from Naphtali. These men were listed by their tribal descent, and were counted by families. The total was 603,550.

Those from the tribe of Levi were not included because I had said, "Don't count the men of the tribe of Levi because they are in charge of taking care of the tabernacle and its equipment. They are to carry it when you move from one location to another, and they are to camp around it. They are to take it down and set it up. If anyone else goes near it, he is to be put to death.

"All other Israelites are to set up their tents by tribes with a flag at each tent. The Levites are to set up their tents all around the tabernacle to keep My wrath from falling on the people. The Levites are to be totally responsible for the tabernacle." The Israelites did everything I told Moses.

The Arrangement of the Tribes

2I said to Moses, "The Israelites are to camp around the tabernacle a little distance from it, and each tent is to fly a flag representing the family. The tribe of Judah is to camp east of the tabernacle; its leader is Nahshon, and their census number is 74,600. The tribe of Issachar is to camp on one side of Judah; its leader is Nethanel, and their census number is 54,400. The tribe of Zebulun is to camp on the other side of Judah; its leader is Eliab, and their census number is 57,400. Those three tribes total 186,400, and when the Israelites move, they are to go first.

"The tribe of Reuben is to camp to the south of the tabernacle; its leader is Elizur, and their census number is 46,500. The tribe of Simeon is to camp on one side of Reuben; its leader is Shelumiel, and their census number is 59,300. The tribe of Gad is to camp on the other side of Reuben; its leader is Eliasaph, and their census number is 46,650. These tribes total 151,450, and when the Israelites move, these three will follow the three tribes on the east of the tabernacle. When the Levites move with the tabernacle, they will go behind Reuben, leaving in the same order as they camped.

“The tribe of Ephraim is to camp west of the tabernacle; its leader is Elishama, and their census number is 40,500. The tribe of Manasseh is to camp on one side of Ephraim; its leader is Gamaliel, and their census number is 32,200. The tribe of Benjamin is to camp on the other side of Ephraim; its leader is Abidan, and their census number is 35,400. These three tribes total 108,100, and when the Israelites move, these three will follow the Levites.

“The tribe of Dan is to camp north of the tabernacle; its leader is Ahiezer, and their census number is 62,700. The tribe of Asher is to camp on one side of Dan; its leader is Pagiel, and their census number is 41,500. The tribe of Naphtali is to camp on the other side of Dan; its leader is Ahira, and their census number is 53,400. These three tribes total 157,600, and when the Israelites move, these three will be last.

“The total of all these men 20 of age and older is 603,550, not including the Levites.” The Israelites did everything I told Moses, encamping around the tabernacle with their flags. And when they moved from one location to another, they followed in the order I told them.

I do all things decently and in order (1 Cor. 14:40). There were approximately 3 million people in the wilderness. Common sense demanded they travel and live in order.

The Sons of Aaron

3 When I spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, Aaron’s sons were Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. They were anointed and set apart to be priests, but Nadab and Abihu died in the Sinai Desert when they used unapproved fire in an offering to Me. Since Nadab and Abihu had no sons, Eleazar and Ithamar served as priests with Aaron.

I said to Moses, “Present the Levites to Aaron as his assistants. They are to serve him and all the Israelites at the tabernacle, taking care of all the equipment and doing the work involved in the tabernacle. The Levites are to help Aaron and his sons in every way. Aaron and his sons are the priests, and anyone else who tries to assume their work will be put to death.”

I, the LORD, said to Moses, “I have chosen the Levites to be Mine in place of every firstborn son. When I killed all the firstborn of the Egyptians, I set

apart for Me the firstborn son in each of your families. But now the Levites will be Mine in their place.”

Then I, the LORD, said to Moses in the Sinai Desert, “Count by clans and families every male Levite a month old and older.” So Moses did as I, the LORD, said. The sons of Levi were Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. Gershon’s sons were Libni and Shimei, Kohath’s sons were Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel, and Merari’s sons were Mahli and Mushi. These sons and grandsons of Levi were heads of Levite clans.

The Gershon clans were the Libnites and Shimeites, and the men and boys of at least a month old totaled 7,500. They were to camp west of the tabernacle. Their leader was Eliasaph, son of Lael. They took care of the tabernacle, its coverings, all its curtains in and around the tabernacle, ropes, and all the related equipment.

The Kohath clans were the Amramites, Izharites, Hebronites, and Uzzielites, and the men and boys at least a month old totaled 8,600. They were to camp south of the tabernacle. Their leader was Elizaphan. They were to take care of the sacred chest, the table with the bread, the lampstand, the incense altar, the altar of burnt offering, various utensils, the curtain between the holy place and the most holy place, and other related items. Eleazar, Aaron’s son, was chief of all the Levites and was responsible for the care of the tabernacle.

The Merari clans were the Mahlites and Mushites, and the men and boys at least a month old totaled 6,200. Their leader was Zuriel. They were to camp north of the tabernacle. They were to take care of the tabernacle frames, crossbeams, posts, sockets, and related equipment, and the posts, sockets, pegs, and ropes.

Moses, Aaron, and his sons were to camp east in front of the tabernacle, with overall responsibility for the tabernacle. Anyone else who tried to get close to the tabernacle was to be put to death. The Levite males at least one-month-old totaled 22,000.

I, the LORD, said to Moses, “Count and list the names of every Israelite male at least a month old. The Levites are to be set apart for Me in place of them, and the firstborn of the Levites’ livestock are to be for Me in place of the Israelites’ firstborn livestock.” Moses followed My command and counted all the Israelite firstborn sons at least a month old, and the total was 22,273.

I, the LORD, said to Moses, “The Levites are to be in place of all the firstborn in Israel, and the Levites’ livestock in place of all the Israelites’ firstborn livestock. But there are 273 more firstborn Israelites than Levites, so

they must be bought back from Me. Collect five pieces of silver for each one, and give the money to Aaron and his sons.” Moses did this, collecting 1,365 pieces of silver, and he gave the money to Aaron and his sons, as I had said to do.

Just as the tabernacle was in the center of the camp, and My presence was in the tabernacle; so I want My presence in the center of your life so others may see Me living in you.

The Duties of Kohath’s Sons

4I, the LORD, then said to Moses and Aaron, “Find out how many men in the Kohathite clans are between 30 and 50 years old who are able to work in the tabernacle. They are to take care of all the holy objects in the tabernacle. And when the Israelites move camp, Aaron and his sons are to go into the tabernacle, take down the curtain between the holy place and the most holy place, and cover the sacred chest with it. Then they are to cover it with leather, and then a cloth of solid blue. Then they are to put the carrying poles in the rings on the chest.

“Aaron and his sons are to spread another blue cloth over the table for the bread, and on the cloth, they are to place the dishes, spoons, bowls, cups, and the bread itself. Over this, they are to spread a red cloth, a piece of leather and put the carrying poles in the rings in the table.

“They are to cover the lampstand with its lamps with another blue cloth, along with the lamp snuffers, fire pans, and jars of oil. Then they are to cover all these items with a piece of leather and put it on a frame for carrying it. They are to cover the gold altar of incense with another blue cloth and a piece of leather, and put its carrying poles in the rings on the altar.

“Then they are to wrap in a blue cloth all the other utensils used in the tabernacle, and cover them with a piece of leather and place them on a carrying frame. After removing the ashes from the Altar of Burnt Offering, they are to cover it with a purple cloth. Then they are to place on the purple cloth all the utensils used at the altar, including the fire pans, meat forks, shovels, and bowls. They are to cover all of these with a piece of leather and put the carrying poles in the rings on the altar.

“When Aaron and his sons have covered all the tabernacle items, and the camp is ready to move, the Kohathites will carry all the items. But they must not touch any of the items, or they will die.

“Eleazar, Aaron’s son, is responsible for the oil, incense, the daily grain offering, and anointing oil. He is in charge of seeing that everything is properly cared for.”

I, the LORD, told Moses and Aaron, “To be sure the Kohathites don’t die when they go near the holy objects. Have Aaron and his sons go into the tabernacle with them and tell each one what to carry. If they look at these objects before they are covered, they will die.”

Then I told Moses, “Find out how many men in the Gershonite clans are between 30 and 50 years old who are able to work in the tabernacle. They are to carry the tabernacle curtains and coverings, the courtyard curtains, the curtains at the tabernacle entrance, and other related equipment. They are to do whatever needs to be done with these items. Aaron and his sons are to supervise the Gershonites, assigning specific duties to each one. These are the Gershonite’s tabernacle duties, all under the direction of Aaron’s son, Ithamar.

“Find out how many men in the Merarite clans are between 30 and 50 years old who are able to work in the tabernacle. They are to carry the tabernacle frames, crossbars, posts, and sockets, and the courtyard bases, pegs, ropes, and all related equipment. Tell each man what he is to carry. These are the Merarites’ duties, all under the direction of Aaron’s son, Ithamar.”

Moses, Aaron, and the leaders did as I, the LORD said, and counted all the men between 30 and 50 years old who could work in the tabernacle. The Kohathites totaled 2,750, the Gershonites totaled 2,630, and the Merarites totaled 3,200. The total of all these Levite men between the ages of 30 and 50 was 8,580. Each one was given a specific responsibility, and the numbering followed My command.

I had a reason to command a man to begin serving in the tabernacle when he was 30 years old just as I waited for Jesus to be 30 years old before He began His life ministry. I want people to serve Me in wisdom. You want them to learn from childhood and adolescence the important lessons that come from experience. I have said novices should not be used in the Lord’s work (1 Tim. 3:6), lest they be lifted up with pride. I want a minister who knows what to do because he has grown in spiritual maturity.

Keep the Camp Pure

5I, the LORD, told Moses to tell the Israelites, “Remove from the camp anyone who has leprosy or a discharge, or who has touched a dead body. This applies to both men and women. Because I live among you, it is important for you to keep the camp clean.” The Israelites did this just as I commanded.

Then I told Moses to tell the Israelites, “When someone sins against another person and thus has been unfaithful to Me, he is guilty, and must confess his sin. He must pay the person for whatever he did wrong plus 20 percent of its value. If the victim has no close relative to whom the payment can be made, the payment belongs to Me and is to be paid to the priest. Also a ram must be offered as a substitute payment for sin. All such gifts brought to the priest are to belong to him. Each priest must keep what is given to him.”

I, the LORD, told Moses to tell the Israelites, “Suppose a man’s wife sleeps with another man, but there are no witnesses, and yet the husband is jealous and suspicious. He is to take his wife to the priest and present an offering of two quarts of barley flour as a grain offering. And he is not to put any oil or incense on the flour. The priest will then have the woman stand in My presence. He will put some dust from the tabernacle floor in some water, and have her loosen her hair and hand her the barley flour offering, and then hold the jar of water. He is to say, ‘If you have been faithful to your husband, this bitter water will not harm you. But if you have sinned by sleeping with another man, you will be unable to have children and people will curse your name.’ Then the woman is to say, ‘Let it be as you have said.’ Then the priest is to write these curses on some leather and wash them into the bitter water. The woman is to drink the water, and the priest is to take the grain offering from her hands, wave it before Me, and burn a handful of it on the altar of burnt offering. If she is guilty of adultery, then when she drinks the water she will suffer pain, be unable to have children, and people will curse her. But if she has not been unfaithful, she will be clean and able to have children.

“This is what you are to do if a woman commits adultery or if her husband suspects that she has been unfaithful to him. The priest is to have her stand in My presence and follow these instructions. Her husband will not be punished, but if she is guilty, she will suffer the consequences.”

I want My followers to separate themselves from all evil and to protect them from physical contamination and inward filthy attitudes and actions.

The Vow of a Nazarite

6I, the LORD, told Moses to say to the Israelites, “If someone wants to dedicate himself to Me by taking the vow of a Nazarite, he must drink no wine or any fermented drink or any kind of vinegar. He must not eat or drink grape juice or eat grapes or raisins, not even the grape seeds or skins.

“During the time he is a Nazarite, he must not cut his hair, because he is set apart to Me. Also while he is a Nazarite he must not go near a dead body, even if it is his own father, mother, brother, or sister. That would make him ceremonially unclean and would defile his hair, which is a symbol of his separation to Me as a Nazarite. So he must remain dedicated to Me.

“If someone suddenly dies near him, his hair is defiled. So seven days later he is to shave his head. The next day he is to take two doves and two pigeons to the priest at the tabernacle entrance, who will offer one as a sin offering and one as a burnt offering as substitute payments for sin, because he is guilty by being near a dead body. Then his hair will grow back, and he will again be dedicated to Me. He must start over as a Nazarite, by making a vow again and bringing a year-old male lamb as a guilt offering.

“When he has completed the time of his being a Nazarite, he is to go to the tabernacle entrance and present to Me a year-old female lamb without defects as a sin offering, and a ram without defect as a fellowship offering. Also, he is to bring a grain offering, a drink offering, and bread baked without yeast, cakes made of fine flour mixed with olive oil, and wafers with oil in them.

“The priest is to present to Me the sin offering, the burnt offering, the ram as a fellowship offering, the bread without yeast, and the grain offering and drink offering. At the tabernacle entrance the Nazarite is to shave off his hair and put it in the fire under the fellowship offering. The priest is to put the boiled shoulder of the ram and a cake and a wafer into the Nazarite’s hands, and then he will give them back to the priest who is to wave them before Me. They and the ram’s breast and thigh belong to the priest. Then since he is no longer a Nazarite, the man may again drink wine. These are the regulations for the Nazarites. If they can bring more to Me than what they vowed, they should do so.”

Vowing the Nazarite vow in the Old Testament is similar to vowing a fast today. It means you are making a commitment to Me so I will answer your prayer that you seek. You cannot bargain with Me so that I answer a prayer because you stop eating. That is good works and not expressions of faith. I answer your prayers because of My grace.

I told Moses to tell Aaron to bless the people with these words, “May the LORD bless you and protect you; may His face shine on you; may He be gracious to you; may He favor you and give you peace.” In this way, Aaron and his sons will place My name on the Israelites, and I will bless them.

The Leaders Make an Offering

7The day Moses set up the tabernacle, he dedicated it to Me, with its furnishings, the Altar of Burnt Offering, and utensils. Then the 12 leaders who had counted the people made offerings, including six covered carts and 12 oxen, an ox for every leader and a cart for every two leaders. I told Moses to accept these gifts so the Levites could use them in their tabernacle work.

So Moses gave the carts and oxen to the Levites: two carts and four oxen to the Gershonites, and four carts and eight oxen to the Merarites, all under the direction of Ithamar, Aaron’s son. None were given to the Kohathites because they were to carry sacred objects on their shoulders.

The 12 leaders brought offerings to dedicate the Altar of Burnt Offering to Me. I told Moses to have one leader bring his offerings each day. The first day Nahshon of the tribe of Judah brought these offerings: a silver platter weighing over three pounds; a silver sprinkling bowl weighing about two pounds, both of them filled with flour mixed with olive oil as a grain offering; a gold box filled with incense and weighing about four ounces; a young bull, a ram, and a one-year-old male lamb as a burnt offering; a male goat as a sin offering; and two oxen, five rams, five male goats, and five one-year-old male lambs as a fellowship offering.

The same offerings were brought by each of these leaders on the following days: On the second day Nethanel of the Issachar tribe, on the third day Eliab of the Zebulun tribe, on the fourth day Elizur of the Reuben tribe, on the fifth day Shemumiel of the Simeon tribe, on the sixth day Eliasaph of the Gad tribe, on the seventh day Elishama of the Ephraim tribe, on the eighth day Gamaliel

of the Manasseh tribe, on the ninth day Abidan of the Benjamin tribe, on the tenth day Ahiezer of the Dan tribe, on the eleventh day Pagiel of the Asher tribe, and on the twelfth day Ahira of the Naphtali tribe.

So these offerings for the dedication of the Altar of Burnt Offerings totaled these items: 12 silver platters and 12 silver sprinkling bowls, weighing about 60 pounds; 12 gold boxes filled with incense and weighing about 4 pounds; 12 bulls, 12 rams, and 12 one-year-old male lambs for the burnt offering with the grain offering; 24 bulls, 60 rams, 60 male goats, and 60 one-year-old male lambs for the fellowship offering. All these were for dedicating the Altar of Burnt Offering.

Whenever Moses went into the tabernacle to speak with Me, he heard My voice from between the two winged creatures above the lid on the sacred chest in the most holy place.

Aaron Lights the Lamps

8I, the LORD, said to Moses, “Tell Aaron to put the seven lamps on the lampstand so that the light shines forward. Aaron placed the lamps just as I had said. The lampstand was made of gold from the base to the blossoms at the top, exactly as I had told Moses.

I, the LORD, said to Moses, “Set the Levites apart from the rest of the Israelites. Make them ceremonially clean by sprinkling water on them. Then have them shave their entire bodies and wash their clothes. Have them bring a bull with a grain offering of flour mixed with olive oil, and a second bull for a sin offering. Have all the Levites come to the tabernacle entrance and ask all the Israelites to come. Present the Levites to Me and have the Israelites lay their hands on them. Have Aaron present the Levites to Me as a wave offering from the people to get the Levites ready to serve Me.

“The Levites are to place their hands on the bulls, one for a sin offering and one for a burnt offering, as substitute payments for sin. Have the Levites stand in front of Aaron and his sons who will then dedicate them to Me as a wave offering. This will show that the Levites are separate from other Israelites and belong to Me.

“After you have dedicated the Levites to Me as a wave offering, they will be ready to serve in the tabernacle. They are to be given completely to Me, and they will be Mine in place of the firstborn sons. When I killed the firstborn sons of the Egyptians, I had set apart the firstborn males in Israel as Mine. But now I

have chosen the Levites in place of all the firstborn Israelite sons. I have given the Levites as gifts to Aaron and his sons to work in the tabernacle and to provide substitute payment for sin so no disease will come on them when they approach the tabernacle.”

Moses, Aaron, and the Israelites dedicated the Levites as I had commanded. After the Levites purified themselves and washed their clothes, Aaron presented them to Me as a wave offering and provided a substitute payment for their sins. Then the Levites began working in the tabernacle, supervised by Aaron and his sons, thus doing exactly what I commanded Moses.

I, the LORD, said to Moses, “Levites between the ages of 25 and 50 are to work in the tabernacle, but they are to retire at age 50. When they retire, they can help the Levites in their duties, but not take on any regular tasks. This is how duties are to be assigned to the Levites.”

You live in a world darkened by sin and lawlessness. Let Me light your path so you will know where to walk, and not lose your way.

Observe the Passover Meal

9In their 13th month after leaving Egypt, I told Moses in the Sinai Desert, “Celebrate Passover at sundown on the 14th day of April.” So Moses told the Israelites to celebrate the Passover, and the people did, just as I said.

But because some people had touched a dead body, they were ceremonially unclean. So they said to Moses, “True, we have touched a dead body, but why should that keep us from celebrating the Passover?” Moses responded, “I’ll see what the Lord says about this.” Then I, the LORD, told Moses to tell the people, “If you are unclean because of having touched a dead body or you are away on a journey, you may still celebrate the Passover. But like everyone else, you must celebrate it on April 14, eating the lamb and bread without yeast and bitter herbs. Don’t leave any leftovers till the next morning, and don’t break any of the lamb’s bones. Follow the regulations carefully.

“If you don’t celebrate the Passover when you are on a journey, you will no longer be a part of the Israelites. You will suffer this consequence for failing to present a Passover lamb to Me at the proper time. If a foreigner living among you wants to celebrate the Passover, he must follow its rules and regulation. The regulations for Israelites are the same for foreign residents.”

On the very day the tabernacle was erected, My cloud that looked like a fire covered the tabernacle all night long. Every day My cloud covered the tabernacle, and every night it changed to what looked like fire.

Israel knew I was with them when they saw My cloud. Today, you know I am with you because I promised it in My Word. By faith, trust Me to be with you to protect, guide and cause you to grow in grace.

When My cloud moved above the tabernacle, the Israelites moved on, and wherever My cloud stopped, the Israelites made camp there. This was My way of telling the Israelites when to move out and when to stop and make camp. So long as My cloud stayed over the tabernacle, the people did not move out. Sometimes My cloud was over the tabernacle only a few days, and so the people would then set out. Sometimes My cloud stayed over the tabernacle only overnight, and so when it lifted, whether in the daytime or at night, the people moved out. Other times My cloud didn't move for a couple of days or a month or a year; and so the Israelites stayed encamped. But when it lifted, they set out. The people obeyed Me, following whatever I told Moses.

Your church is a mighty army that I lead. I have set a time for each of you to march, and set a time for each of you to rest. Find your place in this huge parade, do not lag behind, and do not run ahead or bump into those in front. Learn to walk at the pace I teach you, and carry the burdens of others.

Silver Trumpets

10I, the LORD, told Moses, “Make two trumpets of silver to use in calling the Israelites to assemble or in signaling them to move camp. If both trumpets are blown, all the Israelites must gather at the tabernacle entrance. But if only one trumpet is sounded, the 12 tribal leaders are to assemble. When a different trumpet blast is sounded, the tribes to the east of the tabernacle are to set out. When a second blast is sounded, the tribes to the south of the tabernacle are to set out. Trumpet blasts for assembling the people differ from the signals for breaking camp. The trumpet blowers are only the priests, Aaron's descendants. This law is to be the same for generations to come.

“When you are in your land, and you go into battle against your enemy, sound an alarm with the trumpets. I will hear it and will rescue you. Also, blow the trumpets when you celebrate your annual festivals and at the beginning of each month and when you offer burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. These trumpet blasts will remind you that I am with you and I am the LORD your God.”

On the 20th day of the 13th month after the Israelites left Egypt, My cloud over the tabernacle lifted. So the Israelites left the Sinai Desert and followed My cloud till it stopped in the Paran Desert. This was the first time they followed My cloud after I gave My traveling instructions to Moses. The tribe of Judah behind its flag went first, led by Nahshon. Next was the tribe of Issachar, led by Nethanel, and the tribe of Zebulun, led by Eliab.

The tabernacle was taken down, and the Gershonites and Merarites were next and carried the tabernacle. Next was the tribe of Reuben, led by Elizur, followed by the tribe of Simeon, led by Shelumiel, and the tribe of Gad, led by Eliasaph.

Next were the Kohathites, who carried the objects for the tabernacle, which was to be erected by the time they arrived. Following them were the tribe of Ephraim, led by Elishama; the tribe of Manasseh, led by Gamaliel; and the tribe of Benjamin, led by Ahidan. The last three were the tribe of Dan, led by Ahiezer; the tribe of Asher, led by Pagiel; and the tribe of Naphtali, led by Ahira. This was the order in which the tribes marched each time they moved camp.

Moses said to his brother-in-law Hobab, son of Reuel the Midianite, “Finally, we are on our way to the land promised to us by God. Why don’t you join us? We will treat you well, because the Lord has given them wonderful promises.” Hobab replied, “No, thanks. But I should return to my own country and relatives.” Moses pleaded, “Please stay with me. You know this desert, so you can help us know where to camp. And you can share in the blessings the Lord gives us.”

Leaving the Sinai Desert, they traveled for three days, with the sacred chest as the head of the procession, and My cloud over them. As the Levites carried the sacred chest, Moses said, “Rise up, Lord, defeat your enemies and make them run.” Then when the Levites stopped with the chest, Moses prayed, “Return, Lord, and bless Israel’s thousands of people.”

Don't look down in discouragement; look up to see Me leading you by My presence. May My cloud remind you to worship Me and follow Me without complaint.

The People Complained

11 The people started complaining about their hardships, and I, the LORD, heard them. And I became so angry that I destroyed the outskirts of their camp by fire. The people yelled to Moses for help, and when he prayed the fire went out. So they named the place Taberah (meaning “Burning”).

You need a good memory so you won't forget the places and times you disobeyed Me. Remember the consequences you suffered because you disobeyed Me. May your memory keep you from future consequences; may you always obey Me from now on.

One day some Egyptians who had come with the Israelites complained, “We would like some meat. We remember the fish we ate in Egypt, and also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic. But now all we ever see is manna!” The manna was like small white seeds and looked like resin from the bark of a tree. The people gathered it from the ground, crushed it or pounded it into flour, and boiled it to make thin wafers. It tasted like it was cooked in olive oil. The manna fell with the dew each evening.

Moses heard the people weeping at their tents. I got very angry, and Moses was displeased too. Moses asked Me, “Why are you bringing this trouble on me? What have I done to deserve this? They aren't my children? So why should I have to nurse them along? They keep wanting meat, but where could I possibly get any? The load of these people is too heavy for me. If this is how you will trust me, then put me to death and end my misery.”

I, the LORD, said to Moses, “Choose 70 leaders of Israel and have them meet with you at the tabernacle. I will talk with you there and I will empower them with My spirit. They will share your responsibilities so you won't have to carry the burden of these people alone. Tell the people, ‘Purify yourselves because tomorrow you will have meat to eat. I heard your complaint. And so

you will have meat every day for a month, so much so that you will get sick of it, all because you rejected Me and complained that you even left Egypt.”

Moses said, “There are 600,000 men here, so how can you give them meat for a whole month? If we slaughter all our flocks and herds and catch every fish in the sea, that wouldn’t be enough meat.” I, the LORD, answered, “Is My power limited? You will see that My Word will come true.”

Moses told the people what I had said. Then he had the 70 leaders stand with him by the tabernacle. I, the LORD, came in the cloud and spoke to Moses. Then My Spirit took control of them, and they prophesied (but they did it only this one time).

Two of the 70, Eldad and Medad, had not gone to the tabernacle with the others. But My Spirit came upon them, and they prophesied. A young man told Moses what happened. Joshua, Moses’ assistant, urged Moses to stop them. But Moses replied, “Are you concerned that I should be the only one with this ability to prophesy? I could wish that all God’s people were prophets and had God’s Spirit on them.” Then Moses and the 70 leaders went to their tents.

Later I sent a strong wind that blew quails from the Mediterranean Sea and completely covered the Israelite camp, flying three feet high for 15 miles or so in every direction. All day and night the people gathered quail, each person getting about 50 bushels. Then they spread them out to dry. But as the people started eating, I in My anger sent a terrible disease, and many people died. The people called the place Kibroth-Hattaavah (meaning, “Graves for the Greedy” because they buried the people who complained about the manna). Then Israel traveled to Hazeroth.

Many times you doubt My ability to do things, just as Moses didn’t believe I could feed the multitude. Yet I brought quail to feed almost 3 million people. This was exceedingly above and beyond what the people expected. You need faith to trust Me for great answers and take away your unbelieving heart.

Miriam is Punished

12 Miriam and Aaron criticized Moses because he married a woman from Ethiopia. “So does he think the Lord speaks only through him? The Lord can speak to me too.” And I, the Lord, heard them. (Moses was the most

humble man on earth.) So I told Moses, Aaron, and Miriam to go to the tabernacle entrance. Appearing in a cloud, I told them to come close. Telling them to listen carefully, I said, “I speak to prophets in visions and dreams, but not with Moses, My servant. I speak face to face with him and clearly, not in riddles. So you ought not to criticize him.” I, the Lord, was angry with them and I left.

As My cloud lifted, Miriam’s skin suddenly turned white with leprosy. Seeing what happened, Aaron said, “Don’t punish me for our foolishness. Don’t let Miriam’s skin be like that of a stillborn child.” So Moses asked Me, the LORD, to heal her, and I said, “If her father had spit in her face she would have been ceremonially unclean for a week. I’ll have her stay outside the camp for a week.”

A week later, when Miriam returned, the Israelites left Hazeroth and camped in the Paran Desert.

Even Aaron and Miriam, leaders in Israel, fell into the trap of complaining. But I never allow any sin to go unpunished, even when leaders give in to selfish criticism. Keep your heart pure and straightforward. Don’t compare yourself to others. Be filled with the fruit of the Spirit and glorify Me with your words.

The Twelve Spies

13I, the LORD, instructed Moses to explore Canaan by sending in 12 spies, one from each tribe. They went from the Paran Desert where the Israelites were camped. These are their names and tribes: Shammua from the tribe of Reuben, Shaphat from Simeon, Caleb from Judah, Igal from Issachar, Hoshea from Ephraim, Palti from Benjamin, Gaddiel from Zebulun, Gaddi from Manasseh, Ammiel from Dan, Sethur from Asher, Nahhi from Naphtali, and Geuel from Gad. At that time Moses changed Hoshea’s name to Joshua.

As Moses sent them out, he gave them these instructions: “Go south through the Southern Desert and into the hill country to see what the land is like. See if the people are strong and weak and how many live there. See if the land is fertile or not and if the towns are walled or not. See if the soil is good and what kind of trees grow there. Bring back some of the crops including grapes, since they should be ripening now.”

The 12 men left from the Zin Desert in the south and went all the way to Rehob near Lebo-Hamath in the north. Going through the Southern Desert, they came to Hebron. They saw there clans of giant people, the Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmai. When they got to the Eschol Valley, they cut off a branch with such a large cluster of grapes that it took two men to carry it on a pole. They also took some pomegranates and figs. The Israelites called the place Eschol (meaning “Cluster”) because of the cluster of grapes the spies took.

After exploring the land for 40 days, the 12 spies returned to Kadesh in the Paran Desert and reported to Moses, Aaron, and all the Israelites what they saw, and showed them the fruit they brought back with them. They reported, “The land does have lots of milk from many cows and has much honey from bees. But the people there are strong, their cities are well fortified, and we even saw clans of giants. Also, the Amalekites live in the Southern Desert; the Hittites, Jebusites, and Amorites live in the hill country; and the Canaanites live near the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River.”

Then Caleb, the spy from Judah, calmed down the people and said, “Let’s go take the land. We can do it.” But the other men said, “We can’t go against these people. They are stronger than we are.” They spread discouraging words about the land, saying, “The land devours its people, the people are very tall, and we saw giants there. Next to them, we felt as small as grasshoppers.”

Unbelief looks at both obstacles and enemies, and cries out, “It can’t be done!” Faith looks at My promises and cries, “It will be done!”

My People Rebel at Kadesh-Barnea

14 After hearing the majority report of the spies, the Israelites cried all night long. They complained to Moses and Aaron, “We wish we had died in Egypt or here in the desert. Why is the Lord leading us into Canaan only to be killed and our women and children captured? Let’s go back to Egypt. That would be better than here.” They said, “Let’s choose a leader and go back.”

Moses and Aaron fell with their faces down to the ground. Two of the spies, Joshua and Caleb, tore their clothing in grief and told the people, “The land we explored is very good. The Lord will bring us there into that fertile land and give it to us. So don’t rebel against the Lord, and don’t be afraid of the people

there. We can easily conquer them because the Lord is with us. So don't be afraid."

The people even talked about stoning Joshua and Caleb. But I, the LORD, appeared in My cloud, and I said to Moses, "How long will these people reject Me? Will they never believe Me even after all the miracles I have done for them? So I will destroy them with a terrible disease, but I will make you the ancestor of a nation greater than they are."

Moses pleaded, "But, Lord, what if the Egyptians hear about it? You brought these people from Egypt by Your great power. If You destroy them, the Egyptians will tell the people of Canaan about it. And the Canaanites know that You are with us, and talk with us, and that You guide us by Your bright cloud in the daytime and a flaming fire at night. If You kill us, the nations who hear about it will say You weren't strong enough to bring us into the land, and so You killed us all in the desert.

"So, LORD, show us Your power. You don't easily get angry, You are full of love, and You forgive sin. Yet You punish the guilty, even their guilty children and grandchildren. Because of Your love forgive our sins, just as You have forgiven us since we left Egypt."

I, the LORD, replied, "Alright. I will forgive them. But as surely as I live and My glory fills the earth, not one of these Israelites will enter the land of Canaan. They saw My miracles in Egypt and in the desert, but they won't see the Promised Land. But My servant Caleb is different and follows Me wholeheartedly. I will bring him into the land, and his descendants will live there. But since the Israelites are so afraid of the Amalekites and Canaanites, tomorrow My people are to go back in the desert toward the Red Sea."

I, the LORD, said to Moses and Aaron, "How long will these people complain against Me? Tell them this: 'I will do the very things I heard you say. You said you would rather die in the desert, and you will! This includes everyone 20 years of age and older who complained against Me, except Caleb and Joshua. You were concerned that your children would be captured, but they will enter the land you rejected, but you will die in the desert. You will wander in the desert for 40 years, because of your unfaithfulness to Me. You will suffer one year for each of the 40 days the spies explored the land. You will see what it is like for Me to be your enemy. I will do these things because you have all been against Me.'"

I, the LORD, sent a terrible disease on the men who spread a bad report about the land, and they died. Of the 12 spies only Joshua and Caleb lived on. When Moses reported My words to the people, they were very sad.

Early the next morning they said, “We have sinned. But we are now ready to enter the Promised Land.” But Moses said, “You are disobeying the Lord. Your plan won’t work. Don’t go up, because your enemies will defeat you. The Amalekites and Canaanites will kill you with their swords because you rejected the Lord.”

But the Israelites went into the hill country anyway, though neither Moses nor the sacred chest left the camp. The Amalekites and Canaanites defeated the Israelites and chased them all the way to Hormah, southeast of Beersheba.

Moses didn't just plead My mercy or goodness (which is a good basis for prayer) but Moses based his request on the promises I made to My people. Moses also reminded Me what the people would say if I destroyed My people in the desert. Moses interceded and I listened to Him. He had the ability to touch My heart in prayer. You can have that ability in your prayer life so you can get answers. Find My heart in prayer.

Rules About Offerings

15I, the LORD, told Moses to tell the Israelites, “When you are in the land, and you want to please Me by bringing a burnt offering or any other offering by fire, the sacrifice must be from your sheep, goats, or cattle. Whether you bring a burnt offering, a sacrifice in fulfillment of a vow, or a freewill offering, or an offering associated with the annual festivals, you must also bring a grain offering of two quarts of flour mixed with a quart of olive oil. With each lamb for a burnt offering, also present a quart of wine as a drink offering.

“If you bring a ram as a sacrifice, include with it a grain offering of four quarts of flour mixed with two and a half pints of olive oil; and two and a half pints of wine as a drink offering. I will be pleased with this sacrifice.

“If your offering is a bull as a burnt offering or other sacrifice or to fulfill a vow or as a fellowship offering, also bring a grain offering of six quarts of flour mixed with two quarts of olive oil. Also, bring two quarts of wine as a drink offering. I will be pleased with this sacrifice. Follow these instructions for each bull, ram, lamb, or young goat you offer.

“These instructions are to be followed by you Israelites and also foreign residents. The same laws apply to both and are not to be changed. I view you

and foreign residents the same way, and that's why the same laws apply to both."

Remember the nature of a sacrifice. It is giving up something you need, or something you use, or something you enjoy. When you sacrifice something to Me, it's a choice to put Me and My work first, and put you and your plans second. Israel showed their faith and love to Me by sacrificing their animals and crops to Me. This was quite a sacrifice for those living in an agricultural society; they gave Me necessities, not luxuries.

Then I, the LORD, told Moses to tell the people, "When you enter the land, and you eat the food there, give some of it as an offering to Me. From the first of the flour you grind present a cake to Me. This offering from your threshing floor must be given every year for generations to come.

"Suppose you as a nation fail to keep any of these commands but don't mean to, or suppose some of your descendants fail to do it without meaning to, and you are not aware of it at first, then they must offer a bull as a burnt offering (I will be pleased with it), along with a grain offering, drink offering, and a male goat as a sin offering. Then the priest will present these as substitute payments for sin, and the people will be forgiven, since their sin was not intentional and they brought to Me an offering by fire and a sin offering. Both Israelites and foreign residents will be forgiven.

"Suppose one of you sins without intending to. Then he must bring a year-old goat as a sin offering. The priest is to offer the sacrifice as a substitute payment for sin, and the individual will be forgiven. This law applies to both Israelites and foreign residents.

"If anyone purposefully sins by blaspheming Me, the LORD, that person, whether an Israelite or a foreign resident, will no longer be part of the Israelites. Because he has mistreated My Word and despised My commands, he will not be a part of the nation, and he will suffer the consequences of his sin.

"One time a man was found gathering wood on the Sabbath. He was brought to Moses and Aaron and all the people. But no one knew what to do with him, so they kept him in custody. Then I, the LORD, told Moses that the man must die by stoning by all the people. So the people took him outside the camp and stoned him to death, as I had commanded."

I, the LORD, told Moses to tell the people, “Sew tassels on the bottom of your clothes and tie each one with a blue string. As you look at these tassels, they will remind you of My commands and urge you not to follow your desires. The tassels will help you remember to obey My commands and to be holy before Me. Don’t forget that I am the LORD your God who brought you out of Egypt. Yes, I am the LORD, your God.”

This passage shall remind you how much I hate sin, especially when My followers sin willfully.

The Rebellion of Korah

16One day Korah, a grandson of Levi, and three Reubenites, Dathan, Abiram, and On, rebelled against Moses. They and 250 well-known leaders went to Moses and Aaron and said, “Why do you two think you are greater than anyone else in our nation? All of us—not just you—have been set apart by the Lord, and He is with all of us.”

Hearing this, Moses fell with his face to the ground. Then he said to Korah and the others, “Tomorrow morning the Lord will show who is set apart to Him, and that person will come near to Him. Korah, you and your followers tomorrow are to burn fire and incense in some fire pans to the Lord. Then we will see whom the Lord has chosen to be His priest. You Levites, not Aaron and I, are the ones who have gone too far.”

Moses then said to Korah, “Isn’t it enough that God has separated you and all other Levites from the rest of the Israelites to serve Him in the tabernacle and minister to the people? He has given you Levites special responsibilities, and now you are trying to be the priest too. You and your followers are actually working against the Lord, not against Aaron.”

When Moses sent for Dathan and Abiram, they said, “We won’t come. Isn’t it enough that you have brought us out of the rich land of Egypt to die in the desert? And now you want to boss us. What’s more, you haven’t brought us into a land where there is plenty of milk and honey and fertile fields and vineyards. You can’t fool us. We won’t come.”

Hearing this, Moses got very angry and said to Me, the Lord, “Don’t accept their offering. I’ve done nothing wrong to them. I haven’t even taken a donkey from them.” Then Moses said to Korah, “Tomorrow you and your 250

followers are to present yourselves to the Lord, and Aaron will be there too. Put fire and incense in your fire pans, to present them to the Lord, and Aaron is to do the same.” So each man did that and stood with Moses and Aaron at the tabernacle entrance. Then My glory appeared to all the Israelites, and I told Moses and Aaron to get away from the Israelites because I would kill them.

Moses and Aaron fell with their faces to the ground and prayed, “God, You are the source of life. So why be angry with all the Israelites when only one man sinned?”

Then I, the LORD, told Moses to tell the people to move away from the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. Moses went over to Dathan and Abiram and was followed by the leaders. He warned the people, “Get away from the tents of these evil men and don’t touch anything of theirs or you will be destroyed.” So they moved back from their tents, but Dathan and Abiram stood at their tents with their wives and children.

Moses said to everyone, “This wasn’t my idea, but here is how you will know that the Lord is in this. If these men die a natural death, then the Lord didn’t send me. But if a deep crevice appears in the ground and they with their belongings fall into it and die, you will know they turned against the Lord.”

As soon as Moses said this, the ground split open, and Korah, Dathan, and Abiram and their families and households fell into the large crevice. As soon as they fell into the grave alive, the crevice closed over them, and they died. Hearing the men’s screams, the Israelites ran, fearing that the earth would swallow them too. Then My fire killed the 250 men who were offering incense.

I, the LORD, told Moses, “Tell Eleazar, Aaron’s son, to take the fire pans, which are holy, from the fire and scatter the coals far away from the tabernacle. That’s because these men sinned against Me in burning incense. Hammer the metal of the fire pans into a thin sheet of bronze for a covering over the Altar of Burnt Offering, which will be a warning to the Israelites.” So Eleazar had the bronze fire pans hammered out into a thin sheet of bronze to cover the Altar of Burnt Offering, as I, the LORD, told Moses. This was a warning to the Israelites that only Aaron’s descendants were to burn incense to Me. If anyone else did, they would meet the same fate as Korah and his followers.

The very next morning the Israelites again complained against Moses and Aaron and said, “You two have killed the Lord’s people.” As the people gathered around Moses and Aaron, suddenly My glory appeared and My cloud covered the tabernacle. As Moses and Aaron were standing at the tabernacle entrance, I told Moses to get away from the people so I could destroy them. Falling face down on the ground, Moses told Aaron, “Grab a fire pan, put

incense and fire in it, so it can be a substitute payment for sin. Why? Because the Lord is angry and He has already sent a terrible disease on the people. Aaron did as Moses said and stood between the living and the dead. The disease had started to spread, but Aaron offered the incense in the fire pan to the Lord, thus making a substitute payment for the people's sin. Then the disease stopped spreading.

But 14,700 people died from the disease besides those who died with Korah and his followers. Then Aaron joined Moses at the tabernacle entrance.

I have put My Spirit on those I call to serve Me fulltime as My leaders. Some like the "honor" and "power" of "church leadership," but they were not called by Me, nor are they spiritually qualified. Moses was correct to test them by fire, and the church must test false leaders who wrongly want to lead My church today. I have said, "Do not despise inspired messages, put all things to the test: Keep what is good, and avoid every kind of evil" (1 Thess. 5:20, 22, TEV). Carefully obey what I have said in the inspired Word of Scripture.

Aaron's Walking Stick

17I, the LORD, told Moses, "Take 12 walking sticks, one from each of the tribes, and write the name of the tribal leader on his stick. Write Aaron's name on the one from the tribe of Levi. Then place them in the tabernacle in front of the sacred chest where I meet with you. Buds will sprout on the stick of the man I choose to be My priest. This will put an end to the people's complaining."

So Moses told this to the Israelites and their leaders. Aaron brought their sticks to Moses, who then placed them in the tabernacle. The next day when Moses went into the tabernacle, he saw that Aaron's stick had buds, flowers, and almonds on it. Moses brought out all 12 sticks, showed them to the people, and each man took his own.

I, the LORD, told Moses, "Put Aaron's stick in the sacred chest, as a warning to any rebellious people. This will put an end to their complaining against Me and keep them from dying." Moses did that. But the Israelites shouted, "We'll die! We are all doomed! We'll all die if we even get close to the tabernacle."

Aaron's walking stick that bloomed and bore fruit shows that I am able to make dead bodies live. This pictures My resurrection and power.

The Duties of the Priests and the Levites

18I, the LORD, said to Aaron, “You, your sons, and your relatives are responsible for any violations against the tabernacle, and you and your sons are responsible for any violations against the priesthood. Your fellow Levites are to help you when you serve in the tabernacle. But in performing their duties, they are not to go near the tabernacle furnishings or the Altar of Burnt Offering. If they do, they will die. The Levites are to help you in caring for the tabernacle, and no one else.

“You are to care for the tabernacle and the Altar of Burnt Offering, so that I won’t be angry with you again. The Levites are a gift from Me to you. They are dedicated to Me to serve in the tabernacle. But only you and your sons are to serve as priests at the Altar of Burnt Offering and the most holy place. Anyone else who tries to do these things will die.”

Then I the LORD said to Aaron, “You are in charge of all the gifts the people bring to Me. And I am giving you and your sons a regular share in these offerings. The grain offerings, sin offerings, and guilt offerings are for you and your sons, along with portions of sacrifices that are not found on the Altar of Burnt Offering. These portions you eat are very holy, and only men may eat them.

“Also gifts that are presented to Me as wave offerings are for you and your children to eat if they are ceremonially clean. Also, the first-harvested olive oil, wine, and grain that people bring to Me are for you and your children if they are ceremonially clean.

“Everything that the people dedicate to Me is yours. The firstborn son in every family and the firstborn male of your flocks and herds are yours. But you must buy back from Me every firstborn son and every firstborn male of unclean animals. Buy them back when they are one-month old for about two ounces of silver. But do not buy back the firstborn of an ox, a sheep, or a goat because they are set apart to Me. Sprinkle their blood on the Altar of Burnt Offering and burn their fat as an offering to Me. I will be pleased with those offerings. You may eat the meat of these animals, just as you may eat the heart and right thigh that are offered to Me as wave offerings. These offerings the people bring to

Me I give to you and your children. This is My everlasting promise (like a covenant of salt) for you and your descendants.”

I, the LORD, also said to Aaron, “You will not inherit any land or share property with others, because I am your inheritance. One-tenth of the people’s crops and one out of every ten newborn animals is to be given to the Levites as pay for their tabernacle work. No Israelite is to go near the tabernacle, or they will be guilty and will die. Only the Levites are to serve at the tabernacle, and they are responsible for any offences against it. They are to receive no inheritance; instead their inheritance consists of the crops and newborn animals the Israelites bring to Me.”

I, the LORD, told Moses to speak to the Levites and tell them, “When the people bring 10 percent of their crops and newborn animals to you, you are to present a tenth of that to Me. This will be as if you are bringing to Me grain from the threshing floor and grape juice from the winepress. By presenting to Me one-tenth of all you receive from the Israelites, you are making an offering to Me. This portion to be given to Me is to be the best of everything you receive.

“When you present the best part to Me, it will be as if it came from your own threshing floor or winepress. You and your Levite families may eat this food wherever you wish; it is your pay for serving in the tabernacle. You won’t be punished for eating this food so long as you give the best portions to the priests. But if you treat the offerings as commonplace and not holy, you will die.”

Rules About Cleanliness

19I, the LORD, said to Moses and Aaron, “Here is another requirement. The people are to bring to you a red heifer with no physical defects and that has not been used for plowing. Give it to Eleazar, who is to have it slaughtered outside the camp while he watches. Then he is to sprinkle some of its blood seven times toward the tabernacle, and the heifer is to be burned completely. Eleazar is to take some cedar wood, a hyssop branch, and red wool and throw them onto the heifer as its being burned. Then he is to wash his clothes and take a bath. He may return to the camp, but he will be ceremonially unclean all day. The man who burns the heifer must also wash his clothes and take a bath, and he too will be ceremonially unclean all day.

“A ceremonially clean person is to gather up the heifer’s ashes and put them in a clean place outside the camp. The ashes are to be kept there mixed with water for the people to use in the ceremony to wash away sins symbolically. Also the man who gathers up the ashes is to wash his clothes and take a bath, but he too will be ceremonially unclean all day. This is a permanent law to be followed by both Israelites and foreign residents.

“If someone touches a dead human body, he will be ceremonially unclean for a week. He can become ceremonially clean by washing on the third and seventh days with the water mixed with the heifer’s ashes. If he doesn’t do this on those two days, he will remain unclean. If someone touches a dead human body and doesn’t purify himself, he makes the tabernacle unclean and he will no longer be a part of My people. Since the water of purification was not sprinkled on him, he will remain ceremonially unclean.

“If someone dies in a tent, anyone who enters the tent or is already in it will be ceremonially unclean for a week, and any open jar in the tent will be unclean. If someone touches the body of a person who has been killed with a sword or has died a natural death, or if he touches a human bone or a grave, he will be ceremonially unclean for a week.

“To be ceremonially clean, pour over him some of the water with the heifer’s ashes in it. Then someone who is ceremonially clean is to dip a hyssop branch in the water that has the heifer’s ashes and sprinkle the tabernacle and its furnishings and the people who were there. He is also to sprinkle anyone who touched a human bone or a grave or someone who was killed or died a natural death. He is to do this on the third and seventh days. Then the person being cleaned is to wash his clothes and take a bath, and that evening he will be clean. But if he does not purify himself, he is no longer to be a part of the Israelites. This is a permanent law. The one who sprinkles the water and ashes must wash his clothes, and if someone touches this water, he will be ceremonially unclean all day. If a person is unclean, anything he touches becomes unclean, and anyone who touches that object will be unclean all day.”

I want My servants clean from all kinds of defilement. So separate yourself from all that defiles.

Moses Defies Me

In March of the Israelite's 40th year in the wilderness they arrived at the Zin Desert and set up camp near Kadesh. There Miriam, Moses' sister, died and was buried. No water was there, so the Israelites complained to Moses and said, "We wish we had died when the Lord killed our brothers. You brought us into the desert and now we and our livestock will die. Why bring us out of Egypt into this awful place? Here we have no grain, figs, grapes, or pomegranates. And we have no water to drink."

Moses and Aaron fell face down at the tabernacle entrance, and My glory appeared to them. I, the LORD, instructed Moses, "Take your walking stick and you and Aaron gather the Israelites together. Speak to that nearby rock, and water will come gushing out of it. This will give plenty of water for all of them and their livestock."

So Moses took his stick, he and Aaron assembled the people, and Moses said, "Listen, you rebellious people. Why must we bring you water out of this rock?" Then Moses struck the rock twice, and water gushed out, and the people and their livestock drank. But the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "You did not obey Me and treat Me with respect in front of the Israelites—you hit the rock twice, not once as I said—so you will not be the one to lead them into the land I will give them." Because the people had complained to Me, the LORD, about the lack of water, they named the place Meribah (meaning, "Complaining").

I called Moses the most humble man on earth (Num. 12:3, KJV), yet he was motivated by pride. "Must we bring water—out of this rock" (Num. 20:10, NKJV). He was tempted at his strongest point of character, yet he sinned. When you are tempted at your strength, do not sin.

Moses sent messengers from Kadesh to the king of nearby Edom with this message: "We are Israelites, your relatives. No doubt you have heard about the trouble we've had. Our ancestors lived a long time in Egypt. But the Egyptians were mean to us. So we prayed to the Lord, and He brought us out of Egypt. We are now at Kadesh near your territory. Please let us go through your country. We won't go into your fields or vineyards or drink from any of your wells. We'll stay on the main road until we have passed through your country."

The king of Edom answered, "No! You may not go through our country. If you try, we will attack you." The Israelites answered, "We promise to stay on the main road and if any of our livestock drink any of your water, we will pay for it. We simply want to pass through on foot." Again Edom answered, "No,

you can't go through our land." Then Edom sent out many strong soldiers. So since Edom would not let them go through their country, Israel gave up the idea.

The Israelites then traveled from Kadesh to Mount Hor, near Edom's border. There I, the Lord, said to Moses and Aaron, "Aaron will die here. He will not enter the land I promised because both of you rebelled against Me by disobeying Me at Meribah. Moses, take Aaron and his son, Eleazar, up Mount Hor. Then take Aaron's priestly garments and put them on Eleazar. Aaron will die there."

Moses did as I, the LORD, told him to do. Everyone watched as Moses, Aaron, and Eleazar climbed up Mount Hor. Moses took off Aaron's priestly garments and put them on Eleazar. And Aaron died there on the mountaintop. And when the Israelites heard the news, they mourned for Aaron for 30 days.

The Israelites Defeat the Canaanites

21 When the Canaanite king of Arad, who lived in the Southern Desert, heard that the Israelites were approaching Atharim, he attacked them and took some as captives. Then the Israelites promised Me the Lord, "If you will help us defeat the Canaanites here in the Southern Desert, we will completely destroy their cities." I, the LORD, heard their prayer, and helped them destroy the Canaanites and their towns. So they named the place Hormah (meaning "Destruction").

The Israelites traveled from Mount Hor eastward to go around Edom. But they got impatient, and complained again to Me, the LORD, and Moses. "Why have you brought us here to die in the desert? We have no bread and no water, and we are tired of this awful manna." Then I, the LORD, sent poisonous snakes which bit the people and many died. The people said to Moses, "We admit we did wrong in speaking against the Lord and you. So ask the Lord to take the snakes away." Moses prayed, and I, the LORD, said to Moses, "Make a bronze replica of a snake so people can look at it and be healed." So Moses made a bronze snake and put it on a pole. Anyone who was bitten and looked at the bronze snake lived.

The bronze serpent points you to Jesus Christ. Both were lifted up as a sign of the peoples' sin. All the people had to do was "look and live." Have you looked to Christ who bore your sin?

The Israelites then camped at Oboth, and from there they went to Iye Abarim in the desert east of Moab. From there they traveled to the Zered Valley, and then near the Arnon River and camped in Amorite territory. The Arnon is the border between the Amorites and the Moabites. The book of the wars of the Lord mentions the town of Waheb in the Suphah territory, the Arnon River, and the ravine leading to the town of Ar near the southern Moabite border.

Then the Israelites went to Beer, a well where I, the LORD, told Moses to gather the people together because I was going to give them water. The Israelites sang about his well in this song: “Spring up, O well. Sing about the well that the princes dug, the well the leaders dug with their scepters and staffs.” Then they traveled to Mattanah, Nahaliel, Bamoth, and the valley in Moab where Mount Pisgah overlooks the desert near the Dead Sea.

Messengers went to Sihon, king of the Amorites, with this request: “Let us pass through your territory. We won’t go into your fields or vineyards or drink from any of your wells. We will stay on the main road as we go through your land.”

But Sihon refused to let Israel pass through his land. Instead he marched his army against the Israelites at Jahaz. But Israel defeated them and took over their land from the Arnon River north to the Jabbok River, but not beyond that with the territory of the Ammonites, whose border was well fortified. The Israelites captured the cities of the Amorites including Heshbon and nearby villages. Heshbon was the city of Sihon, the Amorite king, who had conquered all the Moabite territory north of the Arnon. That’s why they wrote this poem about Heshbon:

“Come and rebuild Heshbon, which was King Sihon’s capital city. Fire went out from Heshbon, Sihon’s city, and burned up the city of Ar in Moab, killing its citizens. You Moabites are destroyed. Your god Chemosh could not keep your sons and daughters from being taken as captives to Sihon. We Amorites completely defeated the Moabites, including their towns of Heshbon, Dibon, Nophah, and Medeba.”

So the Israelites settled in the land of the Amorites. They captured Jazer and surrounding towns, and forced out the Amorites. Then the Israelites went north toward Bashan, and Og, Bashan’s king, attacked the Israelites at Edrei. I, the LORD, assured Moses that I would help his people defeat Og, just as they

had done to Sihon in Heshbon. So Israel defeated Og and his entire army, killing them all. And the Israelites took over the land of Bashan.

Balaam, the False Prophet

22The Israelites traveled back to Moab and camped by the Jordan River across from Jericho. Balak, son of Zippor, and king of Moab, heard what Israel had done to the Amorites, and Moab was frightened. So the Moabites said to the Midianite leaders, “These people will wipe us out like an ox eats grass.” So Balak sent a message to Balaam, who was at Pethor near the Euphrates River, with these words: “A great number of people have left Egypt and have settled next to me. Come put a curse on them. Then maybe I can defeat them. I know that people you bless will prosper and those you curse will fail.”

The leaders of Moab and Midian left and took money to pay Balaam for his help. When they told Balaam why they had come, Balaam urged them to spend the night and told them he would give them My answer the next day. When I asked Balaam who those men were, Balaam told him their message. I told Balaam, “Don’t put a curse on these people because they are blessed.”

The next morning Balaam told Balak’s leaders, “I had refused to let him go with them.” So they went back to Balak and told him Balaam would not join them. So Balak sent more princes who were more distinguished than the others. They went to Balaam and said, “Balak urges you not to let anything keep you from coming. He’ll pay you well for your services and he’ll do whatever you suggest. Please come curse these people.”

But Balaam responded, “I can’t go beyond what the Lord my God has told me even if Balak gave me his palace filled with silver and gold. So stay here overnight, and I’ll see what the Lord will tell me.” That night I told Balaam, “Alright, go with these men. But do only what I tell you to do.”

The next morning Balaam saddled his donkey and went with the men. But I was very angry with Balaam, and so I had My angel stand in the road to stop him. When the donkey saw the angel in the road with a sword in his hand, the donkey turned into a field. Balaam beat the donkey to get it back on the road. Then the angel stood where the road was a narrow path between two vineyards with a wall on each side. The donkey got so close to one of the walls that it crushed Balaam’s foot. Balaam beat the donkey again. Then the angel stood in a place so narrow the donkey couldn’t get by. So the donkey lay down. And

Balaam was so mad he beat the donkey again. Then I, the LORD, caused the donkey to speak, and it said, “What have I done to you that made you beat me these three times?”

Balaam answered, “You’ve made me look like a fool. If I had a sword with me, I’d kill you.” The donkey said, “Have I ever done anything like this before?” Balaam answered, “No.” Then Balaam saw the angel with a sword in his hand. And he bowed down.

The angel asked, “Why did you beat your donkey three times? I have come to stop you because you are going in the wrong direction. If the donkey hadn’t seen me and stopped, I would have killed you.” Balaam admitted, “I admit I was wrong. I didn’t realize you were trying to stop me. If you don’t think I should go on, I’ll go back home.” Then the angel replied, “You may go, but say only what I tell you.” So Balaam went on with Balak’s princes.

Balak went to meet Balaam at a town on Moab’s northern border. Balak asked, “Why didn’t you come right away when I asked you? Did you think I wouldn’t pay you enough?” Balaam answered, “Well, I’m here now. But I can say only what God tells me to say.”

Then Balaam and Balak went to Kiriath-Huzoth, where Balak sacrificed some cows and sheep, and gave portions of the meat to Balaam and his officials. The next morning Balak took Balaam to Ramoth-Baal and from there Balaam could see some of the Israelites down below.

Balaam Blesses Israel the First Time

23 Balaam then told Balak to build seven altars there and to bring him seven bulls and seven rams. Balak did that and together they sacrificed a bull and a ram on each altar. Balaam said, “Wait here while I go see what the Lord will tell me. If He meets with me, I’ll tell you what He says.” Balaam told Me about the animal sacrifices he and Balak made. Then I, the LORD, told Balaam to go to Balak with My message. When Balaam returned, Balak was standing there by his offerings with his officials. Then Balaam said, “Balak brought me from the hills of eastern Syria to curse Israel. But I can’t curse them when God hasn’t. I see them from the mountaintops, a people who are different from other nations. There are so many of them, no one could count even a fourth of them. I hope to be righteous all my life and die in peace like them.”

Balak said to Balaam, “Why are you saying all this? I asked you to curse them, and you are blessing them instead.” Balaam answered, “I can say only

what the Lord tells me to say.” Balak then said, “Let’s go to another place where you can see only a smaller part of the Israelites, and you can curse them at least.” So Balak took him to the Zophin plateau on the top of Mount Pisgah, where again he built seven altars and sacrificed a bull and a ram on each one.

Balaam told Barak to stay by his offering while he went aside to meet Me, the LORD. After I appeared to Balaam and gave him another message, Balaam went back to Barak, who asked, “What did the Lord say?” Then Balaam gave this message: “Listen to my words, Balak. God is not a man, so He doesn’t lie or change His mind. He keeps every promise He makes. God has told me to bless Israel, and I can’t change His command. No problems will come to Israel because the Lord their God is with them and He is their King. God has brought them out of Egypt, and they are strong like a wild ox. No magic or curse can harm them. Instead people will say, ‘Look what God has done for them.’ They are like lions ready to attack, and they won’t rest till they’ve eaten their prey.”

Hearing this, Balak said, “If you aren’t going to curse them, at least don’t bless them.” Balaam replied, “As I told you, I can say only what the Lord tells me to say.” So Balak suggested they go to yet another place. He said, “Maybe God will let you curse them from there.” So he took Balaam to Mount Peor, overlooking the desert. Balaam told Barak to build seven altars again and to bring him seven bulls and seven rams. Then Balak, like before, offered a bull and a ram on each altar.

Learn to speak only the words that come from Me.

Balaam and Balak

24This time Balaam did not go to meet Me as he had done before. Instead he looked toward the desert and saw the Israelites camped there. Then My Spirit came on him, and he said, “I am Balaam, and my eyes clearly see the future. I hear God’s words, I see a vision, I fall down, and my eyes are open. Israel, your tents are beautiful. They are like wide valleys, gardens by a river, like tall aloe trees, and cedar trees near water. They will have plenty of water. Their king will be greater than Agag the Amalekite, and their kingdom will be outstanding. I brought them out of Egypt, and they are strong like a wild ox. They will defeat their enemies, breaking their bones and shooting them with arrows. They are like a lion lying down, and no one dares arouse him. So

anyone who blesses Israel will be blessed, and anyone who curses Israel will be cursed.”

Hearing this, Balak was furiously mad. He said, “I called you out to place a curse on these enemies of mine, but you have blessed them—not once, but three times. So leave here and go home! I said I would pay you well, but because you blessed Israel, I won’t pay you anything.”

Balaam reminded Balak that he said that even if Balak gave him his palace, he couldn’t go against the Lord’s words. He could say only what the Lord told him to say. “Yes, I am going home, but first let me give you a warning about what the Israelites will do to you.”

Balaam said, “I am Balaam, and my eyes clearly see the future. I hear God’s words and the Almighty gives me a vision, and I fall down and my eyes are open. I see that in Israel’s future a king of Israel will rise like a star; he will be important like a scepter. He will crush the people of Moab. Israel will conquer Edom and Seir, and Israel will grow strong. The ruler of Israel will destroy the survivors of every city he conquers.”

Then Balaam saw a vision about the Amalekites and spoke these words: “Amalek was a prominent nation, but it will be destroyed.” Next saw a vision about the Kenites and spoke these words: “You think you are in a safe place, living in the rocks. But you will be destroyed when Assyria takes your people as captives.”

Then Balaam concluded, “No one can live when God does this. Ships will come from Cyprus, and those people will oppress Assyria and Eber. But later Cyprus will be destroyed.” Then Balaam left to go home, and Balak also left.

The Israelites Are Seduced by the Midianites

25 When Israel was camped at Shittim, some of the men had sex with some Moabite women. These women had invited the men to attend their sacrifices to their gods. The men ate meat from the sacrificed animals and worshiped the Moabite gods. This led the Israelites to worship Baal-Peor, which made Me, the LORD, very angry. I said to Moses, “Take these Israelite leaders who are responsible for this and kill them in broad daylight, so that I may no longer be so angry with the Israelites.” Moses told the leaders to put to death anyone who worshiped Baal-Peor.

One of the Israelite men brought a Midianite woman to meet his family right in front of everyone. Phinehas, Aaron’s grandson, saw this, grabbed a

spear, followed the man and woman into his tent and killed both of them. Then the disease stopped, though 24,000 Israelites had already died. I, the LORD, told Moses that if Phinehas hadn't done that, I would have wiped them all out. "Because of Phineas' loyalty and zeal for Me, I promise that he and his descendants will be priests forever."

The man who was killed was Zimri, son of Salu, a leader in the Simeon tribe. The name of the Midianite woman was Cozbi, daughter of Zur, a tribal leader in Midian. I, the LORD, said to Moses, "Treat the Midianites as your enemies and kill them for two reasons: because they tricked you into worshiping Baal, and because Cozbi was involved with Zimri."

Look at false religions and heresy as I look at them. You need eyes to see their lies and wisdom to understand their danger. Then you need courage to turn your back against it.

The Israelites Are Counted a Second Time

26 Then I, the LORD, told Moses and Eleazar to take a census of every male 20 years of age or older who is able to serve in the army. The Israelites were camped then on the plains of Moab by the Jordan River across from Jericho. Moses and Eleazar told the leaders to take a census, as I, the LORD, had commanded.

In the tribe of Reuben were the clans of Hanoch, Pallu, Hezran, and Carmi, whose total was 43,730. Pallu was the father of Eliab, whose sons were Nemuel, Dathan, and Abiram. Dathan and Abiram were the leaders who with Korah had rebelled against Me. That is when I caused a huge crevice in the earth into which Korah and his followers fell to their death; these five and 250 others, all as a warning to Israel. But Korah's line wasn't destroyed.

In the tribe of Simeon were the clans of Nemuel, Jamin, Jakin, Zerah, and Shaul, whose total was 22,200. In the tribe of Gad were the clans of Zephon, Haggi, Shuni, Ozni, Eri, Arod, and Areli, whose total was 40,500. Judah's sons Er and Unan died in Canaan. In the tribe of Judah were the clans of Shelah, Perez, Zerah, Hezron, and Hamul, whose total was 76,500.

In the tribe of Issachar were the clans of Tula, Puab, Jashub, and Shimron, whose total was 64,300. In the tribe of Zebulun were the clans of Sered, Elon, and Sahleel, whose total was 60,500. In the tribe of Manasseh, Joseph's son,

were the clans of Makir and his son Gilead, and the clans of Makir, were Iezer, Helek, Asriel, Sechem, Shemida, and Hephher. (Hephher's son Zeluphehad had no sons, but he had daughters named Malah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah.) The total of those in Manasseh's clans was 52,700.

In the tribe of Ephraim were the clans of Shuthelah, Beker, Tahan, and Eran, Shuthelah's son. Their total was 32,500. In the tribe of Benjamin were the clans of Bela, Ashbel, Ahiram, Shupham, Hupham, and of Bela's sons, Ard and Naaman, whose total was 45,600. In the tribe of Dan was the one clan of Shuram, whose total was 64,400.

In the tribe of Asher were the clans of Imnah, Ishvi, Beriah, and of Beriah's sons, Heber and Malkiel. (Asher had a daughter named Serah.) Their total was 53,400. In the tribe of Naphtali were the clans of Jahzeel, Guni, Jezer, and Shillem, whose total was 45,400.

The total number of the men of Israel 20 years of age and older was 601,730.

I, the LORD, said to Moses, "Divide the land of Canaan among the tribes according to their numbers. Larger tribes are to receive more land than smaller tribes. Cast lots to find out which tribes are to have which land, and the size of the land is to be based on the number each tribe."

In the tribe of Levi were the clans of Gershon, Kohath, Merari, along with the clans of Libni, Hebron, Mahli, Mushi, and Korah. Kohath was the father of Amram, whose wife was Jochebed. She was a descendant of Levi, from Egypt. Jochebed and Amram's three children were Aaron, Moses, and Miriam. Aaron had four sons, Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. Nadab and Abihu died when they offered to the Lord the wrong kind of fire.

All the Levite males one month old and older totaled 23,000. They were not counted in the census numbers with the other tribes because they would not receive any land in Canaan.

These are the census figures Moses and Eleazar counted on the plains of Moab by the Jordan River across from Jericho. These figures included no one Moses and Aaron had counted in the Sinai Desert years earlier, except Caleb and Joshua, because, as I said, they all died in the desert.

The Jordan census was one of the last responsibilities given to Moses by Me. The leadership would soon pass from Moses to Joshua. I number My people, just as I number the stars. Because everyone is valuable to Me, I count them.

The Daughters of Zelophehad

27One day the five daughters of Zelophehad—Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah—made a request of Moses, Eleazar, the tribal leaders, and all Israelites at the tabernacle entrance. Zelophehad was the great-great-grandson of Manasseh. The daughters said, “Our father died in the desert, but not because he rebelled with Korah and his followers. He died because of his own sin. But since he had no sons, we are concerned that his name will not be remembered. So we ask that you give us some property in Canaan with our father’s relatives.”

When Moses asked Me what to do about this request, I said, “They are right. Give them the property that would have gone to their father. And tell the Israelites, ‘If a man dies without a son, give his land to his daughters. Or if he has no daughters, give it to his brothers. Or if he has no brothers, then give the land to his uncles. If he has no uncles, give the property to his nearest relative. This law is to be followed by My people.’”

I, the LORD, told Moses, “Go into the Abarim Mountains and look out over the land I am giving to My people. After you have seen it, you will die as did Aaron. Both of you disobeyed me in the Zin Desert at the waters of Meribah near Kadesh.” Moses said, “You are LORD, the God of the spirits of everyone. So appoint a leader for the people, someone capable of leading them in battle. Otherwise the people will be like sheep with no shepherd.”

I, the LORD, then told Moses, “Lay your hands on Joshua, in whom is My Spirit. Then as he stands before Eleazar the priest and all the Israelites, have them appoint Joshua as their leader. Transfer your authority to him so all My people will follow his leadership. To get information from Me have him go to Eleazar, who will ask Me through the Urim and Thummin. The people are to follow his leadership.”

Following My command, Moses had Joshua stand before Eleazar and all the Israelites, while Moses laid his hands on Joshua, as I had told him to do.

Moses did exactly as I commanded; he elevated Joshua to follow Me. When your time comes, I will choose someone to follow you.

The Daily Offerings to Me, the LORD

28I, the LORD, told Moses to say to the Israelites, “At the appropriate times offer sacrifices to Me, and I will be pleased with them. Each day offer as burnt offerings two one-year-old lambs without any defects. One lamb is to be offered in the morning and the other in the evening. With each of them offer a grain offering of two quarts of flour mixed with a quart of olive oil. This is the same as the offering you first offered to me at Mount Sinai. Along with each sacrifice, pour out a quart of wine on the Altar of Burnt Offering as a drink offering to Me. In the evening offer the second lamb with the same kind of grain offering and drink offering. I will be pleased with the offerings.

“Each Sabbath offer two-year-old lambs without defects, along with the drink offering and grain offering of four quarts of flour mixed with olive oil. This is in addition to the regular daily burnt offering and drink offering.

“On the first day of each month offer to Me a burnt offering of two bulls, one ram, and seven one-year-old male lambs, all with no defects. With each bull offer a grain offering of six quarts of flour mixed with olive oil. With the ram include a grain offering of four quarts of flour mixed with oil. And with each lamb offer a grain offering of two quarts of flour mixed with oil. I will be pleased with these burnt offerings. With each bull offer a drink offering of two quarts of wine; with the ram, about one and a fourth quarts; and with each lamb, a quart. Also offer to Me a male goat as a sin offering.

“Celebrate the Passover every April 14. The next day begin the week-long Festival of Bread without Yeast. On the first day of this festival assemble together and do no work. Offer to Me a burnt offering of two young bulls, one ram, and seven one-year-old male lambs, all with no defects. With each bull present a grain offering of six quarts of flour mixed with oil; with the ram, four quarts; and with each lamb, two quarts. Also offer a male goat as a substitute payment for sin. These are to be in addition to the regular daily sacrifices, and the sacrifices in this week-long festival will be pleasing to Me. Then on the last day of this festival have the people assemble in worship and don’t do any work that day. On the first day of the Harvest Festival in the fall, have the people assemble in worship, do no work that day, and bring an offering of new grain. Offer a burnt offering of five young bulls, one ram, and seven one-year-old male lambs. I will be pleased with their sacrifices. With each bull bring a grain offering of six quarts of flour mixed with olive oil; with the ram, four quarts; and with each lamb, two quarts. Also offer a male goat as a substitute payment for sin. These animals are to have no defects and are to be offered on this

festival day with their drink offerings, and in addition to regular burnt offerings and grain offerings.”

Just as offerings were brought to Me daily in the Old Testament, now offer yourself to Me daily in prayer and Bible study.

The Offerings in Several Festivals

29“For the Festival of Trumpets assemble in worship on the first day of September and don’t do any work. For a burnt offering bring a young bull, a ram, and seven one-year-old male lambs, all with no defects. With the bull present a grain offering of six quarts of flour mixed with olive oil; with the ram, four quarts; and with each lamb, two quarts. Also offer a male goat as a substitute payment for sin. These are in addition to monthly and daily burnt offerings, grain offerings, and drink offerings—offerings that will be pleasing to Me.

“On the tenth day of this seventh month, the Day of Atonement, assemble in worship and don’t do any work. Present to Me a burnt offering of a young bull, a ram, and seven one-year-old male lambs, all with no defects. With the bull prepare a grain offering of six-quarts of flour mixed with olive oil; with the ram, four quarts; and with lamb, two quarts—the same as on the Festival of Trumpets. Also offer a male goat as a substitute payment for sin, in addition to the sin offering and the regular burnt offering, grain offering, and drink offerings.

“On the 15th day of that same month assemble in worship and don’t do any work. For seven days celebrate the Festival of Shelters. Present to Me a burnt offering of 13 bulls, two rams, and 14 one-year-old male lambs, all with no defects. With each bull include a grain offering of six quarts of flour mixed with olive oil; with each of the two rams, four quarts; and with each of the 14 lambs, two quarts. Also offer a male goat as a substitute payment for sin, in addition to the regular burnt offering, grain offering, and drink offering.

“For the next six days sacrifice one less bull each day than the day before, starting with 12 bulls on the second day and ending with seven bulls on the seventh day. The other sacrifices and offerings are to be the same for each day. On the eighth day assemble again in worship and don’t do any work. Present to Me a burnt offering of a bull, a ram, and seven one-year-old male lambs, all

with no defects. Also offer the proper grain offerings and drink offerings with each animal. Include a male goat as a substitute payment for sin, in addition to the regular burnt offering, grain offering, and drink offering.

“Present these offerings in your annual festivals, in addition to any offering given with vows you make or any fellowship offerings.” Moses told the people everything I, the LORD, had told him about all these offerings.

Just as Israel brought Me whole burnt offerings of food offerings, drink offerings, and peace offerings, plus additional vow offerings and special gifts, you should offer Yourself to Me completely in every part of your life.

Rules About Vows

30I, the LORD, said to Moses and the tribe leaders that when someone makes a vow or a pledge to Me, he must carry through with what he promised. If a woman who is still living with her parents makes a vow or a pledge, and her father hears of it but doesn't say anything about it, she must keep her vow or pledge. But if her father objects to it, she needn't keep it, and I will forgive her.

“If she marries after making a vow, and her husband hears of it and says nothing, then she must carry through with it. But if her husband objects to it, she needn't keep it, and I will forgive her. However, widows and divorced women are to keep their vows.

“If a married woman makes a vow or a pledge, and her husband hears about it and says nothing, then she must carry through with it. But if her husband objects to it, she needn't keep it, and I will forgive her. Her husband may confirm or nullify any vow or pledge she makes. If he says nothing about it, on the day he hears about it, she must do what she promised. But if he waits till the next day before trying to stop her, he must be punished.”

These are the regulations I gave Moses about the relationship between a husband and his wife and the relationship between a father and his daughter who is living at home.

Vow to Me from the depth of your heart. Fulfill your vows to Me because you love Me and want to please Me.

War Against the Midianites

31 I, the LORD, said to Moses, “Punish the Midianites for leading the Israelites into idolatry. After that you will die.” So Moses said to the people, “Prepare for battle against the Midianites to punish them. Have each tribe send in 1,000 men.” So 12,000 men were chosen, and Phinehas, Eleazar’s son, led them and took some objects from the tabernacle and trumpets for sounding the charge. They killed every Midianite soldier, including their five kings, Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur, and Reba. Also they killed Balaam, son of Beor. The Israelites captured all the Midianite women and children and took all their herds and flocks and a lot of miscellaneous items. Also they burned away every Midianite town and camp. Gathering all the plunder, captives, and animals, the soldiers brought them to Moses and Eleazar and the Israelites where they were camped on the plains of Moab by the Jordan River across Jericho.

Moses, Eleazar, and the leaders went to meet the soldiers outside the camp, but Moses was very angry with the officers. He asked, “Why did you bring back the women alive? They are the ones who followed Balaam’s advice and encouraged our people to rebel against the Lord at Baal-Peor. That’s why thousands of our people died from a terrible disease. So kill every boy and any of the women who have had sex. But keep alive the virgins.

“Any of you who have killed anyone or touched a corpse is to stay outside the camp for a week. Then purify yourselves and your captive virgins on the third and seventh days of that week. Wash your clothes and anything made from leather, goat hair, or wood.”

Then Eleazar told the soldiers that I said, “Put into the fire anything that can stand heat, such as gold, silver, bronze, iron, tin, and lead, to make it ceremonially clean. Then purify it with water. Wash your clothes on the seventh day and you will be clean, and then you can return to the camp.”

I, the LORD, said to Moses, “You and Eleazar and the tribal leaders are to list everything taken from the Midianites, including the captives and animals. Then divide them into two parts, half for the soldiers and half for the other people. The soldiers are to give to Eleazar for Me one of every 500 captives and animals. From their half the Israelites are to give to the Levites, who are in

charge of the tabernacle, one of every 50 captives and animals.” Moses and Eleazar did just as I directed them to do.

The list of what the soldiers took from the Midianites included 675,000 sheep, 72,000 cattle, 61,000 donkeys, and 32,000 young women who were virgins. So from the soldiers’ portion they gave to Me 675 out of 337,500 sheep, 72 out of 36,000 cattle, 61 out of 30,500 donkeys, and 32 out of 16,200 women. Moses gave these to Eleazar as My share.

From the portions for the people, Moses set aside one of every 500 animals and virgins and gave them to the Levites, as I had commanded.

The army officers said to Moses, “Not one soldier is missing. So we want to give to the Lord all the gold jewelry we took from the Midianites—armbands, bracelets, rings, earrings, and necklaces—as a substitute payment for sin.” Moses and Eleazar accepted all this jewelry from the officers, and this gift to Me weighed about 420 pounds, not counting anything the soldiers kept for themselves. Moses and Eleazar accepted the gold and placed it all in the tabernacle as a memorial to Me for My help.

I gave My people victory in battle, because they honored and obeyed Me.

Two Tribes Remain East of the Jordan River

32The tribes of Reuben and Gad, who had many sheep, saw that the lands of Jazer and Gilead were good sheep country. So they said to Moses and Eleazar and the other tribal leaders, “The Lord helped us conquer the people around Ataroth, Dibon, Jazer, Nimrah, Heshbon, Elealeh, Sebam, Nebo, and Beon, and this is good land for livestock. If it is alright with you, we would like to stay here on this east side of the Jordan River.”

Moses said, “Are you suggesting that you want to stay here while other Israelites cross the Jordan and do all the fighting? That would discourage them from crossing the Jordan and taking what the Lord has given them. A similar thing happened when I sent 12 men into the Canaan from Kadesh Barnea to explore the land. When they returned from the Eschol Valley, they discouraged the people from going in. This made the Lord angry, and He said, ‘No one who was 20 years old or older at the time will enter the land promised to Abraham,

Isaac, and Jacob, except Caleb and Joshua, because they obeyed Me completely.’

“The Lord in His anger made us wander in the desert 40 years until everyone who had sinned had died. Now you sinners are doing the same thing, and the Lord is even more angry now than then. If you turn from the Lord, He will leave His people in the desert, and it will be your fault.”

The Reubenites and Gadites responded, “What we would like to do is build pens for our sheep and goats and towns for our wives and children. But we will cross the Jordan ahead of our fellow Israelites and see that they get settled in, but first we’ll need to build fortified cities for our wives and children. We won’t go home till all the other tribes have settled in. And we won’t want any land on the other side of the Jordan, since the land here east of the river will be ours.”

Moses said, “Alright. If you do what you said—prepare for battle, cross the Jordan, and help your fellow Israelites defeat their enemies—then you may return to your land east of the Jordan. But if you don’t keep your word, you will have sinned against the Lord, and He will punish you. So go ahead and build cities for your families and pens for your flocks.”

The people of Reuben and Gad said, “We will do what you have said. Our wives and children and our flocks and herds will stay here in Gilead. But our men will be ready for battle as you said.”

Moses then said to Eleazar, Joshua, and the tribal leaders, “If the men of Reuben and Gad help you defeat the Canaanites, as they’ve promised, then after the battles, the land of Gilead will be theirs. But if they don’t keep their promise, they must not be given land on this side of the Jordan.”

The men of Reuben and Gad said, “We will do what the Lord has commanded. We will fight for the Lord in Canaan, and then we will inherit land on this east side of the Jordan.” So Moses gave the tribes of Gad, Reuben, and East Manasseh the land of Sihon, king of the Amorites, and Og, king of Bashan. The Gadites built up the cities of Dibon, Ataroth, Aroer, Atroth-Shophan, Jazer, Jogbehah, Beth-Nimrah, and Beth-Haran, and built pens for their sheep. The Reubenites built Heshbon, Elealeh, Kiriathaim, Nebo, Baal-Meon, and Sibmah. The Reubenites renamed some of these cities.

The Makir clan of the tribe of East Manasseh conquered Gilead, drawing out the Amorites. So Moses gave Gilead to the Machirites, and they settled there. Jair, another clan of the Manasseh tribe, captured a number of towns in Gilead and called their area Harroth-Jair. Nobah captured the town of Kenath and surrounding villages and named it Nobah, after his own name.

This chapter is about obeying Me in all decisions. Make all decisions in life whether great or small according to My will.

The Journey From Egypt to Moab

33 This is the itinerary the Israelites followed when Moses and Aaron led them out of Egypt. Moses wrote down the places where they traveled, as I had told him to do. They left the Egyptian city of Ramses on April 15, the day after Passover the night before. As the Egyptians were burying their firstborn sons, they watched the Israelites leave their country. I had defeated the gods of Egypt!

Leaving Ramses, the Israelites camped at Succoth, then at Ethan at the edge of the desert, then they turned back toward Pi Hahiroth, near Baal-Zephon, and then camped at Mount Migdol. After crossing the Red Sea, they traveled for three days into the Etham Desert and camped at Marah. Then they camped at Elim, where there were 12 springs of water and 70 palm trees. Leaving Elim, they camped by the Red Sea and then in the Sin Desert. Next they camped at Dophkah, Alush, and Rephidim, where there was no water. From there they went to the Sinai Desert and then to Kibroth Hattaavah. Their other stops included Hazeroth, Rithmah, Rimmon-Parez, Libnah, Rissah, Kehelathah, Mount Shepher, Haradah, Makheloth, Tahath, Terah, Mithkah, Hashmonah, Moseroth, Bene-Jaakan, Hor-Haggidgad, Jotbathah, Abronah, Ezion-Geber, Kadesh (in the Zin Desert), and Mount Hor near Edom.

At Mount Hor, I told Aaron to climb that mountain where he would die. On July 15, 40 years after leaving Egypt, Aaron died at the age of 123.

The Canaanite king of Arad, who lived in the Southern Desert, heard that the Israelites were coming toward his people. The Israelites went from Mount Hor and camped at Zalmonah, Punon, Oboth, Iye-Abarim, at the border of Moab. From there they went to Dihon-Gad, Almon-Diblathaim, and near Mount Nebo in Abarim, and then to the plains of Moab beside the Jordan River. They camped along the Jordan River, from Beth-Jeshimoth to Abel-Shittim.

I, the LORD, told Moses to tell the people, “When you cross the Jordan into Canaan, you must force all the people out. Destroy their idols, carved stones, and altars, and demolish their hilltop shrines. Then settle in the land I have given you.

“Distribute the land according to the size of your tribes. Larger tribes should be given more land than smaller tribes. If you don’t get rid of the people living there, they will be like barbs in your eyes and thorns in your sides. I will destroy you as I had planned for you to destroy them.”

This chapter gives details of Israel’s travels and struggles. They followed Me in small details. May that be true of your life.

Boundaries of the Promised Land

34I, the LORD, told Moses to tell the people, “When you come into the land, these will be the boundaries of your land. The southern border is to be the Zin Desert at the northwest part of Edom; beginning at the Dead Sea. It is to continue south past Scorpion Pass toward Zin and to include Kadesh-Barnea, and from there it is to go to Hazar-Adar and Azmon. It is to follow the brook of Egypt down to the Mediterranean Sea.

“The western boundary is to be the Mediterranean Sea.

“The northern border is to begin at the Mediterranean Sea and extend out to Mount Hor, and from there to Lebo-Hamath, Zedad, Ziphron, and Hazar-Enan.

“The eastern border is to begin at Hazar-Enan and extend south to Shepham and on to Riblah east of Ai, and along the eastern hills of the Sea of Galilee. Then the border is to go along the Jordan River to the north end of the Dead Sea.”

Moses said, “This is the land you are to divide by casting lots for the nine and a half tribes. The land east of the Jordan has already been assigned to the other two and a half tribes of Reuben, Gad, and East Manasseh.”

I, the LORD, said to Moses, “Eleazar and Joshua are to divide the land, and one leader from each tribe is to help them. These are their names: Caleb from Judah, Shemuel from Simeon, Elidad from Benjamin, Bukki from Dan, Hanniel from Manasseh, Kemuel from Ephraim, Elizaphan from Zebulun, Paltiel from Issachar, Ahihud from Asher, and Pedahel from Naphtali.” These are the names of the men I chose to help Eleazar and Joshua divide the land of Canaan for the tribes.

This I am concerned with both what My people did and how they did it. Follow that pattern in your life. Glorify Me in both what you do and how you do it.

The Levites Are Given Land

35 On the plains of Moab by the Jordan River across from Jericho, I told Moses to tell the Israelites, “You are to give land to the Levites for them to live in, with pasturelands for their animals. The pasturelands are to be 1,500 feet out from the city walls. And each pasture is to be 3,000 feet on each of four sides, with the towns in the center.

“Give the Levites six Towns of Refuge. If a person accidentally kills someone, he can run to one of these towns for safety. Also give the Levites 42 other towns, for a total of 46. The larger tribes are to receive more towns than the smaller tribes.”

I, the LORD, then told Moses to tell the people, “When you are settled in Canaan, choose these 46 Towns of Refuge, where a person can go for protection if he accidentally kills someone. That way a person will be protected from anyone who might try to kill him before a trial is held. Three of the six towns are to be on each side of the Jordan. The towns will be places of protection for the Israelites and foreign residents who might kill someone accidentally.

“If anyone strikes someone with a piece of iron, or a huge stone, or a wooden object, and the person dies, it is murder, and the murderer is to be put to death by one of the victim’s relatives. If anyone kills a person out of hatred by shoving him, throwing something at him, or hitting him, he is a murderer and is to be put to death by one of the victim’s relatives.

“If anyone accidentally kills another by shoving him, throwing something at him, or dropping a stone on him, but not in anger, then the people are to decide whether he is guilty. If they decide the death was accidental, then the person is to be protected from the victim’s relative by staying in one of the Towns of Refuge until the high priest dies.

“If the person leaves the Town of Refuge, and a relative of the victim kills him, the relative is not guilty of murder. So the accused should stay in the town until the priest dies. Then he can go home. This is a permanent law.

“Any murderer is to be put to death, but at least two witnesses must testify of his guilt. No money is to be paid to free a murderer from death. Nor is money to be paid by a person in a Town of Refuge to allow him to return home before the high priest dies. This will keep the land from being polluted by murder. The only thing that can keep the land pure is putting the murderer to death. A sacrifice for him is not enough. So avoid defiling the land where you and I dwell. Yes, I, the LORD, dwell among you.”

Just as Israel had Towns of Refuge for those who sinned unintentionally, so Jesus is your “town of refuge” when you sin ignorantly. Claim the promise, “the blood of Jesus Christ—cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7, NKJV).

Land Is Given to the Daughters of Zelophehad

36The heads of the Gilead clan of the Manasseh tribe went to Moses and the heads of other Israelite families, and said, “When the Lord told you to divide the land among the tribes, He said for you to give Zelophehad’s land to his five daughters. But if they marry men from other tribes, the daughters’ land will go to their tribes. The daughters’ land will no longer be part of our tribe’s inheritance, and it can’t be returned to the original owner even in the Year of Jubilee.”

Moses gave the people this answer from Me: “These men from the Manasseh tribe are right. These daughters may marry anyone, so long as the men are in the Gilead clan of the Manasseh tribe. No land is to pass to another tribe; it is to remain with the tribe that originally inherited it. Any daughter who inherits land is to marry someone from her own tribe. This will help keep inherited land moving from one tribe to another.”

Zelophehad’s daughters did as the Lord commanded. Mahlah, Tirzan, Hoglah, Milcah, and Noah married cousins on their father’s side. By marrying within the clans of the Manasseh tribe, their land stayed in their father’s clan.

Those are the commands and regulations I gave to Moses and the Israelites while they were camped in the plains of Moab by the Jordan River across from Jericho.

Israel did the right thing when faced with a practical problem of oversight. May you always do the right thing when faced with any oversight you have made.

I AM GOD

Of the Second Chance

The Book of Deuteronomy

Deuteronomy means “second giving of the law.” As Israel was camped on the east side of the Jordan River—ready to enter the Promised Land—I told Moses to repeat the law and a history of the wilderness wandering. This generation was under 20 years of age when I delivered them from the Egyptian bondage. This book includes five sermons reminding Israel “you shall” obey Me and worship Me in integrity. Deuteronomy is a picture of what you must do to enter My promises today and how you must walk in fellowship with Me.

I, the LORD, Speak to the People of Israel Through Moses

1 This book records the speeches Moses gave to the Israelites while they were in Moab east of the Jordan River, camped near Suph between Paran on one side and Tophel, Laban, Hazeroth, and Dizahab on the other. (Traveling by foot from Mount Horeb to Kadesh-Barnea by the Mount Seir Road normally takes only 11 days.) Moses gave these speeches on February 15th, 40 years after the Israelites left Egypt. Earlier I had defeated King Sihon of the Amorites, and King Og of Bashan, who reigned at Ashtaroth, near Edrei.

So I addressed the Israelites through Moses in Moab east of the Jordan River. “You have stayed here long enough. Break camp and go to the land of the Amorites, and to the people in the Jordan River Valley, the hill country, the Southern Desert, the Mediterranean coast, the land of Canaan and Lebanon, and all the way to the Euphrates River. I am giving all this land to you. So go take it, because it is the land that I promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and their descendants.”

At that time Moses said he couldn't lead by himself because I had made Israel as numerous as the stars. "And I will increase your numbers many times more and bless you, as I promised."

No one man can solve all your problems and settle all your disputes. So I told Moses to choose wise and respected leaders from each tribe, and make them official leaders.

You agreed to this idea. So Moses supported them as leaders in charge of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens. Also, he told the judges to hear disputes and judge cases fairly, without showing any partiality toward the rich. They are not to be afraid of anyone, for they are judging as My representatives. If they feel some cases too difficult to settle, then Moses will hear them.

Just as Moses delegated to others, may you learn to do what only you can do and delegate to others what they can do.

Then you left Mount Horeb and went toward the Amorite hill country. As you traveled through the terrible desert, you reached Kadesh-Barnea. Then Moses said to the people, "We have reached the land the Lord is giving us. Go take the land He, the God of our ancestors, told us to take. Don't be afraid or discouraged." But the people suggested sending 12 men to inspect the land and bring back a report and tell what roads to take and what the towns are like.

This seemed like a good idea, so Moses chose 12 men, one from each tribe. They explored the hill country, and at the Eshcol valley they gathered some fruit and brought back. They said the land is good. But the people rebelled against Me, the LORD, and refused to go in. They grumbled in their tents and said, "The LORD must hate us by bringing us here from Egypt to be destroyed by the Amorites." The men who inspected the land had discouraged them by saying that the people are taller and stronger than they are and the cities are large with high walls, and some of the people are giants, descendants of Anak.

Don't let the pessimism of others ruin your trust in Me.

Then I said through Moses, “Don’t be afraid. I, the LORD, your God, will lead the way and will fight for you just as I did in Egypt and in the desert. You now know I took care of you, just as a father cares for his child.”

But the people still refused to trust Me, who led them by a flaming fire at night and a cloud in the daytime to show them where to camp and where to travel.

So I said in My anger, “Not one of you evil people will be allowed to enter the Promised Land, except for Caleb. He will enter the land because he obeyed Me completely. I will give him some of the very lands he walked on in exploring the land.”

I, the LORD, was angry and told Moses, “Your people will not enter the Promised Land either. But Joshua will. So encourage him as your leader. You thought your children would be taken as captives, but they will enter the land and conquer it. So you may as well turn around and go back through the desert toward the Red Sea.”

Then the people confessed that they sinned against Me and said they would go in and fight. So they put on their weapons, thinking it would be easy to conquer the area.

But I told Moses to tell the people not to do it because I would not be with them. Their enemies could defeat them. Moses told the people what I said, but they wouldn’t listen. They rebelled and in pride went into the hill country. Then the Amorites chased them like bees from Seir all the way to Hormah.

Never face the enemy without My presence.

They wept before Me, the LORD, but I paid no attention. So they stayed at Kadesh-Barnea for a while.

The People Wander in the Desert

2 Then Israel went back into the desert toward the Red Sea and spent a long time in the area of Mount Seir near Edom. Then I, the LORD, said, “You have been here long enough. So now turn north. Tell the people they

will soon go through the land of the Edomites, descendants of Esau who live in Seir. They will be afraid of you. But be careful. Don't start a war because I have given them all the hill country of Seir. Pay the Edomites for whatever food or water you use. I, the LORD, have blessed you and watched over you in your journey of 40 years in the desert, and you had everything you needed."

"So you passed through the territory of your relatives, the descendants of Esau. You followed the Arabah Road that starts in the south at Elath and Ezion-Geber and traveled north on the desert road that leads to Moab. I, the LORD, warned you not to attack the Moabites either, because I would not give you any of their lands since I had given it to Lot's descendants." The Emites who used to live there were as tall as the Anakites. The Emites and the Anakites are often called Rephaites, but the Moabites called them Emites. The Horites used to live in Seir, but the Edomites drove them out, just as Israel would drive the Canaanites from the land I, the LORD, would give them.

I, the LORD told you, "Cross the Zered Valley at the southern border of Moab," and you did. This was 38 years after leaving Kadesh-Barnea, and by then all the Israelite soldiers had died, as I had said. I, the LORD, was against them until they all finally died.

After these men all died, I, the LORD said to Moses, "Today go past Ar and cross Moab's northern border into Ammon. Don't start a war with the Ammonites. I won't give you any of their land because I have given it to Lot's descendants.

"That territory used to belong to the Rephaites, and the Ammonites called them the Zamzummites. They were strong, numerous, and tall like the Anakites. But I, the LORD, helped the Ammonites defeat them, and the Ammonites settled there. I helped them as I had helped the descendants of Esau defeat the Horites. Similarly, the Caphtorites from Crete destroyed the people of Avvim in villages as far south as Gaza."

Then I, the LORD, said, "Cross the Arnon River, and I will help you defeat Sihon, the Amorite, king of Heshbon. Attack him and possess his land. I will cause people everywhere to be afraid of you." So I sent messengers to Sihon, asking him to let you pass through his country, staying on the main road.

“Tell them you will pay for whatever food or water you take. The Edomites and Moabites have let you cross their land. You want to cross the Jordan River and get into the land I, the LORD; your God am giving you.”

But Sihon refused to let them cross his land, because I, the LORD, had made him stubborn. But I promised, “I will help you defeat Sihon and take his land. Then Sihon and his army met you at Jahaz, and I, the LORD, helped you defeat them. You completely destroyed their towns and killed every man, woman, and child. Keeping their livestock and everything of value, I, the LORD, helped you destroy every town from the Arnon Valley north to Gilead. But as I, the LORD, told you to stay away from the Ammonite towns in the hill country and near the Jabbok River.”

Israel Defeated Og, King of Bashan

3 I, the LORD, say, “When you turned toward Bashan, King Og attacked you at Edrei. But I told you not to be afraid.” I said, “I will give you victory over him, and give you his land. You will defeat him just as you defeated Sihon, king of the Ammonites in Heshbon. I, the LORD, helped you destroy Og and his army, leaving no survivors. And you conquered all 60 of his towns in the Argob region, towns with high walls and many unwalled villages. You destroyed Og’s kingdom—every man, woman, and child—just as you had done with Sihon’s kingdom in Heshbon, keeping the livestock and loot for yourselves.

“You now possess all the territory of the two Amorite kings east of the Jordan all the way from the Arnon River to Mount Hermon in the North. (Mount Hermon is called Sirion by the Sidonians, and it is called Mount Senir by the Amorites.) You conquered all the towns on the plateau and all of Gilead and Bashan as far as Selecah and Edrei, two of Og’s towns. Og was the last of the giant Rephaites. His iron bed, more than 13 feet long and six feet wide, is still in the town of Rabbah of Ammon.

“To the tribes of Reuben and Gad I gave land, extending north from Aroer by the Arnon River to the southern half of Gilead. To the tribe of East Manasseh I gave the rest of Gilead and all of Bashan, Og’s kingdom. The whole region of Argob in Bashan was called the land of the Rephaites. Jair, of the tribe of East Manasseh, took this region of Argob east to the borders of Geshur and Maacah. The people started calling that country Havvoth-Jair

(meaning ‘Jair’s Villages’). Then I gave Gilead to the Makir clan of Manasseh. The land I gave to Reuben and Gad extended from the Jabbok River in Gilead down to the Arnon River, and their western border was the Jordan River from the Sea of Galilee to Mount Pisgah east of the Dead Sea (also called the Sea of the Arabah). I told the tribes to the east of the Jordan, ‘I, the LORD, have given you this land. But first your men in the army are to cross the Jordan and help the tribes there. Your wives, children, and livestock are to stay in their tribal territories until your fellow Israelites have conquered the land I am giving them. Then you can go back home.’”

I told Joshua, “You saw what I, the LORD, did to Sihon and Og. I will do the same with the nations west of the Jordan. Don’t be afraid, because I, the LORD your God, will fight for you.”

Build your future on the past victories I have given you.

Then Moses asked Me, “You have shown me Your greatness and power. No god can do the great things You have done. Please let me cross the Jordan to see the good land there and the hills and the Lebanon Mountains.”

But I, the LORD, was angry with him. I said, “Don’t say anything more about this. You may go to Mount Pisgah and view the land in every direction, but you are not to cross the Jordan.”

I understand why Moses prayed this request. But you must learn when My “no” means “no never.” Yet in the midst of My “no” see glimpses of My grace.

“I appointed Joshua to lead the people across the Jordan and encouraged him. He will help them conquer the land. So you stay in the valley of Beth-Peor.”

Obey My Commands

I, the LORD, said, “Listen now, Israel, to the laws I will teach you, and obey them so you can conquer the land I am giving you. Don’t add any laws or

4 subtract any. Instead, obey them as from Me. You saw that I killed everyone at Baal-Peor for worshiping the idol Baal. But you who were faithful to Me are alive today. These are the laws from Me, your LORD, that you are to obey in the land. Obey them carefully, and other nations will say you are a wise people. No other nation has a God near them as I, the LORD, your God is near you when you pray to Me. And no other nation has such upright laws as you have.

“But be careful that you don’t forget what you have seen Me do for you. And tell your children and grandchildren about these things. Remember when you stood before Me at Mount Horeb and I said, ‘Gather My people together so they will learn to reverence Me all their lives and will teach My words to their children.’ As you stood at the foot of Mount Horeb, it was surrounded by black clouds and thick darkness, and flames shot into the sky. Then when I spoke to you, you heard Me, but you didn’t see Me. Moses said I was making an agreement with you, and that you are to obey the Ten Commands, which I wrote on flat stones. At that time I told Moses to give you the laws and commands you are to obey in the land you will conquer west of the Jordan River.

“When I spoke to you from the fire at Mount Horeb, you saw no form. So be careful. Don’t make and worship idols whether shaped like a man, woman, animal, bird, moving creature, or fish. And when you see the sun, moon, and stars in the sky, don’t bow down and worship them. These things in the sky are for the benefit of all nations.

“You belong to Me, the LORD because I took you out of the furnace of Egypt to be My people.

“I was angry with you because of your sin, and I told Moses he could not enter the land I would give to you. I told him he would die here, but you will cross the Jordan River and take the land. Always remember the agreement you have with Me, and don’t make an idol in any shape. I want you to worship only Me. And if you don’t, I can be like a fire consuming everything in My path.

“In the future, when you have children and grandchildren and you have been in the land a long time, don’t make an idol of any kind. If you do this evil thing, I will be angry with you. And heaven and earth will be witnesses of your idolatry, and you will die in the land. Your days there will be brief; you will be destroyed. I will scatter you into other countries, and only a few

of you will survive there. There you will worship idols made of wood and stone, idols that can't see, hear, eat, or smell.

“But if you seek Me with all your heart and soul, you will find Me.

“So when these difficult days come, return to Me and obey Me. I am a God of mercy. I won't leave you or destroy you, and I won't forget the agreement I made with your ancestors and which I confirmed by an oath.

“Think of all of history, and check everywhere to see if anything as great as this has ever happened: Has any nation heard Me speaking out of the fire, as you have, and lived to tell about it? Has any other god ever taken a nation out from another nation by trials, miracles, war, great power, and awesome deeds, right before your very eyes?

“I did all this so you would realize that I am God and that there's no one like Me. You heard My voice from heaven, and on earth, you saw the great flame of fire, and you heard My voice. Because I loved your ancestors and chose to bless their descendants, I brought you out of Egypt with great power. You now face nations greater and stronger than you, but I will bring you into the land and give it to you as your inheritance.

“Remember that I am the LORD God both in heaven and on the earth, and there is no other. If you obey My laws and commands, which I am passing on to you now, all will be well with you and your children, and you will enjoy a long life in the land I am giving you.”

Then Moses chose three towns of refuge east of the Jordan. If someone killed a person unintentionally and without anger, he could run to one of these towns and be safe living there. The towns were Bezer in the desert for the tribe of Reuben, Ramoth in Gilead for the tribe of Gad, and Golan in Bashan for the tribe of East Manasseh.

When the Israelites had come out of Egypt, Moses gave them their laws and regulations. This was east of the Jordan where the Israelites had defeated Sihon, king of the Amorites, who reigned in Heshbon, and Og, king of Bashan. This land extended from Aroer by the Arnon River north to Mount Siyon (another name for Mount Hermon) and included the land east of the Jordan down to Mount Pisgah east of the Dead Sea (also called the Sea of the Arabah).

The Ten Commands

5 Moses called the people together and said, “Listen to all the laws and regulations I am giving you today. Learn them and be sure to obey them. The Lord, our God, made an agreement with us at Mount Horeb. That wasn’t just for our ancestors; it was for all of us here today. The Lord Himself spoke to you out of the fire on the mountain. You were afraid of the fire and didn’t go up the mountain. So I stood between the Lord and you, and I passed His words onto you. He said, ‘I am the Lord, your God, who brought you out of slavery in Egypt. Do not worship any god except Me. Do not make idols of anything shaped like birds, animals, or fish. Never bow down to them or worship them. Why? Because I am the Lord, your God, and I want your complete worship. If you hate Me, I will punish the sins of future generations. But I will always love those who love and obey Me.

“Don’t use My name disrespectfully. If you do, I will punish you.

“Observe the Sabbath Day, keeping it holy. You have six days each week in which to do your work, but on the seventh day, you are to honor Me. No one is to work on that day, including your family members and slaves, and even animals and foreigners living in your cities. Don’t forget that I brought you out of slavery in Egypt with great power, and that’s why you should keep the Sabbath.

“Respect your parents. If you do, you will have a long life in the land I am giving you.

“Don’t murder.

“Don’t commit adultery.

“Don’t take what doesn’t belong to you.

“Don’t tell lies.

“Don’t desire to have what belongs to someone else, including someone’s wife, slaves, animals, or anything else.”

I gave you these 10 Commands to tell you how I expect you to guard yourselves against sin. Give Me your obedient heart to worship Me, willing hands to serve Me and feet to follow Me.

“There on the mountain I gave these commands in a loud voice from the fire to all of you, as you were surrounded by the great cloud and heavy darkness. I gave only these commands, and Moses wrote them on flat stones and gave them to you. When you heard My voice and saw the fire on the mountain, the tribal leaders came to Moses and said, ‘We have seen His glorious majesty and heard His voice. This shows that people can live if God speaks to them. But if He speaks to us again from the fire, we will die. Who can survive, as we have, after hearing God speaking from the fire? You go and listen to what God says. Then come back and tell me and we will listen and obey.’

“I heard you and said, ‘Moses, I have heard what the people said. But I wish they would always revere Me and keep My commands. Then they and their children would prosper. Tell them to return to their tents. But you come back so I can give you all my commands, laws, and regulations, which you are to teach them to obey, in the land I will give them.’”

So Moses said to the people, “Carefully obey the Lord’s commands in every detail. Stay on the path He has given, and you will have long, prosperous lives in the land you will enter.”

Be careful to obey in both little and big things. The essence of obedience is a relationship to Me.

“Love the LORD Your God”

6“These are the commands, laws, and regulations I taught you so you can obey them in the land I am giving you after you cross the Jordan. I’m giving you these so that you, your children, and grandchildren will revere Me by obeying these laws. Then you will enjoy a long life. So listen closely and obey them so that all will go well with you and you will become a great nation in the land of much milk from cows and much honey from bees, just as I have promised.

“Israel, listen! I am your God the only true God. So love Me completely with all your heart, soul, and strength. Think about these commands all the time, and tell them over and over to your children. Talk about them when you are at home or walking along the road, and at bedtime and when you get

up in the morning. Tie copies of them on your hands and foreheads, and write them on the doorposts of your houses and on your city gates.

“I, the LORD, your God promised your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that I would give you this land. The land has large cities you didn’t build, houses full of good things, wells you didn’t dig, and vineyards and olive orchards you didn’t plant. When you enjoy this food don’t forget that I am the one who brought you out of slavery in Egypt.

“Worship Me, the LORD, your God and serve only Me. When you take an oath, use only My name. Don’t worship any of the gods of nations around you because I, the LORD, want you to worship only Me. In My anger, I may wipe you off the face of the earth. Don’t try My patience as you did at Massah. Be sure to obey all My commands, laws, and regulations. Always do what is right and good in My sight. Then all will go well with you, and you can go take this land from your enemies just as I promised your ancestors.

“When your children ask why the Lord gave you all these commands, laws, and regulations, tell them, ‘We were slaves in Egypt, but the Lord brought us out by His great power. We saw Him perform miracles and do terrible things to the Egyptians. He brought us out of Egypt so He could bring us into this land He promised to our ancestors. He has told us to obey all these laws and to revere Him so that He can prosper us and keep us alive, as we are now. We are righteous when we obey His commands.’”

I drew the line at Mount Sinai that separated God-worshippers from idolworshippers. It was a line that has repeatedly been drawn through the ages. Get on My side of the line; while the rest of unbelieving humanity lines up on the other side with false gods. I am the LORD, the only God.

My Promises Are True

7“When I, your LORD God, bring you into the land, I will destroy the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Ammonites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. These nations are larger and stronger than you, but when you defeat them, destroy them completely. Don’t make any

treaties with them, and show them no mercy. Don't let your sons and daughters marry any of them. If they do, these people will influence your sons to worship other gods, and I will be very angry with you, and I will quickly destroy you.

“Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones, cut down the poles they rise in worshiping Asherah, and burn their idols in the fire. You are a holy people, dedicated to Me, your God, who has chosen you to be My special treasure. Why did I choose to love you? Not because you are larger than other nations, for you are the smallest. My choice of you was simply because of My love and My promise to your ancestors. That's why I rescued you with great power from slavery in Egypt. Remember that I am the LORD, your God, who is the faithful God who will keep My agreement for a thousand generations with those who love and obey Me. Those who hate Me will be destroyed quickly. So obey these commands, laws, and regulations I am giving you today.

“If you are careful to obey these laws, I, the LORD, your God will keep My part of the agreement with you, as I promised your ancestors. I will love you and bless you, giving you many children, and many crops of grain, grapes, and olives, and many calves and lambs. You will be more blessed than any other nation; your men and women and livestock will not be barren. You will be healthy and not suffer the horrible diseases you had in Egypt; instead, I will cause your enemies to suffer from them. You must destroy your enemies without pity. And do not worship their gods; if you do, they will trap you.

“You may think, ‘How can we destroy these nations that are stronger than us?’ But don't be afraid. Just remember what I, the LORD, your God did to Pharaoh and all Egypt. You saw how I used My great power to work mighty miracles and bring you out of Egypt. I will do the same against the nations you fear. Some enemies may hide, but I will send hornets against them. So don't be afraid of these nations, because I, the LORD, your God am great and awesome.

“I will force them out little by little. You won't be able to get rid of them all at once, for if you did there would not be enough people to kill all the wild animals, and this would be a dangerous situation. But I will hand them over to you by causing them to be confused. You will defeat their kings, and no one will even remember their names. No one will be able to stand against

you as you destroy them all. Burn their idols, and don't take the silver and gold from their idols, for idolatry is disgusting to Me. If you bring an idol into your home and worship it, you will be destroyed. Hate such detestable things, for they are doomed to be destroyed."

If you clean your house, your body and mind will be clean.

Always Remember Me, the LORD

8 "Be careful to obey all the commands I am giving you today. If you do, you will live, become a great nation, and take over the land I, the LORD, promised to your ancestors. Remember how I led you through the desert for 40 years, humbling you and checking to see if you would obey My commands. I caused you to go hungry and then fed you manna, which you and your ancestors had not heard of. I wanted you to realize that you need more than food; you need every word I have spoken to you. In those 40 years your clothes didn't wear out, and your feet didn't swell. Yet I, the LORD, have been disciplining you just as a father disciplines his son.

"Obey the commands I, the LORD, have given you by following and revering Me. I, the LORD, am bringing you into a good land, with streams flowing from springs in the valleys and hills. The land has wheat, barley, vineyards, fig trees, pomegranates, olive trees, and honey. Food will be plentiful, and you will lack nothing. Iron is common in the rocks, as is copper in the hills. When you have eaten and are full, praise Me, your LORD, for giving you this good land.

"Be careful and don't forget Me, the LORD, your God. Be sure to obey My commands, laws, and regulations. When you have plenty to eat, are settled in nice houses, and your flocks and herds are growing, and you have more silver and gold, don't be proud and forget Me, your LORD, and God who brought you out of slavery in Egypt. Remember how I led you through the huge and dreadful desert with its dangerous snakes and scorpions. There was no water, but I brought water out of a rock. I gave you manna to eat which your ancestors never heard of. I was testing you to make you humble and put your trust in Me. When you are tempted to think you got rich by your own power, remember that I, the LORD, your God have given you the

ability to become rich. This is to keep the agreement I made with your ancestors.

“If you ever forget Me and worship other gods, you will be destroyed, just as I destroyed other nations you fought.”

The Israelites Did Not Obey

9“Listen, Israel. You will soon cross the Jordan River to go into the land and defeat the nations that are greater and more powerful than you. Their large cities have high walls, and some of the people are giants, descendants of Anak. You have heard that no one can defeat them. But I, the LORD, your God will destroy them like a fire. And you will defeat them quickly, as I, the LORD, promised.

“After I, the LORD, have done this for you, don’t think you are such good people. No, I, the LORD, will defeat them because they are so wicked.”

Keep humble so I can use you. I will honor you when you are humble, in part because you are open to My guidance. It’s only then that I can show you what is right and teach you in My way. My Son, Jesus said, “Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.”

“Again, I will do this because of their wickedness, not your goodness and honesty, and because of My promises to your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Not because of your goodness will I, the LORD, give you this land; in fact, you are a stubborn people.

“Don’t forget how you made Me angry in the desert. You have rebelled against Me from the day you left Egypt until now. In fact, at Mount Horeb (Sinai) I was so angry that I was ready to destroy you.

“This was when Moses was on the mountain for 40 days and nights with nothing to eat or drink. From the fire, on the mountain, I, the LORD, gave him two flat stones with the Ten Commands written on them while you watched below. So at the end of 40 days, when I, the LORD, gave you the

flat stones, I told Moses to go down right away because you had disobeyed Me by making an idol from gold.

I, the LORD, said to Moses, “These people are so stubborn. Let Me alone. I will destroy them, and no one on earth will remember them. Moses and his descendants will become an even bigger and more powerful nation than Israel.” So Moses went down the mountain, carrying the two flat stones.

“Moses immediately saw the idol you had made in the shape of a calf and was amazed at how quickly you turned from Me, the LORD. So Moses threw down the stones and smashed them as you looked on.

“For 40 days and nights, he lay prostrate before Me, the LORD, and ate and drank nothing all that time. Moses was so concerned about your terrible sin which aroused My anger. He was concerned that I was angry enough to destroy all of you. But I listened to him. And even though I, the LORD, in My anger was about to kill Aaron, Moses prayed for Aaron. Then Moses burned the idol you had made. He took the gold, ground it into powder, and threw the powder into the stream flowing down the mountain.

“You also made Me, your LORD, angry at Taberah, Massah, and Kibroth-Hattaavah. Then at Kadesh-Barnea when I told you to take the land, you rebelled and didn’t trust or obey Me, your Lord. In fact, you have been rebelling against Me ever since I have known you.

“That is why Moses lay prostrate before Me, the LORD, for 40 days and nights.” Moses prayed, “Sovereign LORD, please don’t destroy Your people, the treasure You rescued from Egypt in Your great power and strength.

“Remember the promise You made to Your servants Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to overlook the people’s stubbornness, wickedness, and sin. If you don’t, the Egyptians will say, ‘You, the Lord, weren’t powerful enough to bring Your people into the land You promised them. In fact, You hated them, and so You put them to death in the desert.’ But, Lord, they are Your people who belong to You, and You brought them out of Egypt by Your great power and strength.”

The Second Set of Stone Tablets

Then I, the Lord, said to Moses, “Get two flat stones like the ones I gave
10you earlier. Also, make a wooden chest. And you must write on the stones the Ten Commands that were on the first stones. And keep these in the chest.”

So Moses made a chest of acacia wood and chiseled two stones like the ones he broke. He carried the stones up the mountain, My hand wrote on them, the Ten Commands, which were the same as what I had given before from the fire on the mountain as you watched below.

Moses came down the mountain and put the stones in the sacred chest, as I, the LORD, had told him to do and they are there now.

“You traveled from the wells of the Jaakanites to Moserah, where Aaron died and was buried, and Eleazar, his son, became high priest. From there you went to Gudgodah and on to Jotbathah, where there are streams of water. I, the LORD, chose the tribe of Levi to carry the sacred chest and to serve Me in the tabernacle, which they still do. The Levites have no territory allotted to them because I, the LORD, am their inheritance.”

After Moses had stayed on Mount Horeb another 40 days and nights, I, the LORD, again heard his prayer and said I would not destroy you. I said, “Go lead these people into the land I promised their ancestors. Now, Israel, what do I, the LORD, your God want you to do? I want you to reverence Me, follow Me, love Me, and serve Me with all your heart and soul, and to obey My commands and laws that I am giving you today. All this is for your own good.

“Everything belongs to Me, including the heavens and the earth and everything on it. And yet I loved your ancestors and chose them and you, their descendants, above anyone else, as is evident today. Therefore cleanse your sinful hearts and stop being stubborn. I, the LORD, your God am the God of gods and LORD of lords. As the mighty and awesome God, I am impartial, and I take no bribes from anyone who might try to change My mind. I defend the rights of orphans and widows, and I care for foreigners and see that they have food and clothing. You too must love foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt. Reverence Me, the LORD, your God and serve Me. Cling to Me and make promises only in My name. Make Me the object of your praise because as your God I performed great miracles for you. When your ancestors went to live in Egypt, there were

only 70 of them, and now I, the LORD, your God have made you as many as the stars in the sky.”

The greatest inheritance of all is Me, your God. Beyond the Ten Commands and every other directive, My greatest gift is My presence.

The Importance of Obedience

11 “Love Me, the LORD, your God, and always keep My regulations, commands, and laws. You, not your children, were the ones who were disciplined by Me when you saw My majesty, great power and strength. They didn’t see the miracles I, the LORD, performed in Egypt against Pharaoh and his entire nation. Nor did they see how I drowned the Egyptian army and their horses and chariots in the Red Sea as they were chasing you. You, not your children, saw how I cared for you in the desert. Also you saw what I did to Dathan and Abiram, Eliab’s sons, in causing them to fall into a huge crevice with their families and belongings. You, not your children, saw all these wonderful things I, the LORD, did for you.

“So obey all My commands I am giving you today. If you do, then you will have the strength to take the land you are about to enter after crossing the Jordan River. And if you obey these commands, you will live a long time in the land I promised along with your ancestors and their descendants, this land with lots of milk and honey. The land you are about to enter is not like Egypt, where you had to plant seeds and then irrigate them as in a vegetable garden. The hills and valleys in the land where you are going are watered by rain. I, the LORD, your God care for this land; I keep My eyes on it all the time.

“So if you obey all My commands, love Me, and serve Me with all your heart and soul, I will send rain in the fall and spring so that you will have plenty of grain, grapes, and olive oil. You will have good pasture land for your cattle, and you will have plenty to eat.

“Beware that you don’t turn from Me and worship other gods. If you bow down to them, I, the LORD, will be angry and I will hold off the rain. You will have no crops, and you will die. So keep these words in your mind,

and tie copies of them on your hands and foreheads. Teach them to your children, talking about them at home, when you are walking along the road, at bedtime, and when you get up in the morning. Write them on the doorposts of your houses and on your city gates. That way as long as the sky is above the earth you and your children will live long lives in My land that I promised to your ancestors.

“Obey all the commands I am giving you. Love Me, your Lord, follow My ways and cling to Me. Then I will force out of the land the nations that are larger and stronger than you. Wherever you go the land will be yours, from the desert in the south to Lebanon in the north and from the Euphrates River to the Mediterranean Sea. No one will be able to defeat you. I, the LORD, your God will make everyone afraid of you, as I promised.

“I am giving you a choice: you will be blessed if you obey My commands, or you will be cursed if you disobey and worship other gods. When you are in the land, you are to announce the blessings on Mount Gerizim and the curses on Mount Ebal. As you know, these mountains are west of the Jordan River near the great oak tree of Moreh where the Canaanites live near Gilgal. You will soon cross the Jordan River and conquer the land I, the LORD, your God am giving you. When you have settled there, be sure you obey the commands and laws I, the LORD, am giving you today.”

I chose the land of promise for Israel, and it was just dirt, rocks, and trees. But how greater is My choice of you and My care for you. The land of promise was just a place I loved, but you are My people. Love Me and serve Me with all your heart. Worship Me for My greatness of care that I extend to you.

The One Place For Worship

12“These are the commands and laws you must obey in the land that I, the LORD, the God of your ancestors, am giving you. After you capture the land, destroy all the places where the nations worship their gods, including those on mountaintops, on hills, and under large trees. Tear down these altars, smash their sacred stones, and burn the poles involved in their

worshiping the goddess, Asherah. Destroy these idols and even rename those places. Don't worship Me, the LORD, your God the way these people worship their gods.

“When you are in the land, you are not to worship Me, your LORD, anywhere you choose, as the nations do. Instead, I will choose the place for My tabernacle. And you are to bring your offerings and sacrifices, tithes, and gifts, offerings to fulfill a vow, freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your cattle, sheep, and goats. There you and your families will eat your sacrifices and rejoice in all I, the LORD, have done for you.

“You now do as you please, but things will be different when you arrive in the place of rest I, the LORD, your God will give you. When you cross the Jordan and settle in the land, I will give you rest, and you will be safe. Bring your burnt offering, sacrifice, tithes, and other gifts to the place I, the LORD, your God will choose. Rejoice there with your families, servants, and the Levites, who, as you know, will have no tribal land of their own. You are not to sacrifice your burnt offerings anywhere you choose. You are to offer them only at the place I, the LORD, will choose.

“However, you may kill an animal for food anywhere you choose, just as you do when hunting gazelles or deer. And anyone can eat the meat, whether he is ceremonially clean or unclean. But do not eat the blood; drain it out on the ground.

“You are not to eat in your hometowns any of your offerings including the tithe of your grain, grapes, and olive oil; the firstborn of your cattle, sheep, or goats; or anything you have vowed to give to Me, the LORD, or freewill offerings, or special gifts. Instead eat them before Me, the LORD, at the place I will choose for you, your families, servants, and Levites. And rejoice in everything you do. And don't forget the Levites.

“When I, the LORD, your God, give you more land, and you would like some meat to eat, you may eat as much as you want. But some of you may not be able to travel from your homes to the tabernacle. So when you need meat, you may butcher some of your cattle, sheep, or goats in your towns and eat as much as you want. This is the same as eating meat from gazelles or deer that you hunt, and it can be eaten by the ceremonially clean or unclean. But don't eat the blood because it is the animal's life. Drain out the blood on the ground. Don't eat the blood so that all will go well with you

and your children. In this way you will be doing what pleases Me, the LORD, your God.

“Take your sacrifices and offerings to fulfill a vow to the place I will choose. When you sacrifice the meat and blood of your burnt offerings on the altar of burnt offering, you may eat the meat, but be sure to drain out the blood beside the altar. Obey these laws, and as I said, all will go well with you and your children, and you will be doing what I, the LORD, your God, say is good and right. When I, the LORD, your God destroy these nations, and you settle in the land, don’t be trapped into following their gods. And don’t think you should worship the same way they worship their gods. Don’t do that. Why? Because they worship their gods in terrible ways that I hate, even burning their sons and daughters to their gods. Obey all that I command you. Don’t add any or subtract any.”

Meet Me at My place. Bring your tithe to Me there. I will fellowship with you and other believers. Commit yourself to worship Me in My special place.

Worship Me, the One True God

13 “If a prophet claims to tell by dreams what will happen in the future or says he has performed a miracle, and the miracle takes place and he says, ‘Let’s worship these other gods,’ don’t listen to him. I, the LORD, am checking to see if he loves Me wholeheartedly. Follow and reverence Me, the LORD, your God. Obey My commands, serve Me, and cling to Me. Put that dreamer to death. Why? Because he tried to get, you to rebel against Me, the LORD, your God, the one who brought you out of slavery in Egypt.”

Reject anyone who pulls you away from Me.

“Suppose a close relative or friend says, ‘Let’s worship their other gods’ (gods of nations around you), don’t give in and don’t pity him or protect him. Stone him to death, and if you are the one he tried to influence, then

you be the first to throw a stone followed by other Israelites. He deserves to be stoned because he tried to turn you from Me, the LORD, your God who rescued you from slavery in Egypt. When the people hear of this, they will be afraid, and this will keep everyone from ever doing such a terrible thing again.

“Suppose you hear a rumor that some wicked men are in one of your towns encouraging the people there to worship other gods. You are to see if that rumor is true. And if it is true, then you are to kill everyone in that town and all their livestock. Pile all their possessions in the town square, and burn the loot and the town itself as a burnt offering to Me, the LORD, your God. And don’t ever rebuild the town, and don’t keep any of the possessions for yourselves. Then I, the LORD, will no longer be angry. I will be merciful and compassionate, and make you a great nation, as I promised your ancestors. But this will depend on your obeying all the commands I, the LORD, your God, am giving you today and your doing what is right.”

Put to death all evil lust within your life. Do not tolerate anything that I hate.

Clean and Unclean Foods

14“You are My children, so don’t cut yourselves (as people in other nations do when they worship their gods), or shave your foreheads when you mourn the dead. That’s because you are holy to Me, the LORD, your God and of all the nations I have chosen you to be My special people. Don’t eat any animal that is unclean. But you may eat the meat of cattle, goats, deer, gazelles, roebucks, wild goats, ibex goats, antelopes, and mountain sheep. You may eat the meat of any animal that has split hooves and chews the cud. You are not to eat the meat of camels, rabbits, or rock badgers, because they chew the cud but don’t have split hooves. They are ceremonially unclean. And don’t eat pigs; they have split hooves, but they don’t chew the cud. In fact, don’t even touch a dead pig.

“You may eat any fish that has fins and scales. But you are not to eat any other water creatures that don’t have fins and scales. You may eat any clean bird. But you are not to eat the meat of any of these: eagles, vultures, kites,

falcons, ravens, horned owls and screech owls, gulls, hawks, little, big, and white owls, desert owls, osprey, cormorants, storks, herons, hoopoes, and bats. You are not to eat any flying insects, but you may eat certain kinds of winged insects.

“You are not to eat any dead animal you find. You may give it to a foreign resident, and he may eat it, or you may give it to a foreigner who is visiting you. But you are a people set apart to Me, the LORD, your God. Don’t boil a young goat in its mother’s milk.

“Every year set aside a tenth of all your crops. Also bring a tenth of your grain, grapes, and olive oil, and the firstborn of your cattle, sheep, and goats to the place I, the LORD, will choose for My tabernacle. You may eat these there, and this will help you learn to respect Me, the LORD, your God. But if the tabernacle is too far away from where you live and you can’t take all your tithe there, then sell your tithe and take the money to the tabernacle. There you may buy cattle, sheep, drinks, and feast in My presence with joy. Let the Levites celebrate with you since they have no tribal territory of their own. Every third year, store your tithe of that year’s produce in your towns. That way food will be available for foreigners, orphans, and widows in your towns. Then I, the LORD, your God will be pleased and will bless you.”

I own everything because I’ve created all things, yet I allow you to possess things and even own things. Then I allow you to give back to Me some of the belongings you own. Accept My gifts to you and use them for My glory.

Forgive Debtors Every Seven Years

15“At the end of every seven years, you must cancel debts owed to you. Every creditor is to tell his fellow Israelites that the debt is canceled and no more payment is to be made on the loan. However, this does not apply to foreigners with a debt. No one will become poor because of this, because I, the LORD, your God will bless you in the land if you obey Me and follow My commands that I’m giving you today. Because of My blessings, you will make loans to other nations, but you won’t have to

borrow from any of them. Also, you will rule over many nations, but none of them will rule over you.

“If there is a poor Israelite in any of the towns in the land, I, the LORD, your God am giving you, don’t be uncaring and selfish with your money. Instead be generous and lend him whatever he needs. Don’t think, ‘Well, the seventh year is coming soon, so if I loan him something now, I won’t get it back.’ If you loan him nothing, he may tell this to Me, and I may say you are guilty. Give him a generous loan without complaining about it. Then I, the LORD, your God will bless you and give you success in everything you do. Since some of your Israelites will always be poor, be generous toward them.

“If you buy an Israelite as a servant, you are to set him free after six years. Don’t send him away empty-handed; give him sheep and goats and grain and wine. The more I, the LORD, have blessed you, the more you should give to him. Don’t forget that you were slaves in Egypt, and I, the LORD, rescued you. But if your servant says he doesn’t want to leave you because he loves you and your family and enjoys being with you, then push a sharp tool through one of his earlobes. He will then belong to you the rest of his life. Do the same for female servants. Don’t complain when you set a servant free. After all, you got his service for half the cost of hiring someone.

“Give to Me, the LORD, your God every firstborn male cow, sheep, or goat. Don’t work the firstborn cattle in your fields and don’t shear your firstborn sheep. Each year you are to take these firstborn animals to the tabernacle, and you and your family are to sacrifice them there and eat the meat from them. But if an animal is lame or blind or has some other defect, you are not to sacrifice it to Me, the LORD, your God. Instead, you are to eat it at home. Anyone may eat it whether he is ceremonially clean or unclean, just as anyone may eat a gazelle or deer killed in your hunting. But be sure never to eat the blood; drain it out on the ground.”

Three Festivals Each Year

16“Celebrate the Passover to Me, the LORD, your God in the month of April, the month that I, the LORD, your God brought you out of Egypt at night. Sacrifice to Me a cow, sheep, or goat at the place where I will

choose to be worshiped. Eat it with bread without yeast, and eat that kind of bread for seven days, as you did when you left Egypt in a hurry. Eat this bread—the bread of suffering— because you left Egypt in a hurry. Don't have any yeast in your house for seven days, and don't leave any leftovers until morning.

“Don't sacrifice the Passover in any town where you live. It must be offered in the place the LORD, your God will choose to be worshiped. Kill the sacrificial animal at sunset, at the time of day you left Egypt. Roast the lamb, and eat it and then return to your tents in the morning. Eat bread without yeast for six days. Then on the seventh day meet together to worship Me, your LORD, and God, and don't do any work.

“Seven weeks after the beginning of your grain harvest, celebrate the Harvest Festival by giving a freewill offering, with the size depending on the size of the harvest I, the LORD, have given you. Make this a time of joy with your family, your servants, the Levites in your towns, foreign residents, orphans, and widows. Obey these laws, remembering that you were slaves in Egypt.

“At the end of the harvest season celebrate the Festival of Shelters for a week. This too is to be a joyful time, with the same people who were with you for the Harvest Festival. This festival is to be for a week at the tabernacle, to be located at the place where I, the LORD, will choose. You will have good harvests, and this will give you much joy.

“Three times every year each man is to go to the tabernacle at the place I, the LORD, will choose for the Festival of Bread without Yeast, the Harvest Festival, and the Festival of Shelters with a gift to Me, the LORD. The size of the gift is to depend on the way I, the LORD, your God have blessed you.

“In every town in the land where I, the LORD, your God have given you, appoint judges and officials for each of your tribes, who are to judge fairly. They must never twist justice or be partial. And they must not accept bribes, because bribes can keep wise people from seeing the truth and can wrongly influence their decisions. To live and enjoy the land I, the LORD, your God has given you, be sure you always treat everyone with justice.

“When you build the altar of burnt offering for Me, the LORD, your God never set up next to it a wooden pole dedicated to the goddess,

Asherah, and don't set up a sacred stone, because I, the LORD, your God hates these."

Never forget the suffering of Christ at Passover that brought you to salvation. Thank Me for Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came. And remember I delivered you from bondage when you celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles.

Judgment of Evil and Rules For the King

17 "Don't sacrifice to Me, the LORD, your God any cow or sheep with a physical defect because I despise such offerings. If someone sins before Me, the LORD, your God by worshiping other gods and bowing down to them or to the sun, moon, or stars, you must see if this is true. If it has been proved that this terrible thing has been done in Israel, then take that person to the city gate and stone him to death, but only if two or three witnesses confirm his guilt. The witnesses must be the first ones to throw stones. In this way, you will help get rid of evil among your people."

Be harsh with sin in your life because I do not tolerate evil of any kind.

"In some legal cases, it may be difficult to know if someone is guilty or not, to know if he is guilty of murder or manslaughter, or an injury intentionally or not. Take the problem to the Levites and to the judge who is in office at the time, and he will decide the case. Then follow their decision, doing whatever they tell you to do. Carry out the verdict they give you, and don't change it in any way. If the defendant shows disrespect for the judge's decision or the priest, he must be put to death. In this way, you will help get rid of evil among your people. When the people hear about this, they will be afraid and won't challenge the court's decision again.

"When you are settled in the land, and you say you want a king as other nations have, be sure to appoint the man I, the LORD, your God chooses. He must be an Israelite, not a foreign resident. Also, the king is not to have

many horses, and he must not send people back to Egypt to get horses. I, the LORD, have told you never to go back there again. Also, the king is not to have many wives, because they will lead him away from Me. And he must not become unusually rich with silver and gold.

“When the man becomes a king, he is to go to the priests and write for himself a copy of the law, and he is to read from it every day. This will help him reverence Me, the LORD, his God and follow carefully all these laws and commands. The law will keep him from thinking he is better than everyone else, and it will keep him from turning away from the law in even the smallest way. Then he and his descendants will reign over Israel for many years.”

Always hold the Scriptures in your heart and obey them constantly.

A Share Given to the Priests and Levites

18 “Since Levites, including the priests, are to have no tribal territory, they are to eat from the sacrifices brought by the people to Me, their LORD, for that is their inheritance. They are to have no tribal territory of their own because I, the LORD, Myself am their inheritance as I promised.

“When you sacrifice a bull or a sheep, the priests are to receive the animal’s shoulder, jaws, and stomach. You are also to give the priests the first part of your grain, wine, and olive oil, and the first wool you shear from your sheep. This is because I, the LORD, your God have chosen them and their descendants from all your tribes to serve Me always.

“If a Levite moves from his hometown to the place where the tabernacle will be set up, he may serve his fellow Levites in representing Me, the LORD, his God. He may have received money from the sale of family belongings, but he should still receive the same amount of food from the sacrifices as other Levites.

“When you enter the land I, the LORD, your God am giving you, don’t copy the horrible customs of the nations there. Don’t any of you sacrifice your son or daughter in fire, or practice fortune-telling or witchcraft, or interpret omens, or cast spells, or be a medium pretending to contact the dead, or a psychic pretending to tell the future or to talk with the dead.

Anyone who does any of these is disgusting to Me, and that is why I will help you destroy these nations. By contrast you must be completely blameless before Me, your LORD. The nations you are about to displace practice magic and witchcraft, but I, the LORD, your God will not allow you to do such things.

“I, the LORD, your God will raise up for you a prophet from among you who will be like Moses, and you must listen to him and obey him. Remember that at Mount Horeb (Sinai) you said you didn’t want to hear the voice of the Lord, your God, or see the terrible fire again or you would die. Then I, the LORD, said to Moses, ‘Alright, when I want to speak to them, I will choose one of you to be a prophet. I will tell him what to say, and he will tell the people what I said. If anyone doesn’t listen to the prophet, he will have to deal with Me. And if a prophet claims to give a message from Me, but I didn’t give it, or if he claims to have a message from another god, he must be put to death.

““But how will you know if a message is from Me? If what he says will happen does not occur, that message is not from Me. He has made up the message, so you don’t need to be afraid of him.””

Believe only those who speak for Me if they speak exactly what the Scriptures say.

The Towns of Refuge

19“After I, the LORD, your God have destroyed the nations in the land I am giving you and you are settled in, choose three towns as Towns of Refuge. Divide the land into three districts with a Town of Refuge in the center of each district, with roads leading to each town.

“This is the rule to follow if a person kills someone unintentionally without any previous hatred toward him, he must run to a Town of Refuge for safety. For example suppose a man goes into a forest with a friend to cut wood, and as he swings his ax the ax head comes off the handle and hits his friend and kills him. He may run to one of these three towns and be safe. If the distance to the town is not too great, a relative of the dead man might

catch up with the innocent ‘murderer’ and kill him. That’s why it’s important to have these Towns of Refuge.

“If I, the LORD, your God expand your territory as I promised to your ancestors, and give you this land, then set aside three more Towns of Refuge. (Of course, this depends on your obeying My commands and loving Me and following Me.) This will help keep innocent people from being killed in your land and keep you from being guilty of murder.

“But if someone hates his neighbor and attacks and kills him, and then he runs to a Town of Refuge, the leaders of his hometown are to take him back home and hand him over to a relative of the victim who will put him to death. Don’t show any mercy for the murderer. Getting rid of anyone who murders an innocent person is for the good of your nation.

“Your ancestors set up stones to mark the boundaries of properties in the land I, the LORD, your God will give you. So don’t move these stones.

“Never convict someone of a crime based on the words of one witness. Guilt or innocence must be determined by two or three witnesses.

“If a false witness accuses a man of a crime, both men are to face the priests and judges in My presence. The judges are to see if the witness is lying. If he is lying, punish him the way he wanted the man to be punished. This will be for the good of your nation. In fact when people hear that this is what happens to witnesses who lie, they will never again lie in court. Don’t show any pity for the liar. His punishment will be taking his life if he took someone else’s life, gouging out one of his eyes if he gouged out someone’s eye, or a tooth for a tooth, a hand for a hand, a foot for a foot.”

You have a city of refuge when you sin unintentionally, it is Jesus Christ.

How to Make War

20“When you go to war, and you see horses and chariots with an army bigger than yours, don’t be afraid. I, the LORD, your God who brought you out of Egypt, will be with you. Before you go into battle, the priest is to speak to the soldiers. He will say, ‘Listen to me. As you go into battle today,

don't be discouraged or afraid, and don't panic when you see them. The LORD, your God, will go with you, will fight for you, and will give you victory.'

"The officers will tell the soldiers, 'Has anyone just built a house and hasn't dedicated it? You may go home, because if you die in battle, someone else will dedicate it. Has anyone planted a vineyard and not yet eaten any grapes from it? You may go home, because if you die in battle, someone else will enjoy your grapes. Has anyone become engaged but isn't yet married? You may go home, because if you die in battle someone else will marry her. If you are afraid or terrified, you may go home so you won't discourage the other soldiers.' When the officers finish giving these words, they are to appoint unit commanders.

"As you come to a town to attack it, first offer peace to the people there. If they accept your offer, they are to open their gates and to become your servants. But if they reject your offer and fight against you, attack the town. I, the LORD, your God will help you capture the town, and you are to kill all the men there. Take the women, children, livestock, and everything of value for yourselves. This is how you are to treat all the towns at a distance from you, towns not in the land I, the LORD, your God am giving you. But in the towns you are receiving as an inheritance from Me, the LORD, your God kill every living being. Completely destroy the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites, as I, the LORD, your God has told you to do. If you don't, they will influence you to worship their detestable gods, and you will be sinning against Me, the LORD, your God.

"When you attack a town, and the battle continues on, don't chop down its fruit trees. The townspeople aren't your enemies. But you may cut down trees that aren't fruit trees. You may use wood from those trees to build equipment you need to capture the town."

Thank Me for spiritual victory in Christ when you completely separate yourself from sin and defilement.

Unsolved Murders

“Suppose the body of a murder victim is found in a field in the land I, the LORD, your God gave you, and you don’t know who the murderer is. **21** Leaders and judges in the town near the body are to find out which town is closest to the body. Then the leaders of the closest town are to take a heifer that has never been put to work or worn a yoke, and they and the priests are to take her to a valley where there is a stream where the land hasn’t been plowed. There they are to break the heifer’s neck. (The priests are those whom I, the LORD, your God has chosen to be My servants, to pronounce blessings, and to settle legal cases.) The town leaders are to wash their hands over the cow’s dead body and say, ‘We did not commit this murder, and we don’t know who did. Lord, please accept this heifer as a substitute payment for sin for your people, and don’t hold your people guilty of this crime.’ If you do this, following My orders, you will be forgiven of the alleged crime and not be guilty.

“When you go to war and I, the LORD, your God help you defeat an enemy, one of the prisoners you take may be a beautiful woman whom you want to marry. Bring her home, have her shave her head and trim her nails, and get rid of the clothes she wore as a foreigner. After she has mourned for her parents for a month, then you may marry her. Later, if you are not pleased with her, you may divorce her and let her go free. You may not sell her or treat her as a slave because you have humiliated her.

“Suppose a man has two wives and he loves one more than the other. If both wives have sons, then the firstborn of the son of the wife he loves less is to receive a double share of the father’s property. This is because he is the firstborn son.

“Suppose parents have a stubborn and rebellious son who refuses to obey even after he has been punished. His parents are to take him to the elders at the town gate and tell the elders, ‘This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious, doesn’t obey us, and is a wicked drunkard.’ Then all the men of the town are to stone the son to death. Getting rid of him will be for the good of the nation because when your people hear about this, they will be afraid.

“If a criminal is executed and you hang his body on a tree, don’t leave it there overnight. Bury it the same day, because any dead body is under My curse. Don’t make unclean the land I, the LORD, your God am giving you as your inheritance.”

Jesus became guilty of all the sins of the world. He was hanged on a tree (cross) for me. Thank You for forgiveness.

Miscellaneous Instructions

22“If you see a cow or sheep wandering around lost, take it back to its owner. If the owner lives far away, or if you don’t know who the owner is, take the animal with you and care for it. Then when the owner comes looking for it, give it to him. Do the same if you find someone’s donkey or his clothing or anything he loses. Don’t pretend you don’t have them.

“If you see someone’s donkey or an ox fallen on the road, don’t ignore it. Help it get back on its feet.

“A woman is not to wear men’s clothing, and a man is not to wear women’s clothing. I, the LORD, your God hate anyone who does this.

“If you see a bird’s nest in a tree or on the ground, and the mother bird is in the nest with her eggs or baby birds, you may take the eggs and the young, but let the mother go free. I, the LORD, will bless you and you will have a long life.

“If you build a house, put a railing around the flat roof. This will keep you from being guilty if someone falls off the roof and dies.

“If you plant a vineyard, don’t plant any other crops with it. If you do, the grapes and other crops will be ruined. Don’t plow with an ox and a donkey hitched together. Don’t make clothes of wool and linen together. Sew tassels on the four corners of your cloaks.

“Suppose a man marries a woman and then after sleeping with her doesn’t like her, and gives her a bad reputation by accusing her of not being a virgin when they married. The bride’s parents are to bring to the town’s elders at the city gate proof that she was a virgin when she got married. The girl’s father is to say to them, ‘I gave my daughter to be this man’s wife, and now he hates her and is accusing her of not being a virgin. But here is proof that she was.’ The parents are to show them the sheet bed from their daughter’s wedding night. Then the elders are to punish him and have him pay his father-in-law 100 silver pieces. And the man is not to divorce her.

“However, if the man was right and there is no proof that she was a virgin when she married, the men of the town are to stone her to death at the front door of her father’s house. She has done a disgraceful thing by sleeping with someone before she got married. You must get rid of this evil from your nation.

“If a man is caught having sex with another man’s wife, put to death both him and the woman. You must get rid of this evil from your nation too. If a man is caught having sex with an engaged woman, stone to death both of them at the city gate. This is because she was in town and didn’t scream for help and he violated another man’s wife. You must get rid of this evil too.

“If a man raped an engaged woman out in the country, the man is to die. Don’t punish the woman because she has done nothing that deserves death. She is like being a murder victim, because though she screamed no one heard her there in the country.

“If a man rapes a virgin who is not married and they are caught, he is to pay her father 50 pieces of silver, and marry the girl and not divorce her as long as he lives.

“A man must not marry a woman who is already married to his father, for this would be a disgrace to his father.”

There are many laws about having sex. I have commanded you to have sex only within marriage. Commit yourself to be sexually pure and pray for all your friends and relatives that they will make that same commitment.

Banned People

23“If a man’s private parts are crushed or cut off in connection with pagan worship, he may not worship with My people. No one born outside of a legal marriage may worship with My people, nor may his descendants for ten generations.

“No Ammonite or Moabite may worship with My people, nor may his descendants for ten generations. They refused to give you food and water

when you left Egypt. And they hired Balaam, son of Beor, in northern Syria to put a curse on you. However, because I, the LORD, your God love you, I refused to listen to Balaam and turned his curse into a blessing. So don't sign a peace treaty with the Ammonites or Moabites or try to help them in any way. But don't hate the Edomites, because Edom is your relative. And don't hate Egyptians because you lived as foreigners in Egypt. Let the great-grandchildren of the Egyptians who came with you worship with you.

“When you are encamped when at war with your enemies, stay away from everything impure. For example if a man has a nocturnal emission at night, he is ceremonially unclean and is to go outside the camp and stay there during the day. Late afternoon he is to take a bath, and at sunset he may return to the camp. Set up a place outside the camp as a toilet area. When you relieve yourself, use a shovel to dig a hole, and bury the waste in the hole. Because I, the LORD, your God am in your camp to protect you and help you defeat your enemies, keep your camp holy and clean. If I see something indecent among you, I will turn away from you.

“If a slave escaped from his master and came to you, don't force him to return. Let him live in whatever town he chooses, and don't mistreat him. No Israelite man or woman is to become a temple prostitute. And don't bring to My tabernacle any earnings from prostitutes or homosexuals even if it is to pay a vow, because I, the LORD, your God despise them both.

“Don't charge interest on loans you make to another Israelite, whether it is money, food, or anything else. You may charge a foreigner interest, but don't charge interest from a fellow Israelite so that I, the LORD, your God will bless you in everything you do in the land you are about to take.

“If you promise to give a gift to Me, the LORD, your God do it promptly. If you don't, you will be guilty of sin. However, it is not a sin not to make a vow. But if you do choose to make a vow be careful to do as you have said in making the promise to Me.

“You may eat as many of your neighbor's grapes as you want, but don't take any away with you. It is the same with someone else's grain. You may pick some heads of grain, but don't cut down any grain with a sickle.”

These practical instructions are based on My wisdom. Do to others as you would have them do to you. I, the LORD, will help you live wisely and practically with others.

Divorce and Other Matters

24 “Suppose a man finds something disgraceful in his wife and he divorces her and sends her away. Then she marries another man, and later he too divorces her, or he dies. Then her first husband is not allowed to marry her again after she has had sex with her other husband. That would be disgusting to Me, the LORD, and would pollute the land I, the LORD, your God am giving you.

“If a man has been married less than a year, he must not be drafted into the army or given any related duties. He is to stay home and make his wife happy.

“When you loan money to someone, don’t take a millstone of his as a guarantee that he will pay back the loan. That’s because he needs millstones for grinding grain into flour to make bread. Without his millstones, he may starve.

“Don’t kidnap a fellow Israelite and treat him as a slave or sell him. If you do, you will die. Get rid of this sinful practice.

“If someone has leprosy, he must do exactly what the priests tell him to do, following the instructions I have given them. Don’t forget what I, the LORD, your God did to Miriam after you left Egypt.

“When you loan something to a neighbor, don’t go into his house to get a guarantee that he will pay you back. Wait outside and let him bring it to you. If the man is poor, and the only thing he can give you as a guarantee of his repayment is his coat, don’t keep it overnight. Take it back to him before sunset so he can sleep in it. He will thank you, and I, the LORD, your God will see that you have done a good thing.

“Never take advantage of poor people you have hired to work for you, whether they are Israelites or foreign residents. Pay them their wages at the end of each day because they are poor and need the pay to survive. If you don’t, they will tell Me, the LORD, and you will be guilty.

“Don’t put parents to death for crimes their children committed, and don’t put children to death for crimes their parents committed. Each person is to be put to death for his own sin, not someone else’s. Treat foreigners and orphans fairly. If you lend money to a widow, don’t take her coat as a

guarantee that she will pay you back. Don't forget that you were slaves in Egypt and that I, the LORD, your God rescued you from there. You know what it was like to be treated badly there, so treat your widows fairly.

“When you are harvesting in your field and you forget to bring in a stack of harvested grain, don't go back for it. Leave it for foreign residents, orphans, and widows, so that I, the LORD, your God will give you success in all you do. And when you knock down olives from your olive trees, don't go back over the branches again. Leave the remaining olives for foreign residents, orphans, and widows. When you pick grapes from your vineyard, go over them only once and leave the rest for foreign residents, orphans, and widows. Remember that you lived in poverty as slaves in Egypt, and that's why I, the LORD, your God am giving you these commands.”

Learn the “sympathy side” of My law. I want you to treat everyone fairly. I want you to obey My law accurately. Be gracious to other needy people so that someone will be gracious to you.

Additional Law

25“If two men have a dispute and they go to court, the judges are to decide who is innocent and who is guilty. If the guilty man deserves a beating, the judge is to make him lie down and be beaten with the number of lashes his guilt deserves. But he is not to be given any more than 40 lashes, because that would humiliate him.

“Don't put a muzzle on an ox while it is threshing grain. Let him be free to eat some of the grain.

“If two brothers are living together, and one of them dies without a son, his widow must not marry outside the family. Instead she is to marry her brother-in-law. The first son she has with him is to carry on his dead brother's name. But if the man does not want to marry his sister-in-law, she is to go to the town's elders and explain that he refuses to carry on his brother's name. Then the elders are to talk with him. If he doesn't change his mind, she is to take off one of his sandals, spit in his face, and say, ‘This is what happens to a man who won't provide offspring for his dead brother.’

From then on the man's family will be called 'The family of the man whose sandal was taken off.'

"If two men are fighting, and the wife of one of them tries to rescue her husband by grabbing the other man's private parts, you are to cut off her hand, showing her no pity.

"Don't have two different sets of weights, one that is heavy when you are buying things, and one that is light when you are selling things. And don't have two different measures, one that is large for buying, and one that is small for selling. If you use accurate weights and measures, you will live long in the land I, the LORD, your God am giving you. I despise anyone who is dishonest. "Remember what the Amalekites did to you after you left Egypt? They attacked your people who were tired and couldn't keep up with the others. Obviously they had no respect for Me. I, the LORD, your God will give you rest in the land I am giving you. But don't forget to destroy the Amalekites completely."

These instructions tell you how to interpret the laws I've given to you. The way Moses interpreted these laws is a pattern of how to interpret them.

Give Me Your Best

26"When you enter the land I, the LORD, your God am giving you and you have conquered it and settled down, put the first crops of your harvest in a basket. Then go to the tabernacle at the place I, the LORD, your God will choose. Tell the priest, 'I thank the Lord for bringing me to the land He promised to our ancestors.' The priest is to take the basket and place it in front of the altar of burnt offering. Then you are to say, 'My ancestor, Jacob, was a wandering Aramean who went to live in Egypt with a few people. But they became a great and powerful nation with many people. The Egyptians were cruel to us, making us work hard. We prayed to the Lord, the God of our ancestors, and He heard us and saw our hardship and troubles. He brought us out of Egypt with great power and strength. And He terrified the Egyptians with marvelous miracles. He brought us here to a

land with lots of milk from cows and lots of honey from bees. And now I bring the first of the crops from the soil that He, the LORD, has given me.’

“Place the basket before Me, the LORD, your God as you bow down before Me. Then the Levites and foreign residents are to be glad for all the good things I, the LORD, your God have given you and your family.

“Every year you are to give 10 percent of your harvest to Me, the LORD. Then every third year you are to give this 10 percent to the Levites, foreign residents, orphans, and widows so they will have enough to eat. Then pray, ‘I have given the 10 percent of my harvest to the Levites, foreign residents, orphans, and widows as You have commanded. I haven’t forgotten any of Your commands. Nor have I eaten any of this tithe while I was in mourning, nor touched any of it when I was unclean, nor offered any of it as a sacrifice to the dead. I have fully obeyed Your commands, my Lord and God. Now please look down from heaven, Your holy dwelling, and bless us Your people and the land You promised to our ancestors, a land with lots of milk and honey.’

“I, the LORD, your God am commanding you today to obey these laws and commands with all your heart and soul. You have said you will follow Me, the LORD, obey My laws, commands, and regulations. And I have said today that you are My people, My special treasure, as I promised. I will make you greater than any other nation, and you will receive praise, fame, and honor above them all. And you will be set apart to Me, the LORD, your God as I promised.”

The Altar at Mount Ebal

27Moses and Israel’s elders told the people, “Keep all these commands the Lord is giving you today. When you cross the Jordan River into the land the Lord, your God, is giving you, set up some large stones and cover them with white plaster. Write on them these laws when you have crossed into the land with lots of milk and honey. Set the stones on Mount Ebal, and build an altar of stones to the Lord, your God. Don’t use any iron tools on the stone; use only uncut stones. And on this altar offer burnt offerings to the Lord, your God. Also offer fellowship offerings there and eat the meat with joy in His presence, the Lord, your God. Write all the words of this law clearly on the stone.”

Then Moses and the priests said to Israel, “Be quiet and listen. Today you have become the people of the Lord, your God, so obey Him and follow His laws and commands.” That same day Moses told the people, “After you have crossed the Jordan, go to Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal. Have the tribes of Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Ephraim, West Manasseh, and Benjamin go up on Mount Gerizim and bless the people. Then have the tribes of Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali go up on Mount Ebal, and pronounce the following curses.

“The Levites are to shout these curses to the people. ‘Cursed is anyone who makes an idol from wood or metal which the Lord hates, and worships it, even secretly. Cursed is anyone who disrespects his parents. Cursed is anyone who moves his neighbor’s boundary stones to extend his own territory. Cursed is anyone who leads a blind person in the wrong direction. Cursed is anyone who is unjust to a foreign resident, an orphan, or a widow. Cursed is anyone who has sex with his father’s wife, for this man shows no respect for his father’s marriage. Cursed is anyone who has sex with an animal. Cursed is anyone who has sex with his sister, or half-sister. Cursed is anyone who has sex with his mother-in-law. Cursed is anyone who murders someone in secret. Cursed is anyone who accepts money to murder an innocent person. Cursed is anyone who refuses to obey these laws.’ To each of these curses the people are to say ‘Amen.’”

It does you good to repeat My prohibitions, because you will never forget them, or carelessly do them. Keep from outwardly sinning against Me, and keep yourself from secret sin.

The Blessings For Being Obedient

28“If you fully obey Me, the LORD, your God and carefully keep all My commands, I will make you the greatest nation in the world. The following blessings will be yours if you obey Me, the LORD, your God. I will make you successful whether you live in a town or in the country. You will have many children, and abundant crops and your cattle and sheep will have many calves and lambs. You will have much fruit and plenty of bread

to eat. You will be blessed wherever you go, when you come in and when you go out.

“I, the LORD, will defeat your enemies. They may come at you in one direction, but they will run from you in seven directions. I, the LORD, will fill your barns with large crops, and I will prosper you in everything you do. I, the LORD, will set you apart as My special people if you obey My commands and follow Me. Everyone will see that you belong to Me, the LORD, and they will be afraid of you. I will prosper you with many children, animals, and crops in the land I promised to your ancestors.

“I will open My storehouse of clouds to give you plenty of rain at the right time and to give you success in everything. You will have plenty of goods to lend to other nations, but you won’t need to borrow any. I, the LORD, will make you a leader among nations and not a follower, if you obey My commands from the LORD, your God, and follow them carefully. You will always be powerful, not weak. But this means you must not turn aside from My commands and must not worship and serve other gods.

“If you don’t obey Me, the LORD, your God and follow My laws and commands, these curses may come on you: You will be cursed whether you live in the city or the country. You will have very little food. Your children will be few, your crops will not be large, and your cows and sheep won’t have many calves and lambs. You will be cursed whether you are coming or going. You will be confused and frustrated in everything you try to do and you will suddenly perish because of your sin in rejecting Me. I, the LORD, will send terrible diseases on you which will cause all of you to die. Diseases will cause you to lose weight, and you will have burning fevers and swelling. Your land will have terrible heat and drought, with diseases and mildew on your plants, all of which will lead to your deaths. The sky above you will give no rain, and it will seem hard as bronze, and the ground beneath you will be dry, and as hard as iron. Instead of rain you will have dust storms and sandstorms, and they will ruin your crops.

“Your enemies will defeat you. You may attack them in one direction, but you will run from them in seven directions. Other nations will be horrified at what is happening to you. When birds and animals eat your carcasses, no one will scare them away. I, the LORD, will give you boils, tumors, running sores, and itching, with no cures just as I did to the Egyptians. You will become insane and blind and confused. In bright

sunshine, you will grope like a blind person in the dark. You will fail in everything you try to do. Every day you will face troubles and be robbed, with no one to help you.

“You will be engaged, but before you are married, someone will rape your fiancé. You will build a house, but you won’t get to live in it. If you plant a vineyard, you won’t be around later to eat some grapes. Your ox will be slaughtered by someone while you watch, but you won’t eat any of it. Someone will steal your donkey, and you won’t get it back. Your sheep will be given to your enemies, and no one will help you get them back. Your own children will be taken captive to a foreign country while you look on, unable to do anything. Foreigners you haven’t even heard of will eat what you worked hard to produce, and you will have only trouble the rest of your life. Seeing tragedies all around you will cause you to go insane. You will have painful, incurable boils on your legs and knees. And they will even cover your entire body.

“I, the LORD, will let you and your king be taken captives to a nation you don’t even know. There you will worship idols of wood and stone. Nations will be horrified when they see you, and they will make fun of you.

“When you plant a lot of seeds, you will have only a small harvest because locusts will eat your crops. When you plant vineyards, you won’t have any grapes or make any wine because worms will eat the grapes. You will have many olive trees in the land, but you won’t have any olive oil because unripe olives will fall off. You won’t even be able to keep your own children because they will be taken away as captives. Locusts will strip your trees of their leaves and eat all your crops.

“Foreign residents will become wealthy while you become poor. You will be so poor you will have to borrow from them. They will be leaders, and you will be followers.

“These problems will overtake you and destroy you if you do not obey Me, the LORD, your God and keep My commands and regulations. These will be warnings to you and your descendants. If you don’t serve Me, the LORD, your God with joy when I prosper you, then you will serve your enemies, and you will experience hunger, thirst, and poverty and have nothing to wear. Your enemies will work you so hard it will be like having an animal’s iron yoke around your neck until you are destroyed.

“I, the LORD, will cause a nation that speaks a different language to attack you like an eagle swooping on its prey. These fierce-looking people will have no respect for elderly people or pity for children. They will take your calves and lambs and your crops, and leave you with no grain, grapes, or olive oil. You may feel safe in your cities but they will attack you and tear down your high city walls. During these attacks you will get so hungry you will eat your own sons and daughters whom I, the LORD, your God gave you. Because of his hunger even a gentle, kind man will eat his own children and will refuse to give any of the meal to his own brother or wife or children. The most tender woman who lives in such luxury she doesn’t have to put her feet to the ground to do any work will secretly eat her own newborn children and the afterbirth and not share any with her husband or other children.

“If you can’t carefully follow all these words and if you don’t reverence Me, the LORD, your God, I will send on you and your descendant’s awful disasters and serious prolonged disease. Even the diseases you feared in Egypt will stay with you.

“I, the LORD, may bring on you other kinds of illnesses and disasters not even mentioned here until they destroy you. Though you were as numerous as the stars, only a few of you will survive. I, the LORD, was pleased to prosper you and help your nation grow, but it will also please Me to destroy you and pull you up by the roots from the land you are entering.

“I, the LORD, will scatter you among the nations far and wide. There you will worship idols of wood and stone that neither you nor your ancestors have known. In those nations you will have no rest. You will be filled with anxiety, with eyes longing for home, and a heart of despair. You will live in constant fear, all day and night. Every morning you will wish it were evening, and every evening you will wish it were morning, all because of the terrible things you will see. I, the LORD, will send you back to Egypt even though I said I would never send you there again. There you will try to sell yourselves as slaves, but no one will even want to buy you.”

You should tremble at the curses I promised to My people, Israel. I kept these curses when I sent Nebuchadnezzar to destroy the Promised Land and take Israel captive to Babylon. I did it again when My people rejected Jesus as their Messiah. It is a terrible fate,

but I warned the Jews to worship Me only. One day “all Israel will be saved,” and My people will return to their land to live happily with Me. Learn from Israel’s disobedience, and always obey and worship only Me.

The Covenant Renewal

29 These are the words of agreement Moses told the Israelites in Moab, in addition to the agreement I, the LORD, made with them at Mount Horeb (Sinai). Then Moses called the people together and said, “In Egypt, you saw everything the Lord did there to Pharaoh, his officials, and the land, including His great trials, miracles, and amazing wonders. Yet even now after 40 years you still don’t understand. When He led you through the desert, your clothes and sandals didn’t wear out. You ate no bread and drank no wine, but He gave you special food so you would realize He is the Lord, your God.

“When we camped here, Sihon, king of Heshbon, and Og, king of Bashan, attacked us, but we defeated them. We took their land and gave it as an inheritance to the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and East Manasseh. Therefore obey the terms of this agreement so that you will succeed in everything you do.

“You are all standing here in the Lord’s presence, including leaders, elders, officials, parents and children, and foreign residents who cut wood and carry water for us. You are standing here today to enter into an agreement with the Lord, your God, an agreement He is confirming with an oath. This will confirm that you are His people and He is your God, just as He promised to your ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He is making this agreement not only with you but also with your descendants.

“You remember how we lived in Egypt, and then as you traveled through the lands of enemy nations, you saw their awful idols of wood and stone, silver, and gold. So be sure not one of you turns from the Lord, our God, to worship the idols of those nations. Be sure you don’t become like a root of a plant that produces bitter, poisonous fruit. Don’t think someone can go his own way and still expect the Lord to bless him. That will lead to your land being ruined; His wrath will be against him. In fact, the curses of this

book will be on him, and the Lord will remove him from Israel's tribes. The Lord will focus on him, and bring on him the curses written in this book.

“Your descendants and foreign residents from distant lands will see the disasters and diseases the Lord has brought on your land. The land will be a burning waste of salt and sulfur, where nothing is planted, nothing sprouts, and nothing grows. It will be like Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim, which the Lord destroyed in His anger. People in other nations will wonder why the Lord did this in His burning anger. The answer they will receive is this: ‘This is because My people rejected the agreement I, the LORD, made with them when I brought them out of Egypt. They worshiped gods they did not know. And so I, the LORD, was very angry with them and brought on them the curses recorded in this book. In My anger I, the LORD, pulled up Israel by the roots and threw them into another land, where they are today.’

“Some secret things belong to the Lord, our God, but the things He has revealed belong to our children and us to obey forever.”

My Promise Remains Constant

30 “When all these blessings and curses happen to you, you will think about them while you are in the nations where I, the LORD, your God will send you into captivity. If you and your children then return to Me and obey Me with all your heart, then I will rescue you and bring you back from captivity with My love. I will restore you from the nations where you will be scattered. Even from the most remote countries I will bring you to this land of your ancestors and make you more successful and numerous than they were before.

“I, the LORD, your God will make your hearts, and the hearts of your descendants fully devoted to Me so that you will love Me with all your heart and soul, and enjoy life. I, the LORD, your God will place the curses on your enemies who hate you and persecute you. Then you will obey Me, the Lord, and My commands, and I will help you prosper in all you do and give you many children, and livestock, and abundant crops. I will be pleased to bless you in this way, just as I did for your ancestors. But you must obey Me, the LORD, your God and all My laws and commands and turn to Me with all your heart and soul.

“What I am telling you to do isn’t impossible. Since My commands aren’t in heaven, you can’t say, ‘Who will go to heaven and get them for us?’ And since they aren’t beyond the ocean, you can’t say, ‘Who will cross the ocean and get them for us?’ No, My commands are close by, even in your mouth and heart, so you can easily obey them.

“You have a choice: You can choose life and prosperity or death and disaster. If you love Me, the LORD, your God, follow Me, and obey My laws, commands, and regulations, then you will enjoy life and increase in numbers, and I, the LORD, your God will bless you in the land you will enter.

“But if you reject Me and disobey Me and you worship other gods, you will be destroyed, and you won’t live long in the land.

“Heaven and earth know that I am giving you a choice between life and death, between being blessed and cursed. So choose life so you and your children can live, and so you can love Me, the LORD, your God; hear My voice, and be faithful to Me. I can give you life for many years in the land I promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.”

Joshua Becomes the New Leader

31 Moses said to the people, “I am now 120 years old, and I can no longer lead you. The Lord has told me I won’t be able to cross the Jordan. But He will lead you across the river and destroy the nations there so that you can occupy the land. Joshua will lead across, and the Lord will destroy your enemies there just as he destroyed Sihon and Og, two Amorite Kings. Do to them exactly what was told you to do. Be strong and brave, without any fear of them because the Lord, your God, is with you and will never leave you.”

Moses said to Joshua in front of all the people, “Be strong and brave as you lead these people into the land and divide it among the tribes. The Lord will lead you and be with you and will never leave you. So don’t be afraid or discouraged.”

Moses wrote down all these laws and gave the copy to the priests. Then Moses told the priests, “Every seven years, when you cancel people’s debts in the Festival of Shelters, you are to read these laws when the people assemble at the gate of the tabernacle. Men, women, children, and foreign

residents are to listen and respect the Lord, your God, and obey these laws carefully. Also when children in the future are born, they are to listen and respect the Lord, your God, as long as they are in the land.”

Then I, the LORD, said to Moses, “You will soon die, so bring Joshua to the tabernacle, and I will appoint him as leader of the people.” So Moses and Joshua went to the tabernacle. I, the LORD, appeared there in a heavy cloud over the tabernacle entrance, and I said to Moses, “You will soon die, and these people will worship gods in the land where they are going, and they will break the agreement I made with them. I will become so angry that I will not answer their prayers, and they will be destroyed. Terrible disasters will help them realize I am no longer with them. I will ignore them because they will sin in worshiping gods.

“Write the words of this song and teach it to the people as a warning. When I bring them into the land of milk and honey that I promised to their ancestors, they will have plenty to eat, but then they will worship other gods and reject Me and break My agreement. When they face terrible disasters, this song will remind them and their descendants that these are because they have rejected Me. I know that they are inclined to turn from Me.” So Moses wrote down the words of the song and taught it to the people.

I, the LORD, told Joshua, “Be strong and brave, because you will lead the people into the land, and I will be with you.”

After Moses wrote down all these laws, he told the Levites to place them in the sacred chest. Then he said, “I know how rebellious and stubborn you are. You have been rebellious while I am alive; so I’m concerned that you will be worse after I die. So call together the tribal leaders so I can speak to them with heaven and earth as my witnesses. After I die you will become corrupt and turn from the Lord. When you sin, you will face disaster, and I will be angry with you for making idols.” Moses taught the people the following words for a song.

Moses’ Song

32 “Listen sky and earth to the words I taught Moses. My teaching will be as gentle as rain and as pleasant as dew.

“Praise Me your God for My greatness. I am like a firm rock, and all I do is right. I am faithful, I do no wrong, and I am just and fair.

“People have been dishonest, and instead of being like My obedient children, they are twisted and crooked in their ways. Foolish, unwise people treat Me, the LORD, unfairly. But I am their Father, the One who created them.

“Think about past generations. Your parents or elders will tell you. When I gave land to each nation, dividing up the human race, I made Israel My people.

“I found Israel in the barren desert, and cared for him and protected him like protecting My very eyes, and like an eagle carrying its young on her wings. I alone did this without the help of any false god.

“I will help Israel capture the best of the land, and will give him crops, honey from rocks, and olive oil from trees growing in a cliff. I will give Israel curds and milk from their herds and flocks, and meat from lambs and goats and rams in Bashan, along with the best wheat and grape juice.

“Jeshurun (that is, Israel), grew fat and was bloated, and then rebelled against Me. He left Me, his Creator, and rejected Me, who like a rock can give security and safety. I wanted Israel to worship only Me, not foreign gods; their disgusting idols made Me angry. Israel even offered sacrifices to demons, to gods his ancestors never knew. You turned from Me who was strong like a rock and who created you, and you forgot Me.

“Because Israel, My children, rejected Me, I was angry. I said, ‘I won’t listen to them.’ Why? Because they are wayward and unfaithful. I wanted them to worship only Me; their worthless idols made Me angry. Now, in turn, a cruel and foolish nation will make Me envious and angry.

“My anger burns like a fire in the world of the dead, consuming crops and setting mountains on fire. I will bring disasters on them, striking them with arrows, starvation, diseases, wild beasts, and poisonous snakes. Children, young people, and older people will perish in the streets and their homes.

“I wanted to scatter them to other nations so no one would remember them. But I didn’t want your enemy to say they defeated you with no help from Me.

“Israel doesn’t have good sense or understanding. If they were wise, they would realize what would happen. How could one enemy soldier chase 1,000 Israelites, or how could two soldiers pursue 10,000? Only if I, the LORD, give up on them. Even our enemies know their gods are not like Me. They are like vines from Sodom and Gomorrah; their grapes are poisonous and bitter. Their wine is like the deadly poison of cobras.

“I am storing up these facts. I will repay Israel for her spies, and her doom will come.

“I, the LORD, will have compassion on My people when I see that the strength of both slave and free is gone. I will say, ‘Where are the gods they relied on?’ Since they received the fat of sacrifice and drank drink offerings, they should be able to help you and protect you.

“‘I am the true God. There is no other god. I am the only One who can bring life and death. I wound, and I heal, and no one can stop Me. As sure as the fact that I am alive, I can sharpen My sword and punish My enemies who hate Me. My arrows will be covered with the blood of captives and enemy leaders.’

“All nations should be glad for My people because I will take revenge on My enemies and make substitute payments for the sins of My land and people.”

Moses and Joshua spoke the words of this song to the people. Then when Moses finished, he said, “Think about all these words so that you can encourage your children to obey the law. These are not mere words. They can give you long life in the land you will conquer.”

Remember this hymn, “Sing them over again to me, wonderful words of life.”

Later that day I, the LORD, told Moses, “Go up to Mount Nebo in the Abarim Range in Moab and view Canaan, which I am giving to your people. You will die there on the mountain just as your brother Aaron died on Mount

Hor. Both of you disobeyed Me at Meribah-Kadesh in the Zin Desert by not promoting My holiness to My people. So you will see the land from a distance, but you will not enter the land I am giving to the people.”

Desire to die very simply in My presence just as Moses died with Me. In the flesh, you resist your physical death, but in your spirit seek Me.

Moses Blesses Israel

33 Before Moses died, he blessed the tribes of Israel with these words: “The Lord came from Mount Sinai and dawned on us from Mount Seir, and His glory was shining from Mount Paran. Thousands of His angels were with Him. You, O Lord, love Your people and Your angels. They bow down in worship and receive instruction from You in the law Moses gave us. You were king over Jeshurun (Israel) when the leaders and tribes met together.

“Reuben will live even though his tribe is small.” About Judah Moses said, “Lord, hear Judah’s cry and bring him home, and help him defeat his enemies.” About Levi Moses said, “The Urim and Thummin belong to Levi. You tested him at Massah and Meribah. He had less concern for his immediate family than for his agreement with the Lord. Levi teaches Your laws to Israel and offers up incense and burnt offerings. Bless all he does, and attack and defeat his enemies.”

About Benjamin, Moses said, “Benjamin, the Lord loves you and protects you so you can be secure and rest on Him.”

About Joseph, Moses said, “May the LORD bless your land with dew and water from wells, with the best crops growing in the sun and with fruit every month, with the best crops on the mountains and hills, and with the best gifts from the earth and the favor of God who appeared in the burning bush. May these blessings be on Joseph, a prince among his brothers. You are strong like a young bull, defeating your enemies no matter where they are, like a wild ox goring them with his horns. These are the blessings of all those in Ephraim and Manasseh.”

About Zebulun and Issachar, Moses said, “May you, Zebulun, be joyful wherever you go, and may you, Issachar, be joyful when you are home. You will ask people to offer sacrifices on the mountains, and you will enjoy fish found in the sea and treasures found in the sand.”

About Gad, Moses said, “The Lord will bless you with more land, and you will defeat your enemies like a lion tearing at its victim. You chose good land for your tribe. And when your tribal leaders met, you followed the Lord’s will.”

About Dan Moses said, “You are like a lion’s cub, leaping out from Bashan.”

About Naphtali, Moses said, “You are enjoying the Lord’s blessings. You will inherit land to the south toward the Sea of Galilee.”

About Asher Moses said, “Asher, you are well liked by your brothers. You will have plenty of olive oil, your town gates will be strong with iron and bronze, and you will be strong as long as you live.”

The KJV reads, “As the days, so shall thy strength be” (Deut. 33:25b). This teaches you to live for today, and trust Me for strength for today. You’re not responsible for a day you haven’t lived and I won’t give you strength till you need it. Fill each day with work and faithfulness, knowing I’ll give strength for that day. Do not worry about tomorrow till it gets here. Live for Me day by day.

Moses continued, “No one is like the God of Jeshurun (Israel), who rides in majesty on the clouds to help you. The eternal God is your refuge, and He carries you in His arms. He brings out your enemy and tells you to destroy him. You will be safe and secure, with lots of grain and wine because of much dew. Israel, you are so blessed. No one has been saved as you have. He protects you as with a shield, and He is like a great sword. Your enemies will bow before you in fear, and you will trample down their hilltop shrines where they worship their false gods.”

The Death of Moses

34 Later Moses climbed from Moab to Mount Pisgah to the peaks of Mount Nebo, east of the Jordan River and across from Jericho. I, the LORD, showed Moses all the land from Gilead and Dan in the north, and the land that would become the territories of Naphtali, Ephraim, Manasseh, and Judah west to the Mediterranean Sea. I, the LORD, also showed Moses

the Southern Desert and the region from Jericho (“the City of Palm Trees”) south to Zoar. Then I, the LORD, said, “This is the land I promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and their descendants. You have seen it, but you won’t enter it.”

Moses, My servant, died there, just as I, the LORD, had said. I buried him in a valley in Moab near Baal-Peor, but no one knows where his grave is. Moses died at the age of 120, yet his eyesight was still good, and he was still strong. The people of Israel mourned and wept for him for 30 days.

Before Moses died, he had made Joshua the leader of the people, and I gave Joshua wisdom. The people listened to Joshua and obeyed the commands I had given Moses.

No one else has ever been a prophet like Moses. I, the LORD, spoke to him closely as to a friend, and I sent him to do amazing miracles in Egypt before Pharaoh, his officials, and the entire nation. No other person has ever shown such power and performed such amazing deeds as Moses did before all the people of Israel.

All must die, including you—if the rapture doesn’t come—you must prepare for that inevitable day. You don’t like pain, so pray it will be as easy as possible. You don’t want to be a burden on anyone, so pray it will be as quick as possible. You want to live and serve Me as long as possible, yet I love you and want you to come live with Me.

I AM GOD

The Conqueror

The Book of Joshua

I begin this book, “Moses my servant is dead.” Joshua led Israel “out” of its wilderness wanderings, “into” the Promised Land. I promised Israel success—victory over pagan nations—as they obeyed and followed Me. “And I, the LORD, gave unto Israel all the land which I swore to give unto their fathers. They possessed it, and dwelt there.”

The book of Joshua is a picture of the victorious Christian life I promised to believers today. Victory doesn't come without obedience. You must struggle or fight against your spiritual enemy. Victory comes with preparation, discipline, and trust in Me.

I, The LORD, Appoint Joshua as the New Leader

1 I, the LORD, said to Joshua, son of Nun, after Moses, My servant, died, “Now that Moses is dead lead My people across the Jordan River into the land I am giving them.

“As I promised Moses, so I promise you that the land will be yours wherever you go. It will extend from the Southern Desert in the south to Lebanon in the north on to the Euphrates River in the east and the Mediterranean Sea on the west, including all the land of the Hittites. I will be with you as I was with Moses, and no one will be able to defeat you. I will never leave you on your own or abandon you.

“Be strong and brave as you lead My people into the land I promised your ancestors. I repeat, be strong and brave.”

Obey all the laws Moses gave you. If you follow them carefully, you will succeed wherever you are. Your success depends on your studying them, thinking about them all the time, and obeying them.

“As I’ve said, be strong and brave. Don’t be afraid or discouraged; just remember I will be right there with you wherever you go.”

Joshua then told the leaders to get the people ready because in three days they would cross the Jordan and possess the land. Then Joshua reminded the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and East Manasseh that they could have the land to the east side of the Jordan, but that their troops must first cross the Jordan ahead of the other tribes while their wives and children and livestock stayed home. Then when the troops help the other tribes conquer the land, they may return to their homes east of the Jordan.

The men told Joshua, “We will do whatever you say and go wherever you tell us to go. We will follow your orders just as we followed Moses. And may the Lord be with you as He was with Moses. If anyone rebels against you and doesn’t obey you, we will put him to death. So be strong and brave.”

Rahab Helps the Two Spies

2 Joshua sent two men as spies from Shittim to look over the land, especially Jericho. So in Jericho, they decided to stay overnight in the house of Rahab, a prostitute. Someone heard about them and told Jericho’s king that some Israelite spies had come there. So he sent word to her to turn the men over to him. But Rahab hid the men. She told the soldiers, “Yes, they came here, but I don’t know where they are from. They left just before sunset and just before the city gates were closed. I don’t know where they went, but if you hurry maybe you can catch them.” She had hidden them under some stalks of flax on the roof. So the king’s men went down to the Jordan River, and as soon as they left the city, the city gates were closed.

Rahab went up to her roof and said to the spies, “I know the Lord has given you this land, and we are all terribly afraid. Word has spread that the Lord dried up the Red Sea when you came out of Egypt and that you completely wiped out Sihon and Og, the two Amorite kings east of the

Jordan.” She told them about Me, “Our hearts have melted in fear, and we are totally discouraged, knowing that the Lord your God is the one who is over heaven and earth. Promise me that you will be kind to my family in return for my being kind to you. And don’t kill my parents and siblings and their families.”

The men said, “We’ll defend your lives with our lives. If you don’t tell what we are doing, we will be kind to you when the Lord gives us this land.” Rahab’s house was built on top of the city wall, so she let them down by a rope through a window. She told them, “Go hide in the hills where the king’s men can’t find you. Then after three days, you can be on your way.”

The men said to her, “We’ll guarantee your safety only if you tie this red rope in the window and if your parents and siblings and their families are here in your house. If anyone leaves your house, he will be killed. Also, if you tell others about our spying, we will not keep this promise.” She agreed to those terms, sent them on their way, and put a red rope in the window.

The spies left and hid in the hills for three days. The soldiers looked for them everywhere along the roads but didn’t find the men. So the soldiers returned to Jericho. Then the two spies crossed the Jordan River and told Joshua everything that had happened. “We put our trust in the Lord, and the Lord will certainly give us the land because all the people are scared to death of us.”

Thank Me for all the people who have helped you in your Christian walk. Especially thank Me for those who helped you when you couldn’t help yourself.

The Miraculous Crossing

3 Early in the morning Joshua and all the Israelites left Shittim and went to the Jordan River, where they camped. Three days later the leaders went through the camp with the My instructions: “When you see the priests carrying the sacred chest, you are to follow it. Since you haven’t been this way before, the priests will guide you. But stay back from the sacred chest about half a mile.”

Joshua repeated My instructions, “Dedicate yourselves to Me, your Lord, because tomorrow I will do some amazing things for you.” Joshua told the priests to take the sacred chest and cross the Jordan. So they did and went on ahead of the people. I, the LORD, told Joshua, “Today the people will begin to appreciate you as their leader. They will know that I am with you just as I was with Moses. Tell the priests who are carrying the sacred chest to go a few steps into the Jordan and stand there.”

Joshua repeated My instructions, “Listen to what I, the LORD, your God will do. You will know that I, the living God, is with you when I force out of the land the Canaanites, Hittites, Hivites, Perizzites, Girgashites, Amorites, and Jebusites.” I, the LORD your God, say, “The sacred chest that belongs to Me, the Lord, of all the earth, will go into the Jordan ahead of you. First, choose one leader from each tribe. Then the very minute the priests carrying the sacred chest step into the Jordan, the water upstream will stop flowing.”

So the people left their camps, and the priests with the chest went first. In the spring the Jordan’s banks were overflowing. But as soon as the priests’ feet touched the river, the water stopped flowing. It piled up a great distance north at the town of Adam near Zarethan. And the water, south of where the Israelites were, flowed into the Dead Sea so that the riverbed of the Jordan was completely dry. The priests carrying the sacred chest stood on dry ground in the middle of the Jordan while all the people crossed over.

When a big river is a barrier that keeps you from doing what I want you to do, step out in faith to trust Me for a solution.

The Twelve Stones

4 After all the people crossed over, I, the LORD, said to Joshua, “Tell the 12 men, one chosen from each tribe, each to take a large rock from the river where the priests are standing and set these rocks up as a monument at the place where you will stay tonight.”

So Joshua told these men, “Go into the riverbed near the sacred chest, and each of you is to pick up a large rock and put it on your shoulder, one stone for each tribe and set them up as a memorial. Then when your

children ask what this pile of rocks means, tell them that the rocks are to remind us that the Jordan River stopped flowing when the sacred chest was in the river. These rocks are to be a permanent reminder of this miracle.”

The Israelites did as Joshua told them, taking 12 rocks from the middle of the Jordan as I had told Joshua. They carried them to their camps and put them up together as a memorial. Joshua also built another memorial of 12 stones right in the middle of the Jordan where the priests with the sacred chest were standing when the people crossed over. This memorial is still in the river bottom.

The priests with the sacred chest stood in the dry riverbed until all the people crossed. After all the people crossed, the priests went to the other side of the Jordan. The troops from Reuben, Gad, and East Manasseh, 40,000 of them, went across ahead of the other tribes and were ready for battle near Jericho.

From that day on the people appreciated Joshua, just as they had appreciated Moses. Then I, the LORD, told Joshua to tell the priests with the sacred chest to come out of the Jordan. So Joshua told them. As soon as the priests came out of the river, the water of the Jordan filled in, and its banks overflowed as before.

On April 10 the people crossed the Jordan and camped at Gilgal, east of Jericho. At Gilgal Joshua set up the monument of rocks that were taken from the Jordan. He told the people, “In the future when your children ask why this pile of rocks is here, tell them, ‘Our ancestors crossed the Jordan on dry ground. The Lord, your God, did this so you could cross over on dry ground, just as He had done to the Red Sea. He did this because He wants everyone to know that He is powerful and that people should respect him as your Lord, your God.’”

The rocks teach the lesson of memory. Don't forget My past "works." I can do "miracles" for you in the future, just as I've done in the past.

Circumcising the Jewish Men

When the Amorite kings west of the Jordan and the Canaanite kings along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea heard how I had dried up the Jordan River so the Israelites could cross over; their hearts melted in fear and they were totally discouraged from facing the Israelites.

I told Joshua to make some flint knives to circumcise the Israelite males. This was the second time this was done in Israel. So Joshua did, and he named the place Gibeath Haaraloth (meaning “Hill of Foreskins”).

But why was this done? Because all the men 20 years of age and older who left Egypt had died in the desert. They had been circumcised, but all the males born in the desert had not. During the 40 years, the Israelite men had died in the desert because they had disobeyed Me. So I, the LORD, promised them that I would not let them enter the Promised Land I promised to your ancestors.” Moses then circumcised their sons. After all the men in Joshua’s day were circumcised, the Israelites stayed near Gilgal while the men healed.

I, the LORD, told Joshua, “Today I have rolled away the disgrace of My people being in Egypt.” So the Israelites named the place Gilgal (meaning “To Roll Away”). On the evening of April 14, the Israelites celebrated the Passover near Gilgal. The next day they ate bread without yeast and also ate roasted grain. After they ate this food, manna never appeared again.

One day when Joshua was near Jericho, he saw Me standing in front of him with a sword in My hand. When Joshua asked Me if I was on his side or the enemy’s side, I said, “I am Commander of My army.” Joshua fell with his face to the ground and asked, “Do you have a message for me?” I said, “Take off your sandals because this is holy ground.” And Joshua did so.

Just as I came to help Joshua fight his battles, I will come help you fight your battles against sin and satan. See My promises in Scripture, and claim them; I will give you victory.

The Fall of Jericho

The people of Jericho had been locking up their city gates because they were afraid of My people. No one was allowed to go in or out. I said to

6 Joshua, “I will give you Jericho with its king and soldiers. Here’s what you are to do: Have your entire army march around the city for six days.

Also have seven priests walk in front of the sacred chest, blowing trumpets. On the seventh day, the soldiers and priests are to walk around the city seven times, with the priests blowing their trumpets. When the priests play one long blast, all the people are to shout loudly. Then the walls will fall down, and you can charge right into the city.”

So Joshua told the priests to carry the sacred chest and have seven priests march ahead of it carrying trumpets. In front of them, an armed guard marched, leading the people around the city. Then the seven priests marched blowing their trumpets, with the sacred chest behind them. The armed guard went ahead of the priests, and a rear guard followed the sacred chest. Joshua commanded, “Don’t say anything till I tell you to shout.” The people circled the city once then returned to their tents for the night.

Early the next morning the seven priests took the sacred chest and blew their trumpets. Soldiers went in front of them, and a rear guard followed. Then they all returned to their tents for the night. And they did this for six days.

On the seventh day, they got up early and marched around the city seven times. The seventh time around, the priests played a long blast on their trumpets, and Joshua said, “Get ready to shout.” Then I, the LORD, spoke, “I, the LORD, have given you the city. Destroy everything in the city as an offering to Me. Kill everyone except Rahab and all her relatives in her house, because she helped our two spies. Don’t take anything that is set apart for destruction, or you will be destroyed, and you will bring disaster on the land. Silver, gold, and objects of bronze and iron are to be dedicated to Me and put in My treasury.”

Then the priests played a long blast on their trumpets, the people shouted, and the walls collapsed, and the soldiers ran in and took the city. They destroyed every living thing in the city—men, women, young and old, cattle, sheep, and donkeys.

Joshua told the two spies, “Go into Rahab’s house and bring her and her relatives out, as you promised to do.” So the spies brought her and her relatives to a safe place outside the Israelites’ camp. The soldiers burned

down the entire city, but they put in My treasury anything of silver, gold, bronze, or iron. Joshua spared Rahab and her relatives and her belongings because she had helped Israel's two spies. And they still live with the Israelites.

Joshua then pronounced a curse on anyone who rebuilds Jericho. He said, "If he lays the foundation, his firstborn son will die, and if he tries to build the city gates, his youngest son will die." Then I said, "I, the LORD, was with Joshua and his name became well known throughout the land."

When you have a battle. Let Me show you My plan for victory. When the conflict finally comes, I will give you the courage to win the victory.

The Sin of Achan

7I, the LORD, had said that everything in Jericho was to be set apart for destruction. But Achan of the tribe of Judah took some things for himself, and this made Me very angry. Joshua sent some men to Ai east of Bethel to spy out the land. When they returned to Joshua, they said, "Two or three thousand men can take Ai because it's a small town. You don't need to send the whole army against Ai." So three thousand men attacked Ai, but the men of Ai chased the Israelites down to the stone quarries, killing about 36 of them. The Israelites melted in fear, and they became discouraged.

Joshua and the leaders tore their clothes in grief, fell facedown to the ground before Me and the sacred chest. They threw dust on their heads all day. Joshua asked Me, "O Sovereign LORD, why did You bring us across the Jordan to let the Amorites kill us? We would have been all right on the east side of the Jordan. What can I say now that our army has run from the enemy? When the Canaanites and other nations hear about this, they will surround us and wipe us out. How will this affect Your reputation?"

I answered, "Stand up. You needn't be lying face down. Israel has sinned by stealing some of the things that were to be destroyed. After stealing these things, they lied and have hidden the objects. That is why the

Israelites were defeated. I can't help you anymore unless you do what I have said.

“Tell the people, ‘Tomorrow set yourselves apart to Me. I know that you have taken things that should have been destroyed. So if you want to defeat your enemies, you must get rid of these things.’”

“In the morning come to Me tribe by tribe, and I will show you which tribe is guilty. Then the clans of that tribe are to present themselves, followed by all the families in that clan. Then the men in that clan are to present themselves, and I will point out which man is guilty. This is because one did a terrible thing in breaking the agreement you had with Me.”

Joshua got up early next morning. When each tribe came before the tabernacle, I, the LORD, pointed out the tribe of Judah. Then the clan of Zerah was guilty, followed by Zimri's family. When each man in Zimri's family was brought to Me, I showed that Achan, Carmi's son, was the guilty one.

Joshua said, “Achan, my son, give glory to the Lord by telling the truth. Tell me what you have done and don't try to hide anything.”

Achan replied, “It is true. I have sinned against the Lord. I stole a beautiful Babylonian robe, 200 pieces of silver that weighed about 5 pounds, and a gold piece that weighed more than a pound. I hid them in the ground under my tent.”

Joshua sent some men to Achan's tent. They ran there and found the items with the silver underneath the other objects. They brought them to Joshua and the Israelites and put them on the ground before Me. Then Joshua and all the people took Achan, the silver, the robe, the gold piece, his sons and daughters, his cattle, donkeys, and sheep, his tent and all his belongings to Achor Valley. Joshua said, “Because you have caused a lot of trouble for Israel, the Lord is bringing a terrible disaster on you.” The people stoned Achan and his family to death and burned their bodies. They piled rocks on their corpses, and that pile is still there.

Then I, the LORD, was no longer angry with Israel. Ever since then the place has been called Achor Valley (meaning “Trouble Valley”).

Come to Me when facing defeat and destruction. Stand in My presence, confess your sin, and the covering of the blood of Christ

will forgive you.

Ai is Captured and Destroyed

8I told Joshua, “Don’t be afraid or discouraged about Ai. Take the army and attack Ai. I will help you defeat Ai and his army and capture the city. Do to them as you did to Jericho and its king. But you may keep the treasures and livestock. Set up an ambush behind the city.”

So Joshua and his army prepared to attack Ai. He chose 30,000 of his best soldiers and told them, “While it is dark set up an ambush behind the city. Get close to the city and be on the alert. I and the rest of the army will attack the city. Then when the Ai army comes against us, we will run. They will think we are running from them like before. So when they have all left the city in pursuing us, you are to jump up from your hiding, capture the town, and set it on fire. These are your orders.”

The 30,000 soldiers went into an ambush near Bethel, west of Ai, and Joshua stayed with the people in the camp that night. Early the next morning Joshua got the army ready. He and the leaders of Israel went ahead of them to Ai. The troops set up camp north of Ai, with the valley between them and Ai. Joshua had sent 5,000 troops to the west of Ai. So part of the troops were north of Ai, and some were west of the town.

When Ai’s king saw Joshua’s army, he sent out troops early in the morning against them, not knowing an ambush was behind the city. Joshua and his troops ran away from the city to the desert, pretending to be beaten. As the men of Ai chased after Joshua’s army, no man was left in Ai or Bethel, so the city was undefended.

Then I, the LORD, said to Joshua, “Point your sword toward Ai, for I will give you the city.” So as soon as Joshua did this, his troops who were in ambush ran into the town, captured it, and set it on fire. When the men of Ai saw smoke rising from their town, they knew they had no way of escape because Joshua’s soldiers whom they had been chasing into the desert had turned back against them. And when Joshua saw the smoke, he and his troops attacked the men of Ai. The Israelite men from the ambush went out of the city and attacked the men of Ai, who were then caught in a trap. All

the soldiers of Ai died; no one survived or escaped. The Israelite troops captured the king of Ai and brought him to Joshua.

When the Israelite soldiers killed all the men of Ai in the fields and the desert, they went back to the city and killed everyone there. Everyone in Ai—12,000 in all—died that day, as Joshua was pointing his sword toward the city. The Israelite soldiers took all the animals and other belongings in the city, as I, the LORD, had said they could do.

Ai became a permanent mound of ruins, desolate to this day. The king of Ai was killed, and his body was hung on a tree all day. At sunset, they took down his body and tossed it by the city gate. They covered his corpse with a big pile of rocks which is still there.

Then Joshua built on Mount Ebal an altar to Me, the God of Israel, as Moses had said was to be done. On the altar, which was made of stones that were uncut nor shaped by iron tools, they sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. As the Israelites watched, Joshua carved the law on stones. Then all the Israelites, including foreign residents, leaders, officials, and judges, stood in two groups, with half of them in front of Mount Gerizim and half in front of Mount Ebal, facing the sacred chest. The priests were in the middle. Then Joshua read the blessings and curses from the law. He also read to everyone, including women and foreign residents all the commands Moses had given.

When you are defeated and discouraged, do not give up, nor turn back. Face your enemy again, and by My power, you will be victorious.

The Gibeonites Trick Joshua

9When the kings west of the Jordan heard what happened to Ai, they quickly combined their forces to attack Joshua and Israel. Those kings were from the hill country and foothills to the west, along the shores of the Mediterranean Sea, and all the way north to Lebanon. These were the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites.

When the people of Gibeon heard what Joshua had done to Jericho and Ai, they decided to trick the Israelites by having some of their men pretend to be messengers from a distant country. They loaded their donkeys with old sacks and old patched wineskins. The men wore old patched sandals and worn-out clothes. And all their bread was dry and moldy. Arriving at the Israelite camp at Gilgal, the men said to Joshua and the Israelite men, “We have come from a far country to ask you to make a peace treaty with us.”

The men of Israel said, “But maybe you live near us. If so, we can’t make a treaty with you.” The Gibeonites said, “If we make a treaty, we will be your servants.” Joshua asked, “Who are you and where are you from?” They responded, “We are from a country far from here. We have heard that the Lord your God, is famous, and we have heard of all He did in Egypt and to Sihon and Og, the two Amorite kings east of the Jordan. So our leaders told us to go on this journey and tell you we are your servants and ask you to make a peace treaty with us. This bread was fresh when we left home, but you can see that it is now dry and moldy. And these wineskins were new, but you see how they are now cracked and patched. And our clothes and sandals are worn out.”

The Israelites tried some of the food to see if it really was spoiled. But they did not ask Me about the matter. They went ahead and made a peace treaty, promising not to kill their people. And Israel’s leaders promised they would keep the treaty.

Three days later the Israelites found out that they were neighbors. So the Israelites went to their towns of Gibeon, Kephirah, Beeroth, and Kiriath-Jearim, arriving on the third day of their trip. The Israelites went to those towns but not to attack them because the leaders had promised they wouldn’t.

The Israelite people complained about their leaders’ decision not to attack these towns. But the leaders explained that they promised before Me, the Lord, God of Israel, that they would not harm them. They said, “We told them we would let them live so that God wouldn’t be angry with us for breaking our promise. We also told them we would make them chop wood and carry water for all of us.”

Joshua met with some of the Gibeonites and said, “Why did you lie to us, saying you live far away when you actually live close to us? You are

now under a curse, and your people will now have to chop our wood and carry water to our tabernacle.” They responded, “We heard that the Lord, your God, told Moses to kill everyone here and occupy all this land. So we were afraid for our lives. What you do to us is up to you. So do what seems right.”

Joshua kept the Israelites from killing these neighbors. And that day he made the Gibeonites wood-choppers and water-carriers for the Israelites and for the altar of burnt offering. Whatever I, the LORD, choose for them, they would do that work.

You must learn how to deal with people who come to seek your help. Pray to seek My will. Examine the facts carefully. Follow the principles of Scripture. Follow My leading, and glorify Me in all your relationships.

The Amorites Are Defeated

10Adoni-Zedek, Jerusalem’s king, heard that Joshua had destroyed Ai and Jericho, killing the king of each town. He also heard that the Gibeonites had made a peace treaty with Israel. He and his people were afraid because they knew that Gibeon was a large town, as great as the royal cities and larger than Ai, and Gibeon’s men were excellent fighters. So Adoni-Zedek wrote to several other kings: Hoham of Hebron, Piram of Jarmuth, Japhia of Lachish, and Debir of Eglon. He said, “Come help me destroy Gibeon because the Gibeonites have signed a peace treaty with Joshua and the Israelites.”

So these five Amorite kings moved all their troops together and attacked Gibeon. The Gibeonites sent men to Joshua at Gilgal with these words: “Don’t forget us. Come help us quickly, because five Amorite kings together are attacking us.”

When Joshua and his army, with his best fighting men, left Gilgal, I, the LORD, said, “Don’t be afraid of the Amorites. I will give you victory over them.”

Marching all night from Gilgal to Gibeon, Joshua made a surprise attack. I caused the Amorites to panic in surprise, and the Israelite soldiers killed many people in Gibeon and chased and killed others who were escaping to Beth-Horon, Azekah, and Makkedah. As the Amorite troops ran down the road from Beth-Horon to Azekah, I made huge hailstorms that killed more of the enemy than those who died in battle.

That day Joshua prayed loud enough for everyone to hear, “Sun, stand still over Gibeon, and moon, stand still over Aijalon Valley.” So the sun and moon stopped while Israel was defeating its enemies. This prayer is written in the Book of Jashar. The sun stopped at noon and didn’t go down for 24 hours. On no day before or after this have I, the LORD, ever done anything like this, all in answer to the prayer of one man. Obviously, I was fighting for Israel. Then Joshua and all his army returned to Gilgal.

The five Amorite kings had escaped and hid in a cave near Makkedah, about 25 miles away. When Joshua heard about this, he told his men to roll big stones over the cave’s entrance and to post men to guard it. To the other soldiers, he said, “Keep chasing your enemies and don’t let them reach their cities. Remember that the Lord, your God, is helping you.” So almost all the soldiers of the five kings were killed, except for a few who reached their cities. The army returned safely to Joshua at Makkedah, and because of this great victory, no one criticized Joshua’s troops.

Joshua told his men to remove the rocks from the cave’s entrance and to bring the five kings out to him. So they did—the kings of Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish, and Eglon. Joshua called all the Israelites together and told his commanders to put their feet on the kings’ necks. Joshua then said, “Don’t ever be afraid or discouraged. Be strong and brave. This is what the Lord will do to all the enemies you will fight.”

Joshua killed the five kings and hung the corpse of each one on a tree. At sunset, he told his troops to take down the bodies and throw them in the cave where they had been hiding. They covered the cave entrance with big rocks, and those rocks are still there now.

Later Joshua and his men attacked Makkedah, killed the kings, and destroyed everything in it, just as they had done at Jericho. Then they attacked Libnah and killed the king and everyone in it, just as they had done at Jericho. From there they went to Lachish and attacked it, and took it on the second day of battle. They killed everyone there, just as they had done

at Libnah. King Horam of Gezer went to help Lachish, but Joshua and his troops defeated him and killed all his soldiers.

From Lachish Joshua and Israelites went to Eglon and captured it, killing everyone, and destroying everything in it, just as they had done at Lachish. From there they attacked Hebron and nearby villages, killing everyone there including its king. Next, they attacked Debir and its nearby villages, killing everyone and destroying everything in it, just as they had done with Hebron and Libnah.

So Joshua conquered the whole region, including the people and kings of the hill country, the Southern Desert, and the western foothills and mountain slopes toward the Dead Sea. He killed everyone, just as I, the LORD, the God of Israel, had told him to do. He killed people from Kadesh-Barnea to Gaza and from the region of Goshen to Gibeon. Joshua and his army took these kings and their land in one campaign, because I, the LORD, the God of Israel, fought for them. Then Joshua and the Israelite army returned to their camp at Gilgal.

Joshua defeated the entire country. He captured all the kings and their lands in a single campaign. There were 25 city-states in Canaan when Israel entered it, and by 1390 BC, Israel had swallowed up most of them. This is because I was fighting on behalf of Israel.

The Northern Cities Are Defeated

11 When King Jabin of Hazor heard about Joshua's victories, he sent messages to many kings, asking them to join him in fighting Israel. He sent these messages to Jobab of Madon, the kings of Shimron, and Achshaph, the kings in the northern mountains, the kings of the Jordan River Valley south of Lake Galilee, and the kings in the western foothills and in Naphoth-Dor on the west, to the kings of the Canaanites in the east and the west, to the kings of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, and Jebusites in the hill country, and to the Hivite kings below Mount Hermon in the region of Mizpah. All these kings and their troops with their huge number

of horses and chariots seemed more numerous than grains of sand on a beach. They met together at the Waters of Merom and set up camp there.

I, the LORD, said to Joshua, “Don’t be afraid of them, because in 24 hours they will all be dead. Cut the leg muscles of their horses, and burn their chariots.” So Joshua and his army made a surprise attack at the Waters of Merom, and I, the LORD, helped Israel defeat the enemy. The Israelite soldiers chased them all the way to Greater Sidon in the north, to Misropheth-Maim to the northwest and the Mizpah Valley in the northeast, leaving no survivors. Joshua and his men did as I, the LORD, told them to do; they cut the leg muscles of the enemies’ horses and burned their chariots.

Then Joshua captured Hazor and killed its king, Jabin, who had controlled all those cities. Joshua and his army killed everyone in Hazor and anything that was alive, and they burned up the town of Hazor.

Joshua captured these royal towns and killed all their kings, totally destroying them as I had told them to do. But he did not burn any of these towns built on small hills except Hazor. The soldiers carried off the animals and valuables in these cities, but they killed all the people and anything that breathed. This is what I, the LORD, told Moses to do, and what Moses told Joshua to do and this is what Joshua did.

Joshua and his army conquered the entire land—the hill country, the Southern Desert, the Goshen region, the western foothills, the Jordan River Valley, and Israel’s mountains and foothills from Mount Halak near Edom, to Baal-Gad in the Lebanon Valley south of Mount Hermon in the north. He captured and put to death all their kings. Joshua was at war with these kings for a long time, but he finally defeated them all except for the Hivites in Gibeon. I, the LORD, made these people stubborn so that I might destroy them completely without mercy as I had commanded Moses to do.

Joshua also killed all the descendants of Anak who lived in the hill country of Hebron, Debir, and Anab, and all the hill country of Judah and Israel. No Anakites were left in Israelite territory, except some who survived in Gaza, Gath, and Ashdod. Joshua conquered the entire land as I, the LORD, had told Moses would happen, and he divided the land among the tribes. Then the land finally had rest from war.

Joshua took control of the entire country, just as I had told Moses to do long ago. Joshua gave the land as an inheritance to Israel and divided up the land by their divisions and by their tribes. Then Israel had rest; there was no more war. You can have the same peace in your life when you trust Me to deliver you from the evil one.

The Kings Defeated

12The Israelites had killed two kings east of the Jordan River and took over their territory all the way from the Arnon River Gorge in the south to Mount Hermon in the north, including the eastern side of the Jordan River Valley. The first king to be defeated was Sihon the Amorite king who reigned in Heshbon. His kingdom extended from Aroer on the Arnon River Gorge north to the Jabbok River, which is the border of the Ammonites. His kingdom included half of the Gilead region. Sihon also ruled over the eastern half of the Jordan River Valley south from Lake Galilee to Beth-Jeshimoth at the northwest corner of the Dead Sea south to the slopes of Mount Pisgah.

Og, king of Bashan, one of the last of the Rephaites, reigned in Ashtaroth part of each year and in Edrei the rest of the year. His territory extended from Mount Hermon in the northeast to Slecah and included the land of Bashan west to Geshur and Maacah. He ruled over the northern half of Gilead.

Moses, My servant, had conquered Sihon and Og and had given their land to the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and East Manasseh. Later Joshua and the Israelites defeated the kings on the west side of the Jordan, from Baal-Gad in the Lebanon Valley in the north to Mount Halak near Edom in the south. This region included the hill country, the foothills, the Jordan River Valley, and its western slopes, and the Southern Desert. This included the lands of the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites. The Israelites defeated the kings of these towns: Jericho, Ai (near Bethel), Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish, Eglon, Gezer, Debir, Geder, Hormah, Arad, Libnah, Adullam, Makkedah, Bethel, Tappuah, Hopher, Aphek, Lasharon, Madon, Hazor, Shimron Meron, Acshaph, Taanach, Megiddo,

Kedesh, Jokneamon on Mount Carmel, Dor in Naphath-Dor, Goyim in Gilgal, and Tirzah. There were 31 kings in all.

You must conquer your inner world so you can conquer the outer world. I will fight for you as you fought for Israel. I can protect you from evil when you can't protect yourself.

The Unconquered Land

13 Years later when Joshua was old, I, the LORD, said, “You are getting old, but still Israel has not taken all sections of the land. This includes the regions of the Philistines and Geshurites which extend from the Shihor River east of Egypt north to Ekron. This Canaanite territory includes the Philistine cities of Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron. Also, the land of the Avites in the south is yet to be conquered. And the area to the north has not been conquered. This includes the land of the Canaanites from Mearah (which belongs to the Sidonians) north to Aphek at the boundary of the Amorites, the land of the Gebalites and all the Lebanon Mountains area to the east from Baal-Gad south of Mount Hermon to Lebo-Hamath, and the Sidonians in the hill country from Lebanon to Misrephoth Maim. I will help Israel force out all the people who live in these areas. And you are to divide the land among the nine tribes and the tribe of West Manasseh as I have instructed you.”

Moses had given the land east of the Jordan River to East Manasseh and the tribes of Reuben and Gad. That region extended from Aroer at the Arnon River Gorge and from the town in the middle of the gorge and it included the plateau of Medeba to Dibor. This region also included the towns of Sihon, the Amorite king, who ruled in Heshbon. Some of Sihon's towns were east to the Ammonite border.

This region also included Gilead, the territory of Geshur and Maacah, all of Mount Hermon and all Bashan as far as Salecah. This was the region of Og, who reigned in Ashtaroth and Edrei and was one of the last Rephaites. Moses had defeated Sihon and Og and their people. But the Israelites did not force out the people of Geshur and Maacah, and so they still live among the Israelites.

Moses gave no land to the Levi tribe because I promised them that instead of land they would receive offerings made to Me, the God of Israel.

The land for the clans in the tribe of Reuben was as follows: The territory from Aroer at the Annon River Gorge and from the town in the middle of the gorge north to the plateau of Medeba to Heshbon and all the towns near it on the plateau including Dibon, Bamoth Baal, Beth-Baal Meon, Jahaz, Kedemoth, Mephaath, Kiriathaim, Sibmah, Zereth Shahar on the hill in the valley, Beth-Peor, the slopes of Mount Pisgah, and Beth-Jeshimoth. These were all the towns on the plateau and in the region of Sihon, who ruled at Heshbon. Moses defeated Sihon and killed him and the Midianite chiefs, Evi, Rekem, Zur, Hur, and Reba, who were allied with Sihon. The Israelites also killed Balaam, son of Beor, who practiced fortune-telling. These towns and villages were for the Reuben tribe, and the Jordan River was its western boundary.

The land for the clans in the tribe of Gad was as follows: The territory of Jazer, all the towns of Gilead, and half the Ammonite territory to Aroer near Rabbah, and from Heshbon in the south to Ramath Mizpah and Betonim in the north and from Mahanaim and Lidebon farther north. Gad also received four towns in the valley—Beth-Haram, Beth-Nimrah, Succoth, and Zaphon—with the rest of King Sihon's territory up to the Galilee Lake. These regions with their towns and villages were given to the tribe of Gad.

The land for the clans of the East Manasseh tribe was as follows: The territory extending from Mahanaim which included all of Bashan, the realm of Og, king of Bashan, the 60 towns of Jair in Bashan; the northern half of Gilead; and Og's two towns of Ashtaroth and Edrei. All this was given to the clans of the tribe of Machir, Manasseh's son.

This is how Moses divided the land east of the Jordan River when he was in the plains of Moab across the Jordan east of Jericho. He gave no land to the Levi tribe, because I, the God of Israel, said I would be their inheritance.

I had a predetermined place for each Israelite, just as I have a predetermined place for you in this life. I selected your parents in a certain culture, of a specific city and state. Now work for Me where you are and glorify Me through your life.

The Division of Canaan

14The remaining nine and a half tribes inherited land in Canaan, given to them by Eleazar the priest, Joshua, and the tribal leaders. The land each tribe was to receive was assigned by casting lots, as I, the LORD, had told Moses to do. Moses had already given land east of the Jordan to two and a half tribes, but no land was given to the Levites. The tribe of Joseph had become two tribes, Manasseh and Ephraim. The Levites did not receive any land, but they were given towns to live in with pasturelands for their flocks and herds. So the dividing of the land was as I, the LORD, had told Moses.

While the Israelites were still at Gilgal, some men from the tribe of Judah went with Caleb to see Joshua. Caleb said, “You know that at Kadesh-Barnea the Lord sent you and me when I was 40 years old to explore the land. I brought back a report of what I felt was true, but the other ten spies made our people afraid to try to conquer the land. But I trusted the Lord with all my heart. That day Moses told me that because I trusted the Lord the land I was walking on would belong to me and my descendants forever. Moses made that promise to me 45 years ago. Though I’m now 85, I feel as strong and energetic now as I did then. I can still fight as well now as then. So please give me this hill country that the Lord promised to me. You heard the ten spies talk about the Anakites there in their large, well-fortified cities. But with the Lord’s help, I will force them out of the land.”

So Joshua commended Caleb and told him Hebron would be his. Hebron still belongs to Caleb’s descendants, because he trusted Me, the LORD, the God of Israel with all his heart. Hebron used to be called Kiriath-Arba because Arba was one of the greatest leaders of the Anakites. Then there was peace in the land.

Caleb trusted Me to help him victoriously conquer the mountain that was his lifelong dream. It’s one thing to have a dream, but a dream is only the beginning. It’s another step forward when you pray and work for your dream. To capture your dream takes you and Me

working together. By faith, you have to work hard and work smart. And as you work for your dream, you have to know how to work with Me.

Dividing Up the Promised Land

15The land assigned to the clans of the tribe of Judah extended south to the border of Edom, all the way to the Zin Desert. Judah's southern border began at the southern tip of the Dead Sea, went west just south of Scorpion Pass, on to Zin and south of Kadesh-Barnea. From there the southern border went past Hezron to Addar and turned toward Karka. Then it passed to Azmon and reached the brook of Egypt, and then ended at the Mediterranean Sea.

Judah's eastern border was the Dead Sea up to where the Jordan River flows into it. The northern boundary began where the Jordan enters the Dead Sea, and went west to Beth-Hoglah, and continued north of Beth-Arabah to the Bohan Rock. The boundary then went to Debir of Trouble Valley and north to Gilgal, opposite the slopes of Adummim. From there it went to Em Shemesh and Em Rogel and then up the Hinnom Valley along the southern slope of Jerusalem, the Jebusite city. From there the boundary line went to the top of the mountain west of the Hinnom Valley at the north end of the Rephaim Valley. Then the line went west to the Nephtoah Spring to the towns around Mount Ephron and down to Baalah, now called Kiriath-Jearim. The northern border then went west to Mount Seir and then along the northern side of Mount Jearim (also called Kesalon) and down to Beth-Shemesh and to Timnah. The line went to the north side of Ekron and then turned to Shikkeron, passed by Mount Baalah on to Jabneel. The western boundary ended at the Mediterranean Sea. The clans of Judah lived within these borders.

Joshua gave Caleb some land in Judah, which included Hebron, also named Kiriath-Arba because Arba was an ancestor of Anak. Caleb forced three descendants of Anak to leave Hebron. They were Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmai. Then Caleb went to Debir, formerly called Kiriath-Sepher, and he said, "My daughter Achsah can become the wife of the man who

captures Kiriath-Sepher.” Caleb’s nephew Othniel captured the town, and so Othniel married Achsah.

One day Achsah urged her husband to ask her father for a field. She went to see her father Caleb, and when she got off her donkey, he asked her what he could do for her. She answered, “The land you gave me is in the Southern Desert. But I need some land with springs of water.” So Caleb gave her the Upper Spring and the Lower Spring.

These are the towns given to the clans of the tribe of Judah: The towns in the Southern Desert near Edom were Kabzeel, Eder, Jagur, Kinah, Dimonah, Adadah, Kedesh, Hazor, Ithnan, Ziph, Telem, Baloth, Hazor Hadattah, Kerioth Hezron (also called Hazor), Amam, Shema, Moladah, Hazar Guddah, Heshmon, Beth-Pelet, Hazar Shual, Beersheba, Biziothiah, Baalah, Lim, Ezem, Eltodad, Kesil, Hormah, Ziklag, Madmannah, Sansannah, Lebaath, Shilhim, Ain, and Rimmon. This was a total of 29 towns and their villages.

The towns given to the clans of the tribe of Judah in the western foothills were Eshtaol, Zorah, Ashnah, Zanoah, En Gannim, Tappuah, Enam, Jarmuth, Adullam, Socoh, Azekah, Shaaraim, Adithaim, and Gederah (also called Gederothaim), a total of 14 towns and their villages.

Also, the towns included Zenan, Hadashah, Migdal Gad, Dilean, Mizpah, Juktheel, Lachish, Bozkath, Eglon, Cabbon, Lahmas, Kitlish, Gederoth, Beth-Dagon, Naahah, and Makkedah, a total of 16 towns and their villages.

Other towns were Libnah, Ether, Ashan, Iphtah, Ashnah, Zenib, Keilah, Aczib, and Mareshah, a total of nine towns and their villages.

Also included were Ekron, with its surrounding settlements and villages; the area west of Ekron and Ashdod, with their villages; Ashdod and its surrounding settlements and villages; and Gaza, with its settlements and villages as far west as the brook of Egypt and along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea.

Another of Judah’s regions was the hill country with 38 towns and their villages. Shamir, Jattir, Socoh, Dannah, Kiriath-Sannah (now called Debir), Anab, Eshtemoh, Amim, Goshen, Holon, and Giloh were a total of 11 towns and their villages.

Arab, Dumah, Eshan, Jahim, Beth-Tappuah, Aphekah, Humtah, Kiriath-Arba (now called Hebron), and Zior were a total of nine towns and their villages. Maon, Carmel, Ziph, Juttah, Jezreel, Jokdeam, Zanoah, Kain, Gibe-ah, and Timnah were a total of 10 towns and their villages.

Hallul, Beth-Zur, Gedor, Maarath, Beth-Anoth, and Eltekon were a total of six towns and their villages. And Kiriath-Baal (also called Kiriath-Jearim), and Rabbah were two more towns with their villages.

Six towns and their villages were given to Judah's clans in the desert: Beth-Arabah, Middin, Secacah, Nibshan, the City of Salt, and En Gedi. Unfortunately, the Israelites could not force out the Jebusites who were living in Jerusalem, so the Jebusites still live there with the people of Judah.

Your incomplete victory is also a prediction of your future struggles with that same problem.

Ephraim and Manasseh's Share

16The southern borders of the land assigned to Joseph began at the Jordan River at Jericho and went west through the desert into the hill country of Bethel. It went from Bethel to Luz and then to the border of the Archites in Ataroth. The line went west to the land of the Japhletites as far as Lower Beth-Horan and Gezer, over to the Mediterranean Sea. This is the land given to the descendants of Joseph's sons, Manasseh and Ephraim.

The boundary of the territory of Ephraim's clan went from Ataroth Addar in the east to Upper Beth-Horon in the west and continued to the Mediterranean Sea. The northern border started at Micmethath and went east to Taanath Shiloh, and on to Janoah. From there the boundary line went down to Ataroth and Naarah toward Jericho and to the Jordan River. The line went west from Tappuah to the Kanah Ravine and on to the Mediterranean Sea. Ephraim also had some towns and villages in the territory of the half-tribe of Manasseh. The Ephraimites could not force the Canaanites out of Gezer, so some of them still live with the people of Ephraim. But now the Canaanite people of Gezer have to work as slaves for the Israelites.

Property and Territories Given Out

17 Makir was the firstborn son of Manasseh, who was the firstborn son of Joseph. Makir was the ancestor of the Gileadites, who had received Gilead and Bashan because they were good soldiers. The half tribe of Manasseh on the west side of the Jordan River received land for the clans of Abiezer, Helek, Asriel, Shechem, Hephher, and Shemida.

Hephher's son, Zelophehad, had no sons, but he had these five daughters: Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah. They went to Eleazar the priest, Joshua, and Israel's leaders and said, "God told Moses to give our daughters some land just as He gave to our male relatives." So Joshua gave them some property with their brothers, as I, the LORD, had commanded.

Manasseh's land west of the Jordan consisted of ten parts. This was in addition to the land of Gilead and Barshan that was given to East Manasseh.

The territory of West Manasseh extended from Asher south to Micmethath east of Shechem and ran farther south to include En Tappuah. This town itself was in the Ephraim tribe, though Manasseh had the land around Tappuah. The boundary line continued south to the Kanuh Ravine and then went from the north side of the ravine to the Mediterranean Sea. A few towns belonging to Ephraim were north of the ravine, but the land itself north of the ravine belonged to Manasseh. The land on the south belonged to Ephraim, and the land on the north belonged to Manasseh. The western border of the Manasseh tribe was the Mediterranean Sea, and the tribe bordered Asher on the north and Issachar on the east.

In the territories of Issachar and Asher, Manasseh had Beth-Shan, Ibleam, and Dor (also called Naphoth Dor), Endor, Taanach, and Megiddo with their surrounding settlements. But the people of Manasseh could not capture these Canaanite towns. But when the Israelites grew strong, they forced the Canaanites to work as their slaves, but they could not force them out completely.

One day the people of Manasseh and Ephraim said to Joshua, "Why have you given us only one portion of land when we have so many people?" Joshua responded, "If you have so many people and not enough land, go clear out land in the forest that belonged to the Perizzites and Raphaites." But they answered, "That still wouldn't give us enough land.

And even the Canaanites living in Beth-Shan and in the Jezreel Valley have iron chariots.”

Joshua then said, “True; there are many of you. But you are powerful. I’ll give you more land along with the forested area, and when you clear the land, it will be yours. Yes, the Canaanites are powerful people and have iron chariots. But you can force them out.”

Do not look at the might of your enemies even when they’ve got “iron chariots.” Look to My strength when you’re weak; You need My strength. When you’re blinded to sin, you need My illumination. When you are attacked, you need My victory.

The Rest of the Land is Divided

18The Israelites all gathered at Shiloh and set up the tabernacle there. The land was under the control of the Israelites, but seven tribes still had not been given their tribal territories. So Joshua said, “Why are some of you waiting to occupy the land the Lord, the God of your ancestors, has given you? Select three men from each tribe, and I will have them survey the land and write a description of each of the seven parts of the land. The tribe of Judah, of course, is to remain in its territory on the south and the tribes of Ephraim and West Manasseh are to be in their territory to the north of Judah. Give me your written descriptions, and I will cast lots to determine which of the remaining seven tribes are to receive which territory. As you know, the Levites are not to receive a portion of land because their service as priests is their inheritance. Also, Gad, Reuben, and East Manasseh have already received their tribal territories east of the Jordan, land given to them by Moses.”

As the men started out, Joshua said again, “Survey the land and unite on a description of it. Then when you return, I will cast lots here in Shiloh in the Lord’s presence.” The men did as they were told, writing a report on each town and dividing the land into seven regions, and they returned to Joshua in Shiloh. Then Joshua cast lots to see how to divide the land, and he told the Israelites what their tribal territories were to be.

The tribe of Benjamin was given territory between the tribe of Judah on the south and the tribe of Ephraim and Manasseh on the north. Benjamin's northern border started at the Jordan River and went west past Jericho and on into the hill country to the desert at Beth-Aven. Then it ran along the ridge south of Luz (also called Bethel), and down to Ataroth Addar on the hill south of Lower Beth-Horon. From there the boundary line turned south and formed the western boundary at Kiriath-Baal (also called Kiriath-Jearim by Judah).

The southern border began at Kiriath-Jearim and went east to the Nephtaoth Spring. Then the line went to the foot of the hill that faces the Ben Hinnom Valley. It continued down the Hinnom Valley along the southern slope of Jerusalem on to En Rogel. Then the line curved north and went to En Shemesh, Geliloth which faces the Adummim Pass, and down to the Bohan Rock. The line went to the north of Beth-Hoglah and to the north end of the Dead Sea where the Jordan River enters the Dead Sea. The Jordan River was Benjamin's eastern border. These are the borders of Benjamin's tribal land for all its clans.

The tribe of Benjamin had these 12 towns and villages in one region: Jericho, Beth-Hoglah, Emek Keziz, Beth-Arabah, Zemaraim, Bethel, Avvim, Parah, Ophrah, Kephaz Ammoni, Ophni, and Geba. The tribe had these additional 14 towns and villages in another region: Gibeon, Ramah, Beeroth, Mizpah, Kephirah, Mozah, Rekem, Irpeel, Taralah, Zelah, Haeleph, Jerusalem (also called the Jebusite town), Gibeah, and Kiriath. This was the tribal territory given to the tribe of Benjamin and its clans.

I Am the judge of all the earth. My justice is always fair. It is possible for some people to be fair to all people.

Dividing the Land

19The second tribe to be selected by casting lots was Simeon. The region for its clans was inside the territory of Judah. One region included 13 towns and their villages: Beersheba (also called Shebal, Moladah, Hazar Shual, Balah, Ezem, Eltolad, Bethul, Hormah, Ziklag, Beth-Marcaboth, Hazor Susah, Beth-Lebaoth, and Sharuhem. Another region included four

towns and their villages: Ain, Rimmon, Ether, and Ashan. Simeon's land also included villages as far south as Baalath Beer (also called Ramah) in the Southern Desert. Since the tribe of Judah received more land than it needed for its people, part of its land was given to Simeon.

The third tribe to be selected by casting lots was Zebulun. Its boundary started at Sarid. From there it went west to Maralah, near Dabbesheth, and followed the ravine near Jokneam. It went east from Sarid toward the territory of Kisloth Tabor and onto Daberath and Japhia. The line continued east to Gath Hepher, En Kazin, and Rimmon and then curved toward Neah. The northern boundary went to Hannathon and ended at the Iphtah El Valley. Five of the 12 towns were Kattath, Nahalal, Shimron, Idalah, and Bethlehem. This was the tribal territory for Zebulun and its clans.

The fourth tribe to be selected by casting lots was Issachar. Its territory included these 16 towns and their villages: Jezreel, Kesulloth, Shunem, Hapharaim, Shion, Anaharath, Rabbith, Kishion, Ebez, Remeth, En Gannim, En Haddah, and Beth-Pazzez. Tabor, Shahazumah, and Beth-Shemesh. These were the towns and their villages for the tribe of Issachar and its clans.

The fifth tribe to be selected by casting lots was Asher. Its territory included Helkath, Hali, Beten, Acshaph, Allammelech, Amad, and Mishal. The western boundary went from Carmel and Shihor Libnath and then turned east toward Beth-Dagon, sharing a border with Zebulun along the Iphtah El Valley. Then the line went north to Beth-Emek and Neiel, passing Kabul on the left. From there it went to Abdon, Rehob, Hammon, and Kanah, as far north as the city of Sidon. The boundary line then turned west toward Ramah and on to the city of Tyre. From there it turned toward Hosah and ended at the Mediterranean Sea near Aczib, Ummah, Aphek, and Rehob. Asher has 22 towns and their villages. This was the tribal territory for Asher and its clans.

The sixth tribe to be selected by casting lots was Naphtali. Its boundary ran from Heleph and the oak tree at Zaananim, past Adami Nekeb and Jabneel to Lakkum and ending at the Jordan River. The boundary ran west through Aznoth Tabor and ended at Hukkok. The line touched Zebulun on the south, Asher on the west, and the Jordan on the east. The cities and their villages were Ziddim, Zer, Hammath, Rakkath, Kinnereth, Adamah, Ramah, Hazor, Kedesh, Edrei, En Hazor, Iron, Migdal El, Horem, Beth-

Anath, and Beth-Shemesh. These were the towns and their villages for Naphtali and the tribe's clans.

The seventh tribe to be selected by casting lots was Dan. Its territory included Zorah, Eshtuol, Ir Shemesh, Shaalabbin, Aijalon, Ithlah, Elon, Timnah, Ekron, Eltekeh, Gibbethon, Baalath, Jehud, Bene Berak, Gath Rimmon, Me Jarkon, and Rakkon. Dan's land went almost to Joppa. The Danites had difficulty taking their land, so they attacked Leshem and killed everyone in it. They settled in Leshem and named it Dan after their ancestor. These were the towns and villages for Dan and its clans.

After all the land was divided among the tribes, the Israelites gave Joshua some land as his inheritance, as I, the LORD, had commanded. He asked for Timnath Serah in Ephraim's hill country, and that is what he received. He built up the town and settled there.

These are the tribal territories that Eleazar, the priest, Joshua, and the tribal leaders gave to the tribes by casting lots in My presence at the tabernacle in Shiloh. So the dividing of the land was completed.

The first shall be last, and the last shall be first. Joshua was the last to receive his land-inheritance. Strive to be last because you want to serve Me the most.

The Towns of Refuge

20I told Joshua, "Tell the Israelites to choose Towns of Refuge, as I told Moses. If anyone kills a person accidentally, he may run to one of these towns and be protected from a relative wanting to take revenge.

"A person running to one of these towns is to explain to the town leaders at the city gate what happened. They must allow him to live in the town. If the avenging relative comes to take the man's life, the town leaders must not release the accused man to him, because the death was not done on purpose. He is to stay in the town until a trial has been held and until the high priest dies."

So the Israelites chose three towns west of the Jordan: Kedesh in Galilee in the hill country of Naphtali, Shechem in the hill country of

Ephraim, and Kiriath-Arba (also called Hebron) in the hill country of Judah. The Israelites chose three towns east of the Jordan: Bezer in the desert in the tribe of Reuben, Ramoth in Gilead in the tribe of Gad, and Golan in Bashan in the tribe of East Manasseh. If any Israelite or foreign resident accidentally killed someone, he could run to one of these six Towns of Refuge to be safe from an avenger before a trial is held.

I, the LORD, look after those who make a mistake. That means I'll take care of you when you make a mistake. I will judge you by what you intend to do, not by those unintentional mistakes you make.

The Towns of the Levites

21 In Shiloh, the family leaders of the Levi tribe and other family leaders spoke to Eleazar, the priest, and Joshua what I had said, “I, the LORD, told Moses that they were to have towns to live in and pastureland for their livestock.” So the Levites received the following towns with pastures.

The Kohath clans who were descendants of Aaron were given 13 towns in the tribes of Judah, Simeon, and Benjamin. Other Kohath clans were given ten towns in the tribes of Ephraim, Dan, and West Manasseh.

The Gershon clans were given 13 towns in the tribes of Issachar, Asher, Naphtali, and East Manasseh. The Merari clans were given 12 towns in the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Zebulun. So the Israelites did as the LORD had told Moses in giving the Levites those towns and pastures.

The Israelites gave 13 towns in the tribes of Judah and Simeon to the Kohathite clans of the tribe of Levi. They received Kiriath-Arba (also called Hebron). Arba was the ancestor of Anak. And the fields and villages around Hebron were given to Caleb. Besides receiving Hebron, a Town of Refuge, the Kohathites also received these towns in Judah and Simeon: Libnah, Jattir, Eshtemoa, Holon, Debir, Ain, Juttah, and Beth-Shemesh with surrounding pasturelands—nine towns in all. Then in Benjamin, the Kohathites received the four towns of Gibeon, Geba, Anathoth, and Almon. This was a total of 13 towns.

Other Kohathite clans received four towns in the tribe of Ephraim, four in the tribe of Dan, and two in the tribe of West Manasseh. The four towns in the hill country of Ephraim were Shechem, a Town of Refuge, Gezer, Kihzaim, and Beth-Horon. The four towns in the tribe of Dan were Eltekeh, Gibbethon, Aijalon, and Gath Rimmon. The two towns in West Manasseh were Taanach and Gath Rimmon—10 towns in all.

The Gershon clans of the Levi tribe received 13 towns with their pasture-lands. Two towns in the tribe of East Manasseh were Golan, a Town of Refuge, and Eshtarah. The four towns in the tribe of Issachar were Kishion, Daberath, Jarmuth, and En Gannim. The four towns in the tribe of Asher were Mishal, Abdon, Helkath, and Rehob. And the three towns in the tribe of Naphtali were Kedesh, a Town of Refuge, Hammoth Dor, and Kartan—13 in all.

The Merari clans of the Levites received 12 towns with their pasturelands. The four towns in the tribe of Zebulun were Jokneam, Kartah, Dimnah, and Nahalal. The four towns in the Reuben tribe were Bezer, Jahaz, Kedemoth, and Mephaath. The four towns in the tribe of Gad were Ramoth, a Town of Refuge, Mahanaim, Heshbon, and Jazer—12 in all.

The Levites lived in these 48 towns and had pastureland around each town for their livestock. I, the LORD, gave Israel all the land I had promised to their ancestors, and they captured the land and settled in. No enemy could defeat them, because I, the LORD, helped them defeat all their enemies. Every good thing I promised to Israel came true.

It's wonderful how Israel looked after My priests back then; may you look after your spiritual pastors and Christian leaders today.

The Eastern Tribes Are Sent Home

22 Joshua called together the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and East Manasseh and said, “You have done everything Moses told you to do, and you have done all that I’ve told you to do. This has taken a long time, but you have helped your relatives carry out all the Lord, your God, told you to do. Now that I have given these tribes rest, you should go to your families in the land Moses gave you east of the Jordan River. So be sure to obey the

commands and laws Moses gave you and what the Lord, your God, has said, ‘Follow Me, obey Me, cling to Me, and serve Me with all your heart and soul.’”

Joshua blessed them and sent them on their way to their families. Moses had given half of the tribe of Manasseh the land of Bashan east of the Jordan River and the other half of the tribe the land west of the Jordan. In his blessing, Joshua said, “When you get home with your livestock, silver, gold, bronze, iron, and clothes, share all this with your relatives.”

So the soldiers of the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and East Manasseh left Shiloh and returned to Gilead, which the Lord had given them. When the soldiers of these two and a half tribes arrived at Geliloth just west of the Jordan River, they built a large altar there. When the rest of Israel heard about this, the men got together at Shiloh and got ready to attack the two and a half tribes.

The Israelites sent Phinehas, Eleazar’s son, and ten tribal leaders to meet with the two and a half tribes in Gilead. They said to them, “All the Israelites want to know how you could be unfaithful to the Lord by building an altar? Why are you rebelling against Him? Wasn’t the sin of our people at Peor bad enough? We are still suffering because of that sin.”

I, the LORD said, “Why turn from Me, the LORD, again? If you rebel against Me, I will be angry with all of you. If you don’t think your land is good enough for worshiping Me, then move across the Jordan and worship Me here at the tabernacle. But don’t rebel by building a separate altar for yourselves. As you know, when Achan was unfaithful and stole some things that should have been destroyed, I was angry with you, and Achan and others died because he sinned.”

The leaders of the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and East Manasseh replied, “The Lord is the great God. If we had been rebellious and disobedient to the Lord, we deserve to die. We didn’t build an altar because we were rejecting the Lord. And we didn’t build it so we could offer burnt offerings, grain offerings, or fellowship offerings. No. We built it because we were concerned that someday our descendants might tell their descendants that because the Jordan River separates them, they would have no share in the Lord’s blessings.

“So we decided to build an altar that would not be for offerings and sacrifices, but as a reminder to worship the Lord at the tabernacle. Then our

descendants wouldn't tell their descendants that they have no right to worship the Lord. If our descendants ever ask about this, we will simply explain that this altar is not for sacrifices but is a witness between the Lord and us. We are not rebelling against the Lord. This altar is a reminder that we are to worship Him only at the tabernacle."

Phinehas and the leaders of the clans were pleased with what the tribal leaders of Reuben, Gad, and East Manasseh said. Phinehas told the men, "Now we know that the Lord is with us and that you have not rebelled against Him. In fact, you have kept Israel safe from being destroyed by the Lord."

Phinehas and the clan leaders went back to Canaan and told the Israelites about their meeting. Everyone was glad and praised Me, the LORD. So they said nothing more about fighting against the tribes of Reuben and Gad. Then the Reubenites and Gadites named the altar Witness (meaning "A reminder to Us That the LORD Is God.")

Joshua Speaks to the Leaders of Israel

23 Years later after Israel had peace with its neighbors and Joshua was getting old, he called a meeting of the elders, leaders, judges, and officials and said, "I am an old man now. You have seen how the Lord has helped you defeat your enemies. As you know, I have given to each of your tribe's land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. But you have not defeated some nations. The Lord, our God, has said, 'I will force them out, and you will take over their land, as I promised.'"

The Lord also said, "So be strong and obey all the laws I gave Moses without turning away from them. Don't have anything to do with these nations that are still in the land. Don't pray to their gods, and don't make any promises using the names of their gods. Don't serve them and don't bow down to them. Continue to cling to Me, the LORD, your God.

"I can force out these powerful nations, with none being able to stand against you. Anyone of you can cause a thousand enemy soldiers to run from you because I, the LORD, your God will fight for you as I promised. So be very sure to keep on loving Me, the LORD, your God.

“If you join with the nations that are left in the land and you marry their sons and daughters and are friends with them, then I, the LORD, your God won’t defeat those nations when you attack them. They will trip you up, and they will be painful to you like whips on your back and thorns in your eyes. Then you will die here in the good land I, the LORD, your God have given you.”

Joshua said, “I am about to die. You know fully well that the Lord, your God, has kept all His promises. Every promise He makes comes true. So also when you sin He will carry out His every threat of calamity until you are all destroyed. If you don’t keep your agreement with the Lord your God and you serve and bow down to false gods, the Lord will be very angry with you, and you will soon die in the good land He has given you.”

Joshua’s Farewell Speech at Shechem

24Joshua called the tribes of Israel for a meeting at Shechem. He asked the elders, leaders, judges, and officials to meet with him and stand before the Lord. He said to them what the Lord said, “I, the LORD, the God of Israel, that your ancestors including Terah, the father of Abraham and Nahor lived on the other side of the Euphrates River and worshiped false gods. But I led Abraham to Canaan and gave him many descendants, including his son, Isaac, and Isaac’s sons, Jacob and Esau. Esau moved to the hill country of Mount Seir, and Jacob and his sons went to Egypt.

“Then I sent Moses and Aaron to help you. And I sent terrible disasters on the Egyptians, and I brought your ancestors out of Egypt. Then when you got to the Red Sea, the Egyptians chased you in their chariots. Your ancestors prayed to Me for help, and so I put a dark cloud between them and the Egyptians, and I brought the sea down on them and drowned them. You saw all this. And then you lived in the desert a long time.

“I brought you into the land of the Amorites east of the Jordan River. They fought against you, but I helped you destroy them all, and you took over their land. Balak, king of Moab, decided to fight against you, but first, he asked Balaam, Beor’s son, to come put a curse on you. But I didn’t let Balaam curse you. Instead, he blessed you several times. And I rescued you from Balak.

“After you crossed the Jordan River, you fought the people of Jericho, and also the Amorites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hittites, Girgashites, Hivites, and Jebusites, and I helped you defeat them. I sent hornets ahead of you to drive out the two Amorite kings; they didn’t run because you fought with swords and bows and arrows. Also, I gave you a land you didn’t work for with cities you didn’t build, and grapes from vineyards and olives from olive trees you didn’t plant.”

Joshua continued, “Now reverence the Lord and serve Him and be faithful. Get rid of idols your ancestors worshiped on the other side of the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. You may think it is difficult to serve the Lord, but you need to choose. Will you worship the gods your ancestors worshiped? Or do you want to worship the gods of the Amorites since you are living on their land? As for my family and me, we will serve the Lord.”

The people answered, “We would never stop worshiping the Lord to worship other gods. We know that the Lord, our God, Himself brought us out of slavery in Egypt by working great miracles. Other nations were around us, but He protected us all the way. He forced out the Amorites and other nations in the land. You said you will serve the Lord; we will too because He is our God.”

Joshua said, “Are you sure you will serve the Lord? Remember that He is holy and doesn’t want you to worship anyone else. He doesn’t readily forgive rebellion. So if you leave the Lord and serve foreign gods, He will turn against you and cause terrible disasters to come on you, even though He has been good to you.”

The people responded, “We promise that we will serve the Lord.” Joshua said, “All right. This is your decision, as you yourselves have said.” They replied, “Yes, it is our decision.” Then Joshua said, “Then get rid of every idol you have and give your hearts to the Lord, the God of Israel.” The people said, “Yes we will serve only the Lord, our God, and obey Him.”

Then Joshua made an agreement with the people at Shechem. He recorded My laws and commands in the book of the law of God. Then he set up a large rock under the oak tree near the tabernacle. The Lord has said, “This rock has heard what I have said to you. So if you turn from Me, this rock will bear witness that you rejected Me.”

Joshua sent everyone back home. Then Joshua died at the age of 110. He was buried in the hill country of Ephraim at Timnath Serah, north of Mount Gaash.

Israel served Me, the LORD, throughout the lifetime of Joshua and the other leaders who were still living and had experienced what I, the LORD, had done for Israel. The Israelites had brought Joseph's bones with them from Egypt and buried them at Shechem in a field Jacob bought from Hamor, founder of Shechem. This field became part of the land given to Joseph's descendants, the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh.

Eleazar, Aaron's son, died and was buried at Gibeah in the hill country of the tribe of Ephraim.

Decide to follow Me wholly; do not turn back. Gaze into My face totally; worship Me with your whole heart.

I AM GOD

The Judge

The Book of Judges

Judge's seven cycles of failure show where Israel sinned and worshiped the idols of nations around them. Each spiritual failure led to cultural failures and military defeat. After each failure, I, the LORD, in My mercy raised up a judge to deliver Israel. Judges were much more than legal arbitrators as seen today; they were spiritual leaders who led in reforms, military leaders who fought, and prophets who spoke for Me.

A key verse in Judges is, "Every man did that which was right in his own eyes." As a result, there was disunity among the 12 tribes. No one completely followed Me, and no tribe completely conquered the territory assigned to them. There was apostasy among the priests and idol worship among the people.

Judges teaches the natural tendency of people to selfish disobedience and sin, but it also shows how I used human leaders to call My people to repent and return to Me.

More Territory Captured

1 After Joshua died, the Israelites asked Me, "Which tribe should attack the Canaanites first?" I answered, "Judah; I'll help them take the land." The men of Judah went to their relatives of the Simeon tribe, and said, "Come join us in fighting against the Canaanites in our territory. Then we will help you fight against them in your territory." So the troops from Simeon went to help Judah.

I helped them defeat the Canaanites and Perizzites, killing 10,000 men at Bezek. They fought against Adoni-Bezek and defeated the Canaanites and Perizzites. Adoni-Bezek escaped, but the Israelites chased him and caught him and cut off his thumbs and big toes. Adoni-Bezek admitted, "I

cut off the thumbs and big toes of 70 kings and made them pick up scraps of food under my table. So now God has paid me back for what I did.” The Israelites took him to Jerusalem, and he died there.

The army of Judah attacked Jerusalem, killed everyone there, and burned it down. Then they fought the Canaanites in the hill country, the Southern Desert, and the foothills to the west. Next, they attacked the Canaanites in Hebron (formerly called Kiriath-Arba) and defeated the forces of Sheshai, Ahiman, and Talmai.

From Hebron, the soldiers of Judah attacked Debin (formerly called Kiriath-Sepher). Caleb said, “Whoever captures Kiriath-Sepher can marry my daughter Achsah.” Othniel, Caleb’s nephew, captured the city, so Caleb gave his daughter Achsah as Othniel’s wife. She urged her husband to ask his Uncle Caleb for a field. She went to see her father, and as she was getting off her donkey, he asked, “Is something wrong?” She said, “You gave me land in the Southern Desert, but I need some land with springs of water.” So he gave her the upper springs and lower springs.

Soldiers of Judah and Simeon together attacked the Canaanite city of Zephath. Because they destroyed the city completely, they renamed it Hormah (meaning “Destruction”). Then the men of Judah captured Gaza, Ashkelon, Ekron, and the land around each town. I helped them defeat the people in the hill country, but they couldn’t defeat the people in the valleys, because they had iron chariots. The city of Hebron was given to Caleb, as Moses had promised, and Caleb defeated the descendants of the three sons of Anak. The Benjamites could not capture Jerusalem where the Jebusites lived.

When the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh attacked Bethel (formerly called Luz), I helped them. When spies went to check on Bethel, they said to a man coming out of the city, “Show us some secret way into the city and we will see that you and your family are safe.” He showed them how to get in, and they killed everyone in the city except the man and his family. The man then went to the land of the Hittites where he built a city and named it Luz.

The tribe of West Manasseh could not force the Canaanites out of their towns of Beth-Shan, Taanach, Dor, Ibleam, and Megiddo and villages around them, because the Canaanites were determined to stay there. So when the Israelites became more powerful, they made the Canaanites work

for them as their slaves, but they could not force them out completely. Also, the tribe of Ephraim couldn't force Canaanites out of Gezer, so the Canaanites continued to live there. And the Zebulun tribe couldn't force the Canaanites out of Kitron or Nahalol, so they too were made slaves. The Asher tribe could not drive out the Canaanites in Acco, Sidon, Ahlab, Achzib, Helbah, Aphek, or Rehob, and so the people of Asher lived among the Canaanites. Also, the Naphtali tribe could not force the Canaanites from Beth-Shemesh or Beth-Anath, and so the Naphtalites made them slaves, and the Naphtali tribe lived with Canaanites all around them.

The Amorites kept the tribe of Dan from going from the hill country to the valleys, and they were determined to stay on in Mount Heres, Aijalon, and Shaalbim. But later when the Ephraim and West Manasseh tribes grew stronger, they forced the Amorites to become slaves. The boundary of the Amorites went from Scorpion Pass to Sela and continued upward from there.

Just as Israel had to both defeat an enemy and take possession of the land, so you must get victory over bad habits and establish good habits. But, some habits are hard to “break” because they have “iron wheels.” When Israel didn't win a complete victory, they later became slaves to those they didn't conquer. In the same way, when you don't get victory over a sin, it becomes your master. Pray for complete victory.

Weeping at Bokim

2 I went from Gilgal to Bokim and gave this message to the Israelites: “As I promised your ancestors, when I brought you out of Egypt I said I would give them this land. I said I will never break My agreement with you, and you are not to make any agreements or peace treaties with the people in this land. You are to break down their altars. But you have disobeyed Me. Therefore I will not force out these nations. They will be painful like thorns in your sides, and their gods will trap you.”

Hearing this, the Israelites started crying, and they called the place Bokim (meaning “People Who Cry”). So they offered sacrifices to Me.

Joshua then sent the people on their way to take the land as each tribe's inheritance. The people served Me during Joshua's lifetime and during the lives of some elders who lived longer than he did, men who had seen the wonderful miracles I performed for Israel. Joshua died at the age of 110, and he was buried in the hill country of Ephraim at Timnath Heres, north of Mount Gaash.

After everyone in Joshua's generation died, the people of the next generation did not know Me or what I had done.

Teach those who come after you all the great things I have done for you. May those who come after you do all the things you have done for Me; but may they do even better things in a better way.

In fact, they sinned against Me by worshiping the idols of Baal. They rejected Me, the God of their ancestors, the One who had brought them out of Egypt. Their worshiping false gods of the people around them angered Me because in worshiping Baal and the Asherah idols they were rejecting Me. So in My anger, I let other nations attack Israel and take their belongings. Their enemies easily defeated them, and Israel could not hold them off. Every time they went to fight an enemy, I was against them, just as I said I would do. And now they were in great distress.

Then I chose leaders called judges, who rescued the Israelites from their enemies. But even then, they would not listen to their judges; instead, they bowed down in worship to other gods. They were quick to reject the way of their ancestors, who obeyed Me. When I chose a judge, I rescued the Israelites from their enemy, and I felt sorry for them as they moaned under the pressure of their enemies. But when the judge died, the Israelites behaved even worse than their ancestors, as they served and worshiped other gods. They stubbornly refused to stop worshiping idols.

So in My anger, I said, "Because this nation has broken the agreement I made with their ancestors, and don't obey Me, I will not force out of their land any of the nations still there when Joshua died. I will use them to test Israel to see if they will obey Me as their ancestors did." That explains why I let these nations stay in the land, and didn't let Joshua force them all out.

You never like being punished by Me, but I do it when you sin and run away. You know I love you and care for you; that's why I punish you. Repent of your sin and come back to Me.

Local Groups Remain Unconquered

3 I left certain nations in the land to test those Israelites who had not been in the previous wars in Canaan. This was so this generation of Israelites would learn how to fight. The nations included the five Philistine rulers, and the Canaanites, Sidonians, and Hivites in the hill country of Lebanon from Mount Baal-Hermon to Lebo-Hamath. I used these nations to test the Israelites to see if they would obey the commands I gave their ancestors through Moses.

All around the Israelites were the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites. So it's not surprising that the Israelites' young men married young women in these nations and that the Israelites' young women married young men in these nations, and that these nations influenced Israelites to worship their gods.

The Israelites sinned against Me by forgetting Me and worshiping images of Baal and Asherah poles. This so angered Me that I let Israel be defeated by Cushon Rishathaim, king of northern Syria. After being under his rule for eight years, Israel asked Me for relief, and I gave them Othniel, Caleb's nephew, to rescue them. My Spirit controlled Othniel, and he became Israel's judge and fought against Cushan Rishathaim and defeated him. Israel then had peace until Othniel died 40 years later.

I use all kinds of people in My service; thank Achsah, his wife, who made Othniel into the leader I could use.

The Israelites again sinned against Me, and so I let Eglon, king of Moab, defeat them. Together with the Ammonites and Amalekites, Eglon attacked Israel and captured Jericho. Eglon was over Israel for 18 years. Again Israel asked Me for help, and I gave them Ehud, a left-handed man of the tribe of Benjamin. The Israelites sent Ehud to take their tax money to Eglon. Ehud made a double-edged dagger about 18 inches long and strapped it under his clothing on his right thigh.

Ehud gave the taxes to Eglon, a very fat man. Ehud then told the men with him to leave. Ehud went with them as far as the stone idols near Gilgal, and then he returned alone to Eglon. Ehud said to him, “I have a secret message for you.” Eglon ordered his officials to leave the room. Then as Eglon was seated in the upper room of his summer palace, Ehud said, “My message for you is from God.” When the king stood up, Ehud pulled out his dagger with his left hand and plunged it so far into Eglon’s stomach that even the handle could not be seen. Leaving the dagger there, Ehud locked the doors and escaped by climbing through a window onto a porch.

When the king’s officials went back and found the doors locked; they said, “He is probably relieving himself.” When the king didn’t come out after a long time, they got a key, unlocked the doors, and found him dead on the floor.

By this time Ehud had escaped past the stone idols near Gilgal and had gone to the town of Seirah. Arriving in the hill country of Ephraim, he blew a call to arms on his trumpet, and some Israelites went with him down the hills. He said, “Come with me because God will help us defeat the Moabites.” So they went with him and took control of the shallow places where people cross the Jordan. They killed about 10,000 Moabites, all of them strong and brave soldiers. Moab was then under Israel’s rule for 80 years.

Deborah’s Leadership

4 After Ehud died, the Israelites again sinned against Me. So I let Habin, a Canaanite king living in Hazor, conquer Israel. Sisera, his army commander, lived in Harosheth Haggoyim. Sisera had 900 iron chariots, and he made life miserable for the Israelites for 20 years. So My people pleaded to Me for help.

Deborah, the wife of Lappidoth, was a prophetess, and she was leading Israel. She would settle Israel’s legal cases while sitting under a palm tree between Ramah and Bethel in Ephraim’s hill country. One day she sent for Barak, son of Ahinoam, who was in Kedesh in the tribe of Naphtali. When he arrived, she said, “The LORD God of Israel is telling you to take 10,000 men from the tribes of Naphtali and Zebulun and lead them to Mount Tabor. I will trick Sisera, Jabin’s army commander, to go with his chariots and

troops to the Kishon River, and God will help you defeat him. Barak said, "Alright. I'll go if you go with me." She replied, "Alright, I will. But the honor of defeating Sisera will go to a woman, not you." So Deborah went with Barak to Kedesh where Barak had gathered 10,000 men from Zebulun and Naphtali. And Deborah went too.

The Kenites were descendants of Hobab (also known as Jethro), Moses' father-in-law. Heber, a Kenite, had moved to live near the great oak tree in Zaanannim near Kedesh, where Deborah and Barak were going.

When Sisera heard that Barak had gone up to Mount Tabor, Sisera went with his men and his 900 iron chariots from Harosheth Haggoyim to the Kishon River. Deborah told Barak, "It's time to attack Sisera. The Lord will help you defeat him." So Barak led his 10,000 troops down the slopes of Mount Tabor. I caused Sisera and all his charioteers to panic, and Sisera even jumped out of his chariot and ran. But Barak chased Sisera's charioteers and soldiers all the way to Harosheth Haggoyim. Every one of Sisera's soldiers was killed.

Sisera ran to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite. Jabin, king of Hazor, and the Kenites were on good terms. Seeing Sisera, Jael went out to meet him. She said, "Come into my tent. Don't be afraid." So he went in, and she covered him with a blanket. He said, "May I have a drink of water? I'm thirsty." She gave him some milk and then covered him up again. He told her, "Stand at the door of your tent so that if anyone asks you if anyone is in the tent, tell them 'No.'"

Sisera was very tired, so he soon went to sleep. Then Jael took a hammer and drove a tent peg through his head, and he died. As Barak was chasing Sisera, Jael went to meet him and said, "The man you are looking for is inside." He went in her tent and saw Sisera lying there with a tent peg through the temple of his head.

Jabin, the Canaanite king, was weakened by the Israelites, and Israel kept getting stronger against Jabin until finally, they destroyed him.

I give victory in many different ways and by different people. Trust the methods I am using. I gave Israel a victory through Barak, Deborah the judge, and Jael, a distant relative. I work My might

through mysterious ways, sometimes using little things like a tent peg.

The Song of Deborah and Barak

5 Deborah and Barak sang this song:

“Praise the LORD. Israel’s leaders took charge, and the people gladly followed. Listen, kings and rulers as they sing to the Lord, they are making music to the God of Israel.

“When the LORD, came from Seir and marched across Edom, the earth shook, and the cloudy sky poured down rain. Even Mount Sinai trembled in His presence; He is the God of Israel.

“In the days of the judge Shamgar, son of Anath, and in the days of Jael, people avoided the main roads and used winding back roads. People left their villages until Deborah took command, protecting His people like a mother. When Israel worshiped false gods, their city gates were attacked, and not even 40,000 soldiers had spears or shields to fight with. But praise the LORD for Israel’s leaders and those who volunteered to serve in the army.

“You rich people who ride on white donkeys and sit on nice saddle blankets, and you poor people who have to walk; listen to the singers at the wells as they tell of great victories through the villages. Then the people marched down to the city gates, and said, ‘Wake up, Deborah, and sing! And get up, Barak, son of Ahinoam, and capture your enemies.’

“The people who were left joined with their leaders and fought against mighty warriors. Soldiers came from Ephraim where the Amalekites used to live. Others came from Benjamin. And captains came from Makir of the tribe of Manasseh and Zebulun. The princes of Issachar were with Deborah and pushed with Barak into the valley. But the people of Reuben could not make up their minds. Why did you stay at home, around the campfires? Was it simply so you could hear the shepherds whistling for their flocks? You could not decide whether to join in battle against Israel’s enemies. The people of Gilead stayed on the east side of the Jordan River, and Asher stayed with his ships at the Mediterranean shore.

“But the soldiers of Zebulun and Naphtali risked their lives on the battlefield. Canaanite kings fought them at Taanach near the Megiddo springs, but they could not defeat them and rob them of their silver. It seemed as if even the stars fought against Sisera, and the old Kishon River swept their soldiers away. Sisera’s horses ran off, their hoofs stamping the ground.”

My angel, the LORD, said, “Put a curse on the town of Meroz because its people did not help fight My enemies.” But Jael, Heber’s wife, is to be honored above all women who live in tents. When Sisera asked her for water, she gave him curdled milk in an expensive bowl. Then with a tent peg in her left hand and a worker’s hammer in her right hand, she crushed his head by piercing his temple. He fell at her feet and lay dead.

“Sisera’s mother looked out her latticed window, wondering why he hadn’t returned from the battle. Her wise women answered her, as she wept saying, ‘Apparently they are finding a lot of loot, capturing a woman or two for each man, and are bringing back beautifully embroidered garments for me.’

“May all our enemies die as Sisera did. And may those who love the LORD shine brightly like the sun.” Then Israel had peace for 40 years.

My Call to Gideon

6 Again Israel sinned against Me, so I let the Midianites oppose them. The Midianites were so cruel that many Israelites lived in rock crevices, caves, and dens in the mountains. Whenever the Israelites planted crops, the Midianites, Amalekites, and other nations attacked Israel. They camped in the land and destroyed crops as far away as Gaza, and killed all of Israel’s sheep, cattle, and donkeys. They came with their own livestock and camels and set up their tents as numerous as swarms of locusts. They ruined the land wherever they were. The Israelites became so poor that they begged Me to help them.

So I sent them a prophet who said, “This is a message from the Lord. ‘I rescued you from slavery in Egypt, setting you free from the Egyptians. When nations here made life miserable for you, I forced them out and gave

you their land. I told you I am the LORD your God and you are not to worship the Ammonite gods. But you did not obey Me.” ’

I, the angel of the LORD, went to the town of Ophrah and sat down under the oak tree that belonged to Joash, of the Abiezer clan of the West Manasseh tribe. His son Gideon was threshing wheat in a shallow winepress so the Midianites couldn't see him. I, the LORD, appeared and said to Gideon, “I am with you, mighty warrior.”

Gideon responded, “But if you are the Lord, why have all these bad things happened to us? True, our fathers told us how You performed miracles in bringing us out of Egypt. But now You have forgotten us, and the Midianites are treating us terribly.”

I, the LORD, said, “Gideon, you are strong, and you can rescue Israel; therefore I am sending you to do it.” Gideon replied, “But how can I rescue the nation? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my entire family.” I, the LORD, then told him, “I will be with you, and you will destroy the Midianites as easily as if they were only one man.”

Gideon said, “So that I will know that I please You and that You really are speaking to me, please do a miracle to prove it. Wait here while I go get an offering to bring to You.” I told him, “Go ahead. I'll wait.” Gideon hurried home, killed and cooked a young goat and made bread without yeast. He put the cooked meat in a basket and poured the broth into a pot. Then he put the meat, broth, and bread under his father's oak tree.

I, the angel of the LORD said, “Put the meat and bread on this rock, and pour the broth over them.” When Gideon did this, I touched the meat and bread with a stick, and fire immediately burned up the meat and bread. Then I disappeared in the smoke of the fire. Realizing he had actually seen Me, Gideon said, “Oh Sovereign LORD. I have seen the angel of the LORD face to face.” But I then said, “Everything is alright. Don't be afraid. You won't die.” So Gideon built an altar and called it “The Lord Is Peace.” That altar is still there outside the town of Ophrah.

That night I spoke again to Gideon, and said, “Your father has an altar to Baal and an Asherah pole near it. Destroy these and build an altar to Me, the LORD your God, on the top of this hill. Using the wood of the Asherah pole, build a fire and offer a bull from your father's herd as a burnt offering to Me.” Then Gideon took 10 of his servants to help him tear down the Baal

altar and Asherah pole. He did this at night because he was afraid that if his family and men of the town found out he did it, they would kill him.

In the morning people saw the Baal altar destroyed and the Asherah pole cut down and the remains of a bull sacrificed on a new altar. Wondering who did this, they discovered that Gideon, Joash's son, did. So the men of the town ordered Joash to bring out his son. They said he must die because he had broken the Baal altar and cut down the Asherah pole.

Joash told the crowd, "Why are you trying to defend Baal? If Baal needs your help, then you are the ones to die. If Baal is really a god, he can defend himself." From then on people called Gideon Jerub-Baal (meaning "Baal Fighter") because they said, "Let Baal fight for himself."

All the Midianites, Amalekites, and other nations camped together in the Jezreel Valley. I, the Spirit of the LORD, came on Gideon, and he blew a trumpet as a signal for the men of his clan, the Abiezrites, to follow him. He sent messengers to the tribes of Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, urging them to send their soldiers to join his army. So they did.

Then Gideon said, "If You will help me rescue Israel as You promised, then prove it to me in this way: Tonight I will place some wool on the threshing floor. If dew in the morning is on the wool, but the ground around it is dry, I will know You will help me." That is exactly what happened. Rising early in the morning, Gideon squeezed enough water out of the wool to fill a bowl.

Then Gideon said, "Don't be angry with me. But I have one more request. This time let the wool be dry, and the ground around it covered with dew." That night I kept the wool dry and covered the ground around it with dew.

You may doubt as Gideon did. It's so easy to doubt when you take your eyes off Me, your Lord, Keep your spiritual eyes on Me; Follow when I lead, go where I want you to go.

I, The LORD, Defeat the Midianites

The next morning Jerub-Baal (that is, Gideon) and his men camped at the Harod Spring. The Midianites were camped north of them in the valley near the Moreh Hill. I told Gideon, “You have too many soldiers. If you keep them all, the Israelites may boast that they won the battle all by themselves. So tell the soldiers that if anyone is afraid, he can leave and go home.” So 22,000 men went home, which left 10,000 with Gideon.

Then I told Gideon he still had too many soldiers. “Take them down to the spring, and I will tell you which ones can go with you and which ones should go home.” When Gideon took his army to the spring, I said, “Some men will lap water like a dog, and others will kneel down to drink.” Three hundred men lapped water with their hands, and all the others knelt down to drink. Then I said, “The 300 who lapped water from their hands will rescue you from the Midianites. You may send the others home.” So Gideon sent home all but the 300.

The Midianites were camped in the valley below Gideon’s army. In the night I told Gideon, “Get up and attack the Midianites because I will give you victory over them. But if you are afraid, go down to their camp with your servant, Purah, and listen to what they are saying. This will encourage you.” So he and Purah sneaked down to the edge of their camp. Their camp had so many people they were like a thick swarm of locusts. And their camels seemed more numerous than the grains of sand on the seashore.

Gideon heard a soldier telling a friend about his dream. “In my dream, a loaf of barley bread tumbled into our camp. And it hit a tent with such force that the tent fell over.” His friend said, “Your dream means that Gideon, Joash’s son, will come and defeat us all.”

When Gideon heard this, he worshiped Me, the LORD. Going back to his camp, he shouted, “Get up! The Lord will help us defeat the Midianites.” He divided his army into three groups of 100 men each and gave each man a trumpet and a clay jar with a burning torch in it. Then he told them, “When we get close to their camp, follow what I do. When I and those who are with me blow our trumpets, you blow yours and shout, ‘We fight for the LORD and for Gideon.’”

Gideon and the 100 men with him got to the edge of the Midianite camp a little after 10 p.m., just as the guards had changed. Gideon and his 100 men blew their trumpets and broke their jars. And the men in the other two groups of 100 each did the same. With the torches in their left hands and

holding their trumpets in their right hands, they all shouted, “We fight with a sword for the LORD and for Gideon.” The enemy soldiers awakened in a panic and started running away.

When Gideon’s 300 blew their trumpets again, I caused the enemy troops to start fighting each other with their swords. They ran to Beth-Shittah toward Zereah to the border of Abel Meholah near Tabbath. Israelite soldiers from Naphtali, Asher, and both halves of the Manasseh tribe charged the Midianites. Gideon also sent messengers to the men in the hill country of Ephraim, asking them to fight the Midianites and to put guards at every low spot of the Jordan River as far as Beth-Barah to keep the Midianites from crossing the river. Troops from Ephraim did exactly as Gideon asked of them. The Ephraim troops even captured Oreb and Zeeb, two Midianite leaders. They killed Oreb at the Oreb Rock and Zeeb at the Zeeb Winepress. The Ephraim troops took the heads of Oreb and Zeeb to Gideon.

Trust Me to give you victory over the enemy even when you don't know how it'll be done. Trust Me to use "broken vessels," lamps, and trumpets. I will use the things you have in My service.

Gideon Pursues Zebah and Zalmunna

8 However, the Ephraimites were very upset with Gideon. They criticized him, saying, “When you went to fight Midian, why didn’t you ask us to help?” Gideon answered, “You were able to do more than I did. You captured and beheaded Oreb and Zeeb. Even the small, leftover grapes of your tribe are far better than the full grape harvest of my clan of Abiezer.” This clever answer calmed down the Ephraimites.

Gideon and his 300 men pursued the Midianites to the Jordan River and crossed it. Tired from the pursuit, they asked the men of Succoth for some bread. They said, “We are tired out, but we need to keep after Zebah and Zalmunna, the kings of Midian.” The town leaders of Succoth said, “Why should we feed your troops? Maybe you haven’t captured Zebah and Zalmunna. Catch them first, and then we will feed you.” Gideon replied,

“Because of your response after we catch Zebah and Zalmunna, I will return and rip open your flesh with thorns and briars.”

Leaving Succoth, Gideon and his men went to Penuel and asked the leaders there for some food. But they answered the same way as the Succoth leaders. So Gideon said, “After I defeat these two Midianite kings, I will come back and tear down your tower.”

Zebah and Zalmunna were in Karkor, east of the Dead Sea, with only 15,000 men of their original army of 135,000. Gideon went along the route of the nomads east of Jobah and Jogbehah and launched a surprise attack against the army. Zebah and Zalmunna fled, but Gideon captured them and all their soldiers.

On his return home, as Gideon went through the Pass of Heres, he caught a young man from Succoth and asked him to write down for him the names of Succoth’s 77 town leaders. Gideon then went to the town officials and said, “You questioned whether I already had captured Zeba and Zalmunna. Well, here they are, and you refused to give my soldiers food.” Gideon then used thorns and briars to kill the 77 town officials. Then he went to Penuel and tore down the town’s tower and killed all the men there.

Then Gideon asked Zeba and Zalmunna, “What were the men like whom you killed at Tabor?” they said, “They were like you; they all looked like sons of a king.” Gideon replied, “Those were my very own brothers. The Lord knows that if you had not killed them, I would let you live.” Gideon told Jether, his oldest son, to kill Zeba and Zalmunna. But Jether was young and was afraid to pull out his sword and kill them. Zeba and Zalmunna told Gideon, “Do it yourself. Don’t ask a boy to kill two men.” So Gideon killed them and took the fancy gold ornaments off their camel’s necks.

The Israelites said to Gideon, “Be our king. Then your son and grandson can follow you as our king.” Gideon responded, “No, I won’t be your king. And my son won’t either. The Lord is your king. But I have one request. Give me the earrings you took from our enemy.” The custom of the Ishmaelites was to wear gold earrings. They gladly gave him the earrings. They spread out a garment, and each man tossed down a ring. Together these rings weighed over 40 pounds. Also, there was gold from the camel’s ornaments and from jewelry worn by the Midianite kings. He also took the kings’ purple robes. He made the gold into priestly vests and placed it in

Ophrah. But the Israelites, including even Gideon and his family, started worshipping it.

Midian was never able to oppose Israel again. And the land enjoyed peace for 40 years. Gideon returned home and had many wives and 70 sons. He also had a concubine in Shechem, who had a son he named Abimelech. Gideon grew to be an old man. He was buried in the tomb of his father, Joash, in Ophrah.

Soon after Gideon died, Israel again worshiped Baal idols, with Baal-Berith as their main god. Again they forgot Me, the LORD their God, who had rescued them from their many enemies. Also, they were ungrateful to Gideon's family for all that Gideon had done for them.

Always do right and never be afraid of reprisals. Life is serious, and sin has consequences. Learn to be thorough in separating yourself from sin.

Deception of Abimelech

9One day Gideon's son, Abimelech, went to Shechem and said to his brothers and others in his mother's family, "Ask the people of Shechem whether it is better to have all 70 of Abimelech's half-brothers rule over you or just Abimelech himself, who is related to you." The citizens of Shechem liked the idea of their relative Abimelech being their king. Then they gave him 70 pieces of silver from the temple of Baal-Berith, and with that money, Abimelech hired some rascals who followed him.

Abimelech went to his father's home in Ophrah and murdered all 70 of his half-brothers except one. That was Jotham, Gideon's youngest son, who escaped by hiding. Then all the citizens of Shechem and Beth-Millo met beside the oak tree by the sacred pillar in Shechem and crowned Abimelech king.

Jotham, Gideon's youngest of his 70 sons, heard about this. So he climbed to the top of Mount Gerizim and shouted, "You citizens of Shechem, listen to me if you want God to listen to you. One time all the trees asked one olive tree to be their king. But the olive tree said, 'No, I

won't stop producing olive oil, just so I can wave branches over the other trees.' Then the trees asked the fig tree to be their king. But the fig tree refused. He didn't want to give up producing figs just to wave his branches over the other trees. Then the trees asked the vine to be their king. But the vine refused to give up its grapes for wine just to wave his branches over the other trees. Then the trees asked a thorn bush to be their king. The thorn bush said to the trees, 'If you really want me to be your king, come enjoy my shade. But if not, then may fire come out of me and burn up the cedars of Lebanon.'

"Have you done the right thing in making Abimelech your king? Is this fair to my father who risked his life for you to rescue you from the Midianites? Actually, you have turned against my father by murdering 69 of his 70 sons and making Abimelech your king. If you have done the right thing toward Gideon, then perhaps all of you and Abimelech will be happy. But if what you did was wrong, then may Abimelech send fire to burn up all of you, and may you send fire to burn up Abimelech." Then Jotham escaped and lived in Beer, where he was afraid of Abimelech.

After Abimelech had ruled for three years, I sent a demon to stir up trouble between Abimelech and the Shechem citizens, and to punish the people of Shechem for killing Gideon's sons. The citizens put some men up on hilltops to watch for and ambush Abimelech, and to rob passersby. Abimelech heard what they were doing.

Gaal, son of Ebed, moved to Shechem, and the town's citizens trusted him. At the time of the grape harvest, the people picked the grapes and then walked on them in their winepresses to make wine. Then they held a festival in the temple of their god. While eating and drinking, they started cursing Abimelech. Gaal said, "Why is Abimelech your king? He's not a true Shechemite. He is a son of Gideon, and Zebul is his deputy. Hamor was the founder of Shechem, so we should follow his descendants, not Abimelech. If I were the ruler of Shechem, I would get rid of Abimelech. I would tell him to call out his enemy, and I would easily defeat them all."

This made Zebul, Abimelech's deputy, and the city's mayor, very angry. So Zebul sent messengers to Shechem to tell Abimelech, "Gaal is persuading the people to make him king. So here's what I suggest: Have your men hide in the fields at night. Then at sunrise, have them attack the town. When Gaal and his men come to fight you, you will defeat them."

So Abimelech and his troops were hiding at night near Shechem in four companies. Gaal went to the city gate as Abimelech, and his men were coming out of their hiding places. Gaal said to Zebul, "People are coming down from the mountaintops." Zebul answered, "You are just seeing shadows." Gaal said, "No, look. People are coming from the mountaintops, and some are coming along the road by the tree where some men try to predict the future."

Zebul said to Gaal, "Now why are you bragging? Why did you say we shouldn't have Abimelech as our king? Why don't you go fight this army you made fun of?" So Gaal and the citizens of Shechem fought Abimelech. Abimelech chased Gaal and his men, and many of them fell wounded. Then Abimelech stayed in Arumah, and Zebul forced Gaal and his brothers out of Shechem.

The next day the people of Shechem were getting ready to go fight in the fields. When Abimelech heard of this, he divided his men into three groups to set up an ambush. When he saw the men coming out of town, he attacked and fought them. He and the men with him rushed to the city gate, and the two other companies rushed on some of the Shechemites and killed them. All day long Abimelech kept attacking the city. Finally, he captured it and killed everyone in it. Then he and his men demolished the city and scattered salt all over it.

Some of the Shechemite citizens who were in the town's tower went to hide in the nearby temple of their false god El-Berith. When Abimelech heard of this, he went to Mount Zalmon and cut off some tree branches and put them on his shoulders. He told the men with him to do the same thing he had done. So they did. Then they piled the branches against the temple and set them on fire. About 1,000 people died there.

Next Abimelech went to Thebez and captured it. But everyone in town hid in the tall tower in the city, locking themselves in and climbing up on the roof. Abimelech rushed to the tower, but as he approached its gate to set it on fire, a woman dropped a heavy millstone on his head and cracked his skull.

Abimelech told his armor-bearer, "Draw your sword and kill me. I don't want anyone to know a woman killed me." So his servant jabbed Abimelech's sword into him, and he died. When the Israelites saw that Abimelech was dead, they went home. In this way, I punished Abimelech

for murdering Gideon's many sons. Also, I punished Shechem for helping Abimelech. Thus the curse by Jotham, Gideon's son, came true.

Tola and Jair

10After Abimelech died, Israel's next judge was Tola. Though he was from the Issachar tribe, he lived in Shamir in Ephraim's hill country. His father was Puah, and his grandfather was Dodo. After leading Israel for 23 years, he died and was buried in Shamir.

Israel's next leader was Jair, from Gilead. He was a judge for 23 years and had 30 sons, each of whom had his own donkey and owned a town in Gilead. These 30 towns are still called Havvoth-Jair (meaning "The Towns of Jair"). When Jair died, he was buried in Kamon in Gilead.

Once again the Israelites sinned against Me. They worshiped not only Baal and the Astoreths but also the gods of Syria, Sidon, Moab, Ammon, and Philistia. They completely turned from Me their Lord and did not serve Me at all. So I became very angry with them, and let the Philistines and Ammonites torment them. For 18 years they were cruel to the Israelites in Gilead, east of the Jordan River in the land that used to belong to the Amorites. The Ammonites also crossed the Jordan and attacked the people of Judah, Benjamin, and Ephraim. The Israelites were in a terrible situation, so they prayed for Me, their LORD, to help them. They admitted they had sinned against Me by turning from Me and worshiping the Baal idols.

I, their Lord, replied, "When you asked Me for help in the past, I rescued you numerous times, from the Egyptians, Amorites, Ammonites, Philistines, Gideonites, Amalekites, and Maonites. Yet you continue to turn from Me and worship other gods. So I won't rescue you anymore. Go ask these gods you've chosen to save you from your trouble."

Again the Israelites admitted, "We have sinned. So punish us in whatever way You think best. But please rescue us from our enemies." Then the Israelites got rid of the idols and worshiped only Me, their LORD. And I felt bad about all their misery.

Meanwhile, the Ammonite soldiers had camped in Gilead, and the Israelites were camped at Mizpah. Seeing that war was about to break out, the leaders in Gilead were concerned about the threat of the Ammonites. So

they said, “If someone offers to lead an attack against the Ammonites, we will make him our king.”

Jephthah

11 Jephthah was known as a great soldier in Gilead. His mother was a prostitute, and his father, whose name was Gilead, had several sons by his legitimate wife. These half-brothers made Jephthah leave Gilead because they said, “As the son of a prostitute, you can’t have any of our family property.” So Jephthah went to live in Tob, an area north of Gilead. A number of rebels there began following him.

Later when the Ammonites attacked Israel, the Gilead leaders asked Jephthah to come back to Gilead and lead their army against the Ammonites. Jephthah said, “How do I know I can trust you?” You made me leave my family, so why do you want my help now?” The Gilead elders said, “But we need you now. If you defeat the Ammonites, we will make you our king.” Jephthah answered, “If the Lord gives me victory over the Ammonites, will you really make me your king?” The leaders said, “The Lord will be our witness that we will do what we say.”

So Jephthah went back to Mizpah, where the leaders made him commander in chief and ruler. He repeated before Me, their LORD, his commitment to them. Then Jephthah sent messengers to the Ammonite king, asking him why he was attacking Israel. The king answered that the Israelites had taken their land from them when the Israelites had come out of Egypt. “This land,” he said, “belongs to us, all the way from the Arnon River in the south to the Jabbok River in the north and west to the Jordan River. So give us back this land, and there won’t be any war.”

Jephthah sent his messengers back to the Ammonite king with these words: “Israel did not take any land from Moab or Ammon. When the Israelites came out of Egypt, they crossed the Red Sea and then arrived at Kadesh. Then they sent messengers to the king of Edom asking permission to go through his country. But he refused. Then they asked the king of Moab the same thing, and he too refused. So the Israelites stayed at Kadesh.

“Later they went east of Edom and Moab and camped on the other side of the Arnon River Gorge. So they never entered the land of Moab. Then

Israel sent messengers to Sihon, the Amorite king in Heshbon, asking permission for his people to go through his country. Sihon didn't trust Israel, so from Jahaz, his army attacked the Israelites. But I, the LORD, the God of Israel, helped Israel defeat Sihon and his army. Israel then took over all the land from the Arnon River to the Jabbok River, and from the desert to the Jordan River.

So I, the LORD, the God of Israel, helped them get rid of the Amorites. "So why should we give it back to you? You keep whatever land your god Chemosh gives you. So we will keep whatever land the LORD our God has given us. Are you better than King Balak of Moab? He didn't quarrel with us about land or try to start a war. So here you are trying to get back the land where Israelites have been living for 300 years in Heshbon and Aroer and surrounding villages and along the Arnon River. If the land is really yours, why have you waited till now to say so? We haven't done anything wrong against you, but you are wrong in trying to start a war. The Lord, the judge, will show which is right."

The king of Ammon paid no attention to Jephthah's message. Then My Spirit, who is the Lord, controlled Jephthah, and he crossed Gilead and East Manasseh and went past Mizpah in Gilead and attacked the Ammonite army. He said to Me, his Lord, "If You help me defeat the Ammonites, whatever first comes out of my house when I return home in peace, I will sacrifice to You." When Jephthah fought the Ammonites, I, the Lord, gave him victory. He destroyed 20 towns between Aroer and Minnith, all the way to Abel-Keramim.

When Jephthah returned home to Mizpah, the first one to come out of his house to greet him was his daughter, his only child, who was playing a tambourine and dancing. When he saw her, he tore his clothes in grief and said, "Oh, my daughter! I am terribly upset because I made a promise to the Lord that I must keep." She said, "Father, you must do whatever you promised to the Lord because He has given you victory over the Ammonites. But first, let me go roam in the hills and cry with my girlfriends for two months because I will never get married."

"Yes," he said, "You may have two months." So she and some girlfriends wandered in the hills for two months, crying because she would never have children. Then she returned home, and he did what he had promised to Me her Lord. Then it became a custom in Israel that every year

young girls would go away for four days to remember what happened to Jephthah's daughter.

These difficult passages reflect the difficult decisions My servants had to make. I'm not as concerned with your physical birth as I am with your spiritual birth.

Jephthah Defeats Ephraim

12The men of the Ephraim tribe got their armed forces together and went across the Jordan River to Zaphon to meet with Jephthah. They asked him, "Why didn't you ask us to help you fight against the Ammonites? Since you didn't, we are going to burn down your house with you in it." Jephthah responded, "But I did ask for your help against the Ammonites, and you wouldn't lift a finger to help. So we risked our lives and attacked the Ammonites, and the Lord helped defeat them. So why are you coming now to fight me?"

The men of Ephraim said, "You people of Gilead are nothing more than refugees from Ephraim. You lived on land that belongs to Manasseh and us." Hearing this, Jephthah called together his soldiers and attacked Ephraim's army. The Gileadites then posted guards where soldiers from Ephraim would try to cross the Jordan to get back home. The guards would say to each soldier, "Are you from Ephraim?" If they said, "No," the guards would demand that he say "Shibboleth" that is because the people could not pronounce the "sh" sound, so they would say "Sibboleth." Then the guards would kill him right there. A total of 42,000 Ephraimites died there that way.

I used weak and unlikely people in the past. I will do it again. Let Me use you. It's easy for believers to get bitter with one another, then argue and fight. Be understanding of others. Since arguing and fighting may lead to bloodshed, be a person of peace.

Jephthah led Israel for six years. After he died, he was buried in a town in Gilead.

The judge after Jephthah was Ibzan, who lived in Bethlehem. He had 30 sons and 30 daughters, and he let them all marry outside his clan. After leading Israel for seven years, he died and was buried in Bethlehem. After Ibzan, Elon from the Zebulun tribe led Israel for ten years. After he died, he was buried in Aijalon in Zebulun. The next leader was Abdon, son of Hillel from Pirathon. He had 40 sons and 30 grandsons, each one riding on his own donkey. After Abdon led Israel for eight years, he died and was buried in his hometown in the hill country of Ephraim, where the Amalekites used to live.

Samson's Birth

13 Again, the Israelites sinned against Me, the LORD, and so I let the Philistines control Israel for 40 years. One day I, the angel of the LORD, appeared to the wife of Manoah of the tribe of Dan who lived in Zorah and who was unable to have children. I said, “You have never been able to have children, but soon you will be pregnant and have a son. Don’t drink any wine or beer or eat any food not allowed by My laws. Your son’s hair must never be cut, because he will be a Nazarite, as a special servant of God. And he will begin to free Israel from the Philistines.”

She ran to tell her husband the news. She said, “A man of God who looked like the angel of the LORD appeared to me. I didn’t ask where he is from, and he didn’t tell me his name. But he said I would get pregnant and have a baby boy. He said I’m not to drink any wine or beer or eat any food forbidden by His laws. He said the boy would be a Nazarite, as His special servant all his life.” Then Manoah prayed to Me, “Lord, please let the man of God come back and tell me more about the child we will have.”

I, the angel of God, appeared again to Manoah’s wife as she was in the field alone. She ran to find her husband and told him, “The same man from God is here again.” Manoah went back with his wife and asked, “Are you the one who spoke to my wife the other day?” I replied, “Yes, I am.” Manoah asked, “Do you have any further word about our future son’s life and work?” I, the angel of the LORD, answered, “Be sure your wife follows

the instructions I gave her. She must not eat grapes or raisins or drink wine or beer, or eat anything forbidden in My law.”

Manoah said, “Please stay here until we get you something to eat.” I the angel said, “I won’t eat anything, but you could offer a goat as a sacrifice to Me. (Of course, Manoah didn’t realize he was talking to Me, the LORD.) Manoah then said, “What is your name, because when the baby is born, we will want to honor you.” I replied, “My name is secret.”

Then Manoah offered to Me a young goat and grain offering on a rock. Then I did an amazing thing. As the flames blazed up from the altar, I ascended in the fire. When Manoah and his wife saw this, they bowed down to the ground. They never saw the angel of the LORD again, but they realized I am the LORD. Manoah was concerned, for he said, “We will die because we have seen God.” Manoah’s wife said, “No, I don’t think the Lord will kill us. If He was going to kill us, He wouldn’t have accepted our offerings and appeared to us and given us this wonderful news about our having a son.”

Later when Manoah’s wife had a son, they named him Samson. I, the LORD, blessed the child as he grew up. Then I, the Spirit of the Lord, began to control him when he was staying in Mahaneh-Dan between the towns of Zorah and Eshtaol.

May you follow Me as carefully as the Nazarites mentioned in Scripture. Abstain from alcohol, unclean activities, and unwholesome things. Let the Holy Spirit work in your life to prepare you for My service.

Samson’s First Wife

14 One day Samson went to Timnah, and there he saw a young Philistine woman. When he got home, he told his parents he wanted to marry her. But they objected strongly, saying, “Why don’t you marry an Israelite girl? Why get a wife from the pagan Philistines? You could choose from the many girls in our clan or even in all of Israel.” Samson said to his father, “Please get her for me. She’s the one I want.”

His parents didn't know that this was from Me, the LORD, because through her I would set a trap for the Philistines, who were ruling Israel. As Samson and his parents were going to Timnah, a lion attacked Samson in the vineyards near town. I, the Spirit of the LORD, came on Samson and he tore the lion's jaws apart as if it were a young goat. But he didn't tell his parents about it. In Timnah, he talked with the girl and still felt she was the one for him.

Later when he went back to Timnah for the wedding, he left the road to look at the lion's carcass. He saw a swarm of bees had made some honey. He took some of the honey, ate some of it, and gave some to his parents. But he didn't tell them where he got it.

His father was making final arrangements for the wedding, and Samson threw a big drinking party for 30 men in the village. Samson said to them, "Let me tell you a riddle. If you can solve it this week, I will give each of you a linen garment and a plain garment. But if you can't solve it, then you must give me 30 linen garments and 30 plain garments." They said, "Okay, let's hear it."

Samson said, "Out of the eater came something to eat, and out of the strong came something sweet." Three days went by, and they still hadn't figured it out. On the seventh day, they said to his fiancée, "Get the answer to this riddle from Samson, or we will burn down your father's house with you in it. Did you invite us here to make us poor by giving all our clothes to Samson?"

So she went to Samson and cried, "You must hate me. Because if you loved me, you would tell me the answer to your riddle." Samson replied, "But I haven't even told my parents, so why should I tell you?"

She cried all week to try to get the answer from Samson. On the seventh day, he finally gave in and told her the answer. Then she gave the answer to the 30 young men. Before sunset, on the seventh day, they went to Samson and gave the answer: "What is sweeter than honey? What is stronger than a lion?" Samson replied, "If you hadn't plowed with my heifer (that is if you hadn't persuaded my fiancée), you wouldn't have found out the answer to my riddle."

I, the Spirit of the LORD, controlled Samson, and he went to the Philistine town of Ashkelon, about ten miles west. There he killed 30 men, took their clothing, and gave it to the 30 men at Timnah. In anger, he left his

bride-to-be and went home to live with his parents. Then she married one of Samson's wedding attendants.

Outward anger comes from lack of inward self-control. This is a strange mixture of outward "righteous indignation" and fleshly desires. I used Samson who was not perfect, so I can use you even when you are not perfect.

More Women Problems

15 Later during the wheat harvest, Samson took a young goat as a gift to the girl he thought was still his fiancée. He wanted to go into her bedroom, but her father said, "You can't do that. I thought you no longer loved her, so I gave her as the wife of one of your wedding attendants. But her sister is prettier than she is. So why not marry her instead?" Samson said, "I now have a right to get even with the Philistines."

So he caught 300 foxes and tied together tails of every two foxes with a torch between each pair. He lit the torches and let the foxes run in the fields of the Philistines, burning both the standing wheat and the stacks of cut wheat, and destroying the olive trees. When the Philistines asked who did this, someone told them Samson did it because his fiancée's father had given her to another man. So the Philistines went to Timnah, got the woman and her father, and burned them to death.

When Samson heard what they did, he said, "I will get even with you." So, after he killed many Philistines, he went to live in a cave at Elam Rock, a few miles southwest of Bethlehem. Then the Philistines set up camp in Judah and raided the town of Lehi. The people of Judah asked them, "Why have you attacked us?" The Philistines said, "We have come to capture Samson and to do to him what he did to some of our people."

A group of 3,000 men from Judah went to the cave where Samson was and said to him, "Don't you realize the Philistines rule over us? What are you doing to us?" He replied, "I was only getting even with them. I was doing to them what they had done to me." The men of Judah said, "Because you have endangered our lives by what you have done, we are turning you over to the Philistines." "Alright. But promise me you won't kill me." "No,"

they said. “We won’t.” So they tied him up with two new ropes and led him off.

As Samson arrived at Lehi, the Philistines shouted with joy that he was captured. But I, the Spirit of the LORD, controlled Samson, and he snapped off the ropes on him like they were burnt pieces of cloth. Seeing a donkey’s jawbone on the ground, Samson picked it up and used it to kill 1,000 Philistines. He then said, “Using a donkey’s jawbone I stacked up bodies in one pile after another. With a donkey’s jawbone, I killed a thousand men.” Then he tossed the jawbone away and called the place Ramath Lehi (meaning “Jawbone Hill”).

He was so thirsty that he prayed to Me, “Lord, You helped me defeat this enemy. Now please don’t let me die of thirst and be at the mercy of these pagans.” I, the LORD, made water gush out of a hollow place in the ground, and when Samson drank he felt strong again. He named the spring En Hakkure (meaning “The Caller’s Spring”). For 20 years Samson led Israel, but Philistines were still in the land.

Recognize the principle that a solitary individual with limited resources can be influential for Me against the crowd, when that individual is filled with the Spirit of God. When you take a stand for Me, many compromising believers will not stand with you, and they may even turn against you. I use ordinary little tools to get My work done, tools like a donkey’s jawbone, so you should use the little things in your life.

Samson at Gaza

16One day Samson went to Gaza, a Philistine city, and slept with a prostitute. Word spread that he was in Gaza, and so some Philistines went to the city gate to wait all night to kill him at dawn. But at midnight he got up, tore the doors and parts of the city gate, put them on his shoulders, and carried them to the top of the hill near Hebron.

Later he fell in love with Delilah, who lived in the Sorek Valley in Philistine territory. The Philistine rulers went to her and said, “Find out why he is so strong and how we can overpower him and tie him up. If you do,

each of us will give you 28 pounds of silver. So she asked Samson the secret of his strength and what it would take to overpower him. He said, "If someone were to tie me with seven new wet bowstrings, I'd be weak like everyone else."

So the Philistine rulers gave her seven wet bowstrings, and she tied him up with them. Some men were hiding in a room in her house, so that she yelled at Samson, "Samson, the Philistines are after you." He snapped the bowstrings as if they were charred pieces of string. So they did not know the secret of his strength.

Then Delilah said to Samson, "You made fun of me and lied to me. So tell me how you can be tied up securely." He said, "If you use new ropes, I'll be weak like anyone else." So she tied him with new ropes, and as before she shouted, "Samson, the Philistines are after you." But he snapped them off as if they were pieces of thread. Again, she said, "You are still making fun of me and lying to me. So tell me how you can be tied up securely." He said, "Okay. Here's what you need to do. Weave the seven braids of my hair into the threads of a weaver's loom. Then I'll be weak like anyone else. So, while he slept, she wove his hair braids into the threads of a loom. Again, she yelled, "Samson, the Philistines are after you." He woke up and pulled up the loom and yanked his hair out from the fabric.

Delilah said, "You say you love me, but three times you have made me look like a fool. And you still haven't told me why you are so strong." Every day she kept nagging him to tell her his secret until he couldn't stand it any longer. So he told her, "I have never cut my hair because I have been a Nazarite all my life. If my hair were cut off, I would be as weak as anyone else."

Delilah urged the Philistine leaders to come back one more time. So they went to her house with their money in hand. She got him to sleep on her lap. Then she called in one of the men to shave off his hair. Delilah woke him up and said, "Samson, the Philistines are after you." He woke up and thought, "I'll free myself like before." But he didn't realize that I, the LORD, had left him. The Philistines grabbed him, blinded him, and took him to Gaza. They put him in prison and chained him with bronze chains. And they made him grind grain using a millstone. But his hair began to grow back, about half an inch every month.

To celebrate their defeat of Samson, the Philistine rulers offered a sacrifice to their god Dagon. They praised Dagon, saying, “Dagon has given our enemy Samson to us. He ruined our crops and killed our people.” In their excitement, they asked that Samson be brought out of prison to entertain them. They made him stand near some columns that supported the roof of their temple. Then Samson asked the servant who held his hand to take him to the columns, so he could lean against them. The temple was packed with men and women and the Philistine rulers, and about 3,000 people were on the temple roof looking down into the courtyard.

Then Samson prayed to Me, “O Sovereign God, please remember me and give me strength so I can get even with the Philistines for putting out my eyes.” Then he put his right hand on one of the central columns and his left hand on the other. He shouted, “Let me die with the Philistines.” When he pushed against the columns with all his strength, the temple crashed and killed everyone in it. Thus, in this one moment, he killed many more Philistines than when he was alive.

His brothers and other relatives went to Gaza to get his corpse and bring it back home. They buried him in the tomb of Manoah, his father between Zorah and Eshtaol. He had led Israel for 20 years.

Think what Samson could have done if he had completely separated himself from sin to Me. Give thanks for all he accomplished in spite of his lack of separation from sin. You should pray, “Use me. Fill me. Accomplish Your purpose in me.”

Micah’s Idols

17A man named Micah lived in the hill country of Ephraim. One day he said to his mother, “Do you remember that someone stole about 28 pounds of silver from you, and you placed a curse on him. I confess; I’m the one.” His mother said, “May the Lord bless you, my son.” When he returned the money to her, she said, “In honor of my son I give this money to my son, so he can make an idol.”

After he gave her the money, she took the 28 pounds to a jeweler, who made an idol. And Micah and his mother kept the idol in their house.

Micah had a shrine in his home where he placed the idol and a priestly vest he made and some other household idols. He even made one of his sons his priest. This is not surprising because in those times when Israel had no king everyone did whatever he wanted.

One day a young Levite from Bethlehem wanted to find a place where he could be a priest. He happened to arrive at Micah's house in Ephraim. When Micah asked him where he was from, he said, "I'm a Levite from Bethlehem, and I'm looking for a place to live." Micah said, "You are welcome to live with me. You can be my priest, and in return each year I'll give you ten pieces of silver, and new clothes and food." The young man agreed to this and became like one of Micah's sons. Micah made the Levite his priest, and the Levite lived with Micah. Then Micah said, "May the Lord be good to me now that I have my own Levite as a priest."

Stealing is always wrong, even from relatives. It's never right to do the wrong thing, even for a good purpose.

Micah and the Tribe of Dan

18In these days, when Israel did not have a king, the tribe of Dan was looking for a place to settle because they did not have any inherited land of their own. The tribe chose five soldiers from Zorah and Eshtaol to explore the land. One time they stayed overnight in Micah's house in Ephraim. Hearing the accent of Micah's young priest, they asked him why he was there. He explained that Micah had hired him as his live-in priest. So they asked him to ask Me if their journey would be successful. The priest said, "Yes, the Lord knows where you are going."

Later the five men arrived in Laish in the north, where the people, like people in Sidon, felt safe and secure. They were prosperous and didn't need to depend on anyone else for protection. When the five men returned to Zorah and Eshtaol, their relatives asked about their journey. The five men said, "We saw some good land up north. We can attack Laish and take it over. When we all get there, you will see that the people think they are safe. God has given us this land that lacks nothing at all."

So 600 Danites, ready for battle, left Zorah and Eshtaol. One night they camped in Judah near Kiriath-Jearim (meaning “Dan’s Camp”). Then they went to Micah’s house in Ephraim. The five men who had spied the land said to the 600, “One of these houses has a priestly vest, household idols, and a carved idol. You know what to do.”

The five men went to see the Levite at Micah’s house, while the 600 Danites stayed by the town gate. The five went in and took the carved idols, priestly vest, and household idols. Then when the priest saw them take these items, he said, “Hey! What are you doing?” They said, “Be quiet and come with us. Wouldn’t you rather be a priest for the entire tribe rather than for one family?” The priest liked this idea, and so he took the priestly vest, household idols, and carved idols and went with the 600. They all started out again, with their children, livestock, and belongings in front of them.

Micah asked his neighbors to help him get his idols back. When they caught up with the Danites, they shouted at them. The Danites said to Micah, “Why did you ask your neighbors to chase after us?” Micah said, “You stole my idols and took my priest. I have nothing left.” The Danites responded, “Don’t argue with us. Some of us are short-tempered and may kill you and your family.” The Danites then left, and Micah, knowing he was outnumbered, went home.

The Danites went on with Micah’s priestly vest, idols, and priest, and went to Laish and attacked and burned the city. No one could rescue them because they were miles from Sidon and hadn’t depended on anyone else for protection. The city was in a valley near Beth-Rehob. Then the Danites rebuilt the city and lived there.

They gave Laish the name Dan, after one of Jacob’s sons. The Danites set up idols there, and Jonathan, son of Gershom, son of Moses, and his sons, were their priests until the people were taken away as captives. The tribe continued to worship the idols Micah had made. But the tabernacle and My presence were in Shiloh.

You want to live in peace like the people of Laish. You want contentment, and respect of others. But when you don’t defend yourself and you are deceived about the enemy, then you’re no longer on guard—that’s when you’re in the most danger. Keep watch

over your body and soul and be on guard against the world, the flesh, and the devil.

The Levite and His Concubine

19In those days, when Israel still had no king, a Levite who lived in Ephraim's remote hill country brought home a concubine from Bethlehem. But she was unfaithful to him, and she went back to her father in Bethlehem. Four months later her Levite husband went with a servant and two donkeys to try to talk her into going back with him. When they arrived there, she invited them in, and her father was glad to see them. He asked them to stay awhile, and so they stayed three days, eating and drinking.

On the fourth day, the Levite and his servant got up early and were getting ready to go. But the woman's father suggested they have something to eat before they leave. So they did, and the father suggested they stay overnight. They finally gave in and stayed that night too. On the fifth morning, the man and his servant again got up early and were ready to leave. But again, the father urged them to stay, have something to eat, and leave that afternoon.

But when afternoon came, as the man and his concubine and his servant were ready to leave, her father said, "It's getting late. So please stay overnight, and then you can leave in the morning." But this time the man didn't want to stay any longer. So they left and went toward Jebus (that is, Jerusalem), and the Levite's servant suggested they stay overnight there. But the master said, "No, this is a city of foreigners. Let's go to Gibeah. We can spend the night either there or in nearby Ramah." As the sun was going down, they went into the town square of Gibeah, but no one invited them in.

That evening an old man from Ephraim who was living in Gibeah was going home from working in the fields. Seeing the three in the town square, he asked them where they were from and where they were going. The Levite said, "We are going from Bethlehem to a remote place in Ephraim where I live. On the way, we will stop at the tabernacle. We have food for our donkeys and ourselves, so we don't need anything."

“Come, stay at my place,” the old man said. “No need for you to sleep here in the town square.” The man took them home and fed their donkeys. After they washed their feet, they ate and drank. While they were eating supper, some scoundrels pounded on the door and shouted to the old man, “Bring out the man who came to your house so we can have sex with him.”

The old man went outside and said, “Don’t do such a terrible thing. This man is my guest, and what you are suggesting is shameful. You can have my virgin daughter and this man’s concubine and do with them whatever you want. But don’t do such a shameful thing to this man, who is my guest.” The men wouldn’t listen to him. So the Levite pushed his concubine out the door, and they raped her all night. At daybreak, she went back to the door and fell down there.

When her husband got up in the morning, he saw her lying there. He said, “Get up. It’s time to go.” But there was no answer. So he put her body on his donkey and left. When he got home, he cut her body into 12 parts and sent one part to each tribe of Israel. People who saw this were shocked. They said, “We’ve never seen anything like this before since we left Egypt several hundred years ago. What can we do about it?”

Evil comes in many different ways and has several different faces. You must recognize it and protect yourself. A “lesser sin” is not any better in My eyes than a “greater sin.” Never bargain with sin.

Israelites Punish the Benjamites for Their Sin

20When the word about this crime appeared, all the Israelites from Dan in the north to Beersheba in the south and Gilead east of the Jordan assembled in Mizpah. The tribal leaders and 450,000 soldiers were there, and the Benjamites heard about it. The leaders asked how this terrible thing happened.

The Levite whose concubine was raped and killed said, “My concubine and I arrived in Gibeah to spend the night. During the night some men from town planned to kill me. But they raped my concubine, and she died. Then I cut her body into 12 parts and sent one part to each tribe because of this terrible act. So, what should we do about this?”

Together the people said, “We’ll not go home; instead we’ll cast lots to decide who will attack Gibeah. We’ll take one-tenth of the men from each tribe to give the soldiers food, and the others will give Gibeah what it deserves because of the terrible thing it did.” So, the Israelite men were united and went to attack the town.

Messengers went through the tribe of Benjamin, saying, “A terrible crime was committed in Gibeah. So, turn these wicked men over to us so we can put them to death and get rid of this sin.” But the people of Benjamin refused to listen. They came from towns all over Benjamin to fight against the Israelites at Gibeah. In all, 26,000 soldiers with swords joined the 700 soldiers in Gibeah. Among these soldiers were 700 left-handed men who could sling a rock at a target the size of a hair and never miss.

But the other tribes had 400,000 experienced soldiers. When the Israelites went to Bethel to ask Me which tribe should go against the Benjamites first, I said, “Judah.” The next morning the Israelites camped near Gibeah and started to go fight the Benjamites. But the Benjamites killed 22,000 Israelites that day. But the others encouraged each other, and then cried before Me all day. When they asked Me whether they should again fight the Benjamites, their fellow Israelites, I said, “Yes, go against them.”

On this second day when the Israelites got ready to fight, the Benjamites killed another 18,000 Israelite swordsmen. So again, the Israelites went to Bethel and cried before Me and fasted all day. And they brought burnt offerings and fellowship offerings to Me, the LORD. They asked Me if they should fight the Benjamites, their relatives. (In those days the sacred chest was in Israel with Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, as the high priest.) I, the LORD, told them to fight them again because this time I would give them victory.

So the Israelites set an ambush against Gibeah. And on the third day, they did the same. Then as the Benjamites ran out of their city to kill Israelites as before, they killed about 30 Israelites in the fields and on the roads to Bethel and Gibeah. The Benjamites thought they were winning as before, but the Israelites were running in order to draw the Benjamites away from the city of Gibeah.

The Israelites ran toward Baal-Tamar. While the Israelites, in ambush west of Gibeah, charged against the Benjamites from behind, 10,000 of Israel's best soldiers made a surprise attack on Gibeah. I helped Israel defeat Benjamin, striking down 25,100 Benjamite swordsmen. Then the Benjamites knew they were defeated.

The Israelites had retreated from Benjamin because they depended on the men in ambush against Gibeah. These men in ambush rushed and went through all the city, killing everyone there. Then they sent up a huge cloud of smoke as a signal for the Israelites to turn back and attack the Benjamite soldiers. When the Benjamites had killed about 30 Israelites, they thought they were winning. But when the Benjamites saw the smoke going up, they were terrified because they realized they were defeated. So they ran toward the desert, but they couldn't escape. The Israelites surrounded the Benjamites, chased them down, and overtook them east of Gibeah. A total of 18,000 Benjamites died in that battle. As they fled to the desert to the Rimmon Rock in the desert, 5,000 of them were killed on the road, and as the Israelites chased them to Gidom, they killed 2,000 more.

That day, 25,000 Benjamite brave soldiers died. But 600 men made it alive to the Rimmon Rock, where they stayed for four months. The Israelites went back to the tribe of Benjamin and killed every living thing, and they set every Benjamite town on fire.

The leaders of Benjamin made a foolish decision, and everyone paid a price. Make smart decisions for those you lead. Also, help those who lead you to make smart decisions.

Wives for the Benjamites

21 The men of Israel had promised at Mizpah never to give their daughters in marriage to Benjamites. The people went to the place of worship at Bethel and sat in My presence all day. And they cried to Me, "Lord, God of Israel, why has this happened to Israel? Now one of our own tribes is missing."

The next day the people built an altar and presented burnt offerings and fellowship offerings to Me, the LORD. They wondered if any tribe was

missing when they met in Mizpah to worship Me, the LORD. They had made a promise that if anyone didn't show up there, he would be put to death. The Israelites felt sad because they realized that the tribe of Benjamin was almost completely wiped out. They said, "A few Benjamite men are left, but how can we get wives for them since we promised the Lord that we would not give them our daughters as wives?"

When they asked if anyone was absent from their assembly at Mizpah, they counted the people and discovered that no one from Jabesh in Gilead had been there. So they sent 12,000 soldiers to Jabesh Gilead and told them to kill every male and every woman who was not a virgin. The soldiers found 400 young virgins in Jabesh Gilead and brought them to the camp in Shiloh in Canaan.

The Israelites offered a peace treaty to the few remaining Benjamites at the Rimmon Rock. So the 400 women from Jabesh Gilead were given as wives to the Benjamites. But there were not enough. This made the Israelites sad because one of their tribes was almost wiped out. The elders were concerned about how to get wives for the other Benjamite men, so the tribe would not be wiped out. They said, "We can't give them our daughters because we promised the Lord we wouldn't do that." Then someone thought of the annual festival to Me in Shiloh, north of Bethel, south of Lebonah, and east of the road leading to Shechem. So they told the Benjamites who did not have wives, "Hide in the vineyards, and when the girls of Shiloh come out to dance, run out and each of you grab one of them to be your wife. If their fathers or brothers object to this, we will say, 'Please understand. We couldn't find enough virgins for our men when we destroyed Jabesh in Gilead. And since you didn't give your daughters to them in marriage, you did not break a promise.'"

So the men of Benjamin did this. As the young women were dancing, each man grabbed one of them and took her to be his wife. They went back to their land, rebuilt their towns, and lived there. Then the Israelites left Shiloh and returned to their tribal territories and their homes. In those days Israel had no king, and so everyone did what he thought was right.

These "Dark Ages" of Israel were terrible. People lived contrary to My law, they were often wrong and suffered for it. Everyone must be taught to live according to what I've revealed as My standard in the

Scriptures. Many of the people thought they were doing right when actually they were foolishly wrong. Sincerity and prayer are not enough to live and serve Me correctly. Live by My standards in the Bible.

I AM GOD

The Kinsmen Redeemer

The Book of Ruth

I Am God, Who used Samuel to tell a short story that begins with a *crisis* when Elimelech and his family abandon the Holy Land and move to the nation of Moab. Complications follow with Elimelech and his two sons dying, leaving a wife and two daughters-in-law with husbands. When Naomi tells the two widows to return to their family and idol worship, one of the two widows—Ruth—decides to follow Me, the LORD of Israel. She went with her mother-in-law (Naomi) back to the Holy Land and Bethlehem. What appears to be a chance choice of a field to pick leftover grain was obviously divine guidance because the field was owned by Boaz, a family relative who becomes the “Kinsman Redeemer.” Boaz redeems Ruth out of bankruptcy and marries her. Their son is Obed, the grandfather of King David.

Ruth is a picture of the Gentile bride—the church—which is redeemed by the family of David—Jesus Christ. It’s also a picture of Gentiles who choose My salvation, as did Ruth.

Elimelech and His Family Move to Moab

1 In the days of the judges, a man from Bethlehem in Judah moved to Moab because of a famine. The man’s name was Elimelech, and his wife was Naomi, and his two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. In Moab, Elimelech died, and Naomi was left with her two sons.

The two sons married Moabite women, Orpah, and Ruth. Then ten years later Mahlon and Kilion died. So Naomi was alone.

Hearing that I, the LORD, had given My people crops again, Naomi decided to go back to Judah with her two daughters-in-law. As they started on their journey, Naomi said to her daughters-in-law, “Why don’t you go back home? The Lord will be kind to you just as you were to your husbands

and me. May the Lord give each of you another husband.” She kissed them good-bye, and they cried, and the two women said, “We will go with you.”

Naomi insisted, “Why come with me? I’m too old to have another husband and to have sons whom you could marry. And you wouldn’t want to wait for them to grow up. No, life has been more difficult for me than for you because it seems that the Lord is against me.” Then they cried again, and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-bye, but Ruth stayed with Naomi. Naomi said, “Ruth, you see that your sister-in-law is going back home and to her gods. Why don’t you go back too?”

Ruth replied, “Please don’t make me go back. I want to go where you go and live where you live. I want your people to be my people and your God to be my God. When you and I die, I want to be buried next to you. And may the Lord punish me severely if we are ever separated.”

Naomi was wrong to send Orpah back to idolatrous gods; never counsel this way. Choose Me, as did Ruth.

Seeing that Ruth had made up her mind, Naomi stopped trying to urge her to go back to Moab. When Naomi and Ruth reached Bethlehem, everyone was excited to see them. And the women asked, “Can this really be Naomi?” She responded, “Don’t call me Naomi (which means ‘Pleasant’), call me Mara (which means ‘Bitter’). Why? Because God has made me bitter. I went away full, but I’ve returned with nothing. The Lord has been against me and has sent me tragedy.”

The barley harvest was just beginning in March when Naomi and Ruth, her daughter-in-law from Moab, arrived in Bethlehem.

Ruth had absolutely no positive incentives to choose and follow Me. May you have a single vision as Ruth to choose Me rather than anything else.

Ruth Works in the Field of Boaz

Boaz, a relative of Naomi's husband, was an important man in Bethlehem.

One day Ruth said to Naomi, "Let me go pick up leftover grain in the fields. Maybe someone will be kind to me." So Ruth did, and it so happened that she was in Boaz's field. She went to his field and greeted his workers with the words, "The Lord bless you," they responded, "and may the Lord bless you." Boaz asked the foreman, "Who is that young woman over there?" The foreman answered, "She came back from Moab with Naomi. She asked me if she could gather grain behind the harvesters. She has been working hard all morning except for a quick break in the shelter."

Boaz went over and talked with her. He said, "Don't go gather grain in anyone else's field. Stay here and follow along after my servant girls. I've told the men not to bother you. And when you are thirsty, feel free to get a drink from their water jars." She bowed to the ground and said, "Why are you so kind to me? You know I am a foreigner."

Boaz answered, "I have been told that you have been kind to your mother-in-law and that after your husband died, you left your parents and your country to come live here in a foreign country. I pray that the Lord, under whose wings you will find protection, the God of Israel, will bless you."

When she went back to work, Boaz told his workers to let her gather grain where it is stacked and to pull out some stalks from the bundles for her to pick up. She worked till evening, and when she beat the grains of barley from the stalks, she had half a bushel. When she took back to Naomi the grain along with leftovers from her lunch, Naomi asked her, "In whose field did you work today? May the LORD bless the man who noticed you and was so kind to you." Ruth told her she had been working in the field of a man named Boaz.

"May the LORD bless him!" Naomi said. "God continues to be kind to us. Boaz is a close relative, responsible for redeeming us." Ruth then said, "Boaz even said I could continue working in his field during the entire harvest time."

Naomi said, "That's good that you can do that. You'll be safer there than in other fields." And so Ruth gleaned with the servant girls during the barley and wheat harvests. All this time she was living with her mother-in-law.

Follow the example of Ruth. You'd have the character to work anywhere, under any conditions. You will work faithfully until a job is done.

Plans for a Husband

3 One day Naomi said to Ruth, “My daughter, I think it’s time I found a home for you so you will be provided for. Tonight Boaz, a relative of yours, will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor. When he is done for the day, notice where he lies down to sleep, and then quietly go lift the cover off his feet and lie down as a way of suggesting marriage.”

Ruth said, “I’ll do whatever you say.” She went to Boaz’s threshing floor that night and did what her mother-in-law suggested. After Boaz ate, he lay down by a pile of grain and went to sleep. Ruth quietly uncovered his feet and lay down. During the night Boaz suddenly woke up, and he saw a woman lying near his feet. He asked, “Who are you?” She said, “I am Ruth. Please spread the corner of your blanket over me because you are a close relative responsible for redeeming me.”

Boaz said, “The Lord bless you. You are certainly loyal to your family. You could have preferred a younger man, whether rich or poor. Don’t worry; I’ll do what you asked. True, I am a close relative, but someone I know is more closely related to you than I am. I’ll check with him in the morning to see if he is willing to redeem you, and then he can marry you. But if he isn’t, then, as surely as the Lord lives, I’ll marry you. So lie down here till morning.”

Ruth got up before daybreak because Boaz had said he didn’t want anyone to know she had been there. Then he put into her shawl six scoops of barley. When Ruth went back to town, Naomi asked how everything went. Ruth said, “Boaz gave me this grain because he didn’t want me to return to you with nothing for you.” Naomi said, “It will be interesting to see what happens.”

I put love in the hearts of men and women for each other, and I will teach you to love deeply those related to you, as deeply as I love you.

Boaz Marries Ruth

4 Meanwhile, Boaz went to the town gate, and the other close relative came by. “Come over and sit down.” Then Boaz got ten town leaders to join them as witnesses. Then Boaz said to the man, “Naomi has returned from Moab and is putting up for sale the land her husband Elimelech owned. As his closest relative, you have the first choice of buying the land. If you want it, buy it now before these ten witnesses. But if you don’t want it, say so, because I am next in line to purchase it.” The man said, “I’ll buy it.”

Then Boaz said, “If you buy the land, you must also marry Ruth. That way her children will carry on the family name and the property will stay in the family.” The other relative said, “I’ve changed my mind. If I marry her, that could make problems for my own estate. So you may redeem it; I can’t.” To finalize a sale of property one person would take off his sandal and give it to the other person. So the man let Boaz buy the property, and he took off one of his sandals and gave it to Boaz.

Boaz told the ten town leaders and others, “You are witnesses that today I have bought the property of Elimelech, Mahlon, and Kilion, and I have agreed to marry Ruth, Mahlon’s widow. This will keep the property in the family, and our children will carry on Mahlon’s family name.” The ten leaders and others said, “We are witnesses. May the Lord give Ruth many children as He did for Leah and Rachel.”

So Boaz married Ruth, and I gave her a son. The women said to Naomi, “Praise the Lord. He has given you a grandson. We hope he will be famous throughout Israel. He will take care of you in your old age. He is the son of your daughter-in-law, who is better to you than you having seven sons.”

Naomi loved the boy and took care of him. The women of the neighborhood named him Obed, who became the father of Jesse and the grandfather of David. The family line from Perez to David was as follows: Perez, Hezron, Ram, Amminadab, Nashon, Salmon, Boaz, Obed, Jesse, David.

I sent Jesus to be your Kinsman-Redeemer; He came to be your substitute (see Heb. 2:11). Then He took your sin and died for you (see 2 Cor. 5:21); Jesus paid your sin debt. He gave you life and freedom and now choose to love and follow Him.

I AM GOD

The Anointing One

The Book of First Samuel

First Samuel marks the end of the time of the judges when “Everyone did what he thought was right” (Judg. 21:25). The priesthood under Eli became corrupt, and Samuel introduced the office of prophets. From then on a prophet, not a priest, primarily spoke My “words.” Also, this book introduces the office of king, when Samuel first anointed Saul. Then after Saul’s rebellion against Me, Samuel anointed David as the next king.

First Samuel contrasts the bad leadership of Saul with the godly leadership of David who was “a man after My (God’s) own heart” (1 Sam. 13:14).

Hannah Prays for a Son

1 Elkanah lived in Ramathaim in Ephraim’s hill country. His father was Jeroham, his grandfather was Elihu, his great-grandfather was Tohu, and his great-great-grandfather was Zuph. So Elkanah was known as a Zuphite. He had two wives, Hannah and Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah didn’t.

Once every year Elkanah went to Shiloh to worship Me, the Lord of the heavens, and offer sacrifices at the tabernacle. Eli was a priest as were Hophni and Phinehas, his sons. Elkanah gave some meat from his sacrifices to Peninnah and his sons and daughters. He gave Hannah twice as much as he gave them to show his love for her since she had no children.

Peninnah made fun of Hannah since she couldn’t get pregnant, and this bothered Hannah. This happened every year. At the tabernacle, Peninnah provoked Hannah so much that Hannah cried and didn’t eat. Elkanah would ask, “What’s wrong, Hannah? Why don’t you eat? Why do you feel so sad? You have me; aren’t I better than if you had ten sons?”

One time when they were at Shiloh Hannah got up after supper and went to the tabernacle. Eli was sitting in a chair by the tabernacle entrance. Hannah was so sad that she cried as she prayed. She promised Me, the LORD, “Please notice my misery. If you give me a son, I will give him back to You for his entire life. And as a sign of my dedicating him to You, we will never cut his hair.”

As she kept praying, Eli watched her. He noticed that her lips were moving, but he heard no words. So, thinking she was drunk, he said, “How long will you stay drunk? Stop drinking wine.” She said, “Sir, I am not drunk. I am deeply disturbed; I was telling the Lord my problem. Please don’t think I am wicked. I was praying because I am deeply grieved.”

Eli said, “In that case, stop worrying. May the God of Israel answer your prayers.” She said, “I hope He will be pleased with me.” Then she left, ate something, and no longer looked depressed.

The next morning Elkanah and his family worshiped Me, the LORD, and then went home to Ramathaim. Later I helped Hannah get pregnant; she had a son. She named him Samuel (meaning “Asked of God” because she had asked Me for him).

The next year Elkanah and his family went to Shiloh to give a sacrifice and to keep a promise he had made to Me, the LORD. But Hannah stayed home. She said, “I’ll wait till I wean the boy, and then I’ll present him to the Lord, and he can be there the rest of his life.” Elkanah said, “That’s fine. Stay with Samuel till you have weaned him. The Lord will help you keep your promise.” So Hannah stayed home and nursed the child.

Then when Samuel was still a small boy, Hannah took him and a three-year-old bull, half a bushel of flour, and some wine to Eli at Shiloh. They killed the bull as a sacrifice to Me and then took Samuel to Eli. She said, “Do you remember that a few years ago I stood here, praying that the Lord would give me a child? Well, here he is. The Lord answered my prayer. Now I am giving him to the Lord to belong to Him as long as he lives.” And they worshiped Me there.

Learn to keep praying when answers don't come. Then learn how to pray the right thing in the right way. Also, learn how to fast and when to fast for answers.

Hannah Praises Me

2 Then Hannah prayed this prayer to Me: “My heart is glad in the Lord; He has given me strength. Now I have an answer to my enemies because He has given me relief from my problem.

“No one is holy like You. And no one is as reliable like a rock as You are. I can tell proud people to stop boasting, because You know all about people and judge what they do.”

I, the LORD, break the bows of soldiers, and also I give strength to the weak. People who had plenty to eat are now starving, and the hungry are now filled. The woman who had no children now has seven, but the one who had many children now has none.

I, the LORD, cause death and give life. I bring some to the grave and raise some up. I make some people poor and others rich. I put some in low positions and others I lift up.

I lift the poor from being low in the dust, and I lift up the needy from a pile of ashes. I give them high positions with princes and put them in places of honor. I have set the world on pillars, making it stable and secure.

I protect every one of My people, but the wicked will die in darkness. No one can succeed by himself. Anyone who opposes Me will be broken. I will thunder against them and will judge all the earth. I will give strength to My anointed king.

Then Elkanah and his family went home to Ramah, and the boy Samuel served Me, the LORD, as Eli’s helper.

Eli’s sons were wicked with no respect for Me, the LORD. Whenever someone was boiling meat from a sacrificed animal, a servant of Eli’s sons would stick a fork into the pot, and give the meat to the priests. This is how they treated every Israelite who made a sacrifice at Shiloh. Sometimes even before the animal fat was burned, the servant would demand that some new meat be given so it could be roasted, not boiled. If the man making the sacrifice said, “Alright. Take what you want, but first, let me burn the fat,” then the servant would say, “No. Give it to me now, or I’ll take it by force.” This sin of Eli’s sons was terrible because they showed no respect for the sacrifices.

By contrast, Samuel was serving Me, the LORD. He was wearing a priestly vest. Each year his mother made him a sleeveless garment and took it to him when she and her husband went to offer sacrifices in Shiloh. Each year Eli blessed Elkanah and Hannah and said, “May the Lord give you more children to take the place of Samuel.” Then they would go home. I gave Hannah three more sons and two daughters. And Samuel grew up in the tabernacle.

When Eli, who was very old, heard what his sons were doing to the people’s sacrifices and that they were sleeping with the women who served at the tabernacle entrance, he said to them, “I have heard reports of your wicked ways. You must stop doing this. These reports are not good. If someone sins against another person, things can be made right. But if you sin against the Lord, no one can help you.” However, his sons paid no attention to their father’s words. The Lord had already planned to kill them. By contrast, the boy Samuel continued to grow taller, and the people and I, the LORD, liked him more.

One day a prophet went to Eli and said, “The Lord says, ‘As you know, I showed Myself to your ancestors when they were in Egypt under Pharaoh. Out of all the tribes of Israel, I chose Aaron to be My priest, offering sacrifices, burning incense, while wearing a priestly vest. And I said that the priests could eat the meat from the sacrifices. Why then do you and your sons have no respect for the sacrifices and offerings people bring? And why do you put yourself and your sons ahead of Me, the LORD, by getting fat from the choice parts of the animal offerings?’

“I had promised that you and the Levites would be My priests forever. But not now! If you honored Me, I would honor you. But since you despise Me, I will despise you. So I will put an end to you and your family so that no one will live a long life. You will cry with grief, and all of your descendants will die young.

“As proof that what I have said will come true, your two sons Hophni and Phinehas will die on the same day. Then I will choose someone to be My priest, who will be faithful and will obey Me. I will bless his descendants, and they will serve as priests before Me. If anyone of your descendants is alive, he will beg My priest for money, and food and he will ask to be a priest so he can have some food.”

If you want to have a godly influence on your children and grandchildren, be tough on sin so both your children and grandchildren can be godly. Don't let anything hinder your prayers from being answered.

My Call to Samuel

3 The boy Samuel served Me, the LORD, by helping Eli. In those days I seldom spoke to My people, and I did not appear to them in visions. One night Eli, now almost blind, was in bed, and Samuel was lying down in the tabernacle near the curtain leading to the holy of holies. When the Lord called Samuel's name, he said, "I'm here." Then he ran to Eli and said, "I'm here. What do you want?" Eli said, "I didn't call you. Go back to bed." So he did. Again I, the LORD, called Samuel's name. So he got up and said to Eli, "I'm here." Eli said, "Son, I didn't call you. Go back and lie down."

I, the LORD, had not spoken to Samuel before, and so he didn't realize I was calling his name. Once more I, the LORD called Samuel's name, and he went to Eli and said as before, "I'm here."

Then Eli realized I was the one calling the boy. So he told Samuel, "Go, lie down, and if He calls you again, say, 'Yes, Lord, I am listening.'" So Samuel went back to bed, and I, the LORD, said as before, "Samuel. Samuel." And the boy answered, "Speak, Lord. I am listening."

I, the LORD, said, "I am going to do a shocking thing in Israel. I will do the terrible things I warned Eli about. He knew his sons were doing disgusting things but he didn't stop them, so I told him I would punish him and his family. I told him that I would never forgive him and his family by sacrifices and offerings."

Samuel stayed in bed the rest of the night, and in the morning he opened the tabernacle doors. He was afraid to tell Eli what I, the LORD, had said. But Eli called him, and Samuel said, "I'm here." Eli said, "What did the Lord say to you? If you don't tell me everything He said, God will punish you." So Samuel told Eli everything I, the LORD, said. And Eli responded, "He is the Lord, and He will do what He thinks best."

As Samuel grew, I, the LORD, was with him, and everything he said came true. Everyone from Dan in the north to Beersheba in the south knew that Samuel was My prophet. I, the LORD, often appeared to Samuel in Shiloh, and Samuel passed those words on to Israel.

There were times when I've called, and you didn't answer. If I speak to you again, will you answer, "Here am I to serve You"? Stop doing those things that block out My call. Learn to recognize My call to you.

The Philistines Capture the Sacred Chest

4 One day when the Israelites went to fight the Philistines, the Israelite soldiers camped at Ebenezer, and the Philistines at Aphek. The Philistines defeated Israel, killing about 4,000 of them. When the remaining Israelite soldiers went back to camp, the elders asked, "Why did the Lord let the Philistines defeat us? Here's what we can do: Let's get the sacred chest from Shiloh and take it with us on the battlefield."

So some of the soldiers went to Shiloh to bring back the sacred chest. Hophni and Phinehas went with them and brought the sacred chest back to camp. When the group arrived with the sacred chest at the camp, the Israelites shouted with such joy that the ground shook. Hearing the noise, the Philistines learned that the sacred chest was now in the Israelite camp, and they were frightened. They said, "A god has come into their camp. So we are in deep trouble. Who can save us from these gods? They are the ones who destroyed the Egyptians with terrible disasters when they were in the desert. Be strong, all you Philistines. If we don't, we will become their slaves just as they were our slaves."

The Philistines fought hard, and again defeated the Israelites, killing 30,000 soldiers, and the others ran to their tents. The Philistines captured the sacred chest, and Hophni and Phinehas were killed.

A Benjamite ran to Shiloh with his clothes torn and dust on his head to express his grief. When he arrived, Eli was sitting in a chair by the roadside, just waiting and concerned about the sacred chest. The man told people in the town about the battle, and the people started crying. Hearing this, Eli

asked what was wrong. The man went over to Eli, who was now 98 years old and blind, and he said, “I just now escaped from the line of battle.” Eli asked what happened, and the man said, “Israel ran from the Philistines, many soldiers were killed, your two sons Hophni and Phinehas are dead, and the sacred chest has been captured.”

When the man mentioned the sacred chest, Eli fell backward off his chair by the town gate. He was a very heavy old man, and he broke his neck and died. He had been a leader of Israel for 40 years.

Eli’s daughter-in-law, Phinehas’ wife, was about to give birth. When she heard that the sacred chest had been taken and that her husband and his father had died, she went into hard labor. As she was dying, the women with her said, “Don’t be afraid. It’s a boy.” But she didn’t pay any attention or respond. Thinking about her husband and her father-in-law, she said, “My son’s name is Ichabod (meaning ‘No Glory’).” She said, “That’s because God’s glory left our people when the sacred chest was captured.”

Empty worship and secret sin have allowed the enemy a victory. Do not be indifferent to Me in the future; fight to be spiritual and stay close to My presence.

Trouble Resulted

5 After the Philistines captured the sacred chest, they took it from Ebenezer to Ashdod, and they put it in their temple next to the statue of Dagon. Early the next morning the people in Ashdod went to see the chest, the image of Dagon was lying face down in front of the chest. So they set it up in its place. The following morning the image of Dagon had fallen over again face down in front of the chest. And its head and both hands were broken off and were in the doorway. That is why the priests of Dagon and its worshipers will step over that part of the doorway and not on it.

I, the LORD, caused sores to break out on the bodies of the people of Ashdod and their neighbors. When the people saw this, they said, “The God of Israel has done this to us and our god Dagon, we must get rid of the sacred chest.” The people asked the Philistine rulers what to do about the Israelites’ sacred chest. They said, “Move it to Gath.” So they did. But there

in Gath everyone, both old and young, got terrible sores, and the people were in a panic. So they sent the sacred chest to Ekron, another Philistine town. Before the sacred chest even entered the city, the people yelled, “They’ve brought the Israelites’ sacred chest here, and it will kill all of us.”

So the people of Ekron got the Philistine rulers together and said, “Please send the Israelite sacred chest away, or it will kill us.” The people of the city were in a panic because a lot of people were dying. Even those who didn’t die were suffering from the sores, and the whole city was in tears.

The Philistines Return the Sacred Chest

6 After the sacred chest had been in Philistia seven months, the people asked their priests and fortune-tellers what to do with the sacred chest and how to send it back. They said, “Send it back with a gift. Send with it an offering that admits our guilt. And, then we will be healed and realize why we have had this problem.”

When the Philistines asked what guilt offering they should send, the priests and fortune-tellers said, “Since all five Philistine rulers have these sores just as you do, send five gold models of the sores and five gold models of the rats that are destroying your crops. In this way, you will honor Israel’s God, and perhaps He will then stop bringing all this trouble on you, your gods, and your crops. Don’t be stubborn like the Egyptians and Pharaoh. As you know, God sent terrible plagues on them, and they finally let Israel go.

“Get a new cart and two cows that have young calves and have never pulled a cart. Hitch the cows to the cart, but put their calves back in the barn. Put the sacred chest on the cart, and put the gold sores and gold rats in a box next to the sacred chest. Send it away, and watch it to see if it goes to the town of Beth-Shemesh. If it does, you know that the Lord brought this disaster on us. But if it doesn’t go into Israelite territory, then you’ll know that this just happened by chance, and was not caused by the Lord.”

So they hitched two cows to a cart and put the calves back in the barn. They put the sacred chest on the cart and next to it the box with the models of the gold rats and sores in it. The cows went straight to Beth-Shemesh,

mooing as they went. The Philistine rulers followed them up to the border of Beth-Shemesh. The people of the town were harvesting wheat in the valley, and when they saw the sacred chest, they were very happy.

The cart came to the field of Joshua from Beth-Shemesh, and the cows stopped by a large rock. The people chopped up the cart and sacrificed the cows as a burnt offering to Me, the LORD. Some Levites who were there took down the sacred chest and the box with the gold objects and placed them on a rock. Then the people of the town offered more sacrifices to Me. The five Philistine rulers watched all this and then returned to Ekron.

These gold sores sent from the Philistines as a guilt offering to Me represented the five towns of Ashdod, Gaza, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron. The five gold rats also represented these same five towns and their surrounding villages. The large rock where the Israelites set the sacred chest is a reminder there in Joshua's field of what happened.

However, 70 of the men of Beth-Shemesh looked inside the sacred chest. And I killed them all. Because of this, the people of the town grieved over this loss. The men said to each other, "Who can stand in the Lord's presence and live? Where can we send the sacred chest from here?" They sent messengers to Kiriath-Jearim to say, "The Philistines have sent back the sacred chest. Please come and get it."

Samuel Leads Israel

7The people of Kiriath-Jearim got the sacred chest and took it to Abinadab's house on a hill, and they chose his son, Eleazar, to guard it. It was there for 20 years. During this time everyone was sad and asked Me, the LORD, to help them. Samuel told everyone, "Come back to the Lord completely, you need to get rid of all your foreign idols and the images of the goddess Astarte. Commit yourselves to the Lord and serve only Him; He will rescue you from the Philistines."

The Israelites got rid of their idols of Baal and Astarte and served only Me, the LORD. Then Samuel said, "Have everyone meet at Mizpah, and I will pray for you there." So they all met at Mizpah, and drew water from a well and poured it out as an offering to Me. They fasted all day and confessed that they had been unfaithful to Me, their Lord.

When the Philistine leaders heard that all the Israelites were at Mizpah, they sent an army to attack them. Hearing of this, the Israelites were afraid. They told Samuel, “Keep praying, and ask God to rescue us.” Then Samuel offered a young lamb as a burnt offering, and he prayed to Me, the LORD, for help, and I answered. Just as the Philistines were ready to attack, I, the LORD, made it thunder so loud that it scared the Philistines. They were in such a panic that they ran from the Israelites. The Israelites ran after the Philistines, killing many of them on the way to Beth-Car.

Samuel propped up a stone between Mizpah and Shen and called it Ebenezer (meaning “Stone of Help”) to remind Israel that I, the LORD, had helped them. So the Philistines did not attack Israel again for a long time, including all of Samuel’s lifetime. The Israelites were able to retake towns from Ekron to Gath. Also, there was peace between Israel and the Amorites.

Samuel was a judge in Israel all his life. Every year he went to the towns of Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah to serve as judge over disputes among the people. He always returned to his hometown in Ramah where he served as a judge. And he built an altar there to Me, the LORD.

Live for Me today and worship Me today because yesterday’s victories are the foundation for another victory tomorrow.

The People Insist on Having a King

8 When Samuel grew old, he made his two sons as judges. One was Joel, and the other was Abijah, and they were judges at Beersheba. But his sons did not follow him. They accepted bribes and were dishonest.

So Israel’s leaders went to Samuel in Ramah, and they said to him, “You are old, and your sons are not following your ways. So we suggest you choose someone to be our king, as kings of other nations.” Their asking for a king displeased Samuel, so he asked Me, the LORD, about it. I said, “The people have rejected Me, not you. They are turning from you just as they turned from Me and have been worshipping other gods ever since I rescued them from Egypt. So warn them and tell them what a king will do to them.”

Speaking to the people, Samuel said, “Here’s how a king will treat you. He will draft your sons into his army. Some of them will ride chariots, and others will run ahead of the chariots. Some will be made commanders, others will farm his land and harvest his crops, and he will have some of them make weapons and chariot equipment. He will force your daughters to work for him, making perfume and doing cooking and baking. He will take the best of your fields, vineyards, and olive groves and give them to his officials. Also, he will require you to give him a tenth of your grain and grapes for his officials. He will take your servants and the best of your livestock and a tenth of your sheep and goats, all for himself. In fact, you will become his slaves.

“Then you will beg the Lord for relief. But He won’t answer you.” The people refused to respond to this warning. They said, “We want a king anyway. He can rule over us and lead us in battles against our enemies.” When Samuel told Me how they responded, I said, “All right. Go ahead and give them a king.” Then Samuel told them to all go back home.

Saul Meets Samuel

9 Saul was a handsome man and was a head taller than anyone else. His father, Kish, was an influential man of the tribe of Benjamin. Saul’s grandfather was Abiel, and Abiel’s lineage included Zeror, Becorath, and Aphiah.

One day some of Kish’s donkeys ran off, and so he told his son Saul to go look for them. So he and a servant went all through the hill country of Ephraim and around Shalishah, but couldn’t find them. They even went to Shaalim and Benjamin, but they couldn’t find them anywhere.

When they got to the district of Zuph, Saul suggested to his servant that they go on home “because my dad may be worried about us.” But the servant said, “I have an idea. In this town, there is a highly respected man of God. Maybe he can tell us where to look.” Saul said, “Yes, but what can we give him as a gift? All our food is gone.” The servant said, “I have a small silver piece we could give him.” Saul said, “Good. Let’s go.” Going up the hill to the town, they saw some girls coming to draw water, and they asked them, “Is the seer here?” (In those days prophets were called seers, men who received messages from Me in visions,

“Yes,” they said. “He just got back in town. And he’s on his way to offer a sacrifice up the hill and to eat with the villagers. If you hurry, you’ll find him.” As Saul and his servant went toward town, Samuel was coming their way to go to the hilltop shrine. The day before this I, the LORD, had told Samuel that he would meet a man from Benjamin and that Samuel was to make him the leader of the Israelites to rescue My people from the Philistines.

When Samuel saw Saul, I, the LORD, said, “This is the man. He will rule My people.” Saul asked Samuel at the town gate, “Can you tell me where we can find the seer?” Samuel said, “I am the Seer. Come on up to the hilltop shrine and eat with me. In the morning I will tell you whatever you need to know. Don’t worry about your father’s donkeys that ran off three days ago. They have been found. All Israel is now focused on you and your family.” Saul said, “But I am from Israel’s smallest tribe and the least important clan in my tribe.”

Samuel took Saul and his servant into the hall at the hilltop shrine and seated them at the head of the 30 or so who had been invited. Samuel told the cook to bring the best piece of meat, and when he did, Samuel said to Saul, “This is for you, and I invited these guests to eat with you.”

Then they went back to town, and Samuel and Saul visited on the roof of Samuel’s home. In the morning Samuel woke Saul up and told him he would help him get ready to leave. Then at the edge of town, Samuel suggested that Saul have his servant go ahead. “But,” Samuel said, “you stay here with me for a few minutes because God has something for me to tell you.”

Study carefully how Saul corrupted himself so it won’t happen to you. Do things differently so you will not backslide. Then look for My hand working in your life in small circumstantial ways. Plan to accomplish something greater with your life than what you’re doing now.

Saul Becomes King

Samuel took a small jar of olive oil and poured it on Saul's head. He kissed Saul and said, "The Lord has chosen you to be the leader of His people. When you are on your way today, you'll meet two men near Rachel's tomb at Zelzah in the territory of Benjamin. They will tell you your father's donkeys have been found. Your father has forgotten about them and is now worried about you."

"So go on from there to the big oak tree at Tabor. There you'll meet three men going up to Bethel. One of them will have three young goats, another will have three loaves of bread, and another some wine in a wineskin. They will give you two loaves of bread. Then go on to Gibeah where some Philistines are camped. You'll meet some prophets coming down from the nearby hilltop, playing musical instruments and prophesying. The Spirit of the Lord will control you, and you will be like a different person, prophesying with them. Then do whatever you feel is best because God will be with you. Then go to Gilgal. Wait for me there, and in seven days I will go there to sacrifice burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. Then I'll tell you what to do next."

As Saul turned to leave, I, the LORD, changed his heart and all the things happened just as Samuel had said. At Gibeah, some prophets met Saul, and again I, the Spirit of God, controlled Saul, and he joined them in prophesying. People who had known Saul before said, "What's happened to him? Is he really a prophet?" A man who lived there said, "Why not? It doesn't matter who his father is. God can cause anyone He wants to prophesy." Yet everyone was so amazed that Saul prophesied, that the people began saying, "Is Saul also a prophet?" Then Saul went to the hilltop shrine to worship.

Saul's uncle asked Saul and his servants, "Where have you two been?" Saul said, "We were looking for my dad's donkeys. We couldn't find them, so we went to talk with Samuel." Saul's uncle asked, "What did he say?" Saul replied, "He told us the donkeys had been found." But Saul said nothing about his being chosen as king.

Samuel had all the people meet together at Mizpah. He said, "Here's what the Lord, the God of Israel says, 'I rescued you from Egypt's power and from other nations that have troubled you. But you have rejected Me, even though I rescued you from many problems. You insisted that you have a king.' So each tribe and clan must now present themselves to the Lord."

So Samuel brought each tribe to Me, and I chose the tribe of Benjamin. Then when each clan in that tribe was brought to Me, I chose the clan of Matri, and from that clan, I chose Saul, Kish's son. But when they looked for him, he was nowhere to be found. So the people asked Me, the LORD, where he was, and I said, "He is hiding with the baggage."

The people ran to find him, and as he stood there, he was a head taller than anyone else. Samuel said, "This is the man the Lord has chosen. You can see that no one is like him." Then the crowd shouted, "May the king live a long life."

Then Samuel told the people the rights and duties of a king, and he wrote them all down on a scroll. And he put the scroll in the tabernacle. Then Samuel sent everyone home. Saul went home to Gibeah, and some men who felt led by Me went with him. But some rascals said, "How can Saul rescue us from our enemies?" They hated him and didn't give him any gifts. But Saul said nothing about them.

Learn the difference between real humility and fake humility. Be bold when you should lead, but be careful of "hiding behind the baggage" trying to be humble.

Saul Rescues Jabesh Gilead

11 When Nahash, king of the Ammonites, attacked Jabesh in Gilead, the leaders of the town suggested that if he made a peace treaty with them, the Israelites would be their servants. Nahash answered, "Yes, I will make a treaty with you, but first I will gouge out the right eye of every man in your town."

The elders said, "Give us seven days to see if we can get some help. And if not, we will surrender to you."

The messengers arrived in Gibeah, Saul's hometown, and when they told about the problem at Jabesh, the people cried. Just then Saul was coming from plowing in the fields, walking behind his oxen. "Why is everyone crying?" he asked. When they told him the situation, I, the Spirit of God, came upon Saul in a powerful way, and he was very angry. He

killed two of his oxen, cut them in pieces, and had messengers take the pieces and say to the Israelites, “Come follow Saul and Samuel into battle. If you don’t, this is what will happen to your oxen.” I, the LORD, made the people so afraid that they all came together as one. A total of 30,000 came from Judah, and 300,000 from all the other tribes, and they assembled at Bezek.

Saul told the messengers to say to the people of Jabesh, “We will rescue you by tomorrow afternoon.” When the people heard this, they were excited. So they told the Ammonites, “We will surrender to you tomorrow, and then you can do whatever you want.” The next day Saul divided his army into three groups and launched a surprise attack in the late hours of the afternoon. They killed Ammonite soldiers well into the afternoon of the next day. A few escaped, but no two of them were together.

Some of the people of Israel went to Saul and said, “Who said they didn’t want you to be king? We will kill them.” Saul said, “No. Don’t do that. We can all be grateful that the Lord has rescued us today.” Then Samuel said, “Let’s all go to Gilgal and agree together there that Saul should be our king.” So everyone went to Gilgal, and before Me, the LORD, they agreed that Saul should be their king. They sacrificed fellowship offerings to Me, and everyone enjoyed a great celebration.

Samuel Makes a Speech to Israel

12 Samuel told the Israelites, “I have given you a king as you asked. I am now old, and my hair is gray, and my sons are grown. I have been your leader since I was a young man. But now you have a king as your leader. Think back on my life. Have I ever taken anyone’s ox or donkey or cheated you or troubled you in any way? Have I ever accepted a bribe to keep me from being honest? If I have done any of these things, I will make it right.” The Israelites said, “No. You have never cheated or troubled us or stolen from us.” Samuel said, “The Lord and the king are witnesses of what you said.” They replied, “Yes, that is true.”

Then Samuel said, “The Lord used Moses and Aaron to rescue your ancestors from Egypt. Now I want to remind you of all the Lord has done for you and your ancestors. After Jacob went to Egypt, your ancestors asked the Lord to help them, and He sent Moses and Aaron to lead your ancestors

out of Egypt and to settle them here. But when they forgot the Lord, He let them be defeated by Sisera, commander of Hazor's army, and the Philistines and the king of Moab.

“Again your ancestors asked the Lord to help them. They admitted that they had sinned by forgetting Him and worshiping idols of Baal and Astarte, and they promised to worship Him if He would rescue them. So the Lord sent Gideon, Barak, Jephthah, and myself to rescue you from your enemies. When you saw that Nahash, king of the Ammonites, was going to attack you, you said you wanted a king to rule over you, even though the Lord, your God, was your king.

“So here is the king you've chosen, the one the Lord has made your king. Now you need to reverence the Lord and serve and obey Him and not rebel against His commands. But if you don't obey Him and you rebel against His commands, you will face serious problems.

“Stand here and watch what the Lord will do. It never rains during the wheat harvest, but I'm going to ask the Lord to send thunder and rain. Why? This will be a sign that you were wrong in asking for a king.” Then Samuel prayed, and I, the LORD, sent thunder and rain. The people all stood amazed. So they asked Samuel to pray that they would not die. They admitted they had sinned in the past many times, including asking for a king.

Samuel answered, “Don't be afraid. True, you sinned. But now follow the Lord and serve Him wholeheartedly. Don't worship idols. They are powerless and can't help you in any way. The Lord won't reject you. That's because of His reputation, and because you belong to Him. I won't stop praying for you. If I did, I would be sinning against the Lord. I will continue to teach you how to live for the Lord, and your part is to continue to reverence and serve the Lord with all your heart and to remember all the wonderful things He has done for you. But if you and your king continue to sin, you, and he will be destroyed.”

Pray continually for your family, leaders, and those you lead. To become effective in prayer let Me teach you to pray.

Saul Sinned at Gilgal

13 Saul was 30 years old when he became king, and he ruled Israel for 40 years. Of the 3,000 men Saul chose as special troops, two-thirds of them were with him at Micmash in the hills near Bethel, and one-third were with Jonathan at Gibeah in the tribe of Benjamin.

Jonathan, Saul's son, attacked the Philistine army at Geba, and news of this spread among other Philistines. So Saul sounded an alarm throughout the land. He announced that because he had attacked the Philistine outpost, the Philistines now hated Israel more than ever. So he ordered all the soldiers to join him at Gilgal.

The Philistines had 3,000 chariots with two chariot drivers in each one, and their soldiers were as numerous as grains of sand on the seashore. They camped at Micmash, just east of Beth-Aven (that is, Bethel). The Israelites, seeing they were outnumbered, hid in caves, under thick bushes, under rocks, and in pits and dry wells. Some even crossed the Jordan River to Gad and Gilead. Saul stayed at Gilgal, and the men with him were terribly frightened.

Saul waited at Gilgal seven days, as Samuel had told him to do. But when Samuel didn't come, Saul ordered his men to help him offer a burnt offering and a fellowship offering. Just as Saul was finishing with the burnt offering, Samuel arrived, and Saul went over to greet him. Surprised, Samuel said, "What have you done making a burnt offering?" Saul replied, "My soldiers were running off in all directions, and you hadn't come when you said you would, and the Philistine soldiers were gathering at Micmash. I was afraid the Philistines would attack us here at Gilgal, and since you weren't here, I went ahead and offered a sacrifice." Samuel said, "Saul, that was a stupid thing to do. If you had obeyed the Lord, your God, He would continue to have someone from your family as king from now on. But because you sinned, that won't happen. In fact, He has already chosen the one to be Israel's next king, a man who loves what God loves."

Then Samuel left Gilgal and went to Gibeah, and about 60 men were with Saul. Saul and his son, Jonathan, were at Geba, and the Philistines were at Micmash. Every day some Philistine soldiers attacked the Israelites. One group went north toward Ophrah near Shual, another went west to

Beth-Heron, and a third went east toward the desert near the Zeboiim Valley.

No blacksmiths were in Israel those days because the Philistines made sure the Israelites couldn't make swords and spears. So whenever the Israelites needed to have their plowshares, picks, axes, and sickles sharpened, they had to go to the Philistines. And their prices were high. So in their battles, no one had a sword or spear, except Saul and Jonathan.

Some Philistines moved their camp to the pass at Micmash.

Jonathan Attacks the Philistines

14 One day Jonathan said to his armor-bearer, "Let's go to the Philistine camp on the other side of the valley." He didn't tell his father who was near Gibeah, sitting under a pomegranate tree in Migron. About 600 men were with him, including Ahijah, who was wearing a priestly vest. He was a great-grandson of Eli. And so he knew Jonathan had left. A cliff to the north of Michmash was called Bozez, and a cliff to the south was called Seneh.

Jonathan suggested, "Let's go toward the outpost of these pagans. Maybe the Lord will help us. He can help a few soldiers like us just as easily as He can help a large number." The armor-bearer responded, "Whatever you say. I'm with you completely." So Jonathan said, "Here's the plan. We'll cross over and let them see us. If they say, 'Wait there where you are in the valley,' we won't climb up to their camp. But if they say, 'Come up here and fight us,' that will be the sign that the Lord will help us win."

So Jonathan and his armor-bearer stood in the valley where the Philistines saw them. The Philistines said, "Look. These Israelites are crawling out of their holes." Then they yelled to Jonathan and his armor-bearer, "Come up here, and we'll teach you a lesson on how to fight." So Jonathan said to his armor-bearer, "Climb on up after me. The Lord will help us win."

Jonathan climbed up the side of the hill, with his armor-bearer right behind him. Jonathan killed some soldiers in front of him, and his armor-bearer killed those who were behind him. That day they killed about 20 men in an area of about half an acre. The whole Philistine army panicked—

those in the camp, those on guard at the outposts, and the attacking forces. Then I, the LORD, sent an earthquake, and the earth shook.

When Saul realized the Philistines were running off in every direction, he asked that his officers see who was missing from their forces. When he learned that Jonathan and his armor-bearer were the ones missing, he asked Ahijah, the priest, to bring the sacred chest. But when Saul and Ahijah were talking, they heard that the noise and confusion among the Philistines kept getting louder. So Saul said to Ahijah, "Never mind." Saul got his men together and led them to the Philistines, and saw that they were in such a panic of confusion that they were killing each other. Some men who had joined with the Philistines now left and went back with the Israelites. Some Israelites had hidden in the hills of Ephraim, but when they heard that the Philistines were on the run, they joined in the chase. So I, the LORD, rescued Israel that day.

The Israelite soldiers were weak because Saul had made them agree that if they ate anything that day, while he was getting even with the Philistines, they would be under a curse. The army went into a forest and saw some honey on the ground. No one dared eat any of it because of Saul's words about the curse. But Jonathan didn't know about this, so he dipped the end of his stick in the honey. As soon as he ate some of it, he felt stronger. One of the soldiers told him, "Saul said a curse would be on any soldier who ate any food today. That explains why we are all so weak."

Jonathan said, "That is a foolish command. Notice how much stronger I feel after eating just a little bit of honey. If the men had eaten some of the food they took from the Philistines, they would feel better, and they could have killed even more Philistines."

That day after the Israelites had killed Philistines from Michmash to Aijalon, about 20 miles away, they were very tired. That evening they butchered sheep, cows, and calves belonging to the Philistines and ate the meat from the animals with the blood. Someone told Saul they were eating blood. Saul said, "That's wrong. Roll a big rock over here. Then tell the men to bring me their cows and sheep and kill them here on this rock. And tell them not to sin against the Lord by eating meat with blood in it." So they did. Then Saul built an altar to Me, the LORD.

Saul said to his soldiers, "Let's attack the Philistines again and fight them all night and kill every one of them." They said, "We'll do whatever

you think is best.” But Ahijah, the priest, suggested they ask Me about this. So Saul asked Me if they should attack the Philistines, but I did not answer him. So Saul said, “Let’s find out who has committed some sin today. Even if it’s my own son Jonathan, he must die.” No one said anything.

Saul told the soldiers, “You stand there, and Jonathan and I will stand opposite over here.” The men agreed. Then Saul asked Me, the God of Israel, for the answer. When they cast lots, everyone was cleared except Jonathan and Saul. Then when the lots were cast again, Jonathan was chosen. Saul then asked Jonathan what he had done. He said, “I simply tasted a little honey on the end of my stick. Must I die for that?” Saul answered, “Yes, Jonathan, you must die.”

The soldiers were against the idea. They said to Saul, “Why should he die when he has rescued us from the Philistines? Not even a hair on his head will be touched because of what he did for us with the Lord’s help.” In this way, the army kept Saul from killing Jonathan, his own son. Then Saul stopped hunting the Philistines, and everyone went home.

Saul fought Israel’s enemies in every direction, against the Moabites, Ammonites, Edom, kings of Zobah, Philistines, and Amalekites. He had victory over them all. Saul had these sons: Jonathan, Ishri (also called Ish-Bosheth), and Malki-Shua. His two daughters were Merab and Michal. His wife was Ahihoam, daughter of Ahimaaz. His army commander was his cousin Abner. And his father was Kish.

All his life Saul fought the Philistines. And he drafted into his army every brave man he saw.

I, the LORD, No Longer Want Saul to Be King

15 One day Samuel said to Saul, “As you know, I am the one the Lord sent to appoint you king over Israel. So here is a message from Him, the Lord of the heavens. ‘I will punish the Amalekites and destroy them all and everything they own. Put to death men, women, children, babies, and all their livestock.’”

So Saul gathered soldiers at Telaim in southern Judah, including 200,000 foot soldiers and 10,000 from the tribe of Judah. After getting an

ambush ready, Saul told the Kenites to leave that area so they wouldn't be destroyed. That's because the Kenites were kind to the Israelites in the desert. So the Kenites left. Then Saul attacked the Amalekites all the way from Havilah to Shur, east of Egypt. Saul kept Agag their king but destroyed all the people. Saul and his army also kept alive the best of the livestock but killed their animals that were weak or sickly.

Then I, the LORD, said to Samuel, "I am sorry that I made Saul king because he has not obeyed Me." This disturbed Samuel, and he cried out in prayer to Me all night. Early in the morning, Samuel got up to go talk with Saul. But someone told him Saul had gone to Carmel, south of Hebron, where he set up a monument to honor himself, and then went to Gilgal.

When Samuel located Saul, Saul said, "The Lord bless you. I have done what the Lord wanted me to do." Samuel answered, "Why then do I hear sheep bleating and cows mooing?" Saul answered, "It's not my fault that they are alive. My soldiers kept the best of the Amalekites' livestock to offer as sacrifices to the Lord, your God. But we killed all the other animals."

Samuel said, "Stop! Don't say any more. Let me tell you what the Lord told me last night." Saul replied, "All right. Tell me." Samuel said, "When you thought little of yourself, the Lord chose you to be Israel's king and to be over all the tribes. Then He told you to completely destroy the wicked Amalekites. Why then didn't you obey the Lord? Why did you keep some animals for yourself? That was a sinful thing to do."

Saul said, "But I did obey the Lord. I killed all the Amalekites and captured alive only Agag their king. I didn't take the best of the sheep and cows; the soldiers did. And they did it to sacrifice them to the Lord, your God, at Gilgal."

Samuel said, "Does the Lord want offerings and sacrifices? No. He wants obedience. To obey Him is far better than offering Him a sacrifice or giving Him the fat of rams. Rebelling against Him is as bad as fortune-telling, and pride is as bad as worshiping an idol. You have not done what the Lord wanted you to do, and so He has rejected you from being king."

Saul said, "Yes, I have sinned. I disobeyed the Lord and you. I was afraid of my soldiers, and I gave in to them. Please forgive me and come with me to worship the Lord." Samuel said, "No. I won't go with you. You rejected The Lord's Word, and so He has rejected you." As Samuel started

to leave, Saul grabbed his robe and it tore. Samuel said, “The Lord has torn away the kingdom from you, and He will give it to someone better. God, who is the Glory of Israel, isn’t a human. So He doesn’t lie or change His mind.”

Again Saul admitted, “I have sinned. But could you honor me before the leaders and the people by going with me to worship the Lord your God?” So Samuel finally agreed and went with Saul to worship Me, the LORD. Samuel then told Saul to bring Agag to him. Agag came, thinking, “Maybe they won’t kill me after all.” But Samuel said, “You have caused mothers to lose their children, so now your own mother will be without children.” Samuel then put Agag to death at Gilgal, by chopping him to pieces. Samuel went home to Ramah, and Saul went home to Gibeah. Samuel never went to see Saul again, though Samuel mourned for him. I, the LORD, regretted I had made Saul king of Israel.

Sin is so attractive; it blinds you to the realities of My Word. I can take away your blindness and help you see sin as it really exists. Then I can give you strength to overcome temptation.

Samuel Secretly Anoints David to Be the New King

16I, the LORD, said to Samuel, “Why keep mourning for Saul? Put some olive oil in a container and go see a man named Jesse who lives in Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king of Israel.” Samuel said, “But if Saul hears about it, he will kill me.” I, the LORD, said, “Take a calf with you and say that you have come to sacrifice to Me. Invite Jesse to the sacrifice. Then pour oil on the head of the one I will point out.”

When Samuel went to Bethlehem, the elders were afraid, and they asked if this was a friendly visit. He answered, “Yes. I have come to offer a sacrifice to the Lord. So purify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice.” He invited Jesse and his sons to join him.

When Jesse and his sons came, Samuel saw Eliab and thought he might be My choice. But I, the LORD, said, “Don’t consider his appearance or

height. He's not the one. I don't choose people based on their appearance. That's what most people do, but I consider the person's character."

Then Jesse had Abinadab, and Shammah and four others come to Samuel, who said that not one of these was the one I had chosen. "Are these all of your sons?" Samuel asked. Jesse answered that the youngest was taking care of his sheep. So Samuel said, "Send for him. We'll wait till he arrives." So David was brought in, and he was a healthy, nice-looking young man. Then I said, "He's the one. Make him king." So Samuel poured oil on David's head as his brothers looked on. From then on I, the Spirit of the LORD, came on David in a powerful way. And Samuel went home to Ramah.

I, the Spirit of the LORD, left Saul and sent a demonic spirit on him that tormented him. Saul's officials suggested a remedy. They said, "We'll find a harpist to play for you whenever the demonic spirit is tormenting you. Then you will feel better." Saul responded, "All right. Find me a good harpist." One of the officials said, "One of Jesse's sons plays the harp. He is brave, a good fighter can express himself well, and is handsome. And besides all that, the Lord is with him."

Then Saul sent messengers to Jesse, asking that he send David to Saul. Jesse sent his son, David, with a donkey carrying a loaf of bread and wine and also a young goat. Right away David started working for him, and Saul liked him very much and made David his bodyguard. Then Saul sent a message to Jesse with the words, "I really like David, so please let him stay here."

Whenever the demonic spirit tormented Saul, David played his harp. This made Saul feel better, and the demonic spirit left him.

David Defeats Goliath

17 Again the Philistines got ready to attack the Israelites. They camped between Socoh in Judah and Azekah in Ephes Dammim. Saul and the Israelites camped in the Elah Valley. They occupied a hill on one side of the valley, and the Philistines were on a hill opposite them.

A Philistine hero named Goliath, who was from Gath and was over nine feet tall, came out of the Philistine ranks to challenge the Israelite soldiers.

He wore a bronze helmet, 125-pound chest armor, bronze to protect his legs, and a bronze sword strapped on his back. His spear was long like a weaver's beam and weighed about 15 pounds. And a man carrying his huge shield walked in front of him.

Goliath shouted to the Israelite soldiers, "Why are all of you lining up for battle? I represent the Philistines, and you are only servants of Saul. So choose someone to represent you. If he can kill me, we will all be your slaves. But if I kill him, you will all be our slaves. I challenge you! Choose someone to come fight with me."

Hearing Goliath's challenge, the Israelite army, including tall Saul, felt helpless and very much afraid. Jesse, who was now getting old, had eight sons, including David. Three sons, Eliab, Abinadab, and Shammah, were in Saul's army. But David worked for Saul part of the time, and other times he helped his father care for his sheep. For 40 days Goliath challenged the Israelite soldiers every morning and evening.

One day Jesse told David, "Take this bushel of roasted grain and these 10 bread loaves to your brothers in the army camp. Also take these 10 hunks of cheese to the commander. See how your brothers are doing. As you know, they are with Saul in the Elah Valley facing the Philistines."

Early the next morning David left the sheep with another shepherd and loaded up the food. He reached the camp as the Israelites were leaving for the battlefield and were shouting battle cries. The two armies were facing each other. David left his things with the men in charge of supplies and ran to greet his brothers. Just then David heard Goliath shout his usual challenge to the Israelite soldiers.

As before, when the Israelites heard him, they were afraid and ran off.

The Israelites had said, "This man keeps coming out to challenge us. Yet Saul says he will reward whoever kills him, and he will give his daughter to be his wife, and he and his family won't have to pay any more taxes."

David asked the men near him, "So is this true that whoever kills Goliath will be rewarded this way? And who does this uncircumcised Philistine think he is, making fun of the armies of the living God?" They told David what the king had said he would do for the man who kills Goliath.

When Eliab, David's oldest brother, heard him talking with the soldiers, he got very angry and said, "What are you doing here? You are supposed to be taking care of our father's sheep. You are so proud and wicked. You just came here to watch the battle." David responded, "What have I done now? Can't I even ask a question?" He walked out to some other soldiers and asked them the same question and got the same answer. Someone told Saul that David had asked about rewards for killing Goliath. So Saul sent for him. David said to Saul, "Don't be discouraged because of this Philistine. I'll go fight him myself."

Saul said, "You can't do that. You are only a boy, and Goliath has been a soldier all his life." David responded, "I take care of my father's sheep. And when a lion or bear carries off one of the lambs, I run after it, hit it, and take the lamb out of his mouth. If the lion or bear attacks me, I grab its hair, hit it, and kill it. I have killed a lion and a bear that way, and so this uncircumcised Philistine will be like that because he has mocked the armies of the living God. The Lord who saved me from the lion and the bear will save me from this Philistine." Saul said to David, "Alright. Go, and may the Lord be with you."

Saul put on David his own military armor and bronze helmet. David strapped on a sword, and walked around, but he wasn't used to wearing such things. He said, "I can hardly move. I'm not used to wearing these things." So he took them off then walked to a stream, picked up five smooth stones, and put them in his shepherd's bag. Carrying his shepherd's rod and his sling, he walked toward Goliath.

Goliath went toward David, walking behind the man carrying his shield. Seeing that David was only a young man, healthy and good-looking, he hated him. He said to David, "What do you think I am? A dog? So that's why you are coming at me with a stick?" And he cursed David in the name of the Philistine gods. "Come here, and I'll kill you and feed you to the birds and wild animals."

David said, "You come out to fight with a sword and a spear and a dagger. But I am coming against you in the name of the Lord of the heavens, the God of Israel's army, the One you have mocked. Today the Lord will help me defeat you. I will kill you and cut off your head. And I will give the dead bodies of your soldiers to the birds and wild animals."

Then everyone here will know that the Lord doesn't need swords or spears. He can win battles without our help. He will help us defeat you."

As Goliath started toward David, David ran to the battle line, took a stone out of his bag, hurled it from his sling, and hit the Philistine in the forehead. The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell face down on the ground. So David defeated the Philistine with a sling and a stone; he killed him without even using a sword. He pulled out the Philistine's sword and used it to cut off his head. Then the Philistine soldiers all ran. The Israelites then pursued the Philistines all the way to their towns of Gath and Ekron. Their dead bodies were all along the Shaaraim road to Gath and Ekron. Then the Israelites went back to the Elah Valley and took what they wanted from the Philistine camp. Later David took Goliath's head to Jerusalem, and he put the giant's big weapons in his own tent.

As Saul had watched David go to fight Goliath, he asked Abner, his army guard, "Who is that young man?" Abner said, "I don't know." So Saul said, "Please find out." When David returned from killing Goliath, Abner took him to Saul, and David still had the Philistine's head in his hand. When Saul had asked him, "Whose son are you?" David replied, "My father is Jesse, and we live in Bethlehem."

Get mentally ready to fight a spiritual enemy. I will give you ingenuity and strength against satan's weapons. Look to Me and not to others. I will take up your cause. Do not worry about big battles. Do not worry about the future, you need My strength today.

Jonathan and David Become Good Friends

18After David and Saul finished talking, David met Jonathan, and they became good friends. Saul kept David with them in Jerusalem and did not let him make any trips home. Jonathan liked David so much that he agreed to be his loyal friend. To seal their friendship Jonathan gave David his robe, sword, and belt.

David was successful in doing whatever Saul asked him to do. Then Saul made him a high-ranking officer in his army, and everyone, including Saul's officers, was pleased with this decision. When the soldiers were

returning home after David killed Goliath, women came out from every town along the way to welcome King Saul. They were singing and dancing to the music of tambourines and cymbals. They sang, "Saul has killed thousands, and David has killed tens of thousands."

This made Saul very angry. "They are saying David has killed ten times as many as I have. What's next? Will they want to make him king?" From then on Saul was suspicious of David. The very next day a demonic spirit overwhelmed Saul, and he began acting like a madman. David came to play his harp for Saul as he usually did at such times. But Saul had a spear in his hand, and threw it at David twice, thinking he could pin him to the wall. But both times David jumped aside.

Saul was afraid of David because I, the LORD, had left Saul and was now with David. So to get rid of David, Saul made him commander of a thousand men and sent him off to fight. David continued to succeed in everything he did because I, the LORD, was with him. When Saul saw this, he was even more afraid of David than before. But all the Israelites appreciated David because he was so successful in leading his troops into battle.

Saul thought to himself, "Rather than my killing David, I'll let the Philistines do it." So he said to David, "If you fight the Lord's battles, including defeating the Philistines, I will give you my daughter Merab as your wife." But David said, "Who am I that I could become the son-in-law of the king?" But when the time came for David to marry Merab, Saul had her marry another named Adriel of Meholah. Meanwhile, Michal, Saul's other daughter, was in love with David, and this pleased Saul. He thought "I'll let him marry Michal, but I'll arrange things through her so he'll be killed by the Philistines."

Then Saul told his officials to tell David privately that because he likes him and they all like him, the king now wants him to be his son-in-law. When they told David this, he said, "How can a little-known, poor man afford a bride prize for the king's daughter?" When Saul's officials told this to Saul, he said, "Tell him the only bride price I need is for him to bring me our enemies." Saul's real plan was to have David killed fighting the Philistines. David was pleased to become the king's son-in-law. Saul set a time limit for this to be done, but before that time ran out, David and his

men killed not 100, but 200 Philistines and he took their foreskins to Saul. Then Saul gave him Michal as his wife.

Saul realized how much I, the LORD, was with David and that his daughter loved David. This made him even more afraid of David, and Saul hated him the rest of his life. Whenever the Philistine army attacked the Israelites, David was more successful than all of Saul's other officers. And David became very famous in all of Israel.

Do not let others make you compromise yourself. Don't be ground under someone's feet. You deal with your feelings; I will deal with the unjust person. Always do the right thing, no matter what's done to you.

Saul Tries to Kill David

19Saul told Jonathan and his officers to kill David. But Jonathan was a good friend of David, and so he warned David, "My father is trying to get you killed. So tomorrow morning go hide in the fields. I'll take my father with me there, and I'll talk with him about you. If I find out something, I'll let you know." The next morning Jonathan spoke well of David to Saul, and urged him not to be against David. "Remember how he risked his life to kill Goliath, and the Lord used him to give us a great victory, and you were happy? So why kill an innocent man? That doesn't make sense." Saul agreed and said, "No, I won't have David killed."

Jonathan told David what happened. And so he brought David to Saul, and things were all right, as they were before. Also like before when there was war again with the Philistines, David killed many of them and forced the retreat.

One day as Saul was sitting at home, listening to David play his harp, a demonic spirit took control of Saul. He threw his spear at David trying to pin him to the wall. But David jumped aside and ran to his house. Saul sent troops to guard David's house that night and then to kill him in the morning. Somehow his wife Michal knew of this plan. So she told David he better get away that night. She helped him get down through a window, and he

escaped. Then she put an image in his bed, covered the image with some of David's clothes, and put goat hair on the image's head.

In the morning when the troops went to kill David, Michal said, "He is sick." But Saul ordered his troops to bring David to him in his sick bed, so Saul himself could kill him. When the men went there, they saw the image in his bed with goat hair on its head. They told Saul, so he said to his daughter Michal, "Why did you trick me this way and help my enemy get away?" She lied to her father, "He said he would kill me if I didn't help him get away."

David went to see Samuel in Ramah, and he told him what happened. So the two of them went to Naioth, a section in Ramah, and stayed there awhile. Somehow Saul heard David was there, so he sent some soldiers to capture him. But when they got there, they saw Samuel and others prophesying. And I, the Spirit of God, took control of these soldiers too and they began prophesying. Saul heard about it, so he sent other soldiers to capture David, but they prophesied too. And this even happened with a third group Saul sent. Then Saul himself went to Ramah and at the well, in Sechu he asked where Samuel and David were. When someone told him they were in the section called Naioth, he went in that direction. And on the way he too began to prophesy. He took off his clothes and laid that way all night. Because he prophesied, people were amazed and would say, "Is Saul a prophet too?"

Jonathan Helps David Escape

20David left Ramah and went to see his good friend Jonathan. David asked him, "What have I done wrong? Why do you think your father is trying to kill me?" Jonathan answered, "I don't think he wants to kill you. He always tells me everything he's going to do, and so I'm sure he wouldn't hide this from me."

"Jonathan, it's true. He knows we are good friends. And so he didn't tell you of his plans to kill me because he doesn't want to hurt your feelings. I know for a fact that I'm very close to death." Jonathan then said, "Tell me what to do and I'll do it."

So David said, “Tomorrow is the new moon festival, and each month at this time your father has me eat with him. But this time I’ll go hide in a field until tomorrow evening. If your father asks where I am, tell him I asked you if I could go to my hometown of Bethlehem for a celebration my relatives are having. If he says, ‘All right,’ then I’m safe. But if he gets angry, you’ll know he wants to kill me. I know you’ll be kind to me because of our agreement to be good friends. If I have done something wrong, then you may kill me. Just don’t hand me over to your father.”

Jonathan said, “Don’t worry. If I find out that my father plans to kill you, I will certainly let you know.” David asked, “But how will I know?” Jonathan answered, “Let’s go to the field, and I’ll tell you.” So when they got to the field, Jonathan said, “I promise that by the day after tomorrow I’ll talk with my father about you and let you know how he feels about you. If he wants to kill you, I will certainly let you know. I pray that the Lord will be with you just as He used to be with my father. Please be kind to me as long as I live. But if I die, be kind to my family after all your enemies are defeated.”

Jonathan made an agreement with David and said, “May the Lord destroy all your enemies.” And because Jonathan appreciated David so much, he asked David to promise once more his deep friendship for him.

Then Jonathan said, “At the new moon festival tomorrow you will be missed at the dinner table. So the day after that, go in the evening to the place by the Ezel Rock where you hid before. I will shoot these arrows to the side of the rock as if I were doing target practice. I’ll tell a boy to get the arrows. If you hear me tell him the arrows are on this side of the Ezel Rock, you’ll know there is no danger. But if I tell him to keep going because the arrows are farther on, that will mean you need to leave. The Lord will keep watching us to see if we keep our agreement to each other.”

So David hid in the field, as Jonathan suggested. At the dinner of the new moon festival, Saul sat down to eat, Jonathan sat across from him, and Abner was next to Saul. But David’s place was empty. Saul didn’t mention that that day because he thought David may have been ceremonially unclean. But when David wasn’t there the second day, Saul asked Jonathan, “Why hasn’t the son of Jesse been here for dinner yesterday and today?”

Jonathan replied, “He asked me if he could go to Bethlehem for a family celebration, and he said his father told him he needed to be there. He

wanted to see his brothers, so I told him he could go.” Immediately Saul became furious with anger, and he yelled at Jonathan, “You So-and-So. I know that you and this son of Jesse, this nobody, are close friends. Shame on you and on your mother. As long as he is alive, you’ll never be king. So go get him so I can kill him.”

“Why do you want to kill him? What has he done wrong?” Jonathan asked. Saul threw his spear at Jonathan to kill him, so Jonathan knew Saul really did want to kill David. Jonathan was so angry he left the table. He didn’t eat anything all the next day because he was so hurt by his father’s awful words about David.

The next morning Jonathan went with a young boy out to the field. He told the boy to run get his arrows after he shot them. When the boy got near the place where the arrows landed, Jonathan shouted, “Keep going. The arrows are a little farther on. Hurry.” So the boy picked up the arrows and took them to Jonathan. Of course the boy didn’t know what this meant. Only Jonathan and David knew. Then Jonathan gave his bow and arrows to the boy and told him to take them back into town.

After the boy left, David left Ezel Rock where he had been hiding and bowed to Jonathan three times with his face to the ground. They hugged each other and cried, especially David. Jonathan then said, “Be on your way because we have each asked the Lord to be sure we and our descendants keep our promise of friendship.” Then David left, and Jonathan returned to town.

Always be faithful to your principles. Be faithful to your friends as Jonathan was to David. Be kind to others as you want them to be kind to you.

David Receives Help from the High Priest

21 David went to Nob to see Ahimelech, the priest. Concerned when he saw David, Ahimelech asked, “Is something wrong? Why are you by yourself?” David answered, “The king sent me on a mission and asked me not to tell anyone, so my men are someplace else. Do you have some food you can give me? Can you give me five loaves of bread?”

The priest said, “I don’t have any ordinary bread. All I have is the bread in the tabernacle. You can have that if your men have not slept with any women last night.” David replied, “Don’t worry. My men are never with women when they are on a regular mission, and this trip is more than ordinary.” So Ahimelech gave David the bread from the Table of Bread without Yeast in the tabernacle, which had already been replaced that day by fresh loaves.

It so happened that one of Saul’s men was there that day. He was Doeg, an Edomite, Saul’s chief shepherd. David asked the priest if he had a spear or sword he could use. “I had to leave on this mission so quickly that I didn’t grab any weapon.” The priest said, “The only sword here is the one used by Goliath, whom you killed. It’s wrapped in a cloth behind the priestly vest.” David said, “Perfect. I’ll take it.”

Then David hurried on to the Philistine city of Gath where Achish was king. Achish’s officers said, “Isn’t he like the king of the land? Isn’t he the one the people sing about as they dance, saying, “Saul has killed thousands, and David has killed tens of thousands”?”

When David heard these words, he was afraid of Achish. So he pretended to be insane. He scratched on doors at the city gate, and he let his saliva drool on his beard. Achish said to his men, “Look at this insane person. Why did you bring him here? Do you think I need more madmen carrying on like this? I sure don’t want him in my palace.”

David’s Hideouts

22 So David left Gath and went to the Adullam Cave. His brothers and other relatives heard where he was and joined him there. Others went there too, including people in trouble, in debt, and discontented for one reason or another. He was the leader of about 400 people.

Later David went to Mizpeh in Moab and said to the Moabite king, “May I bring my parents to live here until I know what God will do?” They stayed in Moab while David was in hiding.

One day the prophet Gad told David to go back to Judah. So David left and went to the Hereth Forest. When Saul was sitting under an oak tree in Gibeah surrounded by his officers and with his spear in hand, he heard

where David was. Saul said to them, “Listen, you Benjamites. If the son of Jesse becomes king, will he give you fields and vineyards? Will he make you commanders in his army? Is that why you are all against me? Not one of you has told me that my own son has made a friendship agreement with Jesse’s son. And not one of you has told me that my own son has encouraged Jesse’s son to kill me.”

Doeg, who was standing there, said, “When I was at Nob, I saw Jesse’s son talking with Ahimelech, the priest. Ahimelech asked the Lord about him and then gave him food and Goliath’s sword.” Immediately Saul sent for Ahimelech and all his relatives and the other priests at Nob. When they arrived, Saul said, “Listen to me, you son of Ahitub.” The priest asked, “What is the problem, my lord?” Saul said, “Why are you and Jesse’s son plotting against me? Why did you give him food and a sword and ask God about him? Now he is preparing to kill me.”

Ahimelech answered, “But, Sir, no one is as loyal to you as David, your son-in-law, and captain of your bodyguard. Everyone in your family respects him highly. That day wasn’t the first time I talked with God for David. So why accuse me and my relatives? We don’t know anything about a plot against you.” Then Saul said, “Ahimelech, you and all your relatives will die.”

Saul ordered his bodyguards, “Kill these priests because they helped David. They knew he was running from me, but they didn’t tell me.” But the king’s officers refused to kill the Lord’s priests. So Saul turned to Doeg and said, “You do it.” Doeg turned on them and killed 85 priests. Then he went to their town of Nob and killed every person and animal there.

One of Ahimelech’s sons, Abiathar, escaped and ran to see David, and told him what Saul had done. Then David said, “That day when I saw Doeg there, I knew he would tell Saul. I have caused the death of all your relatives. Stay with me, and I’ll protect you with my own life. The same person is trying to kill us both. You’ll be safe here with me.”

David Saves the People of Keilah

23 One day word reached David that the Philistines were at Keilah and were robbing wheat from the threshing floors there. When David asked

Me, the LORD, if he should go attack them, I, the LORD said, “Yes.” But David’s men there in Judah were afraid of the Philistines. So they said, “We’ll be terrified if we try to fight them at Keilah.” So again David asked Me, the LORD if they should attack the Philistines, and again I, the LORD, said, “Yes. Go to Keilah, and I will help you defeat the Philistines.”

So David and his men went to Keilah, killed the Philistines, took their cattle, and rescued the people of Keilah. Abiathar, Ahimelech’s son, went with David to Keilah, taking his priestly vest with him. When Saul heard that David was at Keilah, he said, “Now we can kill David. He is trapped inside a city with high walls and gates that can be locked.”

So Saul got his soldiers together and went to Keilah to capture David and his men. David heard what Saul was planning to do. So he asked Abiathar to bring the priestly vest. David prayed to Me, “O LORD God of Israel, I heard that Saul is coming to destroy Keilah because I am here. Will the town leaders turn me over to him? Is he actually coming? Please tell me.” I, the LORD, said, “Yes. He will come.” Then David asked, “Will the Keilah leaders turn me over to Saul?” I, the LORD, answered, “Yes. They will.”

So David and his 600 men left Keilah and kept going from place to place. When Saul heard that David escaped, he didn’t go to Keilah after all. David stayed in caves in the Ziph Desert. Saul kept searching for him, but never found him. When David was at Horesh in the Ziph Desert, he heard that Saul was after him. Hearing this, Jonathan found David at Horesh and encouraged him. Jonathan said, “Don’t be afraid. My father won’t hurt you. You will be king over Israel, and I will be your chief official. My father knows this.” Again they renewed their agreement to be loyal to each other. Jonathan went home, and David stayed at Horesh.

Some people from Ziph went to Saul in Gibeah and told him David was hiding in caves at Horesh on the Hachilah Hill near Jeshimon. “So if you come, we’ll help you catch him.” Saul replied, “Thank you, and may the Lord bless you for being concerned about me. Find out exactly where he is and where he goes, because I know he is very tricky. Find out his hiding places and come back and tell me. I’ll go with you, and if he’s in the area, I will find him.”

So the men of Ziph went home. They found out that David and his men were in the Maon Desert south of Jeshimon. Saul and his men began

searching for David, and when David heard about it, he went to a place in the Maon Desert called the Rock. He and Saul were on opposite sides of a mountain. But just as Saul and his men were about to capture David, a messenger ran to Saul and told him the Philistines were raiding Israel again. So Saul stopped chasing David and went to fight the Philistines. Ever since then, that place has been called The Rock of Escape. David then went to live in the hideouts at En-Gedi.

Your enemies in life are many. Like David, you're not always sure about the loyalty of those around you. I will guide you when to go help another. Seek My will for the things you do.

David Spares Saul's Life

24 When Saul returned from fighting the Philistines, he heard that David was in the desert near En-Gedi. So he took 3,000 top soldiers to go with him to look for David near the rocks of the wild goats. Some sheep pens were by the road, and a cave was close by. So Saul went in to relieve himself. And David and his men were hiding in that very cave, way in the back.

David's men said to him, "Now is your opportunity to kill Saul." They believed I, the LORD, would help David defeat his enemies. So David quietly crept forward and cut off a corner of Saul's robe. But then David's conscience began bothering him. He told his men, "I shouldn't have done that because Saul is the Lord's anointed king." David then told his men not to attack Saul. After that Saul left and started on his way.

David went out of the cave and shouted to Saul, "My lord, the king." Saul looked back and saw David bowing low. Then David shouted to Saul, "Why do you listen to people who say I'm trying to harm you? You can see that isn't true. The Lord put you at my mercy in the cave, and some of my men wanted me to kill you. But I said, 'I can't do that because he is the Lord's anointed king.' Notice that I'm holding this piece of your robe. I cut it off, but I didn't kill you. This proves I'm not trying to harm you or rebel against you. I haven't harmed you in any way, and yet you keep hunting for me to kill me. The Lord will decide which of us has done anything wrong.

He may punish you, but I will never harm you. As the old saying has it, 'Only evil people do evil things.' So I will not do any evil thing to you. Why are you trying to catch me anyway? Why chase me like I'm as worthless as a dead dog or a flea? May the Lord help me escape from you."

Saul called, "Is that really you, my son?" And he cried. He said to David, "You are a better man than I am. You have been kind to me, but I have treated you badly. You have been good to me because when you could have killed me, you didn't. Who else would have let his enemy get away, as you have? I pray that the Lord will reward you well for the way you treated me today. Israel will be blessed under your leadership. Promise me that you won't kill my descendants, but let them live so my name can be remembered."

David promised to do as Saul asked. Then Saul went home, and David and his men went to their hideout.

Samuel Dies

25 Samuel died, and the entire nation of Israel mourned his death. They buried him near his home in Ramah. Then David moved to the Paran Desert. A wealthy man from Maon had property near Carmel. He had 1,000 goats and 3,000 sheep, and his men there were cutting wool from the sheep. His name was Nabal, and his wife's name was Abigail. She was intelligent and beautiful. But Nabal, a descendant of Caleb, was irritable and mean.

When David was in the desert, he sent 10 young men to Nabal with this message: "May you and your family have long, healthy lives. I hear you are cutting wool from your sheep. When your servants were with us in Carmel, we treated them well, and we never stole anything from them, as your own servants can tell you. Please be kind to us and give us any provisions you can." David's men gave this message to Nabal and waited for his answer.

Nabal asked, "Who is this David, this son of Jesse? A lot of servants are running from their master, and maybe he is one of them. Why should I give my bread, water, and meat to some man I don't even know?" David's men returned and told David what Nabal had said.

Immediately David told his men to get their swords, and he strapped his on. About 400 men went with him, and 200 stayed behind to guard their

supplies.

One of Nabal's servants told Abigail, "David sent some men from the desert to talk with our master, but he insulted them. But David's men were good to us. They never hurt us or stole anything from us when they were nearby. While we were herding our sheep near them, they protected us. Think fast, because Nabal may cause trouble for himself and his family. He's so stubborn no one can even talk with him."

Abigail quickly loaded some food on donkeys, including 200 loaves of bread, two skins filled with wine, meat from five sheep, five bushels of roasted grain, 100 raisin cakes, and 200 fig cakes. She told her servants to take these to David, and she would catch up with them. But she didn't tell her husband what she was doing.

As Abigail was riding her donkey into a mountain ravine, she saw David and his men coming toward her. David has just said, "Helping this fellow sure didn't do us any good. We guarded his flocks so that not one animal was stolen or lost. Now he has paid me back with insults. By tomorrow morning every male in his family will be dead. If I don't kill them all off, may God take my life."

Abigail quickly got off her donkey and bowed down in front of David. She said, "I accept blame for this problem. Let me explain. Don't pay any attention to that wicked man Nabal. His name means 'Fool,' and that fits him perfectly. If I had seen the men you sent, perhaps I could have kept him from being so rude. I pray that since the Lord has kept you from taking innocent lives, all your enemies will be like Nabal. Please accept this gift of food for you and your men.

"Please forgive me if I have offended you. The Lord will reward you with a lasting dynasty because you fight for Him and because you have done nothing wrong all your life. Even though some may be chasing you to take your life, the Lord your God will keep you safe. And your enemies' lives will disappear as quickly as a stone from a sling. When the Lord has done for you everything He promised and has made you king, your conscience will be clean because you will not have killed innocent people. When the Lord has done all these things for you, please remember me."

David replied to Abigail, "Praise the Lord, the God of Israel, for sending you to me today. Blessings on you for being so wise and keeping me from killing innocent people. If you hadn't come here quickly, Nabal

and all his men would have been dead by morning.” David accepted her gifts and told her, “You may return home now. I will not kill your husband.”

When Abigail got home, she saw that Nabal was having a big party as if he were a king. He was very drunk, so she didn’t tell him anything about her seeing David until the next morning. Next day when he was sober, she told him what she had done. Right then he had a heart attack, and he lay in bed paralyzed. Ten days later I, the LORD, took his life.

When David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, “Praise the Lord for paying back Nabal for his sin and for keeping me from taking his life.” Then David sent messengers to Abigail to ask her to marry him. When they arrived at Carmel and gave her this message, she bowed down and said, “Yes. And I will gladly be his slave and wash the feet of his servants.” She quickly got ready and went back with David’s messengers. She took with her five of her servant girls. And she became his wife.

David had also married Ahinoam of Jezreel, so he had two wives. Saul had given his daughter Michal, David’s wife, to be the wife of a man from Gallim named Palti, son of Laish.

David Spares Saul’s Life Again

26 Again some people from Ziph went to Gibeah to tell Saul that David was hiding at Mount Hakilah near Jeshimon. So Saul took his 3,000 top soldiers and went to the Ziph Desert to look for him. Saul camped along the road beside Mount Hakilah near Jeshimon where David was hiding. David sent out spies to check on Saul.

One night David went to Saul’s camp, and he saw Saul and his general, Abner, son of Ner, sleeping in the middle of the camp with soldiers sleeping all around them. David asked if Ahimelech the Hittite or Abishai, Joab’s brother and David’s nephew would go with him into Saul’s camp. Abishai volunteered. So David and Abishai went into the camp and saw Saul asleep with his spear stuck in the ground beside his head. Abner and Saul’s soldiers were asleep all around him. Abishai whispered to David, “God has put your enemy right in your hands. Let me go pierce his spear through him. One strike and he’s dead.”

David said, “No. Don’t kill him. You will be held guilty for destroying the Lord’s anointed king. The Lord will take care of him. Either he’ll die in some battle or of old age. But I won’t kill the Lord’s anointed one. But let’s get his spear and water jug and leave.”

So David took the spear and water jug near Saul’s head, and he and Abishai left. No one knew about it or woke up because I, the LORD, had put them into a deep sleep. David stood on the top of a hill some distance away and shouted, “Wake up, Abner!” Abner replied, “Who is it?”

David said, “What kind of man are you? No one is as great as you. So why haven’t you guarded your king? Someone would have come into your camp and killed him. You have fallen down on the job. You and your men deserve to die because you didn’t guard your king, the Lord’s anointed. Where are the spear and the water jug that were beside his head?”

Saul recognized David’s voice and called out, “Is that you, my son David?” David answered, “Yes, it is. Why are you chasing me? What have I done wrong? If the Lord has caused you to be against me, maybe I should give Him an offering. But if this is someone’s idea, I hope the Lord will punish them. You have driven me from home so that I can’t worship there as I would like to do. I don’t want to die in some place away from home. Why have you come after me as if I were a flea or hunt me like a partridge in the mountains?”

Saul responded, “I confess I have sinned. Come back home, and I will not hunt you. You had the opportunity to kill me, but you didn’t. I have been a fool, and I was very wrong.” David then said, “Here is your spear. Have one of your men come get it. The Lord gives rewards to people who are good and are loyal. I could have killed you today, but I wouldn’t harm the Lord’s anointed king. Since I saved your life, may the Lord keep me safe and rescue me from trouble.”

Saul said, “May the Lord bless you, my son. You will do great things and be successful.” So David left, and Saul went back home.

Learn from David how to treat your enemies. Do good to them in return for their evil. Pray for My blessing on their lives. Help them learn that you are not their enemy. Pray for them.

David Lives among the Philistines

27 Then David got to thinking to himself, “Can I really trust Saul? Someday he may kill me. So I think I’ll go to Philistia. Then Saul will stop hunting for me, and I’ll be safe.”

So David and his 600 men and their families went to live in Gath, where Achish was king. David had with him his two wives, Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail of Carmel, Nabal’s widow. Saul heard that David was in Gath, so he stopped trying to find him.

One day David said to Achish, “We would prefer to live in one of your towns in the country rather than here in the capital city.” Achish agreed, and he gave him Ziklag, and that town has been in Judah ever since. And David was there for 16 months.

David attacked the Geshurites, Girzites, and Amalekites who lived in the area from Shur to Egypt. In these attacks, David and his men killed every person and kept for themselves the livestock and clothes. Returning from a raid, he would go see Achish, who would always ask him, “Where did you attack today?” And David would explain where he had been. He killed everyone in those towns because he thought that if he didn’t someone would go to Gath and tell Achish what David had been doing. He did this all the time he was in Philistia. Achish thought the Israelites probably hated David now, and so he would have to stay there and be his servant.

There are times some think David did not do the right thing. Do not justify your faults by the things David did. Always be truthful and then protect yourself.

Saul Consults a Witch at Endor

28 The Philistines got all their forces together to attack Israel again. Achish told David that he and his men must join his forces. David answered, “That’s fine. Then you will see for yourself what I can do.” Achish then told David he would make him his permanent bodyguard.

Samuel had died, and Israel mourned his death and buried him in Ramah. Saul had forced out everyone who was a medium (who claimed to talk with the dead) or a psychic.

The Philistines camped in Shunem, and the Israelites camped at Gilboa. When Saul saw the vast Philistine army, he began panicking in fear. So he asked Me, the LORD, what to do, but I, the LORD, didn't answer him either in a dream or by the Urim and Thummim or by a prophet. So he told his officers, "Find me a woman who can talk with the dead so I can ask her what to do." They told him there was such a woman in nearby Endor.

That night Saul put on ordinary clothes in place of his royal robes, and he and two of his men went to see her. He asked her to bring up the spirit of a dead man so he could talk with him. She said, "Are you trying to trick me and get me killed? You know that Saul has gotten rid of everyone who claims to talk to the dead. You are spying on me." Saul responded, "I promise you in the Lord's name that nothing will happen to you because of this."

She said, "What dead person do you want to talk with?" He said, "Samuel." When the woman saw Samuel, she screamed and said to Saul, "You tricked me. I see now that you are Saul." He said, "Don't be afraid? Just tell me what you see." She answered, "I see a spirit coming out of the ground." Saul asked, "What does he look like?" She said, "He is an old man wearing a robe." Saul then knew it was Samuel, and he bowed down his face to the ground.

Samuel then spoke to Saul, "Why have you disturbed me this way?" Saul replied, "Because I am in deep trouble. The Philistines are getting ready to attack us, and God has left me and won't reply to me through prophets or by dreams. So I've come to you to ask for help."

Samuel said, "But if the Lord has left you and is your enemy, why turn to me? The Lord has done what He said He would do. He will take the kingdom from you and give it to David. Why? Because when He told you to destroy the Amalekites, you didn't do it. So the Philistines will defeat the Israelite army tomorrow, and you and your sons will be with me here."

Saul fell and lay flat on the floor, frightened because of Samuel's words. He was weak because he hadn't eaten anything that day and the night before. When the woman saw how terrified he was, she said, "I risked my life by doing what you asked. So now let me give you something to eat so

you'll have the strength to get back to your army camp." He refused to eat. But when the two men with him also urged him to eat something, he got up and sat on her couch. The woman killed a calf, cooked some of the meat, and baked some bread without yeast. She served them the food, and then they left that night.

Satan's forces are huge as you approach the end of the age. There is an evil spirit world. Let Me, the Holy Spirit, protect you.

Achish Sends David and His Men to Ziklag

29The Philistine army was at Aphek, and the Israelites camped by the Jezreel Spring. As the Philistine commanders were leading their troops in groups of hundreds and thousands, David and his men marched at the rear with Achish. The Philistine commanders asked, "What are these Israelites doing here?" Achish said, "They are with David who was an officer in Saul's Israelite army. He's been with me for over a year, and he's done nothing wrong."

The Philistine leaders were angry, and they said, "Send him back to the town you gave him. We don't want him going into battle with us. He will turn against us. Saul would take him back if he cut off our soldiers' heads and took them to Saul. After all, this is the same man about whom the woman of Israel sang and danced with the words, 'Saul has killed the thousands, and David has killed tens of thousands.'"

So Achish spoke to David, "I know you are reliable, and I want you to fight with me. I have found nothing wrong with you, but my commanders don't want you to come with us. I suggest you go home so you won't upset them." David asked, "But what have I done? Why can't I fight the enemies of my king?"

Achish said, "In my view, you are as good as an angel of God. But my commanders don't want you to be with them in battle. So I suggest you and your men leave early in the morning as soon as the sun is up." So David and his men got up early and went back toward Philistia, and the Philistine soldiers went to Jezreel.

Always ask to see the big picture—My picture—when you get fired, as David was sent home. Let Me help you see My plan on the other side of being dismissed. I am the God of “closed doors” and open doors. Walk through My open doors. Let Me open doors for you.

David Defeats the Amalekites

30 Three days later when David and his men arrived back at Ziklag, they found that the Amalekites had raided the Southern Desert and had attacked Ziklag and burned it to the ground, and had taken women and children as captives. Seeing the ruins and realizing their wives and children had been carried off, David and his men cried loudly and kept crying till they couldn't cry anymore. Of course, David's two wives, Ahinoam and Abigail, were among the captives. David was terribly worried because his men in their grief talked about stoning him. But I, the LORD, strengthened and encouraged him.

David asked Abiathar the priest to bring him the priestly vest. He did, and David asked Me if he should go after the Amalekites. I said, “Yes. Go after them. You will rescue your wives and children.” So David and his 600 men went to the Besor Ravine, south of Ziklag. Of that number, 200 were too tired to keep going, so they didn't cross the ravine, but the other 400 did.

David's men found an Egyptian in a field and took him to David. They gave him water to drink and food to eat—part of a fig cake and two raisin cakes. He hadn't anything to eat or drink in three days, so now he felt much better. David asked him, “Who are you, and where are you from?” He said, “I am an Egyptian, a slave of an Amalekite. He left me here three days ago because I was sick. We raided the towns of the Kerethites in the Southern Desert and the territory of Judah, and the desert where Caleb lives. And we burned Ziklag.”

David asked, “Can you tell me where they are now?” The man said, “If you promise me you won't kill me or give me back to my master, I'll take you to them.” So he led David and his men to the Amalekite camp, and there they were, eating, drinking, and dancing because of all they had taken from the Philistines and Judah. David and his men rushed in on them and

fought them all that night and the next day. The only ones who escaped were 400 young men who rode off on camels. David got back everything the Amalekites had stolen, including his two wives. The men got back all their family members and all their belongings. His troops gathered all the sheep and cattle and drove them on ahead and said, "These are all for David."

When David reached Besor Ravine where the 200 exhausted men were, David greeted them. But some of the men with David were rascals, and they said, "They didn't go with us to the battle, they don't deserve to get any of the things we brought back. Let them get their wives and children and go." But David said, "No. You mustn't do that. That's being greedy. God has protected us and helped us defeat the enemy. No one will listen to you when you talk like that. Those who go to battle and those who stay behind to guard the equipment will share the goods equally." David made that a law from then on.

When David got back to Ziklag, he sent some of the things they had taken from the Amalekites to the elders of Judah. He said, "Here is a present for you from the Lord's enemies." He sent gifts to the elders of these cities: Bethel, Ramoth Negev, Jattir, Aroer, Siphmoth, Eshtemoa, Racal, the towns of the Jerahmeelites and Kenites, the cities of Hormah, Bor Ashan, Athach, and Hebron.

Saul Kills Himself

31 The Philistines attacked Israel at Mount Gilboa, killing many Israelite soldiers and forcing many to run. The Philistines closed in on Saul and his sons, and they killed Saul and Jonathan, Abinadab, and Malchishua. When the archers wounded Saul, he said to his armor-bearer, "Kill me. I don't want these uncircumcised Philistines to capture and torture me and make fun of me." But his armor-bearer was afraid to do it, so Saul took his own sword and fell on it. When his armor-bearer saw Saul was dead; he fell on his sword too and died. So that same day Saul, his three sons, his armor-bearer, and many Israelite soldiers were killed.

When the Israelites on the other side of the Jezreel Valley and beyond the Jordan River heard that the Israelites had fled and that Saul and his sons were dead, they left their cities. And the Philistines moved into those towns.

The next day when the Philistines went to the battlefield to take weapons from the dead soldiers, they found the bodies of Saul and his three sons on Mount Gilboa. They cut off Saul's head, pulled off his armor, and sent messengers to spread the news to their people and to announce the news in the temple of their idols. They put Saul's armor in the temple of the goddess Astarte and nailed his body to the city wall of Beth-Shan.

When the Israelites of Jabesh Gilead heard what the Philistines had done, some brave men one night went to Beth-Shan and took down the bodies of Saul and his sons and brought them to Jabesh, and burned them. Then they buried their bones, under the oak tree at Jabesh, and they fasted for seven days.

Remember that partial obedience is complete disobedience.

I AM GOD

The Victorious King

The Book of Second Samuel

First Samuel records the failure of Eli and King Saul, and Second Samuel reflects the restoration of peace to the nation of Israel through the strength of King David. The tenderhearted David—the shepherd king—conquers the enemies of Israel and sets up a godly rule in Jerusalem. David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years” (5:4).

Yet even in the midst of strength and prosperity, evil slipped into David’s life. He sinned with Bathsheba and murdered her husband. I judged David’s sin, just as I punish sin today. Bathsheba’s baby died, David’s family was ravaged by sin, and David’s oldest son Absalom tried to kill him.

David Mourns the Deaths of Saul and Jonathan

1 After Saul died, David went home to Hebron after defeating the Amalekites. Three days later a man came from Saul’s camp with his clothes torn and dust on his head as signs of grief. He kneeled to the ground in front of David in respect. When David asked him where he came from, he said, “I escaped from the Israelite army.”

David asked, “Tell me what happened. How did the battle go?” The man responded, “Our army ran, but many were wounded and are dead. And Saul and Jonathan are dead.”

David asked, “Are you sure Saul and Jonathan are dead? How do you know?”

“I was on Mount Gilboa, and I saw Saul leaning on his spear, with enemy chariots coming at him. When he saw me, I asked him what I could do. He asked me who I was, so I told him, ‘I’m an Amalekite.’ He said to me,

‘Come, kill me. I’m in terrible pain.’ So I killed him because I could see he couldn’t live any longer. I took his crown and armband to bring to you.”

David and his men tore their clothes in grief. They cried all day long and fasted, saddened by the deaths of Saul and Jonathan and the deaths of so many of their soldiers. Then David asked the man, “Where are you from?” He replied, “I am an Amalekite, but I live in Israel.” David asked, “Why weren’t you afraid to kill the king, the LORD’s anointed one?”

Then David told one of his men to kill this Amalekite, and he did. The man died. David had said, “It’s your fault, not mine that you will die. Why? Because you admitted that you killed the one the LORD chose to be king.” David then wrote a funeral song in honor of Saul and Jonathan. And he ordered his men of Judah to teach it to everyone in Israel. It is known as “The Lament of the Bow” and is written in the Book of Jashar.

“Israel, your glorious king, lies dead on the hills, and his great heroes have fallen.

“Don’t tell the news in the Philistine cities of Gath or Ashkelon. You don’t want the daughters of the pagan Philistines to be glad.

“Don’t let dew or rainfall on the hills of Gilboa, and don’t let crops grow in the fields. There the soldiers’ shields were useless, and Saul’s shield will no longer be polished with oil.

“Jonathan’s bow and arrows caused his enemies’ blood to be spilled, and Saul’s sword killed the enemy’s best soldiers.

“Saul and Jonathan were appreciated and were wonderful men. They were together in life, and they even died together.

“Women of Saul, cry for Saul. He provided fine red cloth for you and gold jewelry.

“Our great soldiers have died in battle and Jonathan lies dead on the hills of Gilboa.

“I miss you, my brother Jonathan. I appreciated you so much, and your appreciation for me was greater than that of a wife for her husband.

“Our great heroes have fallen, and their weapons are destroyed.”

Never “lie” or “stretch the truth” to get on anyone’s good side as this Amalekite did. Remember the consequences of the man who lied to David.

David Becomes King of Judah

2 Eventually, David asked Me, the LORD if he should move back to one of the towns in Judah. I, the LORD, said, “Yes.” So David asked, “Which town should I go to?” And I said, “Hebron.” So David moved to Hebron with his two wives Ahinoam and Abigail, and he also had his men and their families move with him to Hebron and nearby villages. The people of Judah went to Hebron and made him their king.

When David learned that people in Jabesh Gilead had buried Saul, he sent messengers to tell them, “The Lord will bless you for being kind in giving Saul a decent burial. And may the Lord, be kind and faithful to you.” And David promised to be kind to them because of what they had done. “Now that Saul your king is dead, and Judah has made me their king, be strong and courageous.”

Meanwhile, Abner, Saul’s cousin, and his army commanders had taken Saul’s son Ish-bosheth to Mahanaim on the east side of the Jordan River, and made him king over Israel, including Gilead, Asher, Jezreel, Ephraim, and Benjamin. Ish-bosheth was 40 years old at the time, and he ruled for two years. However, David reigned over the tribe of Judah in Hebron for seven and a half years.

Abner and the soldiers with Ish-Bosheth went to Gibeon. Joab, David’s commander and nephew, and David’s soldiers met Abner and Ish-Bosheth’s men at the pool in Gibeon. Abner and his men sat on one side of the pool, and Joab and his men sat opposite them on the other side. Abner suggested to Joab that their men do some hand-to-hand combat. Joab said, “Alright.” Each group chose 12 men. Then they grabbed each other by the hair, and each one stabbed his opponent in the side, and all 24 died. So that place is called Helkath Hazzurim (meaning “Field of Daggers”).

The two groups then started fighting, and the battle was fierce. But David’s men defeated Abner and his soldiers. Three of David’s nephews, Joab, Abishai, and Asahel (sons of Zeruah, David’s sister), were there at this battle. Asahel, who could run as fast as a gazelle, ran straight ahead after Abner. When Abner looked back and saw Asahel, he asked, “Is that you, Asahel?” Asahel answered, “Yes.” Then Abner said, “Why don’t you go

after someone else and take his weapons?” But Asahel just kept running after him.

Again Abner said, “Stop chasing me! If I have to kill you how could I face your brother Joab again?” Asahel kept going, and so Asahel hit him in the stomach with the back end of his spear, and the spear went all the way through him to his back. Asahel fell and died. Everyone who came there and saw Asahel lying dead stopped and looked. But Joab and Abishai went after Abner. About sunset, they arrived at the Ammah Hill near Giah on the road to the Gibeon Desert. Men from Benjamin went to Abner to the top of a hill and were ready to fight.

Abner yelled to Joab, “Why do we keep on killing each other? Why don’t you order your men to stop chasing their own relatives?” Joab answered, “Well, you are right. If you hadn’t said something, we would have chased our own relatives all night.” So Joab signaled on his trumpet for his men to stop chasing the Israelites soldiers. And so the fighting stopped.

All that night Abner and his soldiers went across the Jordan River and crossed a deep ravine and arrived at Mahanaim. Joab and his men went home. When he counted his soldiers, he found that only 19 soldiers were missing, in addition to Asahel. But Abner lost 360 of his men, all Benjamites. Asahel was buried in his family tomb in Bethlehem. And Joab and his men marched all night and reached Hebron at daybreak.

The Sons of David Who Were Born in Hebron

3 War continued on between those who were loyal to Saul and those who were loyal to David. David’s position became stronger, and Saul’s followers grew weaker. While David was in Hebron, he had six sons. His oldest was Amnon, whose mother was Ahinoam. His second was Kileab, whose mother was Abigail. The third son was Absalom, whose mother was Maacah, daughter of Talmai, king of Geshur. David’s fourth was Adonai, whose mother was Haggish; and the fifth was Shephatiah, and his mother was Abital. And David’s sixth son was Ithream, whose mother was Eglah.

During the war between the followers of Saul and David, Abner became more powerful. He even slept with Saul’s concubine Rizpah, daughter of Aiah. Ish-Bosheth told Abner he should not have done that. This made Abner very mad, and he said, “Do you think I’m nothing but a dog? I have been

loyal to your father's family and friends, and I haven't turned you over to David. So why do you accuse me of some crime with Rizpah? So I will now hand your kingdom over to David and help set up his reign from Dan in the far north to Beersheba in the far south." This made Ish-Bosheth so afraid that he didn't say a word.

Abner sent messengers to David to suggest that David make an agreement with him so that he could persuade everyone in Israel to make David their king. David said, "Good idea. But first bring Michal, Saul's daughter, back to me." Then David sent some officials to Ish-Bosheth, demanding that he give David his wife, Michal, whom he bought by killing many Philistines. So Ish-Bosheth agreed and had her taken from her husband, Palti. Her husband Palti went with her to Bahurim, crying all the way. When Abner told him to go home, he left.

Abner told the elders of Israel, "You have wanted to make David your king. So now's the time to do it. Remember that the LORD promised to use David to rescue His people from all your enemies." Abner persuaded the Benjamites to go along with this idea. Then he went to Hebron to tell David everyone was interested in making him king. Abner arrived with 20 men, and David gave a big feast for them. Then Abner said, "Let me go get all Israel to come make an agreement with you and make you king of all Israel." So Abner left.

Right after Abner left, Joab and some of his men returned from a raid, bringing with them everything they had taken from a town. Someone told Joab that Abner had come to see David and Abner left with his blessing. Joab went immediately to the king and said, "What have you done? Why did you let him get away? Don't you realize he came to spy on you?"

Joab sent messengers to catch up with Abner and bring him back from the well at Sirah. But David didn't know about this. Then when Abner got back to Hebron, Joab pulled him aside to the town gate as if to speak with him privately, and he stabbed Abner in the stomach, and he died. When David heard about this, he said he was innocent of killing Abner. "Joab is the guilty one. I pray his family will always have some physical problems with sores, or lameness, or die in war, or starve."

So why did Joab and his brother Abishai kill Abner? Joab killed and his brother killed Abner because Abner had killed their brother Asahel in the battle at Gibeon. Then David ordered Joab and all the people to mourn Abner's death by tearing their clothes and wearing clothes made of old rough

materials and walking in front of Abner's body. David himself walked behind the coffin. Abner was buried in Hebron, and David and all the people cried.

Then the king sang a funeral song about Abner: "Should Abner have died like a fool? Your hands weren't tied nor were your feet chained. And yet you died as a victim of wicked men." And the people cried again.

People urged David to eat something while it was still daytime. But he refused, saying he would not eat anything till after sunset. His attitude pleased the people, just as everything he did pleased them. The people knew by his actions that he had no part in the murder of Abner.

David said, "Today a great leader has fallen in Israel. As you know, I am the king, but these nephews of mine—Joab, and Abishai—are too strong to control. So may the LORD repay these wicked men for the wicked things they have done."

You need the patience to accept things that come slowly, as David was slowly given rulership over the kingdom. Pray to understand how bad things happen. Learn My patience, and put within your heart a spirit of determination to do My will.

Ish-Bosheth is Murdered

4 When Ish-Bosheth heard that Abner had died in Hebron, he was very afraid, and everyone in Israel was very frightened. Ish-Bosheth had put two men in charge of raiding bands. They were Baanah and Recah, sons of Rimmon of the Benjamin tribe. Rimmon was from Beeroth, which was part of Benjamin. People who used to live in Beeroth were considered Benjamites even though they moved to Gittuim and still live there.

Saul's son Jonathan had a son named Mephibosheth who couldn't walk since age five. When someone told his nurse that Saul and Jonathan had died, she hurried off carrying him in her arms, but she fell and injured his legs.

Recab and Baanah went to the house of Ish-Bosheth, arriving there when it was hot, and he was taking a nap. They went into the house, pretending to get some flour. Then they went to the bedroom, and stabbed Ish-Bosheth in the stomach and ran off.

After they stabbed him, they cut off his head. They took his head with them as they traveled all night to the Jordan River. When they got to Hebron, they said to David, “Here is the head of the man Ish-Bosheth who tried to kill you. This is how you are getting even with Saul and his family.”

David answered, “The LORD is the one who rescues me from trouble. Awhile back when someone told me that Saul was dead, he thought he was giving me the good news. But I killed him. Now you two have killed Ish-Bosheth, an innocent man in his own bed. So you too deserve to die.” So David ordered his men to kill Baanah and Recab. They cut off their hands and feet and hung their bodies by the pool in Hebron. But they buried Ish-Bosheth’s head in Abner’s tomb in Hebron.

When you read of those who murder for political gain, may you always do right, in the right way, at the right time, for the right reasons.

David Becomes King over All Israel

5 Leaders from all Israel’s tribes met with David in Hebron and said, “We are all related. When Saul was king, you led us in battle as our real leader. And the Lord said you would be our leader, taking care of us as a shepherd cares for his sheep.” Then David made an agreement with them in My presence, and the leaders crowned him king over all Israel. At the time he was 30 years old, and he ruled for 40 years. This included seven and a half years in Hebron over Judah and 33 years in Jerusalem over all Israel.

David and his men went to Jerusalem to attack the Jebusites, who lived there. When the Jebusites saw them outside their city, they said, “You can’t get in here. Even our blind and lame can keep you out.” But David did capture the fortress of Zion, now called the City of David. David said, “To capture the Jebusites, we’ll have to go up through the water tunnel to reach these blind and lame enemies of mine.” That’s the origin of the saying, “The blind and the lame enemies can’t enter the palace.”

After defeating the Jebusites, David moved to Zion and named it the City of David. He built up the area around it. David became more and more powerful because I, the LORD, and the God of the Heavens, was with him.

Hiram, king of Tyre, sent messengers to David, with carpenters and stone workers who took cedar logs to build David's palace. David realized that I, the Lord, had made him king over Israel and had blessed his rule for their benefit. After David moved to Jerusalem, he married several more concubines and wives and had these sons: Shammua, Shobab, Nathan, Solomon, Ibhara, Elishua, Nepheg, Japhia, Elishama, Eliada, and Eliphelet.

The Philistines heard that David was now king of Israel, and so they took a lot of soldiers to try to find him, but he went into hiding. When David heard that the Philistines soldiers were in the Rephaim Valley, he asked Me, the Lord, if he should attack the Philistines and if he would win. I, the Lord, said, "Yes, I will help you defeat them." So David defeated them at Baal-Perazim. I, the LORD, went against David's enemies like a flood. So he named the place Baal-Perazim (meaning "I, the Lord Broke Through"). The Philistines left their idols there, and David's men picked them up.

Again the Philistines went against David in the Rephaim Valley. When David asked Me what to do, I said, "Don't attack them from the front. Go around behind them and attack them near the balsam trees. When you hear a sound in the tops of the trees like troops marching, then attack the Philistines. That sound will mean I have gone ahead of you to defeat them." So David did as I, the LORD, said and he chased them all the way from Gibeon to Gezer.

David Brings the Sacred Chest to Jerusalem

6 David got together 30,000 of Israel's best soldiers, and they went to Baalah of Judah, also called Kiriath-Jearim. They went there to bring back to Jerusalem the sacred chest, which is named after Me, the LORD of the heavens, whose throne is above the winged creatures. They put the sacred chest on a new ox cart and brought it down from the hillside home of Abinadab. Two of his sons, Uzzah and Ahio, were guiding the cart, and Ahio was walking in front. David and many Israelites were very happy as they sang and played music on harps, lyres, tambourines, castanets, and symbols.

When they got to Nacon's threshing floor, the oxen stumbled, and so Uzzah grabbed the sacred chest to steady it. This made Me, the LORD, very angry, and so I killed Uzzah right next to the chest. This, in turn, made David

angry, and so the place is called Perez Uzzah (meaning “Outbreak against Uzzah”).

Fearful of Me, the LORD, David wondered how he could ever take the sacred chest to Jerusalem. So instead of taking it there, he took it to the home of Obed-Edom from Gath. It was there for three months, and I blessed Obed-Edom and his family.

Hearing that I, the LORD, had blessed Obed-Edom and his family because of the sacred chest, David went to Obed-Edom’s house and took the chest to Jerusalem, and everyone was happy again. After the men who were carrying the chest took six steps, they stopped, and David sacrificed a bull and a calf. Dancing with enthusiasm, David was wearing a priestly vest, while he and the people who brought the sacred chest were shouting and playing trumpets.

Michal, Saul’s daughter, and David’s wife, looked out a window and saw them bringing the sacred chest to Jerusalem. Seeing David jumping and dancing for Me, the LORD, made her feel disgusted. They put the chest in a tent David had set up for it. He then sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings to Me. Then he blessed the people in My name. He gave everyone a loaf of bread, a cake of dates, and a raisin cake, and everyone went home.

When David went home, his wife Michal said in disgust, “You sure made a fool of yourself today, dancing partially clothed in front of your slave girls like an indecent man.” David responded, “I was doing this in thanks to the Lord because He chose me and not your father to be Israel’s king. I am willing to act like a fool to show my joy in the Lord. But my slave girls still respect me.” Because of that, Michal never had any children.

It is written that David was “a man after My own heart.” May it be said of you that you pursued My heart. You need a holy fear of disobeying Me. Let Me come to the center of all your plans. Learn how to please Me. Worship Me with all your heart. Let Me be King of your life.

My Promise to King David

When David was living in his palace and Israel was not at war, he said one day to Nathan the prophet, “Here I am living in this nice palace made with lots of cedar, but the sacred chest is still in a tent.” Nathan told him **7** to do whatever he felt the Lord wanted him to do.

That night I, the LORD, told Nathan to give this message to David: “Are you the one to build a temple for Me to live in? Ever since bringing Israel out of Egypt, I have lived in a tent. I never said to any of the Israelite leaders, who are like shepherds, “Why haven’t you built a house of cedar for Me?”

“I, the LORD of the heavens, chose you, David, from being a shepherd to being the prince of My people. I have been with you, and I have defeated your enemies, and I will now make you very famous. I have given your people a permanent homeland, where they can live in peace and where wicked nations will no longer bother them as they used to do when I appointed judges over them. I will keep enemies away from you.

“Many of your descendants will be kings. After you die, I’ll choose a descendant to follow you, and I will make his kingdom strong. He will build a house—a temple—for Me, and his kingdom will last forever. I will be his father, and he will be My son. If he sins, I will use other nations to punish him. But my unfailing love will always be with him, though I took it from Saul. One of your descendants will always be king, and your throne will be established forever.”

Nathan told David everything I, the LORD, said.

Then David sat in My presence and said, “Who am I and my family, Sovereign Lord, that You have blessed me? And besides that, You have promised to bless my family in the future. How interesting that You treat people this way. What more can I say? You have done this great thing, and You have let me know about it. You are so great, O Sovereign Lord. No one is like You, as we well know. No other nation is like Israel, the people You rescued from Egypt for Yourself. You did wonderful things for them by forcing out other nations and their gods from their land. You chose Israel to be Your people forever, and You are their God.

“Now, LORD God, please keep your promise to me and my descendants. Then You will be honored, and people will say, ‘You, the LORD of the heavens, are the God of Israel.’ And my descendants will be established before You.

“O LORD of the heavens, the God of Israel, You have said my descendants will be kings. That’s why I have the courage to pray this way to You. Sovereign Lord, You are God, and You can be trusted to do as You say, including this promise to me, Your servant. Please bless my descendants so they can continue as kings. Sovereign Lord, please bless my descendants forever.”

The Military Victories of David

8 Eventually, David defeated the Philistines, including conquering Metheg Ammah, also known as Gath. He also defeated the Moabites. He made their soldiers lie down on the ground, and measuring them with a rope, he killed every two men and let every third man live. The Moabites were subject to him and paid him taxes.

When Hadadezer, king Zobah, went to the Euphrates River to regain some land there, David captured 1,700 chariot drivers and 20,000 foot soldiers, and he cut the leg muscles of all but 100 of the horses. The Syrians of Damascus went to help Hadadezer, but David killed 22,000 of them. He set up military posts in Damascus, and the Syrians were subject to him and paid him taxes. I, the LORD, gave David victory in every battle he fought.

Hadadezer’s officers had gold shields, and David took these to Jerusalem. He also took a lot of bronze from the cities of Bethah and Berothai which had been under Hadadezer.

When Toi, king of Hamath, heard that David had defeated Hadadezer, he sent his son, Joram, to congratulate David on his victory, because Toi and Hadadezer were enemies. Joram gave David a number of gifts made from silver, gold, and bronze. And David gave these to Me just as he had done with silver and gold from the many other nations he defeated, such as Edom, Moab, Ammon, the Philistines, the Amalekites, and goods taken from Hadadezer of Zobah.

David killed 18,000 Edomites soldiers in the Salt Valley, south of the Dead Sea. He then set up military posts throughout Edom, and the Edomites were subject to David as their ruler. I, the LORD, gave him victory in every battle.

David reigned over all Israel, always doing for his people what was fair and right. His chief officers were his nephew Joab, army commander;

Jehoshaphat, son of Ahilud, who was government recorder; Zadok, son of Ahitub, and Ahimelech, son of Abiathar, who were priests; Seraiah, chief secretary; Benaiah, son of Jehoiada, captain of David's bodyguard consisting of Kerethites and Pelethites; and David's sons, who were advisers.

You can be victorious like David. Claim victory no matter what strategy the enemy uses against you. I am the source of your victories. Give Me all credit for your victories.

David Befriends Mephibosheth

9 David had promised Jonathan that he would be kind to Saul's family. So he wondered if any of them were alive. David asked Ziba, a servant in Saul's family, to see him. When David asked if he was Ziba, he said, "Yes. I am." Then David asked him if he knew if any of Saul's family was alive because he wanted to keep his promise to be kind to them. Ziba answered, "Jonathan's lame son is still alive." "Where is he?" David asked. Ziba replied, "He is in Lo Debar at the home of Machir, son of Ammiel." So David had Jonathan's son brought to Jerusalem.

When Jonathan's son, who was Saul's grandson, came to David, he bowed down in honor. "Are you Mephibosheth?" David asked. "Yes. I am your servant." David said, "Don't be afraid. I want to be kind to you because of my promise to your father. I'm going to give you back the land of your grandfather, Saul, and I want you to live here at the palace with me."

Mephibosheth bowed down again and said, "I don't know why you are interested in me. I'm nothing more than a dead dog." David then told Ziba, Saul's servant, "I'm giving to your master's grandson everything that belonged to Saul and his family. I want you and your sons and servants to work for Mephibosheth, farming his land and his ways. And he will always eat with me at my table." Ziba had 15 sons and 20 servants. Ziba said, "I will do whatever you tell me to do." So Mephibosheth ate every meal at David's table as if he were one of his sons. Mephibosheth had a young son named Mica. All of Ziba's family members were Mephibosheth's servants. And Mephibosheth, crippled in both feet, moved to Jerusalem and lived in the palace.

Most kings would have killed any heir to their throne, but David exercised grace. I have given you grace, the opposite of what you deserve. You deserve nothing, but I am giving you riches in grace. I am a God of mercy, kindness, and grace.

David Defeats the Ammonites and Syrians

10 Later Nahash, king of the Ammonites, died, and his son Hanun became king. David thought, “Nahash was kind to me so that I will be kind to his son.” David sent messengers to express sympathy to Hanun about the death of his father. When David’s men arrived, Hanun’s officials said, “They aren’t here to express sympathy. They are spies.” So Hanun took David’s men and shaved off half of each man’s beard and cut off their clothes at their buttocks, and sent them off.

David sent messengers to meet his men and to tell them to stay in Jericho until their beards grew back. The Ammonites realized they made David angry, so they hired 20,000 Syrian soldiers from Beth-Rehob and Zobah, 1,000 soldiers from the king of Maacah and 12,000 men from Tob. So David sent Joab with all his soldiers to attack them. The Ammonites were ready to fight by the city gate, and the Syrians of Zobah, Rehob, Tob, and Maacah were in the fields.

Joab realized he would have to fight the enemy behind him and ahead of him. So he chose his best troops and went against the enemy. And he put the rest of his soldiers under Abishai, his brother. Joab told him that each one should be ready to help the other if either group was in trouble. Joab told Abishai to be brave and fight to protect their people and their cities. He added, “We are in the Lord’s hands.”

When attacked, the Syrians began to run. And when the Ammonite soldiers saw the Syrians running, they too ran from Abishai and retreated into the city. Then Joab returned to Jerusalem. The Syrians now saw they could not defeat Israel themselves; so Hadadezer recruited more Syrians from beyond the Euphrates River. They went to Helam under Shobach, Hadadezer’s commander.

David then recruited his soldiers, crossed the Jordan River, and went to Helam. The Syrians fought David, but again they ran from the Israelites.

David's men killed 700 charioteers and 40,000 foot soldiers, and he killed Shobach. All the allies of Hadadezer surrendered to David and were subject to him as their leader. The Syrians, then, were afraid to help the Ammonites any more.

Just know when your enemies come to fight against you, I, the God of the universe, am on your side. I will never leave you or forsake you. Don't be suspicious of people who compliment you or give you gifts. Live with an open hand and an open heart.

David and Bathsheba

11 Armies usually go to war in the spring. But David sent Joab and his army to attack the Ammonites and lay siege to their capital city of Rabbah. But David stayed behind in Jerusalem. One evening he got out of bed and walked on the flat roof of his palace. He saw a beautiful woman taking a bath. He sent someone to find out who she was, and the man told David she was Bathsheba, daughter of Eliam and wife of Uriah, the Hittite. Then David sent for her, and she came to him, and he slept with her. (She had just completed the cleansing ritual after her monthly period.) She went home and then realizing she was pregnant, she informed David.

So David ordered Joab to send Uriah home. Uriah arrived, and David asked him about Joab, the soldiers, and the war. Then David told him to go home and relax. David even gave him a gift. But Uriah didn't go home. Instead, he slept that night at the palace entrance with David's servants.

David heard that Uriah didn't go home to sleep with his wife. So he asked him why. Uriah said, "The sacred chest and our soldiers are all in tents, and Joab and his officers are camped in open fields. So it wouldn't be fair for me to go home, eat and drink, and sleep with my wife. I couldn't do that." David told him, "Okay. Stay here tonight, and go back to the battlefield tomorrow." So Uriah stayed there that day and the next. Then David invited Uriah for dinner and got him drunk. But still, he didn't go home to his wife. Again he slept at the palace entrance.

Next morning David wrote a letter to Joab, telling him to position Uriah in the battle's front lines, and then to pull the troops back so he would be

killed. So Joab put Uriah at a place near the city wall where the enemy's strongest men were fighting. And Uriah was killed, along with several fellow soldiers.

You all sin. You sin in different ways, at different times, to satisfy a different selfish reason. Ask for forgiveness, cleansing, and restoration. Just as I used David after his sin, I can use you.

Joab wrote a report to David, and he said to the messenger, "After David reads this report, he may get angry and ask you why we were fighting so close to the city wall where arrows could be shot at us. He might mention Abimelech who was killed in Thebez when a woman threw a millstone down on him from a city wall. If he says this, just say, 'Uriah, the Hittite, was killed too.'"

The messenger gave this report to David, and added, "The enemy chased us out into the fields, but we pushed them back to the city gate. There the enemy shot arrows at us, and some of your men were killed including Uriah the Hittite." David told the messenger to say to Joab, "Don't be upset by this. Different ones are killed in battle. So keep fighting against the city."

Uriah's wife heard that her husband was dead, and she grieved for him. When her days of mourning were ended, David brought her to his house, married her, and they had a son. I, the LORD, was very displeased with what David had done.

I know you better than you know yourself. When you drift from My fellowship, I will convict you. When you begin to cool off, I will burn your soul with conviction. If you turn around, I will receive you back.

The Results of David's Sins

12 Then I, the LORD, sent Nathan the prophet to tell this story to David: "A rich man and a poor man lived in the same town. The rich man had many sheep and cattle, but the poor man had only a little lamb, which was like a pet to him and his children. He let it eat from his own plate and drink

from his cup, and it slept with him. One day a traveler arrived at the home of the rich man. Instead of killing one of his sheep for food for the guest, the rich man stole the poor man's lamb and killed it and roasted it and served it to his guest.

"This made David terribly angry. He told Nathan, 'The man who did this should be killed. He must pay four times what the lamb was worth.'"

Then Nathan said to David, "You are that man." I, the LORD, the God of Israel, said, "I made you king of Israel, and I kept you safe from Saul. I gave you his palace and his wives and the kingdoms of Israel and Judah, and I could have given you much more. Why then did you disregard My word by doing this evil thing? You murdered Uriah and stole his wife. From now on murder will often occur in your family, all because you disregarded My word and took Uriah's wife to be yours. Your own family members will rebel against you. One who is close to you will go to bed with your wives, and everyone will see it. You sinned in secret, but this sin will be done in the open for everyone to see."

David confessed to Nathan, "Yes. I have sinned against the Lord." Nathan replied, "True. But the Lord has forgiven you, and you won't die. But your sin has caused the Lord's enemies to scoff at Him. So your child will die."

Nathan went home. Then Bathsheba and David's baby got very sick. David begged God to make the boy well. David didn't eat, and he slept at night on the ground. His officials tried to get him to get up and eat, but he refused. When the baby was only a week old, he died. His officials were hesitant to tell him the baby died, because they said, "He was so disturbed when the child was alive. What would he do now that the baby is dead?"

When David heard them whispering, he knew what had happened. So he asked, "Is my child dead?" "Yes," they said. Then David got up, washed, put on some lotion, and got dressed, and went into the tabernacle and worshiped Me, the LORD. Then he went to the palace, and he ate. His servants were surprised. They said, "Why are you acting this way? When the baby was alive, you cried and wouldn't eat. And now that the baby is dead, you are up and eating."

David replied, "I cried and didn't eat when my baby was alive because I thought, 'Perhaps the Lord will let him live.' But now that he is dead, there is

no need to go without eating. I can't bring him back. But someday I will go to where he is."

David comforted Bathsheba, and he slept with her. She got pregnant and gave birth to another son, and they named him Solomon. I, the LORD, loved Solomon, and Nathan the prophet told David that his name should be Jedidiah (meaning "Loved by Me, the Lord").

Meanwhile, Joab and the Israelite army fought against Rabbah, capital of Ammon. He sent word to David telling him he captured the city and cut off its water supply. Joab said to David, "Bring the rest of the army and capture the city so that you will get the credit for the victory instead of me."

So David got the rest of the soldiers together, and they captured Rabbah. He took the crown off of the king's head and put it on his own head. The crown was made of gold and had several gems in it, and it weighed about 75 pounds. He carried off many things of value. And he made the people work as slaves with saws, picks, and axes to make bricks. He did this with all the Ammonite cities. Then David and his army returned to Jerusalem.

Amnon Rapes Tamar

13 David had a beautiful daughter, Tamar, the sister of Absalom. Ammon, her half-brother, fell in love with her. But because he could not win her love, he was so frustrated he became ill. Ammon's cousin, Jonadab, the son of David's brother, Shimeah, was a crafty man. One day he asked Ammon, "Why do you look so sad? What's the problem?" Ammon said, "I'm in love with Tamar, my half-sister, but she doesn't pay any attention to me."

Jonadab said, "Here's what to do. Pretend to be very sick. Then when your father comes to see you, ask him to have Tamar cook you something to eat while you watch and then serve you the food." So Ammon pretended to be very sick. When the king came to see him, Ammon asked that Tamar cook him something to eat, and David agreed and told her to go cook some food for him.

So she went to Ammon's house so he could watch her mixing the dough and baking some bread. When she brought it to him, he told all the servants to leave. He then told her to bring the bread to his bedroom and for her to feed him there. So she did. Then he grabbed her and said, "Come to bed with me, my beautiful sister."

“No!” she said. “Don’t do this. Such a wicked thing should never be done in Israel. This would bring awful shame to me, and you would be known as one of the worst fools in all Israel. Just ask the king, and he will let you marry me.” But he wouldn’t listen, and since he was stronger than she was, he raped her. Then his love turned to hate, and he yelled at her to get up and leave. Then she said, “Don’t send me away. That would be worse than what you have already done.” But again Ammon wouldn’t listen. He called his servant to come, and he said, “Get this woman out of here and lock the door.”

So the servant put her out. Like the king’s other unmarried daughters, she was wearing a long beautiful robe. In grief, Tamar put ashes on her head and tore the robe she was wearing. Holding her head in her hands, she went away crying. Her brother, Absalom, said to her, “I’m sorry Ammon has done this to you. But don’t be so upset. After all, he’s your brother.” Tamar lived in her brother Absalom’s house, and she was devastated beyond words. David heard of this, and he was fuming mad. Never again did Absalom speak to Ammon. He hated Ammon because of what he had done to his sister.

Two years later Absalom’s servants were cutting wool from his sheep in Baal-Hazor near Ephraim’s border. He invited all his brothers and half-brothers and David and his officials to come join him for a feast. David objected, saying they would all be too many for him. Absalom kept asking him, but David refused. Absalom finally suggested David send Ammon. So finally David let Ammon and his other sons go.

Absalom told his men, “I will get Ammon drunk, and then when I give the signal, kill him. Don’t be afraid. Just do as I say, and be strong and courageous.” So Absalom’s men murdered Ammon. Then David’s other sons all jumped on their mules and ran off. Someone told David, “Absalom has killed all your sons.” He tore his clothes in grief, lay on the ground, and his servants also tore their clothes.

Jonadab, David’s nephew, said, “Not all your sons have been killed. Only Ammon. And Absalom has been planning this ever since Ammon raped Tamar. Don’t think all your sons are dead. Only Ammon was killed.” Meanwhile, Absalom escaped.

A man standing on guard saw a lot of people coming down the side of the hill, and he told David. Then Jonadab said to the king, “Your sons are coming, just as I said.” Then the sons arrived, crying loudly. And David and his servants were crying bitterly.

Absalom went to his grandfather, Talmai, king of Geshur. Absalom stayed with Talmai three years. David finally got used to the loss of Ammon, but he longed for Absalom.

Joab Plans the Return of Absalom

14 Joab knew how much the king wanted to see his son Absalom. So he sent someone to bring to him a wise woman from Tekoa. He said, “Put on funeral clothes and don’t wear any perfume. Pretend you have been grieving a long time and go to the king.” Then Joab told her what to say.

The woman from Tekoa went to David, bowed with her face to the ground, and said, “O King, please help me.” David asked, “What’s the problem?” She said, “I am a widow with two sons. They got into a fight, and one of them killed the other. Now the rest of my clan wants me to hand over my only son so they can kill him. But then there will be no one to continue my husband’s name.” David said, “Go on home, and I’ll see that no one harms your son.” She said, “I’ll bear the blame if anyone accuses you for helping me.” David said, “If anyone objects, bring him to me. I’ll see that he never complains again.” She said, “Please pray that the Lord will keep anyone from killing my son.” David said, “You can be sure no one will even mess up your son’s hair.”

She said, “May I mention one other thing?” He said, “Yes.” She said, “Why don’t you do for God’s people what you have said you will do for me? You said you would protect my son, so why don’t you care for your son? All of us must die. Our lives end like water spilled on the ground that can’t be picked up again. But God doesn’t take away life. He figures out ways to bring us back if we have been separated from Him. And may I suggest you should do the same?”

“I have come to you because I am afraid of what people might do to my son and me. I thought, ‘Perhaps the king will listen to me and rescue my son and me from those who want to cut us off from God’s people.’ I know you will help me relax because you know the difference between good and evil for my lord, the king, is like an angel of God. She prayed, ‘May the LORD be with you.’”

The king replied, “I need to know one thing.” “Yes?” she asked. He asked, “Did Joab put you up to this?” She replied, “Yes. I can’t deny it. Joab

sent me and told me what to say. He wanted to help you see the situation and to change it, and in your wisdom like an angel of God you know everything that goes on.”

David sent for Joab and told him, “Alright. Go bring back Absalom.” Joab fell to the ground to honor the king, and he said, “Now I know you approve of me because you have granted me this request.” So Joab went to Geshur and brought Absalom back to Jerusalem. But the king said, “He may go to his own house, but I don’t want to see him.” So Absalom did not see his father.

No one in all Israel was as handsome and well-built as Absalom. He cut his hair only once a year and only then because it got too heavy. It weighed five pounds. He had three sons and a beautiful daughter, Tamar. After living in Jerusalem for two years without seeing his father, Absalom asked Joab to talk with David about seeing him, but Joab refused. Absalom sent for Joab a second time, but again Joab refused. So Absalom said to his servants, “Go set on fire Joab’s barley field, which is next to mine.” So they did. Joab went to Absalom and demanded, “Why did your servants set my field on fire?”

Absalom replied, “I wanted you to ask my father why he brought me back from Geshur. Since I can’t see him, I might as well have stayed there. I want to see my father. And if he thinks I’m guilty of murder, he may kill me.” So Joab told the king what Absalom had said. Then David sent for Absalom, and he bowed low before David with his face to the ground. And David kissed him.

Like David, mourn for those who sin and refuse to return to Me.

The Conspiracy of Absalom

15 Later Absalom bought a fancy chariot and chariot horses and had 50 men run in front of it. Every morning he got up early and waited by the side of the road that led to the city gate. Whenever anyone came that way to bring a problem to David for trial, Absalom would ask, “Where are you from?” and he would tell him his tribe. Then Absalom would say, “You have a strong case. It’s too bad the king has no one to help him in cases like yours.

If I were judge, people could bring their complaints to me, and I would see that they were treated fairly.”

Whenever anyone would start to bow down before Absalom, he would take him by the hands and hug him. In this way, Absalom stole the hearts of all Israel from David. Four years later Absalom said to David, “When I was in Geshur in Syria, I made a vow to the LORD. I told Him that if He brought me back to Jerusalem, I would go worship Him in Hebron.” The king said, “Alright. You may go.” So Absalom went to Hebron.

Then Absalom sent messengers to all the tribes of Israel, with this message: “When you hear trumpets being played, you will know that I have been crowned king in Hebron.” With him were 200 men from Jerusalem he invited as his guests, but they didn’t know his plans. While Absalom was offering sacrifices in Hebron, he sent for Ahithophel, David’s adviser, who lived in Giloh, to join him. And many others joined Absalom too.

A messenger arrived in Jerusalem and told David that many people were joining with Absalom against him. David told his men, “We better leave Jerusalem right away. If we don’t, he’ll come here and kill us and everyone in our city.” His officials said, “We’ll do whatever you say.” So he left with his family, but he left ten concubines to take care of the palace. He stopped at the edge of the city to let his soldiers go past him, along with his bodyguard of Kerethites and Pelethites, and 600 men from Gath.

One of the men from Gath was Ittai. David said to him, “Why are you here? You are a foreign resident. You arrived in Jerusalem just yesterday. So why should you go with us when you don’t even know where I’m going? Take your troops and stay with Absalom.” David wanted Me, the LORD, to be kind and faithful to him. But Ittai said, “As surely as you and the Lord live, I will go wherever you go, even if it costs me my life.” David responded, “Alright. Come along with us.” So Ittai and his 600 men and their families continued on with David.

The people of Jerusalem cried as David and his people passed by them and crossed the Kidron Valley, and went toward the desert. Abiathar and Zadok and all the Levites were with David and were carrying the sacred chest. They set it down, and Abiathar offered sacrifices while the people were leaving the city. Then David said to Zadok, “Take the sacred chest back to Jerusalem. If it’s the Lord’s will, He will bring me back to the tabernacle. But if not, I am in His hands.” David said to Zadok, “You are a prophet, so your son, Ahimaaz, and Jonathan, son of Abiathar, could relay to me any

message you receive from the Lord. I will wait at the shallow shores of the Jordan in the desert.” So Zadok and Abiathar took the sacred chest back to Jerusalem and stayed there. David went up to the Mount of Olives, crying as he went. He had covered his head in grief, and he was barefoot. Everyone with him was crying and covered their heads too.

Someone told David, “Ahithophel, your adviser, has joined with Absalom against you.” David prayed, “LORD, have Ahithophel give Absalom foolish advice.” When David got to the top of the Mount of Olives, Hushai, the Arkite, was waiting for him. His robe was torn, and dust was on his head. David told him, “If you go with me, you may slow us down because of your age. So I suggest you go to the city and tell Absalom you will be his adviser as you were mine in the past. Hopefully, you can help me ruin Ahithophel’s plans. Zadok and Abiathar will be there, and you can tell them anything you hear in the palace about Absalom. Then their sons, Ahimaaz and Jonathan, can tell me what is happening.”

David’s friend, Hushai, got back to Jerusalem just as Absalom arrived from Hebron.

You must see through the lies that people tell. You must see through propaganda and false media reports. Don't panic with the crowd. Ask Me for help to always see things as they are.

David and Ziba

16When David was going down the other side of the Mount of Olives, Ziba, a servant of Mephibosheth, met David. Ziba had two donkeys loaded with 200 loaves of bread, 100 raisin cakes, 100 fig cakes, and some wine. The king asked Ziba, “What are these for?” Ziba answered, “The donkeys are for your family to ride, the bread and cakes are for your men to eat, and the wine is for your men to drink when they get tired in the desert.” David asked, “Where is Saul’s grandson Mephibosheth?” Ziba answered, “He is staying in Jerusalem because he thinks the people will make him ruler over his grandfather Saul’s kingdom.” David told Ziba, “Everything that used to belong to Mephibosheth is now yours.” Ziba said, “I bow as your humble servant. I hope I continue to please you.”

As David and his men were near Bahurim, a man came out of the village and started cursing David. He was Shimei, son of Gera, and was of Saul's family clan. He threw rocks at David and his officials and David's bodyguards who were on each side of David. He said to David, "Get out of here, you murderer and rascal. The Lord is paying you back for murdering Saul and his family. The Lord has now handed your kingdom over to Absalom. You are finished because you are a murderer."

Abishai, David's nephew, said "Why should this dead dog curse the king? Let me go cut off his head." But David said, "No. I have so little in common with you and your brothers. If the Lord told him to curse me, who are we to tell him to stop?" Then David said to Abishai and all his officials, "My own son, Absalom, is trying to kill me. And now this man from Benjamin is merely cursing me. So let him curse, because maybe the LORD told him to. And maybe the LORD will see the trouble I'm in and will bless me."

David and his men continued on, and Shimei was on the hillside opposite him, cursing and throwing rocks and dirt at David. David and his men were tired when they reached their destination. So they rested and then felt better.

Absalom and his men, with Ahithophel, arrived in Jerusalem. Hushai, David's friend, greeted Absalom, saying, "Long live the king." But Absalom said, "Why aren't you with your friend, the king?" Hushai said, "I will stay and serve the one the LORD, and His people have chosen. I served your father, so now I will help you."

Absalom turned to Ahithophel and asked, "What's your advice? What shall I do next?" Ahithophel said, "Go have sex with the ten concubines your father left to take care of the palace. Then everyone will know that you have shamed your father and ruined your relationship with him beyond repair. Then everyone will give you their full support." So a tent was set up for Absalom on the palace roof, and everyone watched as he went into the tent with his father's concubines. Absalom did whatever Ahithophel told him to do, just as David had done. Ahithophel's advice always seemed wise to both David and Absalom as though it came directly from Me, the LORD.

You must see through the compliments people give you, and see beyond the gifts people give you to get on your "good" side. They

usually want you to do something for them. Ask Me for wisdom to see through compliments and bribes.

Ahithophel's Plan

17 Ahithophel then advised Absalom, "Choose 12,000 men to go with you after David. Attack him tonight while he is tired and discouraged. He will panic, and the people with him will run off. But kill only David, and bring everyone else back. When the people learn of his death, they will be glad to return home." This plan sounded good to Absalom and Israel's tribal leaders.

Absalom said, "Let's ask Hushai what he thinks." When Absalom told Hushai what Ahithophel advised, he said, "What do you think?" Hushai replied, "His advice is not good. You know that your father and his men are excellent soldiers. They can be as fierce as a mother bear whose cubs have been robbed. Also, you know your father is an experienced fighter. Even now he's probably spending the night in a cave. As soon as he attacks your men and a few are killed, you will think your entire army has been destroyed. Then the bravest of your soldiers who have hearts like lions will be afraid. Everyone knows that your father and his soldiers are brave fighters.

"So here's my advice: Gather every fighting man in Israel from Dan to Beersheba, and you yourself lead them into battle. Fight David wherever he is, falling on his men, like dew falls on the ground, and killing every one of them. If he escapes into some city, then take ropes and pull down the walls of the city, dragging them into the nearest valley and don't leave even one stone in the city."

Absalom and all the others liked Hushai's advice better than Ahithophel's. This was advice from Me, the LORD, to defeat Ahithophel's advice and to bring trouble on Absalom.

Hushai told Zadok and Abiathar, "Ahithophel has given Absalom advice on how he can defeat David, but I have given a different suggestion. Send someone right away to tell David not to spend the night at the shallow shores by the Jordan River but to cross the river so he and those with him won't be wiped out."

Jonathan and Ahimaaz were staying at En Rogel south of Jerusalem because they didn't want anyone to see them entering the city. A girl gave them the message for David. But a boy saw them leave, and he told Absalom. Jonathan and Ahimaaz went to the house of a man in Bahurim and climbed into the man's well. His wife put a cover on the well and poured grain on the lid. When Absalom's men got to that house, they asked where Jonathan and Ahimahaaz were. She said, "They went across the brook." The men looked for them, but couldn't find them. So they went back to Jerusalem. After they left, the two climbed out of the well and went to David and said, "Hurry and cross the river," and they told them of Ahithophel's plan. So David and all those with him crossed the Jordan, and by sunrise, everyone was across.

Ahithophel heard that Hushai's advice, not his, was being followed. So he went to his hometown of Gilo, set his affairs in order, and then hanged himself. He was buried in his family's burial place.

David went to Mahanaim, and Absalom with his many soldiers were crossing the Jordan. Absalom put Amasa in Joab's place as his army commander. Amasa was a cousin of Joab, a nephew of David, and Amasa's grandfather was Nahash, an uncle of David. The Israelites under Absalom were in Gilead.

When David arrived in Mahanaim, he was welcomed by Shobi from Rabbah, Machir from Lo Debar, and Barzillai from Rogelim. They brought bedding, towels, pottery jars, wheat, barley, flour, roasted grain, beans, lentils, honey, yogurt, sheep, and cheese. They knew David and the people with him would be hungry, tired, and thirsty.

You need to learn when it's best to settle down to wait and when it's best to keep going. I will give you the ability to move quickly according to circumstances. I will teach you how to use time effectively.

The Death of Absalom

18 David appointed officers in charge of groups of 100 men and 1,000 men. He put a third of his soldiers under Joab, a third under Abishai,

and a third under Ittai, and he told the troops he would go into battle with them. But the men objected to this idea. They said, “It won’t matter to our enemy if all of us have to run or if they kill half of us. They want to kill you because that would be like killing 10,000 of us. You should stay here and send us help if we need it.”

David said, “Alright, if you think that is best.” He then stood by the city gate as his men marched out. He then ordered Joab, Abishai, and Ittai to be gentle with his son, Absalom. And all the troops heard this. The battle took place in the Ephraim Forest. David’s men defeated Absalom’s troops, killing 20,000. The battle raged all over the countryside, and more died from the terrible terrain of the forest than from the battle itself.

Absalom was riding his mule under a huge oak tree when his hair caught in the branches. His mule kept going, leaving him hanging in the air. One of David’s men saw this and told Joab, “I saw Absalom hanging in a tree.” Surprised, Joab said, “Why didn’t you kill him? I would have given you ten pieces of silver and a fancy belt.” The man replied, “But I couldn’t kill the king’s son, even if you gave me a thousand pieces of silver. We all heard King David say to protect Absalom. He always knows what is going on, and you would have told him I killed his son.”

Joab said, “I’m not going to waste my time with you.” Then he took three spears and thrust them into Absalom’s heart as he was hanging alive from the oak tree. Ten of Joab’s armor-bearers surrounded Absalom and made sure he was dead. Joab blew a trumpet to signal his troops to stop fighting Israel’s soldiers. They put Absalom’s body in a pit and piled huge stacks of rocks over him. And all the Israelites ran back to their homes.

When Absalom was alive, he had set up a monument to himself in the King’s Valley. He thought, “I don’t have any sons to carry on my name.” He named the column Absalom’s Monument, and it is still called that today.

Zadok’s son Ahimaaz said to Joab, “Let me run and take the good news to the king that the Lord has saved him from his enemy, Absalom.” Joab said, “No, you aren’t the one to take the news. You can be my messenger some other time but not today.” Then Joab said to a man from Ethiopia, “Go, tell the king what you saw.” The man bowed and ran off. Ahimaaz asked Joab if he could run with the news. Joab replied, “Why? You won’t get any reward for giving the news.” Ahimaaz said, “I know. But I still want to.” Joab said, “Alright. Run!” then Ahimaaz took a shortcut across the plain and got to Mahanaim before the Ethiopian did.

While David was sitting between the inner and outer gates of the city wall, a guard climbed to the top of the wall and saw a man running toward them. He shouted down to David to tell him this man was coming. David said, "If he is alone, he probably has good news." As the man got closer, the guard saw another man coming and shouted to David, "Here comes another man." The king said, "He must have good news too." The guard said, "The first one looks like Ahimaaz." The king replied, "He's a good man, so he's probably bringing good news."

Ahimaaz yelled to David, "We won!" He bowed to the king and said, "Praise the Lord because He has given you victory." When David asked, "Is Absalom all right?" Ahimaaz answered, "When Joab sent me, everyone was shouting, but I don't know why." David told him to step aside, and he did. Then the man from Ethiopia arrived and said, "The good news is that the Lord has given you victory over your enemies." The king asked, "Is Absalom all right?" and the man answered, "May all your enemies be like him." Immediately the king was emotionally disturbed. So he went up to the room over the gate and cried and kept saying, "O my son, Absalom! My son, my son, Absalom! I wish I could have died instead of you. O Absalom, my son, my son!"

This was a terrible situation. My people were not fighting Philistines or Canaanites, they were fighting each other. There was a war between Israel and Judah. In the same manner, the worst battles that you as Christians will have to fight will not be against unbelievers; rather, the worst battles will be against your own kind where a believer in Me, as it were, raises his or her spiritual sword against another believer. It is at those times when You need a love for your children, even as David loved Absalom, the rebel to the end.

King David Returns to Jerusalem

19Joab heard that the king was mourning for Absalom. And when David's troops heard of his grief for his son, the joy of that day's victory turned to sadness. They slipped back into Mahanaim like men ashamed after losing a battle. David held his hands over his face and kept on crying aloud, "O my son, Absalom! O Absalom, my son, my son!"

Joab went to the house where David was staying and said, “You have made your soldiers all feel ashamed. They saved your life and the lives of your sons, daughters, wives, and concubines. You seem to love those who hate you and hate those who love you. All of us seem to mean nothing to you. Would you be happy if Absalom were alive and all of us were dead? I suggest you go out there and thank the troops for what they did. If you don’t, they’ll all leave during the night. Then you’ll be worse off than ever before.” So the king went out and sat at the city gate. As news spread that he was there, everyone went to see him.

Meanwhile, the Israelites soldiers had gone home. People everywhere starting arguing, saying to each other, “David saved you from the Philistines, but then we made Absalom our king, and he chased David out of the country. But now that Absalom is dead let’s ask David to return and be our king again.”

So David sent a message to Zadok and Abiathar, the priests, to tell the leaders of the tribe of Judah, “I’ve heard that the nation wants me to continue as their king. But you don’t seem interested. Why? After all, we are related. So why haven’t you done anything to welcome me back?” Then David told them to tell Amasa, “You are my nephew, and I am making you my army commander in place of your cousin, Joab.” Amasa convinced the leaders of Judah that he was David’s commander, and so they told David to come back and bring his soldiers with him.

David started back, and when he got to the Jordan River, he saw that the people of Judah had come all the way to Gilgal to help him cross the river. Shimei, son of Gera the Benjamite, went from his hometown of Bahurim to welcome David back. He is the one who earlier had cursed David and thrown rocks and dirt at David. With Shimei were 1,000 Benjamites, Saul’s servant Ziba and Ziba’s 15 sons and 20 servants. They rushed to the Jordan and crossed over to bring the king’s belongings across the river. After crossing the Jordan, Shimei fell down before David, and he said, “Please forgive me and forget the awful thing I did when you left Jerusalem weeks ago. I know I sinned. That’s why I am one of the first ones to come greet you.”

Abishai, David’s cousin, said, “Shimei should be killed because he cursed the Lord’s chosen king.” David said, “What am I going to do with you and your brother Joab? This is a day for celebration, not killing anyone, because I have again been made the king of Israel.” Then he promised Shimei he would not be killed.

Mephibosheth, Saul's grandson, was with those who went to meet the king. He had missed David, so he hadn't washed his feet or clothes or trimmed his beard since David left. David asked him why he hadn't gone with him when he left Jerusalem. Mephibosheth said, "I wanted to, and I told Ziba to saddle my donkey. But Ziba lied about me, saying I didn't want to come. But you are wise like an angel of God, so I know you will do what is right. You could have killed all my relatives and me. But instead, you let me eat all my meals with you. So I have no complaints."

David replied, "Here's what I'll do. I'll divide all of Saul's property between you and Ziba." Mephibosheth responded, "No. Let him have it all. I'm glad to have you back."

Barzillai had come from Rogelim in Gilead to go across the Jordan with David. He was about 80 years old and was very wealthy. He was the one who had given a lot of food to David and his soldiers in Mahanaim. David invited him to come live in Jerusalem and would take care of him there. But Barzillai said, "No. I'm too old for you to have to do that. At my age of 80, I don't enjoy food, and I am hard of hearing. I would be nothing but a burden to you. Just crossing the river with you will be a great honor. Then I'll go to my hometown, where I can be buried near my parents. Why not let Kimham here go with you, and you can be kind to him?"

The king said, "Good idea. I'll take Kimham with me, and I'll do for him what I would have done for you." All the people crossed the Jordan with David. He hugged Barzillai, who then went home to Rogelim, and David went on to Gilgal, taking Kimham with him. And all of David's soldiers and half of Israel's army went with him across the river. But the men of Israel went to him and said, "Why did the people from Judah do all the work in taking all your belongings across the river?" The men of Judah heard this and said, "Why not? He is from our tribe. Why be so angry? We haven't eaten any of his food, and he hasn't given us any gifts."

"True," they responded. "But Judah isn't the only tribe in our nation. We have ten times as much right to him as you do. So why didn't you ask us to help? Don't forget that we were the first ones to suggest he come back as our king." The people of Judah spoke harshly in their replies.

Sheba's Revolt and Defeat

20 A scoundrel named Sheba, son of Beer, a Benjamite, blew a trumpet and yelled, "We have nothing to do with David, this son of Jesse. Let's all go home; he's not our king." So everyone except the people of Judah left David and followed Sheba. But the men of Judah stayed with David all the way from the Jordan River to Jerusalem. When he got back to his palace in Jerusalem, he placed his ten concubines whom he left there, and whom Absalom raped, in a separate house and under guard. He took care of their needs, but he did not sleep with them. They lived like widows the rest of their lives.

David ordered Amasa to gather the troops in Judah in three days and report back to him. But Amasa took longer than the three days. So David said to Abishai, "Sheba the scoundrel may do us more harm than Absalom did. So take my bodyguard, the Kerethites, and Pelethites, and go after him before he gets into a fortified city and we can't capture him." So Joab's men and David's bodyguard and David's best soldiers went out under Abishai's command to try to capture Sheba.

As they arrived at the great rock at Gibeon, Amasa met them. Joab was wearing his uniform with a dagger at his belt. As he greeted his cousin, Amasa, he secretly slipped the dagger from its holder. With his right hand, he grabbed Amasa by his beard as if to kiss him. Amasa didn't see the dagger in Joab's left hand, and Joab stabbed him in the stomach, and his insides spilled out onto the ground. Amasa died after Joab stabbed him that one time. Then Joab and his brother Abishai went after Sheba.

One of Joab's officers said to Amasa's troops, "If you are for David, come follow Joab." As Amasa was lying in his blood in the middle of the road, people stopped and stared at him. So Joab's officers dragged him to the side of the road and put a blanket over him. Then everyone went with Joab to capture Sheba.

Sheba went through Israel all the way north to the town of Abel Beth-Maacah. He enlisted more troops, some of whom were his relatives. Joab's troops surrounded the city and built a ramp against the city wall and began battering against the wall. A wise woman called out to Joab to come listen to her. When he did, she asked, "Are you Joab?" and he replied, "Yes. I am. Long ago people used to say, 'If you want good advice go to Abel.' We are a peace-loving and faithful people. You can trust us. Why are you trying to destroy a city that is loyal to Israel as a mother? Why destroy what belongs to the LORD?"

Joab said, “No, I don’t want to destroy your city. All I want is a man in your town named Sheba, who led a rebellion against King David. Hand him over to me, and we will leave your city.” The woman responded, “Alright. We will throw his head to you over the wall.”

The woman went to the town leaders and talked them into following her plan. So they cut off Sheba’s head and threw it over the wall to Joab. Then he played his trumpet to signal his victory, and each of Joab’s men went home. And Joab went back to David in Jerusalem.

Joab was the Israelite army commander-in-chief; Benaiah, son of Jehoiada, was in charge of the king’s bodyguard of Kerethites and Pelethites; Ado-ram was in charge of the labor force; Jehoshaphat, son of Ahilud, kept government records; Sheva was royal secretary; Zadok and Abiathar were priests; and Ira, the Jairite, was David’s priest.

Learn a negative lesson from Joab. Never do the right thing in the wrong way. Pray for people who do right in a ruthless way.

The Gibeonites Are Avenged

21 When David was king, a famine lasted three years. When David asked Me, the LORD, about this problem, I said, “This is because Saul and his family murdered the Gibeonites.” So David asked the Gibeonites to come see him. They were not Israelites; they were Amorites. And the Israelites had promised not to kill them, but Saul had tried to kill them all. David said to them, “What can I do for you to make up for what Saul did?” David wanted Me, the LORD, to bless My people again. They answered, “We don’t want you to give us any money, and we don’t want any Israelites to be put to death.” “What then can I do?” David asked.

“Give us seven descendants of Saul, the one who almost killed us all, so we can kill them and hang their bodies near Gibeah, Saul’s hometown.” David said, “I’ll give them to you.” He did not include Mephibosheth, Saul’s grandson, because of the promise he made to Jonathan, Mephibosheth’s father. But he gave them Armoni and another person named Mephibosheth, two sons of Rizpah, and Saul’s concubine. He also took five sons of Merab, Saul’s daughter, and Adriel, her husband. David gave these seven to the

Gibeonites who killed them and hung their bodies on a hill. They died in March at the beginning of the barley harvest.

Rizpah spread a rough cloth on a rock and stayed there through the entire several-month-long harvest to keep birds from her sons' bodies in the daytime and wild animals from eating them at night. When David learned what she did, he had their bones buried in the grave of Saul's father Kish at Zela. (Earlier he had taken the bones of Jonathan and Saul from Jabesh Gilead and buried them in that grave. The men of Jabesh Gilead had taken their bodies from the public square of the Philistines town of Beth-Shan after they died in battle on Mount Gilboa.)

On another occasion, the Philistines were again fighting Israel. David was in the battle with his men, and he became weak and tired. Ishi-Benob, a giant whose spearhead weighed several pounds and who had a new sword, said he would kill David. But Abishai, David's nephew, killed the Philistine. David's men urged David never to go into a battle with them again. They said, "Why risk putting out the light of Israel?"

Later the Philistines fought Israel in yet another battle. This was at Gob, and Sibbecai from Hushah killed Saph, another giant. In another battle at Gob Elhanan, son of Jaare, killed the brother of Goliath from Gath. The handle of his spear was huge like a weaver's beam. In yet another Philistine-Israelite battle, this time at Gath, another giant there had six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot. Jonathan, son of Shimeah, David's brother killed him. These four were descendants of giants in Gath and David and his troops killed them all.

It appears the giant was about to kill David—and David would have died—if Abishai had not intervened. Thank Me for people who saved you from destruction.

The Song of David

22 David sang the following song to Me, the Lord after I rescued him from Saul and his many enemies.

“The LORD is my rock, my fortress, and my Savior, my God where I am safe, the strength of my salvation. He is my shield, and He is strong for me like the horn of an animal. I go to Him for security and safety; He rescues me from violent men.

“I call on the LORD, who deserves to be praised, and He saves me from my enemies.

“Death, like waves of the ocean, surrounded me, and its waves just about destroyed me. The grave wrapped its ropes around me, and I faced the trap of death.

“But in my distress, I called to the LORD, my God, and He heard me from heaven, His temple, and my cry reached his ears.

“The earth shook and trembled, the columns holding up the sky quaked because He was angry.

“In His anger smoke poured from His nostrils and fire and burning coals came from his mouth.

He opened the heavens and came down to the earth, and He walked on dark clouds.

“He rode on the backs of winged creatures, and He appeared in the wind as if He had wings.

“Darkness was all around Him, and dark rain clouds were thick.
“Brightness shone around Him, and bolts of lightning flashed.

“The LORD thundered from heaven, and it was like the Most High God shouting.

“Then He shot arrows of lightning at His enemies, and they ran.

“At His command and the blast of His breath, the very bottom of the sea was revealed and could be seen.

“He reached down and grabbed me and pulled me out of the deep water.

“He rescued me from my powerful enemies, from those who were stronger than me.

“They attacked me when I was in trouble, but the LORD supported me.

“He brought me to a place of safety and rescued me because He takes delight in me.

“The LORD rewarded me for doing what is right and because I lead a clean life.

“I follow what the LORD desires, and I have not sinned by turning away from Him.

“I always keep God’s laws in mind, and I have not turned from His commands.

“I have been blameless before Him and have avoided sin.

“The LORD has done so much for me because He knows I am clean spiritually.

“You are faithful to those who are faithful to You. And You are trustworthy to those who are innocent.

“You show Yourself pure to those who are pure. And you are against those who are wicked.

“You rescue the humble, but you keep watching the proud to bring them down.

“You are like a lamp to me, LORD, turning my darkness into light.

“With Your help, I can defeat any army and climb up any wall to capture the city.

“God’s ways are always perfect. And the LORD’s word is true. He is like a protective shield for everyone who runs to Him for safety.

“Our LORD alone is the true God. He is reliable like a solid rock.

“God gives me strength and makes my way perfect.

“He helps me run as fast as a deer and helps me stand on the mountainsides like a mountain goat.

“He teaches me how to fight in war, and strengthens my arms to use a bow made of bronze.

“You are like a shield giving me victory over my enemies, and Your help has made me great.

“You clear the way for me to keep me from stumbling.

“I chased my enemies and crushed them, not stopping once till I defeated them.

“I crushed them completely, and they could not get up. They fell at my feet.

“You have strengthened me for battle. You have made my enemies fall victims to me.

“You made my enemies turn and run, and I destroyed them all.

“They called for help, but no one answered. They even cried to the Lord, but He refused to respond.

“I ground them to dust, and I stomped on them like mud in the streets, and I spread them out.

“You have given me victory over attacks from my people. You kept me as the leader of many nations, and people I didn’t even know now serve me.

“Foreigners cringe before me, and as soon as they hear me, they obey me. “They lose courage and come trembling from their hiding places.

“The Lord lives. Praise to my Rock. May God, the Rock of my salvation, be exalted.

“He destroys those who are against me and puts them under my power.

“He frees me from my enemies, keeps me where they can’t reach me, and rescues me from violent enemies.

“Therefore I will praise You, Lord, among the nations, and praise You with singing.

“God gives me, His king, great victories. He shows unfailing love to His chosen king, to me David and my descendants forever.”

The Last Psalm of David

23I, the Most High God, made David, the son of Jesse, king. He was anointed by Me, the God of Jacob. He is known as Israel’s psalmist. I, the Spirit of the Lord, spoke through David, telling him what to say. I, the Rock of Israel, said to him, “If you rule righteously and respect Me, I will be like a sunrise in a cloudless sky, and like refreshing rain that brings grass from the ground.”

I have chosen your family and made an eternal agreement with you, an agreement that is eternal and secure. I will always help you and fulfill your desires. I will toss aside evil people like thorns. They are not dug up by hand, but with an iron tool or sharp spear and are burned on the spot.

These are the names of David's best men: Chief of his three greatest soldiers was Josheb-Bassebeth, the Tahkemonite. In a single battle, he used his spear to kill men. Next was Eleazar, son of Dodo, a descendant of Ahoah. He and David fought the Philistines of Pas Dammim. The Israelite soldiers retreated, but Eleazar killed the Philistines till his hand was too tired to lift his sword. With this great victory, David's men simply returned and took the enemies' weapons and equipment.

Next was Shammah, son of Agee, the Hararite. One time the Philistines at Lehi attacked the Israelites in a field of lentils. The Israelites fled, but Shammah stood in the middle of the fields and killed the Philistines. I, the LORD, gave Israel a great victory.

One year in the summer at harvest time these three went to see David in the Adullam Cave while the Philistines were at the Rephaim Valley. The Philistines had occupied Bethlehem, and David was in a hideout. David mentioned that he was thirsty for some good fresh water from the well near Bethlehem. The three broke through the Philistine lines, got water from the well, and took it to David. But instead of drinking the water, he poured it out as a sacrifice to Me, his LORD. He explained, "I can't drink this because it is as precious as the blood of you three men who risked your lives to bring it to me."

Abishai, Jacob's brother, was over the three. One time he speared and killed 300 men. Because of this, he was as famous as the three. But he was not one of them; he was their leader.

Another great warrior, but not one of the three, was Benaiah, son of Jehoiada. He was from Kabzeel. His deeds included killing two of Moab's best warriors, killing a lion down in a snowy pit, and killing a tall Egyptian soldier. Benaiah had only a club in his hand, and the Egyptian had only a spear. Benaiah grabbed the spear and killed the Egyptian with it. These deeds made Benaiah as famous as the three, and he was honored above the thirty. David put him in charge of his bodyguard.

The thirty also included:

Asahel, Joab's brother,
Elhanan, son of Dodo, from Bethlehem;
Shammah from Harod;
Elika from Harod;
Helez the Paltite;
Ira, son of Ikkesh, from Tekoa;
Abiezer from Anathoth;
Mebunnai from Hushah;
Zalmon from Ahoah;
Maharai from Netophah;
Heleb, son of Baanah, from Netophah
Ittai, son of Ribai, from Gibeah (of Benjamin);
Benaiah from Pirathon;
Hiddai from Nahale-Gaash;
Abi-Albon the Arabathite;
Azmaveth from Bahurim;
Eliahba from Shaalbon;
Bene-Jashen;
Jonathan; Shammah from Harar;
Ahiam, son of Sharar, from Harar;
Eliphelet, son of Ahasbai, from Maacah;
Eliam, son of Ahithophel, from Giloh;
Hezro from Carmel;
Paarai from Arba;
Igal, son of Nathan, from Zobah;
Bani from Gad;
Zelek from Ammon;
Naharai from Beeroth (Joab's armor-bearer);
Ira the Ithrite;
Gareb the Ithrite

Uriah the Hittite.

There were 37 in all.

A Census is Taken

24 Again I, the LORD, was angry with the nation Israel. David had a census taken of his soldiers (though I had allowed satan to encourage David to do this). So David told Joab to go through all the tribes, from Dan in the north to Beersheba in the south to count the number of soldiers. Joab replied, “May you live to see your kingdom with 100 times more people than it has now. But why do you want this census taken?” The king insisted they take the census, so Joab and his officers left to count the people.

They first crossed the Jordan River and camped south of the Aroer and then went to Gad and on to Jazer. From there they went north to Gilead and on west to Sidon. Then they arrived at the fortress of Tyre and to all the cities of the Hivites and Canaanites. Then they went south all the way to Beersheba in the Southern Desert. They got back to Jerusalem after nine months and 20 days. Joab told David the number of soldiers was 800,000 in Israel’s ten tribes and 500,000 in Judah.

David’s conscience then convicted him, and he said to Me, the LORD, “I have sinned greatly. Taking this military census was wrong. Please forgive me for doing this foolish thing.” The next morning I spoke to the prophet Gad, who was David’s seer. I told Gad to tell David that I was giving him a choice of one of three options. So Gad said to David, “You may choose three years of famine throughout the land, or three months of running from your enemies, or three days of terrible disease throughout the land. Think this over and let me know what answer I should give to the Lord.”

David said, “That’s a tough decision. But I would rather fall into the hands of the LORD because of His mercy than the hands of our enemies.” So I, the LORD, sent a disease that morning, and it lasted three days, and 70,000 men in the nation died. But when the death angel was ready to destroy Jerusalem, I, the LORD, felt sorry for what was happening, and I told the angel to stop. So the angel stopped at the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.

When David saw My angel striking the people down with the disease, he said, “I have sinned terribly, but these people, my sheep, have done nothing

wrong. Let your punishment be only on my family and me.” In response, Gad went to David and told him to build an altar to Me, the LORD, on Araunah’s threshing floor. So David went to see Araunah, and when Araunah saw David and his men coming, he bowed before the king with his face to the ground.

When Araunah asked David why he came to see him, David said, “I want to buy your threshing floor so I can build an altar to My LORD, so the disease on my people will stop.” Araunah said, “Use whatever you like. Here are oxen for the offering, threshing boards, and yokes for wood to build a fire. I will not sell these; I will give all of these to you.” David said, “No. I insist on buying these things. I won’t sacrifice something to My LORD that costs nothing.” So David paid him 50 pieces of silver for the threshing floor and oxen. David built an altar there to Me, the LORD, and sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. And I, the LORD, answered his prayer and stopped the disease and no one else died from the illness.

You never get to the place that you’re beyond sin. Don’t be blind to evil, and I will keep you in the hour of temptation. Purpose not to sin against Me.

I AM GOD

That Answers by Fire

The Book of First Kings

First Kings records the attempt by Adonijah, a son of David, to steal the throne of Israel. David wisely led Solomon to ascend properly to the office. Solomon built My Temple but later fell away from Me. Then the kingdom was separated under Jeroboam and Rehoboam. First Kings traces the history of the divided nations. Jehoram was king over the southern kingdom of Judah, and Ahaziah became king after Rehoboam took over the northern kingdom of Israel.

Godly kings led the people to obey My law, and ungodly kings led the people away in disobedience. Since obedience brings blessings, there are events of prosperity when My people obey Me, and likewise, events of suffering when My people forsake Me.

Adonijah Attempts Take-Over of David's Throne

1 In his old age, King David couldn't keep warm in bed even with several blankets over him. So his officials found a very beautiful young woman to lie beside him and keep him warm. She was Abishag from Shunem. She took care of him, but he did not have sex with her.

Adonijah, son of David and Haggith, decided to make himself king in place of his father. So he hired chariots and horses, and 50 men to run in front of the chariots and horses, and 50 men to run in front of the chariots. Unfortunately, David didn't ask him what he was doing. Adonijah was Absalom's younger brother and was very handsome.

Adonijah asked his half-brother, Joab, plus Abiathar, the priest, to help him become king, and they agreed. But Zadok, the priest, Benaiah, son of Jehoiada, the prophet, Nathan, Shimei, Rei, and David's bodyguard refused

to support Adonijah. Then Adonijah sacrificed sheep, oxen, and calves at the Zoheleth stone near the En-Rogel spring, where he invited his brothers and royal officials of Judah to join him for his coronation. But he did not invite the prophet, Nathan or Benaiah or the king's bodyguard or his half-brother, Solomon.

Nathan asked Bathsheba, "Have you heard that your step-son Adonijah has made himself king, and David knows nothing about it? Here's what I suggest you do to save your life and the life of your son, Solomon. Go tell David, 'You promised me that Solomon would be the next king. So why is Adonijah king?' When you are talking with David, I'll come in and tell him what you said is true."

Bathsheba went to David's bedroom where Abishag was taking care of him, and she bowed down to him. He asked her what she wanted. And she said, "You promised that Solomon would be the next king. But I'm concerned that you don't realize Adonijah has made himself king. He has sacrificed a lot of oxen, calves, and sheep, and invited to his coronation all David's sons, Abiathar, the priest, and Joab, the army commander, but not Solomon. Everyone is waiting for you to announce the next king. If you don't, Solomon and I will be killed as soon as you die."

The prophet, Nathan, arrived just then, and he bowed before the king, and asked, "Did you say Adonijah would be the next king? He has sacrificed many oxen, calves, and sheep in a coronation ceremony, and he invited all the king's sons, Joab, your army commander, and Abiathar, the priest. But he did not invite me, Zadok the priest, Benaiah, and Solomon. Did you do this without telling us who would be the next king?"

David said, "Call Bathsheba." So she came in and stood there. Then David repeated what I did, "The Lord has been good to me. Now I'll keep the promise I made to him that Solomon will be the next king." Then Bathsheba bowed with her face to the ground and said, "May you live many more years." David then said, "Have Zadok, the priest, the prophet, Nathan, and Benaiah come in." When they arrived, he said, "Take my servants and put Solomon on my mule and go to the Gihon Spring. When you get there, have Zadok and Nathan announce that he is the next king. Blow a trumpet and shout, 'Long live King Solomon!' Then bring him here to sit on my throne as Israel's next king."

Benaiah responded with a prayer to Me, “Amen! May the LORD, the God of David, make it happen. May He be with Solomon as He was with you, and may he be an even greater king.”

Zadok, Nathan, Benaiah, and David’s bodyguard led Solomon to the Gihon Spring riding on David’s mule. Zadok took oil from the tabernacle and poured it on Solomon’s head. They blew a trumpet, and everyone shouted, “Long live King Solomon.” On the way back to Jerusalem the people were playing flutes and were shouting for joy. They made such a noisy celebration that the ground shook.

As Adonijah and his guests were finishing eating at a banquet, Joab asked, “Why all this noise?” Just then Jonathan, son of Abiathar, the priest rushed in, and Adonijah said, “I assume you have good news.” “Not so. David has made Solomon king. David put him on his own mule and sent him to the Gihon Spring with Zadok, Nathan, Benaiah, and David’s bodyguard. Zadok poured oil from the tabernacle on Solomon, making him the next king. The noise you hear is the people celebrating and rejoicing. Solomon is now sitting on the throne.” David’s officials invoked My blessing, “May God make Solomon an even greater king than you.”

David then worshiped in his bed and prayed to Me, “Praise the LORD, the God of Israel, who has made my son king and let me live to see it.”

Adonijah’s guests quickly left the banquet and went their separate ways because they were afraid for their lives. And Adonijah, afraid that Solomon might kill him, ran to the tabernacle and grabbed the corners of the altar of burnt offering. Solomon heard about this and said, “If he behaves himself, I won’t hurt him. But if he doesn’t, I’ll kill him.” Solomon had some men get Adonijah. When he bowed down to Solomon, the king said, “Adonijah, go on home.”

Always go about My work in the right way, at the right time, at the right place and may you seek My wisdom and approval of godly people when doing My service. Act quickly when a crisis approaches and wait patiently; when time dictates, problems will solve themselves. I, the Lord, will teach you how to interpret the differences between these two periods of time. You need good, godly, and smart counselors. Listen to them to find My plan for your life.

King David's Final Instructions to Solomon

2 When David knew he was about to die, he gave these final words to Solomon about Me: "I will soon die, as must everyone. I encourage you to be strong and mature. Obey God's laws, regulations, and commands in the Law of Moses. Then you will be successful in all you do and wherever you go. If you and your descendants obey the Lord wholeheartedly, then one of them will always be king of Israel.

"You know that Joab killed my two commanders, Abner and Amasa. He did it as an act of war, but it was in a time of peace, and their blood stained his belt and sandals. Do with him what you think is best, but don't let him die in peace.

"The sons of Barzillai, the Gileadite, helped me when I was escaping from Absalom. So be kind to them and let them eat their meals with you. You remember Shimei, son of Gera, from Bahurim in Benjamin who cursed me when I was going to Mahanaim. Later when he came to greet me at the Jordan River, I told him I wouldn't kill him. But he is still guilty. So plan to have him killed."

Then David died and was buried in Jerusalem. He had reigned over Israel for 40 years, seven and a half years in Hebron and 33 years in Jerusalem. Solomon became king of Israel, and his reign went well.

One day Adonijah went to see Bathsheba, his stepmother. When she asked him if he was coming to make trouble, he said, "No, I have a favor to ask." She said, "Go ahead; tell me." He replied, "You know that I was king for a short while. But now the Lord has made my brother king. So I have a small request." She asked, "What is it?" He said, "Please ask Solomon to let me marry Abishag, the girl from Shunem. I know he won't say no to you." Bathsheba said, "Okay. I will ask him."

When Bathsheba went to speak to Solomon, he stood up and then bowed down before her. He sat down and had another throne brought in for her. She said, "I have a small request." He asked, "What is it, my mother?" She said, "Please let your half-brother Adonijah marry Abishag."

Solomon said, "What? Since he is my older brother, that is like asking that the kingdom be his. And Abiathar, the priest, and Joab, the army commander, are on his side. May God strike me dead if Adonijah doesn't die today. The Lord has made me king of Israel and has promised that my

descendants will also be Israel's kings." So the king had Benaiah go kill Adonijah.

Solomon then told Abiathar the priest, "Go back home to Anathoth. You should die too, but I won't kill you now because you carried the sacred chest, and you suffered with my father in his troubles." Solomon took away the priesthood from Abiathar. And this fulfilled My promise made at Shiloh that Eli's descendants would not continue to serve as priests.

When Joab heard about Adonijah's death, he ran to the tabernacle and grabbed the corners of the altar of burnt offering. Solomon heard about this, and he told Benaiah to kill him. When Benaiah went to the tabernacle and told Joab that the king said to come out, Joab refused. He said, "Kill me here." Benaiah told this to Solomon, and Solomon said, "Do what he said. Kill him there. Then my family won't be responsible for his foolishly murdering innocent men. He will be responsible for the death of Abner and Amasa. Joab and his descendants will always be guilty of these murders, but may the Lord give David and his descendant's peace."

Benaiah killed Joab, and Joab was buried near his house in the desert. Solomon then made Benaiah the army commander in place of Joab, and he made Zadok the priest in place of Abiathar.

The king told Shimei, "Build a house here in Jerusalem, but don't go outside the city. The minute you cross Kidron Valley, you will die." Shimei said, "That's alright with me." So he lived in Jerusalem a long time. But three years later two of Shimei's slaves escaped to King Achish in Gath. Shimei saddled his donkey, searched for them, found them, and brought them to Jerusalem.

Solomon heard that Shimei had done this. So he called in Shimei and said, "I warned you that if you left Jerusalem, you would die. So why have you broken this promise? And by the way, I haven't forgotten all the terrible things you did to my father, David. The Lord will punish you for what you have done. The Lord will bless me, and my descendants will be Israel's kings."

Then Solomon told Benaiah to kill Shimei, and he did. Solomon was now in complete control of the kingdom with no one opposing him.

Be decisive in dealing with sin, rebellion, and divisiveness in your heart. Then I will forgive you! Cleanse yourself! I will give you strength to resolve past problems with others. Be decisive for Me, and I will use you in My service.

King Solomon Receives Wisdom, Riches, and Honor

3 Solomon signed a treaty with Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and married his daughter. She lived in the City of David until his palace, My Temple, and the city wall were completed.

Because My Temple had not yet been built, people offered sacrifices at shrines on hilltops. Solomon loved Me, the LORD. He followed his father David's instructions, except that he, like others, offered sacrifices and burned incense on hilltop shrines. The most important of the hilltop altars was in Gibeon, and Solomon offered there 1,000 animals as burnt offerings.

At Gibeon, I, the LORD, appeared to Solomon in a dream and told him to ask for anything he wanted. Solomon answered, "You were kind to my father David because he was faithful and honest. And now You have given him a son as king. You made me king in place of my father David, but I am young and inexperienced. And here I am among Your chosen people who are almost more than can be counted. Make me wise and help me know the difference between right and wrong. No one by himself could lead this great people of Yours."

I, the LORD said, "I like what you have asked for. Since you didn't ask for a long life or riches or the defeat of your enemies but for wisdom, I will give you wisdom and insight greater than anyone else. And I will give you what you didn't ask for—wealth and honor—greater than any other king. And you will live a long time if you obey Me and follow My commands as your father David did."

Solomon woke up and realized that I, his LORD, had spoken to him in a dream. He went back to Jerusalem and into the tabernacle. He offered burnt offerings and fellowship offerings on the altar of burnt offering as he faced

toward (but could not see) the sacred chest. Then he gave a feast for all his officials.

One day two prostitutes went to Solomon to settle an argument. One of them said, “This woman and I live in the same house. My baby was born at home, and three days later her baby was born. Her baby died during the night when she rolled over on him. So she got up and took my son from me while I was asleep, and she put her dead son next to me. And when I got up in the morning, I saw he was dead. Then in the morning light, I could see it wasn’t my son at all.” The other woman said, “Wrong. The dead son is yours, and the living one is mine.” They argued back and forth. Then Solomon said, “You each claim the living child is yours, and the dead one belongs to the other.” Then he said, “Bring me a sword.” And he ordered “Cut the baby in half. That way each mother can have half of the child.”

The woman whose son was alive said to the king, “Please don’t kill my son. Give him to her.” But the other woman said, “Go ahead and cut him in half.” Then Solomon said, “Give the baby to the woman who wants him to live. Obviously, she is his mother.” Everyone in Israel was amazed when they heard the king’s decision and realized that I had given him great wisdom.

Pray to Me for wisdom. But study; memorize My Word and review it often. I will help you be smart. But that’s only the beginning of wisdom, Pray for My indwelling Holy Spirit to speak to you and help you understand My will for your life. Pray for wisdom. I will give you everything you need to serve Me and worship Me. Like Solomon, realize you are weak and human. Pray for My presence.

Solomon’s State Officials

4 In Solomon’s rule over Israel, he had these nine top officials: The high priest was Azariah, son of Zadok. Secretaries were Elihoreph and Ahijah, sons of Shisha. The government record-keeper was Jehoshaphat, son of Ahilud. The army commander was Benaiah, son of Jehoiada. The priests were Zadok and Abiathar. In charge of regional officers was Azariah, son of Nathan. A priest and adviser to the king was Zabud, son of

Nathan. The manager of palace affairs was Ahishar. And in charge of the labor force was Adoniram, son of Abda.

The regional officers, one for each tribe, provided food for the king and his household, each one giving supplies for a month. These are their names:

Ben-Hur was in charge of the hill country of Ephraim.

Ben-Deker was in charge of the towns of Makaz, Shaalbim, Beth-Shemesh, and Elon-Beth-Hanan.

Ben-Hesed was in charge of the towns of Arubboth and Socoh, and the region of Hephher.

Ben-Abinadab was in charge of Naphoth-Dor and was married to Solomon's daughter Taphath.

Baana, son of Ahilud, was in charge of the towns of Taanach and Megiddo. He was also in charge of the whole region of Beth-Shan near the town of Zarethan, south of Jezreel from Beth-Shan to Abel-Meholah to the other side of Jokmeam.

The son of Geber was in charge of the town of Ramoth in Gilead and the villages in Gilead, belonging to the family of Jair, a descendant of Manasseh. He was also in charge of the region of Argob in Bashan which had 60 walled towns with bronze bars on their gates.

Ahinadab, son of Iddo, was in charge of the territory of Mahanaim.

Ahimaaz was in charge of the territory of Naphtali and was married to Solomon's daughter, Basemath.

Baana, son of Hushai, was in charge of the territory of Asher and the town of Bealoth.

Jehoshaphat, son of Paruah, was in charge of the territory of Issachar.

Shimei, son of Ela, was in charge of the territory of Benjamin.

Geber, son of Uri, was in charge of Gilead, where King Sihon of the Amorites and King Og of Bashan had lived. And one officer was in charge of the territory of Judah.

So many people were living in Israel and Judah at this time that they seemed like grains of sand on a beach. Everyone had plenty to eat and drink, and all were happy. Solomon's reign extended from the Euphrates River to the land of the Philistines and south to Egypt. These kingdoms paid him taxes every year.

Solomon's provisions for one day were 185 bushels of fine flour, 375 bushels of coarsely ground flour, ten grain-fed cattle, 20 pasture-fed cattle, 100 sheep, and many deer, gazelles, roebucks, and geese. His reign extended over all the kingdoms west of the Euphrates River, from Tiphseh to Gaza. And there was peace in that entire region. In Solomon's lifetime, Judah and Israel were free from warfare and each family had its own grapevine and fig tree.

Solomon had 40,000 stalls for chariot horses and 12,000 charioteers. Each month the regional officers brought food to Solomon and his officials. They also brought barley and straw for the horses.

I gave Solomon great wisdom and insight, and he had a lot of interests. He was wiser than anyone else, including the wise people of the East and in Egypt. He was wiser than anyone else in the world, including Ethan the Ezrahite, Heman, Calcol, and Darda, sons of Mahol. He was famous in all the countries around Israel and Judah. Solomon wrote 3,000 proverbs and 1,005 songs. He knew all about animals, birds, reptiles, fish, and plant life from the cedars of Lebanon to the hyssop plant. Kings from nations everywhere sent people to listen to his wisdom.

Pray to wisely live as you read Solomon's proverbs. You don't know all things, and you never will. Let Me teach you what you need to know, and guide you where you need to go.

I, The LORD, Fulfill My Promise to David

5 King Hiram of Tyre had always been a good friend of David. So he sent officials to meet with Solomon. Solomon wrote back this message about Me: "As you know, my father David wanted to build a temple for the Lord. But he couldn't because of wars he was engaged in. But now the LORD, my God, has given us peace in my kingdom with no threat of war anywhere. So I am planning to build a temple for my LORD, just as He told my father that I should do. Please have cedars from Lebanon cut down for me. I'll send some men to work with yours, and I will pay your men whatever you suggest. No one here can cut down timber the way you Sidonians can."

I gave David a promise that his son would build a temple, and it happened. I have promised that My Holy Spirit would dwell in you and it happened (John 14:26).

Hiram was pleased to hear from Solomon. He said, "I am glad the LORD gave David a wise son as king of Israel." Then he sent this reply to Solomon: "I will give you all the cedar and cypress logs you need. My men will carry them down from Lebanon to the Mediterranean Sea and build them into rafts and send them to wherever you want them. There we will untie the loop, and your workers can take them from there. You can pay me with food for my workers."

Hiram produced for Solomon all the cedars and cypress timber he needed. And every year Solomon sent him 125,000 bushels of wheat and 115,000 gallons of olive oil. I, the LORD, blessed Solomon with great wisdom, and Hiram and Solomon signed a formal peace alliance.

Solomon ordered 30,000 workers from all over Israel to cut logs for My Temple. Each month he sent 10,000 workers to Lebanon so that each worker was in Lebanon for one month and home for two months. Adoniram was in charge of the labor force. Solomon also had 80,000 workers to cut stones, 70,000 men to carry the stones, and 3,300 others to supervise the workers. They cut and shaped large blocks of stone for My Temple foundation. Solomon and Hiram's men worked with men from Gebal in Lebanon in getting the logs and stones ready for My Temple.

The Building of My Temple

6In the spring of Solomon's fourth year as king (966 BC), his workers began building My Temple. This was 480 years after the Israelites left Egypt. My Temple was 90 feet long, 30 feet wide and extended 15 feet from the front of My Temple. Narrow windows were made in My Temple.

Three levels of storage rooms were built along the sides and back of My Temple. The rooms on the bottom level were 7 ½ feet wide, the rooms on the second level were 9 feet wide, and the rooms on the third level were 10 ½ feet wide. The rooms were connected to My Temple walls by beams or

ledges from the wall. To avoid the noise of hammers and chisels at My Temple site, workers shaped the stones at the quarry.

I can fit all the “stones” of your life together perfectly, just as the stones for Solomon’s temple were cut in the quarry but assembled on site. May your life be a “temple” where I dwell and where I am worshiped.

Entrance to the bottom rooms was on the south side of the building, with stairs leading to the other levels. My Temple roof was made of cedar beams. The storage rooms around My Temple were each 7 ½ feet high and were attached to My Temple by cedar beams.

I, the LORD, told Solomon, “If you follow My regulations and obey My commands, I will keep My promise to David. I will live among the Israelites, and I will not leave them.”

So, at last, My Temple was finished. The workers paneled the inside walls with cedar, and they covered the floor with cypress. The most holy place at the back of My Temple was 30 feet square. It was paneled from floor to ceiling with cedar. In front of this was the holy place, 60 feet long. The inside stone walls were covered with cedar paneling that was decorated with carved gourds and flowers.

In the most holy place was the sacred chest. This room was 30 feet square and 30 feet high, and the walls and ceiling were covered with pure gold. The altar of incense, just outside the room, was covered with cedar. The inside walls of My Temple were covered with gold and gold chains hung at the entrance to the most holy place, and the cedar-covered altar of incense was also covered with gold.

Solomon made two winged creatures of olive wood, each 15 feet high, for the most holy place. Each one had two wings, 7 ½ feet long. The creatures were identical in size, each 15 feet high. Their spread-out wings extended from wall to wall and touched each other at the center of the room, and they were covered with gold.

Carved on the walls of the most holy place and the holy place were winged creatures, palm trees, and flowers. And the floor of both rooms was covered with gold. The double doors to the most holy place were made of

olive wood with five-sided doorposts. Carved on the doors were winged creatures, palm trees, and flowers, all covered with gold. Two doorposts to the main entrance to My Temple were made of olive wood, and the two folding doors were made of cypress. Carved on these doors were winged creatures, palm trees, and flowers, all covered with gold.

The walls of the inner courtyard had three levels of cut stones and one layer of cedar beams. The foundation of My Temple was finished in May of Solomon's fourth year, and the entire building was completed in seven years in the fall of Solomon's 11th year (959 BC).

Pray for My presence in your life. More than just My influence, let Me live in You.

Other Building Projects of King Solomon

7 However, Solomon's palace took 13 years to build. One of the largest rooms, called the Lebanon Forest Hall, was 150 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet high. Cedar ceiling beams rested on four rows of cedar columns with 15 columns in each row. Three rows of windows were on each wall, facing each other. And all six doorways were rectangular, hung in sets of three, facing each other.

The Pillars Hall was 75 feet long and 45 feet wide and had a porch at the front covered by canopy supported pillars. The walls of the Judgment Hall, which is where Solomon sat to hear legal cases, were paneled with cedar from floor to ceiling. The place where he lived was behind the Judgment Hall. It was surrounded by a courtyard. He built a palace much like his palace for Pharaoh's daughter, his wife.

All these structures from top to bottom were made entirely of huge stones cut to size and trimmed with saws. Some of the foundation stones were 15 feet long, and some were 12 feet long. Above these foundation stones were other stones cut to size, with cedar beams over them. The walls of the great courtyard had three layers of cut stones topped with one layer of cedar beams, just like the front porch and the inner courtyard of My Temple.

Hiram was a bronze worker in Tyre. His father, now dead, had been a bronze worker too, and he was half Jewish because his mother was from the tribe of Naphtali. King Solomon asked Hiram to come to Jerusalem to do all the bronze work for My Temple, and he did. He made two bronze columns 27 feet tall and 18 feet around. He made a bronze top for each column; each top was 7 ½ feet high. These tops were decorated with seven rows of chain-like designs and with two rows of designs that looked like pomegranates. The tops of the two columns were shaped like lilies and were six feet high. The chain-like designs were above the lily-shaped tops, and around each top were 200 pomegranates in each of two rows. Hiram placed the columns on each side of My Temple door. He called the one on the south Jakin (meaning “He Makes Secure”) and the one on the north he named Boaz (meaning “He Is Strong”). The tops of the columns were shaped like lilies. The construction of the columns was completed.

Then Hiram made a large round water tank called “The Sea.” It was 15 feet across from rim to rim, about 7 ½ feet deep, and 45 feet around. Just below the rim were two rows of bronze gourds, ten gourds to every 18 inches. The tank was set on top of 12 bronze bulls, with these facing outward in each of four directions. The sides were about three inches thick, and the rim flared out like a lily blossom. The tank held about 11,000 gallons.

Hiram then made ten movable bronze stands. Each one was six feet square and 4 ½ feet high, and each stand had square side panels braced with crossbars. On the panels were carved figures of lions, bulls, and winged creatures. Each stand had bronze wheels and axles, and on each stand, a basin rested on four supports with flower designs. A round frame over each stand was 27 inches across, and an opening in each stand was 18 inches high and decorated with floral designs. The side panels of the stands were square. The wheels under the panels were 27 inches across with axles attached to the stand. The wheels were like chariot wheels. The axles, rims, spokes, and hubs were made of bronze.

Each stand had four handles, one at each corner. At the top of each stand was a rim nine inches wide. The supports and panels were attached to the stands, and the supports and panels were decorated with winged creatures, lions, palm trees, and floral designs. The stands were all the same size and were alike, cast from the same mold.

Hiram also made ten bronze bowls for washing, one for each stand. Each bowl was six feet across and could hold about 230 gallons. He put five stands on the south side of My Temple and five on the north. And he put the large basin at the southeast corner of My Temple. He also made pans, shovels, and sprinkling bowls.

These are the items Hiram made for King Solomon for My Temple: two columns, two bowl-shaped tops for the columns, two chain-like designs on the tops of the columns, 400 pomegranates for the chain designs, 10 moveable stands with their 10 basins, the round water tank with 12 bulls under it, and pots, shovels, and sprinkling bowls. All these items were made for My Temple from bronze. These were made in clay molds in the Jordan Valley between Succoth and Zarethan. Solomon did not weigh all the utensils because there were so many.

Solomon also had these items made from gold for My Temple: the gold altar, the gold table for the Bread without Yeast, 10 lampstands in front of the most holy place, flowered designs, lamps and tongs, dishes, lamp snuffers, bowls, incense bowls, fire pans, and door sockets for the most holy place and door sockets for the main room of My Temple.

When Solomon finished the construction of My Temple, he put into the storage rooms the gold and silver items David had dedicated to Me, the LORD.

Worship Me who sits upon the mercy seat on top of the sacred chest.

The Sacred Chest is Brought into My Temple

8 Solomon asked all the tribal leaders and family heads to come to Jerusalem to see him moving the sacred chest from Zion, the City of David, to My Temple. This was during the Festival of Shelters in September. When all the leaders had arrived, the priests and Levites brought the sacred chest and the tabernacle and its furnishings to My Temple. Solomon and many Israelites walked in front of the chest, and they sacrificed more sheep and cattle than could be counted.

The priests carried the sacred chest into the most holy place and put it under the winged creatures. The wings of the creatures covered the chest and its carrying poles. The poles were so long that their ends could be seen from the holy place. And they stayed there from then on. The only objects in the sacred chest were the two stone tablets Moses had put in it at Mount Horeb (Sinai), where I made an agreement with the Israelites after they left Egypt.

When the priests went out of My Temple, a cloud that reflected My glory filled My Temple so that the priests could not serve there. Then Solomon of Me, “This cloud, as the LORD said, shows God is with me. I have built for Him a great temple.” Then Solomon blessed the people, and he said, “Praise the LORD, the God of Israel. He has kept the promise He made to my father, David. He told David He had not yet chosen the city where His temple would be built, but He chose a man to be the leader of the people. David wanted to build a temple for the LORD. But the LORD said, ‘That’s good that you wanted to do that, but your son, not you, will build a temple to honor Me.’ As He promised, the LORD has made me king, and I have built the temple for the LORD. I also made a place in the temple for the sacred chest and in that chest the two flat stones on which is written the agreement the Lord made with our ancestors.”

Solomon stood to face the altar with his hands lifted toward heaven in front of all the Israelites. He prayed, “O LORD, God of Israel, no God is like You. You keep Your agreement based on Your unfailing love. You are loyal to Your servants who obey You. Today You have kept Your promise to David, my father. Now LORD, God of Israel, You promised David that his descendants will always be king of Israel if they obey You as he has done. So now please keep this promise too.

“How could you live on the earth in this temple when even the highest heavens cannot contain You? Yet please hear and answer my prayer. Please watch over this temple day and night where You said You would be worshiped. Hear my prayer and the prayer of Your people; hear from heaven and forgive them.”

Solomon prayed, “Suppose someone accuses a person of a crime, and the accused stands in front of the altar and says he is innocent. Then in heaven decide who is right. Punish him if he is guilty, or let him go free if he is innocent. Suppose Your people sin and their enemies defeat them.

Then if they confess and turn from their sin, hear and forgive them and bring them back to this land You gave their ancestors.

“Suppose there is no rain because Your people sin against You. But if they confess their sin, then hear and forgive them. Teach them to do what is right and send rain on the land you promised is theirs.

“If there is a famine in the land because of a crop disease or crops being eaten by locusts or caterpillars, or if enemies surround their cities, or Your people become deathly sick, if the people pray with their hands lifted at the temple, then hear and forgive them. Deal with each person as You should because You know what is in everyone’s heart. Then they will revere You as they live in the land You gave their ancestors.

“Foreigners will hear about You and Your mighty power. If they pray toward Your temple, hear them and answer their prayers. Then everyone on the earth will come to know You and revere You and will know that I have built this temple to honor you.

“Suppose You send Your people to war, and they pray to You toward Your Temple which I have built to honor You. Hear their prayer and help them. Everyone sins. But suppose Your people sin against You, and You become angry and let their enemies take them captive to other countries. Then if they have a change of heart and repent and admit they sinned and pray toward Jerusalem and Your Temple that honors You, hear their prayer from heaven, where You live, and help them. Please forgive Your people of their sins against You, and make their captors be kind to them. They are Your people whom You brought out of Egypt, which was like being in a furnace. May Your eyes see, and Your ears hear their plea for help. You brought our ancestors out of Egypt, and You told Moses that out of all the nations You had chosen them to be Your special people.”

When Solomon finished this prayer, he had been kneeling with his hands lifted toward heaven. Then he stood up from before Me, the LORD and blessed the Israelites in these words: “Praise the LORD! He has given us peace, as He promised. And every good promise has happened. May the LORD our God be with all of us as He was with our ancestors, and may He never leave us. May He help us follow Him and obey the commands, laws, and regulations He gave our ancestors. And may He remember this prayer day and night, and may He meet all their needs. Then people everywhere will know that You, the LORD, are the true God. May we always be faithful

to the Lord, our God, obeying His laws and commands, just as you are doing now.”

Solomon and the people dedicated My Temple to Me, the LORD, by offering 22,000 cattle and 120,000 sheep and goats as fellowship offerings. Also that day Solomon dedicated the courtyard in front of My Temple. He offered burnt offerings, grain offerings, and the fat of the fellowship offerings there because the bronze altar of burnt offering was too small for all the offerings being given.

Solomon and all Israel celebrated the Festival of Shelters for seven days. The people had come all the way from Lebo Hamath in the north to the brook of Egypt in the South. Actually, they celebrated for two weeks, one week for the fellowship offerings, and one week for the Festival of Shelters. After the Festival, the people blessed the king and went home happy because I, the LORD, had been good to David and My people, Israel.

Pray in the building where I am worshiped. But also pray everywhere. Let your outward body reflect your inner reverence to Me. Thank Me for every time you enter My presence in My house.

I, the LORD, Appear to Solomon a Second Time

9After Solomon finished building My Temple, the royal palace, and other projects, I, the LORD, appeared to him again in a dream as I had done in Gibeon. I said, “I heard your prayer and your request. I have set apart this temple you have built to honor My name. I will always watch over it. If you follow Me with integrity and sincerity, as your father David did, obeying My laws and commands, I will see that a descendant of yours is always king over Israel, as I promised David.

“But if you or your descendants turn from Me and disobey My commands and laws, and worship other gods, I will take them from this land, and I will reject this temple that I have set apart to honor Me. Israel will then be made fun of and ridiculed. And My Temple will become a pile of rocks, and people who see it in ruins will be shocked, and they will say,

‘Why has the Lord done this to this land and His temple?’ Then they will answer, ‘We know why. It’s because they have rejected the Lord their God who brought their ancestors out of Egypt, and they worshiped false gods.’”

It took seven years for Solomon to build My Temple and 13 years to build the royal palace, 20 years in all. Then he gave 20 towns in Galilee to King Hiram in Tyre as payment for all the cedar, cypress, and gold Hiram had given Solomon. But when Hiram went to see the towns, he didn’t like them. He said, “Solomon, my friend, why are you giving me these towns? They are worthless.” So Hiram called the area Cabul (meaning “Worthless”). Yet Hiram had sent Solomon almost five tons of gold.

After Solomon’s workers finished My Temple and the royal palace, he had them fill in the Millo with terraces on the east side of Jerusalem, build a wall around the city, and rebuild the towns of Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer. Earlier Pharaoh of Egypt had captured Gezer, burned it, and killed the Canaanite people who lived there. Then Pharaoh gave Gezer to his daughter when she married Solomon, and Solomon rebuilt it. Also, he built up Lower Beth-Horan, Baalath, and Tamar in the Judean desert. He also built towns for storing his grain supplies, and towns where he would keep his chariots and horses, and he built whatever he wanted in Jerusalem, Lebanon, and elsewhere in Israel.

Some non-Israelites were still living in the land. They were Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites, who were not killed when Joshua conquered the land. So Solomon made them slaves. But he did not make slaves of his own people. Instead, he made them his soldiers, government officials, army officers, commanders, chariot commanders, and chariot drivers. He appointed 550 men to oversee the slave labor.

After Pharaoh’s daughter moved from the City of David to the royal palace, he built the Millo by filling it with terraces. Three times a year Solomon sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings on My Temple altar and burned incense on it. He had several ships at Ezion-Geber, near Elath in Edom on the shore of the Red Sea. Hiram sent some of his sailors to work with Solomon’s sailors. They sailed together to Ophir and brought back 16 tons of gold for Solomon.

I challenged Solomon because I wanted him to be both wise and godly. I want you also to be wise and godly. Ask for wisdom from Me

(see James 1:5), but also ask Me to make you godly.

The Queen of Sheba Visits King Solomon

10When the Queen of Sheba heard how wise Solomon was, she went to Jerusalem to challenge him with some difficult questions. She arrived with many camels loaded with lots of spices, gold, and jewels. She asked him many difficult questions, and he answered each one. She was amazed at his wisdom and at the beauty of his palace and was overwhelmed with all the food he served, and his officials and servants in their uniforms, the people who served his wine, and the burnt offerings he made at My Temple.

She said to Solomon, “In my country, I heard about your wisdom and all you’ve done. I didn’t believe it until I saw it with my own eyes. But I hadn’t heard even half of it. Your wisdom and wealth are greater than I was told. How happy your people and officials must be as they listen to your wisdom. Praise be to the LORD, your God, who is pleased with you and made you king. Because of His love for Israel, He has made you king so you can rule with justice and make right decisions.”

She gave Solomon 4 ½ tons of gold, and large amounts of spices and jewelry; in fact, this was the largest single gift of spices he ever received. As stated earlier, King Hiram’s sailors brought gold from Ophir, as they also brought large amounts of sandalwood and precious gems. Solomon used the sandalwood to make steps for My Temple and palace and to make harps and lyres for his musicians. No one had ever seen so much sandalwood. Solomon gave the Queen of Sheba everything she asked for plus other items. Then she and her officials returned to her country.

Every year Solomon received 25 tons of gold, besides what he collected from merchants, dignitaries, and Arabian kings. He made 200 gold shields, using about 7 ½ pounds of gold for each shield, and 300 smaller shields, using about four pounds of gold for each shield. He put them in his palace in the Lebanon Forest Hall.

His huge throne was made of ivory and covered with gold. It had six steps, a rounded back, and the statue of a lion on each side. Also, it had two lions on each step, 12 in all. Nothing was like his throne in any other kingdom.

His cups and dishes and household items in his Lebanon Forest Hall were made of gold. His many trading ships sailed with Hiram's ships, and every three years they brought back gold, silver, ivory, and apes and peacocks. King Solomon was richer and wiser than any other king. Everyone wanted to meet with him to hear the wisdom I had given him. Every year people brought him gifts of silver and gold, and clothes, weapons, spices, horses, and mules. He also had 1,400 chariots and 12,000 horses that he kept in Jerusalem and other cities. Silver was as common as rocks, and cedar was as common as Sycamore-fig trees in the foothills.

His merchants purchased horses and chariots in Egypt and Cilicia, paying about 15 pounds of silver for each chariot and almost four pounds of silver for each horse. His merchants also sold chariots and horses to the Hittite and Syrian kings.

Use your business ability as a testimony to outsiders, even as Solomon's business impressed the Queen of Sheba. Be a good witness so others will see Me in you.

King Solomon Turns Away From Me, the True God

11 I, the LORD, told the Israelites not to marry women from other nations because they worship foreign gods and they could influence the other Israelites to worship those gods. However, Solomon loved not only Pharaoh's daughter. He also loved women from Moab, Ammon, Edom, Sidon, and the land of the Hittites. Seven hundred of his wives were daughters of kings, and he also had 300 concubines, and they turned his heart from Me, the Lord. As he grew older, some of his wives led him to worship their gods instead of trusting completely in Me, the LORD, as his father David had done. He worshiped Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molech, the disgusting god of the Ammonites. This was sinful, and he did not follow Me, the LORD, completely as David had done. He even built a shrine on the Mount of Olives for Chemosh, the disgusting god of Moab, and one for Molech. He built shrines for each of his wives so they could burn incense and offer sacrifices to their gods.

I, the LORD, was very angry with Solomon because he turned away from Me, even after I, the LORD, appeared to him twice to warn him against worshiping foreign gods. I said, “Because you have not kept My agreement and have disobeyed My laws, I will take the kingdom from you and give it to one of your officials. But because David was your father, I won’t do this while you are alive. I will take the kingdom from your son. But I will still let him be king of one tribe because of David My servant and the city of Jerusalem.”

I, the LORD, brought against Solomon an enemy Hadad, a descendant of the Edomite king. Years before when Joab, David’s army commander, had gone to Edom to bury some Israelite soldiers, he stayed in Edom six months killing every male, except Hadad, then a boy, and some Edomite officials who escaped to Egypt. After leaving Midian, they went to Paran, where some others joined them. Pharaoh gave Hadad a house, land, and food. And Pharaoh gave him his sister-in-law, Queen Tahpenes, as his wife. They had a son, Genubath, who was raised in Pharaoh’s palace as his son.

While in Egypt Hadad heard that David and Joab had died. So he asked Pharaoh if he could return to his country. Pharaoh asked, “Why? Don’t you have everything here that you need?” Hadad answered, “Yes, I do. But I just want to visit my country.” I brought against Solomon another enemy, Rezon, son of Eliada, who had escaped from Hadadezer, king of Zobah. After David destroyed Zobah, Rezon led some rebels to Damascus and controlled the city. Rezon and Solomon were enemies from then on.

Another rebel against Solomon was Jeroboam, son of Nebat. He was one of Solomon’s officials, and he came from Zeredah in Ephraim. When Solomon was building the terraces on the east wall of the City of David, he put Jeroboam in charge of the labor force because he saw he was a hard worker. One day when Jeroboam was leaving Jerusalem, Ahijah, a prophet from Shiloh, grabbed Jeroboam’s new robe and tore it into pieces. He said to Jeroboam, “God said, ‘I will tear ten tribes from Solomon’s kingdom and give them to you. But I will give Judah and Benjamin to Solomon since David was My servant and Jerusalem is My city.

“I’m doing this because Solomon has turned from Me and is worshiping Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Sidonians, and Chemosh, the god of Moab, and Molech, the god of the Ammonites. He is not following Me, and he has not done what I consider right, and he has disobeyed My laws

and commands. I will take the kingdom from his son and make you ruler over ten tribes. That way David will always have a descendant ruling in Jerusalem, where I have chosen to be worshiped. You will rule over Israel, and every nation you want. I will be with you if you obey Me and do what is right and keep My commands and laws, as David did. And I will have your descendants rule Israel. I will punish David's descendants, but not forever." Solomon tried to kill Jeroboam, but he escaped to Egypt, where he was with Pharaoh Shishak until Solomon died.

Everything Solomon did as king and his wisdom is recorded in the book about him. He ruled in Jerusalem 40 years, and then died and was buried in the city of his father, David. His son Rehoboam became king.

Solomon was a sex addict! Keep yourself from illegal sex, keep yourself from addiction. May you find your greatest love in Me. Give Me first place in your life. Let Me sit on the throne of your life and rule you from the inside out.

Rehoboam Ignores Wise Counsel of Older Men

12Rehoboam went to Shechem, where he was to be crowned king. Jeroboam heard about this while he was still in Egypt. Some Israelite leaders sent for Jeroboam. Then they said to Rehoboam, "Your father Solomon was a hard taskmaster. We will serve you but only if you lighten our workload." Rehoboam responded, "I'll think about it and I'll give you an answer in three days." He asked the elders who served his father Solomon what they thought. They said, "If you do as they suggest, and make their workload easier, they will serve you well."

Then Rehoboam asked for advice from the young men he knew growing up. They answered, "Tell them, compared to my load, my father's load was light. It will be like saying my little finger is bigger than his waist. He made you work hard, but I will make you work harder. He used whips on you, but I will use whips with sharp metal tips that will feel like scorpion stings."

Three days later Jeroboam and all the people went to see Rehoboam in Schechem. He told the people he would follow the advice of the young men, He said, “My father used whips on you, but I’ll use scorpions.” He refused to do what the people wanted. Actually, this was of Me, the LORD, because it carried out what I had said to Jeroboam through the prophet Ahijah. The people then said, “We don’t need to follow David and his family. Let’s all go home, and Rehoboam can rule his own people.” So the people of Israel went home, but the tribe of Judah accepted Rehoboam as their king.

When Rehoboam sent Adoram, who was in charge of the forced labor, to talk with the people, they stoned him to death. Then Rehoboam jumped in his chariot and hurried home to Jerusalem. And Israel has continued to oppose David’s family in Judah. When the Israelites heard that Jeroboam was back from Egypt, they made him king over all Israel, except for Judah and Benjamin.

When Rehoboam got back to Jerusalem, he called together his army of 180,000 soldiers, and planned to force the ten tribes of Israel to accept him as their king. But I told the prophet Shemaiah to warn Rehoboam not to go to war against Israel because they are all his relatives, and to tell him to tell the soldiers to go home because this was planned by Me, the LORD. So the soldiers all went home.

Jeroboam rebuilt Shechem in Ephraim and moved there and made it his capital. And he built Penuel. Later he got to thinking, “Everyone goes to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices at the temple, and so they may become loyal again to Rehoboam. They might kill me and go back to Rehoboam as their king.” On the advice of his counselors, he made two gold calf-idols and told the people, “You don’t need to go to Jerusalem to worship. Here are your gods who rescued your ancestors from Egypt.” He put one of these idols in Bethel and the other in Dan. This was a terrible sin for the Israelites to worship these idols. Jeroboam also made shrines on hills and appointed as priests people who were not descendants of Levi, the priestly tribe. Jeroboam also said that the Festival of Shelters would be held in October, not in September. He went to Bethel on that day and offered sacrifices to the calf-idol he had made.

Listen to the advice of wiser people who are older. Seek the wisdom of elders. Always measure it by My Word—the Word of God—before you follow any advice.

The Man of God from Judah

13As Jeroboam was at the altar in Bethel, ready to burn incense to the calf-idol, My prophet came up from Judah and said, “O altar, the LORD says that a son named Josiah will be born to David’s descendants, and he will sacrifice on you, O altar. The priests who make offerings here and human bones will be burned on you.” He added, “Proof that my message is from God is that the altar will split in half and the ashes will fall to the ground.”

This made Jeroboam angry. So he pointed to My prophet and said, “Grab him!” But Jeroboam’s arm shriveled up, and he couldn’t move it. And the altar split in two and its ashes poured out, as My prophet had said. Jeroboam begged the man to ask Me, the LORD, to heal his arm. My prophet prayed, and I, the LORD, healed his arm.

The king then asked My prophet to go with him to his palace and have something to eat, and he would give the prophet a gift for healing his arm. My prophet answered, “No, I wouldn’t do that even if you gave me half your palace. Why? Because the Lord told me not to eat or drink anything here and not to go home the same way I came.” So he went home a different way.

An old prophet was living in Bethel, and his sons told him about My prophet from Judah. “Which way did he go?” the father asked. After his sons told him which road My prophet took to go home, the old man said, “Saddle my donkey.” He found My prophet sitting under an oak tree. “Are you the man of God from Judah?” he asked. “Yes, I am.” So the old man said, “Come home with me and have a nice meal.” “I can’t,” the young prophet said. “The LORD told me not to eat or drink anything in Bethel. And He told me to go home by a different road.” But the old man said, “I’m a prophet too. And an angel told me to tell you to come home with me and have a meal and a drink.” But the old man was lying. So My prophet went with him and ate and drank in his home. As they were eating, a message

came from Me, the LORD, to the old prophet. The old man said to My prophet from Judah, “The LORD says you have disobeyed Me by coming here and eating and drinking when I told you not to do it. So you will not be buried in your father’s tomb.” The man of God finished eating, and the old man saddled the prophet’s donkey. On the way, a lion attacked and killed him, and the lion and the man’s donkey stood there. Some people saw the body and the lion there and told the city officials.

The old prophet heard about this and said, “This must be the prophet from Judah. The LORD warned him, but he disobeyed, and so a lion has killed him.” So he told his sons to get his donkey ready. He found the body lying on the road, with the lion and donkey standing there. The lion had not eaten the body or attacked the donkey. The old man put the body on his donkey and took it to Bethel where he was buried. And he mourned for him, and said, “Oh, my brother.”

He buried My prophet and said to his sons, “When I die, bury me in the grave next to this prophet. What he said will happen to the altar in Bethel and the shrines on the hills.” Jeroboam did not turn from his evil ways. He kept on appointing non-Levitical people to be priests at the shrines. Anyone who wanted to be a priest could be one. This sin of Jeroboam led to the downfall of his kingdom.

There are lying prophets in the world. You need wisdom to discern who they are and courage to not let them influence your life. The devil is a roaring lion walking about trying to eat you up (see 1 Pet. 5:8). Ask for protection when you are defenseless. Ask for empowerment to stand against your enemy (1 John 4:4).

Ahijah’s Prophecy against Jeroboam

14 Jeroboam’s son, Abijah, got sick. So Jeroboam told his wife to disguise herself, go to Shiloh and see the prophet, Ahijah. “He’s the one who said I would be king of Israel. Take ten loaves of bread, some cakes, and a jar of honey to him, and ask him what will happen to our son.” So Jeroboam’s wife got ready and left.

Ahijah was old and blind, but I, the LORD, told him the king's wife was coming to ask about their son. "I will tell you what to say." When Ahijah heard her walking to the door, he shouted, "Come in, Jeroboam's wife! Why are you pretending to be someone else? The LORD has told me to give your husband this bad news: 'I made you a leader of My people Israel. I even took tribes from David's descendants and gave them to you. But you have not kept My commands and obeyed Me and done what is right. In fact, you have done more sinful things than any king before you. You made false idol-gods out of gold, and I am very angry because you have rejected Me. Therefore I will destroy your family by killing every male in it, whether slave or free. I will wipe out your family the way fire burns up trash. Dogs will eat the bodies of your relatives who die in Jerusalem, and birds will eat the bodies of those who die in the country.

"Go back home, Mrs. Jeroboam, and as soon as you get home, your son will die. All Israel will mourn his death. And he is the only one of Jeroboam's relatives who will have a proper burial because he is the only one of Jeroboam's family who pleases Me. I will very soon choose a new king of Israel who will destroy Jeroboam's family. When I strike Israel, it will shake like a reed swaying in the water. I will remove them from this land and scatter them as far away as the Euphrates River. This will all be because they made Asherah poles which made Me angry. I will desert Israel because Jeroboam sinned and caused Israel to sin."

Jeroboam's wife left and went home to Tirzah. The minute she stepped into her house, her son died. All Israel mourned him, just as I, the LORD, had said. The other events of Jeroboam's reign, including his battles, are written in the book about the kings of Israel. He reigned for 22 years and died. His son Nadab became king.

Rehoboam, king in Judah, was 41 years old when he began to reign, and he ruled for 17 years in Jerusalem, the city I had chosen where I am to be honored. His mother was Naamah, an Ammonite. The people of Judah, like those in Israel, sinned and caused Me, the LORD, to be angry. They built shrines and sacred stones and Asherah poles on hills and under every green tree. Male shrine prostitutes were in the land, and the Israelites did the very same disgusting things as the nations I, the LORD, had forced out of the land.

In Rehoboam's fifth year Shishak, king of Egypt, attacked Jerusalem. He took everything of value from My Temple and the royal palace including the gold shields Solomon had made. So King Rehoboam made bronze shields to replace the gold shields, and the palace guards used them. Whenever he went to My Temple, the guards carried the shields and then put them back in the guardroom.

The other events of Rehoboam's reign are written in the book about the kings of Judah. War continued between Rehoboam and Jeroboam. Rehoboam died and was buried in the City of David. His mother was Naamah, an Ammonite, and his son, Abijah, was the next king.

Abijah Becomes King after Rehoboam

15 When Jeroboam had been king of Israel for 18 years, Abijah became king of Judah, and he ruled for three years in Jerusalem. His mother was Maacah, daughter of Absalom. He was sinful like his father, Rehoboam. He did not obey Me, the LORD, as his great-grandfather David had done. But for David's sake I, the LORD, allowed David's line to continue and for Jerusalem to be strong. All his life David had done what pleased Me and obeyed My commands except when he had Uriah the Hittite murdered.

The war between Rehoboam's line and Jeroboam continued, with Abijah and Jeroboam fighting. The events of Abijah's reign are recorded in the book about the kings of Judah. He died and was buried in the City of David. And his son Asa became king.

When Jeroboam was in his 20th year as king of Israel, Asa became king of Judah and Asa ruled in Jerusalem 41 years. His grandmother was Maacah, daughter of Absalom. He pleased Me, the LORD, as David did. He forced the male shrine prostitutes to leave the country, and he destroyed the idols his ancestors had made. His grandmother, Maccah, had made a disgusting idol of Asherah, and so Asa burned it and got rid of her as queen mother. He was faithful to Me, the LORD, even though he didn't destroy all the hilltop shrines. He placed in My Temple all the silver and gold objects he and his father had dedicated to Me.

Asa and King Baasha of Israel were constantly at war. So one time Baasha went to Ramah in Judah, and he kept soldiers there so people couldn't leave or enter Judah. When Asa heard about this, he sent silver and gold to Damascus for Ben-Hadad, king of Syria. Asa suggested they make a treaty like the one their fathers had and that Ben-Hadad break his treaty with Baasha so that Baasha would leave Judah.

Ben-Hadad agreed and sent soldiers to capture the Israelite towns of Dan and Abel-Beth-Maacah and the territories of Kinnereth and Naphtali. So Baasha left Ramah and went to Tirzah. Then Asa ordered everyone in Judah to go take the stones and wood Baasha had at Ramah, and build up Geba and Mizpah. Asa's victories and towns he rebuilt are recorded in the book of the kings of Judah. As he grew older, his feet became diseased. Then he died and was buried in the City of David. And his son Jehoshaphat became king.

When Asa was in his second year as king of Judah, Jeroboam's son, Nadab, became king of Israel and reigned two years. Nadab disobeyed Me, the LORD, and did as his father did in causing the people to sin. Baasha from the tribe of Issachar killed Nadab when Nadab was attacking the Philistine town of Gibbethon. Baasha then became king of Israel replacing Nadab in Asa's third year.

I, the LORD, had a prophet named Abijah. He had said that Jeroboam's whole family would be killed because Jeroboam had made Me, the LORD, angry with his sins. And Baasha killed Jeroboam's entire family. Nadab's reign is recorded in the book of the kings of Israel. Asa of Judah and Baasha of Israel were constantly at war.

When Baasha became king of Israel, Asa was in his third year as king of Judah. Baasha ruled for 24 years from Tirzah. Just like Jeroboam, he disobeyed Me, the LORD, and caused the Israelites to sin.

I have used non-Christians to accomplish My will. I work behind the scenes to bless your life through those who don't live for Me. But you must give yourself to Me to be godly and useful, so I will use you to accomplish My will in your life and in the lives of many others.

Baasha Rules over Israel

16I, the LORD, sent the prophet Jehu, son of Hanani, to say to Baasha, “You were a nobody, but I made you king of Israel. As you are doing the same thing Jeroboam did, sinning and causing My people Israel to sin, I am very angry, so I will destroy you and your family just as I did Jeroboam. Dogs will eat the bodies of your relatives who die in the city, and birds will eat those who die in the country.”

The other events of Baasha’s reign are written in the book of the kings of Israel. He died and was buried in Tirzah. And his son Elah became the next king. I, The LORD, spoke to Baasha through My prophet Jehu because of Baasha’s sins, which made Me, the LORD, angry and because he killed all Jeroboam’s family.

After Asa, king of Judah, had been king of Judah 25 years, Elah, son of Baasha, became king of Israel. He reigned in Tirzah only two years. Zimri had charge of half of Elah’s chariots, and he planned to kill Elah when Elah was drunk at the home of Arza who was in charge of the palace. Zimri simply walked over to him and killed Elah, and made himself king. Then he killed all Elah’s relatives and close friends. This killing was just as I had said through My prophet, Jehu. Baasha and Elah both sinned by worshiping idols, and this made Me, the LORD, angry. Other events in Elah’s short reign are recorded in the book of the kings of Israel.

Zimri ruled Israel only one week. The Israelite army was camped at Gibbethon, a Philistine town, where Nadab was killed. The soldiers heard that Zimri had killed Elah, so they made Omri king. Omri left Gibbethon and went to Tirzah, Israel’s capital. Zimri realized he was cornered, so he went into the palace at Tirzah and set it on fire. He died in the flames because he had disobeyed Me, the LORD, and followed Jeroboam’s evil example. The other events of his brief reign and his rebellion are recorded in the book of the kings of Israel.

Some Israelites wanted Tibni, son of Ginath, as king, but others wanted Omri. Omri’s followers were stronger than Tibni’s, so Tibni was killed, and Omri became king. This happened in Asa’s 31st year as king in Judah. Omri reigned for 12 years; six of them in Tirzah. He bought the hill of Samaria from Shemer for 150 pounds of silver and built the town of Samaria on that hill. Omri did more sinful things than any king before him. He followed

Jeroboam's sinful ways, and like Jeroboam, he caused the Israelites to sin by worshiping idols and made Me, the LORD, angry. The events of Omri's reign are recorded in the book of the kings of Israel. He died and was buried in Samaria, and his son, Ahab, was the next king.

When Asa had reigned 38 years in Judah, Ahab was made the king of Israel, and he ruled for 22 years in Samaria. Ahab committed more sins than any king before him. Following in the ways of Jeroboam was bad enough, but worse than that, he married Jezebel, daughter of King Ethbaal of Sidon, and worshiped the false god Baal. He even built an altar and temple for Baal in Samaria. Also, he built a repulsive Asherah pole. He did more to make Me, the LORD, angry than any king of Israel before him.

A man named Hiel from Bethel was rebuilding the town of Jericho. When he was laying the foundation of the town, his oldest son, Abiram, died and when he was finishing the gates his youngest son, Segub, died. This was My curse on Jericho as Joshua had spoken centuries earlier.

Turn away from false religion and false worship. Pray against evil religions so I will stop the spread of their influence.

I, the LORD, Take Care of My Prophet, Elijah

17 Elijah was a prophet from Tishbe in Gilead. One day he went to King Ahab and said, "I worship and serve the living LORD, God of Israel. He says there will be no dew or rain for several years." Then I, the LORD, told Elijah to leave right away and go across the Jordan River to the Kerith Brook. I, the LORD, said, "You can drink water from the brook, and I have told the Ravens to bring you food." So Elijah did what I, the LORD, said and went to the Kerith Brook. Ravens brought him bread and meat twice every day, and he drank water from the brook. Then later the brook dried up because there was no rain.

Then I, the LORD, told Elijah to go to Zarephath where a widow would feed him. He saw a widow at the town gate gathering sticks, and he asked her for a drink of water and some bread. She said, "I don't have any bread.

All I have is a little bit of flour and a little olive oil. With these sticks, I'm going home to cook a last meal for my son and me, and then we'll die from starvation."

Elijah said, "Here's my answer. Bake me some bread first and give it to me. Then bake some for you and your son. The LORD, the God of Israel, will see that you have plenty of flour and oil until He sends rain for the crops." She did as he said, and she and her son had plenty of food for a long time. As I, the LORD, promised she did not run out of flour and oil.

Later her son got sick and kept getting worse and finally died. She said to Elijah, "What have you done to me? Have you caused my son to die as punishment for my sins?" Elijah took her son upstairs, and prayed, "LORD, my God, why did you let this woman's son die?" He stretched himself over the boy three times and asked Me, the LORD, to bring the boy back to life. I, the LORD, answered Elijah's prayer, and the boy came back to life. Then Elijah carried the boy downstairs, gave him to his mother, and said, "Your son is alive." The woman said to Elijah, "Now I know you are a prophet of God and that the LORD speaks through you."

Look only to Me when you pray, and don't look to surrounding circumstances. Pray according to My Word, not according to pressures around you. Look to Me. Yet, don't be lazy and refuse to work. Learn faith's balance—to trust Me to supply your needs as you work daily at the jobs I gave you.

Elijah Confronts King Ahab

18 Three years after the drought began, I told Elijah to go tell Ahab I would soon send rain again. So Elijah did. The famine was very serious in Samaria. Obadiah, who worshiped the Lord, was in charge of Ahab's palace. When Jezebel was trying to kill My prophets, he hid 100 of them in two caves and gave them food and water. Ahab told Obadiah to look for some grass for his horses and mules so they wouldn't have to kill them. Obadiah went in one direction and Ahab in another.

Obadiah saw Elijah bowed to the ground before him and said, "Is that really you, Elijah?" "Yes," Elijah replied. "Go tell Ahab I am here."

Obadiah said, “But if I do that, he’ll kill me. He has been looking everywhere for you, and if anyone said he wasn’t there, Ahab made them swear you weren’t. So suppose I go tell him I saw you and then the LORD takes you someplace else. If he can’t find you, he’ll kill me. I have served the LORD all my life, and I risked my life by hiding 100 prophets in two caves to keep them safe from Jezebel. And now you want me to tell Ahab you are here? If I do, he’ll kill me.”

Elijah said, “I serve the LORD of the heavens, and I will go see Ahab today.” So Obadiah told Ahab that he had seen Elijah, and Ahab went to meet him. Ahab said, “Is it really you, you troublemaker?” Elijah replied, “I’m not a troublemaker; you are. You have disobeyed the Lord by worshiping the false god Baal. Here’s a suggestion: Have all the people of Israel meet me on Mount Carmel, with 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah, who are supported by Jezebel.”

So Ahab did. And Elijah said to the people and the false prophets, “How long will you try to worship the true God and false gods too? If the LORD is God, follow Him. But if Baal is a god, follow him.” But the people said nothing. Then Elijah said, “I am the LORD’s only prophet, but Baal has 450. Bring two bulls, and the Baal prophets can choose one and cut it up and put the pieces on the wood on an altar but don’t light the fire. I will cut up the other bull and put it on the wood of my altar without lighting a fire. Then you pray to your god, and I’ll pray to mine. And the one who starts a fire is the true god.” They agreed to this plan.

Elijah told the prophets of Baal to go first because there were more of them. So they cut up their bull and shouted their prayers to Baal all morning, dancing wildly around the altar. But there was no answer. At noon Elijah began making fun of them. “Pray louder,” he said. “Baal may be thinking of other things or relieving himself. Or maybe he’s away on a trip or is asleep.” So they shouted louder and cut themselves with swords and knives. They kept doing this all afternoon, but there was no answer at all.

Then Elijah asked the people to gather around him as he repaired My altar, using 12 stones representing Israel’s 12 tribes. He dug a trench around the altar to hold about three gallons. Then he piled wood on the altar, cut the bull into pieces, and put the pieces on the wood. Then he told the people to fill four large jars with water and pour it on the offering and the wood. After

they did this, he said, “Do it again.” Then he said, “Do it a third time.” The water ran down the altar and filled the trench.

When it was time for the evening sacrifices, Elijah prayed, “O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, show that You are the true God and that I am Your servant. Please answer me, O LORD, so that these people will know that You are the true God and that You are turning their hearts back to You.”

I, the LORD, immediately sent fire, and it burned up the sacrifice, the wood, and the stones. It scorched the ground around the altar and dried up the water in the trench. Seeing this, the people bowed down and shouted, “The LORD is God. The LORD is God.” Then Elijah told the people to catch all 450 prophets of Baal. They did, and Elijah took them down to the Kishon Valley and killed all of them there.

Elijah told Ahab to go get something to eat and drink because a rainstorm is coming. So Ahab left, but Elijah climbed back on Mount Carmel and prayed. When he told his servant to look toward the sea, his servant looked, but he said he didn’t see anything. Elijah told him seven times to look, and each time the servant saw nothing. Finally the seventh time the servant said, “I see a small cloud no bigger than a man’s hand.” Then Elijah shouted, “Hurry and tell Ahab to get into his chariot and go home before the rain stops him.”

Soon the sky was black with clouds, and it was windy, and a heavy rain poured down as Ahab was driving back to Jezreel. Elijah tucked his coat into his belt, and he ran ahead of Ahab all the way to Jezreel, a distance of about 25 miles.

There is nothing in false religion, and prayers to false gods are not answered. I, the LORD, am the only God. Stand for Me, no matter what other believers do. Even if no one stands with you, stand alone.

Elijah Runs Away to Mount Horeb

19When Ahab told Jezebel what Elijah had done on Mount Carmel and that he had killed the 450 Baal prophets, she sent him a message

saying, “Tomorrow I’ll kill you.” Elijah was afraid, and so he went south to Beersheba. Leaving his servant there, he walked another whole day, sat down under a tree, and prayed to die. He said, “Take my life. I’m no better than my ancestors.” He lay down in the shade and went to sleep. An angel woke him up and told him to eat. So he ate some baked bread that was by his head, and he drank some water and went back to sleep. The angel woke him up again and told him to eat some more because he would need strength for his long trip.

So Elijah got up and ate and drank again. That gave him the strength to travel 40 days to Mount Horeb (Sinai), the mountain of God, and he slept in a cave there. Then I, the LORD, asked him, “Why are you here, Elijah?” He answered, “I have served You, the LORD of the heavens, enthusiastically, but the Israelites have not kept their agreement with You. They have torn down Your altars and killed Your prophets, and I’m the only one left. And now they want to kill me.”

I, the LORD said, “Go stand before Me on the mountain.” As Elijah stood there, a windstorm hit the mountain causing a landslide and an earthquake. But I, the LORD, was not in the wind. Then there was a fire, but I, the LORD, was not in the fire either. Then Elijah heard a soft whisper, and he covered his face with his cloak and stood at the cave’s entrance. He heard a voice ask, “Why are you here, Elijah?” He said, as he had said before, “I have served You, the LORD of the heavens, enthusiastically, but the Israelites have not kept their agreement with You. They have torn down Your altars and killed Your prophets, and I’m the only one left. And now they want to kill me.”

I, the LORD, told him, “Elijah, go back the way you came and keep going till you get to the Damascus desert. There I want you to appoint Hazael king of Syria, and anoint Jehu, son of Nimshi, king of Israel. Also choose Elisha, son of Shaphat, to be My prophet in your place. Jehu will kill anyone who escapes from Hazael, and anyone who escapes from Jehu will be killed by Elisha. I have 7,000 in Israel who have not worshiped Baal by bowing to him and kissing him.”

Elijah found Elisha plowing a field with two oxen. Ahead of him were 11 farmers each with a pair of oxen, and Elisha had the 12th pair. Elijah went over to Elisha and threw his cloak over him. Elisha left his oxen, ran

after Elijah, and said, “I’ll go kiss my parents good-bye, and then I’ll go with you.” Elijah said, “Alright, but don’t forget what I have done to you.”

So Elisha left and then came back and killed his oxen. He used the wood from his plow to make a fire. He shared the meat with the other plowmen. Then he left with Elijah and became his assistant.

Realize you need food and rest to be physically strong so you can remain spiritually strong. Look after the needs of your body. Keep from discouragement and despondency. Look at everything in life through My eyes, not through your eyes. Keep strong against doubt and fear. Don’t just look at your problems, rather look to Me and search for My solutions to your predicament. Listen for My whisper coming in the darkness of your lonely night. I will speak to you in quietness. While I wait patiently to judge sin, you’re impatient. Let Me open your eyes to see as I see.

Syria and Israel at War

20Ben-Hadad II, king of Syria, called his soldiers together, and 32 kings with their chariots and horses joined him and marched against Samaria, Israel’s capital. Ben-Hadad sent this message to King Ahab: “Give me your gold and silver and your best wives and children.” Ahab replied, “Alright, all I have is yours.”

Ben-Hadad sent another messenger to Ahab: “Besides giving me your gold, silver, wives, and children, my officials will search your palace and your people’s homes, and take whatever is valuable.” Then Ahab called a meeting of the elders and said, “Ben-Hadad is causing trouble. I agreed when he said he wanted my wives and children and gold and silver.” The elders and the people said, “Don’t give in to his demands.”

So Ahab told the messengers of Ben-Hadad that he couldn’t meet their demands. Then Ben-Hadad said, “I’ll completely destroy Samaria. There won’t even be enough dust for each of my soldiers to have a handful.” Ahab told the messengers, “Don’t brag about winning a battle before you’ve even begun to fight.” When Ben-Hadad heard this, he and the 32 kings were drinking in their tents. So he said, “Get ready to attack Samaria.”

Just then a prophet told Ahab, “Look at all these enemy soldiers. The LORD will help you defeat them, and then you will know that He is the LORD.” Ahab asked, “How will this be done?” And the prophet said, “The young officers of the district governors will do it.” When Ahab asked, “Who will lead them in battle?” the prophet answered, “You will.”

So Ahab called together the 232 young soldiers and the 7,000 troops. At noon Ahab and the 32 kings with him were getting drunk, but the young officers marched out of the city. Ben-Hadad’s scouts told him some troops were coming from Samaria. Ben-Hadad said, “Capture them, whether they have come to fight or surrender.”

The young officers led Israel’s troops into battle, and each Israelite killed an enemy soldier. Then the rest of the Syrian army ran, and the Israelites went after them. But Ben-Hadad and a few others escaped on horses.

The Israelite soldiers destroyed most of the Syrian chariots and killed their horses, and many Syrians were killed. Later the prophet told Ahab to be ready for another attack by the Syrians next year.

Ben-Hadad’s officers told him, “The Israelite gods are gods of the hills. That’s why Israel’s army defeated us. But if we fight them on the plains, we will win. So next time get rid of the 32 kings and put commanders in their places. Get the same number of horses, chariots, and soldiers, and if we fight them on the plains, we will win.” So Ben-Hadad did as they suggested.

In the spring Ben-Hadad led his army against Israel at Aphek. The Israelites prepared to fight, but their small number made them look like two flocks of goats compared with the Syrian soldiers who filled the countryside. The prophet said to Ahab, “The Syrians think the LORD is a God of the hills and not the plains. But God will help you defeat their vast army, and then you will know that He is the LORD.”

The two armies faced each other for a week. Then on the seventh day, the Israelites killed 100,000 Syrian soldiers in that one day. The other Syrian soldiers ran to Aphek, but the city wall collapsed and killed another 27,000 Syrians. Ben-Hadad ran to the city and hid in a back room of a house.

Ben-Hadad’s officers said to him, “We’ve heard that the Israelite kings are kind. So let’s put coarse cloth around our waists and ropes around our

heads, and ask Ahab to let us live.” So they did that and said to Ahab, “Your servant Ben-Hadad asks you to let him live.” Ahab asked, “Is he still alive? He is my brother.” Glad to hear him say Ben-Hadad was his brother, they said, “Yes, you two are like brothers.” Then Ahab said, “Bring him here.” When Ben-Hadad arrived, Ahab had him get into his chariot with him. Ben-Hadad said, “I’ll give back to you the towns my father captured from your father, and you can set up shops in Damascus as my father did in Samaria.” Ahab said, “Alright. If you will do this, I will set you free.”

Then a prophet told a man nearby to hit him. But he refused. So the prophet said, “You disobeyed the LORD, and so as soon as you walk off a lion will kill you.” And as he left, a lion attacked and killed him. Then the prophet asked another person to beat him up, and the man did. The prophet placed a bandage over his eyes to disguise himself, and he stood by the road, waiting for Ahab. The prophet said to the king, “I went into battle, and someone brought a prisoner to me and told me to guard him. He said if the prisoner gets away, I would be killed or I would have to pay 75 pounds of silver. When I was busy doing something else, the prisoner got away.”

The prophet pulled the bandage off his eyes, and Ahab saw he was a prophet. He said to Ahab, “The LORD told you to kill Ben-Hadad, but you let him go. Therefore you, not Ben-Hadad, will die and your people, not his, will die.” Ahab then went back to his palace in Samaria, depressed and angry.

I am your strength and wisdom. You win battles in My strength and with My guidance. My presence in your life will make the difference. Do not boast in yourself, glory in My protection.

The Vineyard of Naboth

21 Naboth owned a vineyard near King Ahab’s palace in Jezreel. Ahab said to Naboth, “I would like to buy your vineyard and use it as a vegetable garden since it’s so close to my palace. I’ll give you a better vineyard or pay you cash for yours.” Naboth responded, “No way. This vineyard has been in my family for years. I won’t sell it or trade it.” Ahab went home, depressed and angry, and he lay on his couch in a bad mood,

and wouldn't eat. Jezebel said, "What's wrong? Why don't you eat something?" Ahab said, "I asked Naboth to sell me his vineyard or trade it, and he refused."

Jezebel said, "But you are Israel's king. So get up and eat, and I'll get his vineyard for you." Jezebel then wrote letters in Ahab's name and sent them to the leaders of Jezreel. The letters said, "Have everyone come together and not eat anything. Put Naboth in a central place. Then have two rascals accuse him of cursing God and the king. Then take him outside and stone him to death."

Then the leaders in Jezreel did what she said. They told the people not to eat anything that day. They put Naboth in a central place, and two rascals sat opposite him and accused him of cursing God and the king. Then they took him outside and stoned him to death. The leaders sent word to Jezebel that Naboth was dead. When she got this message, she told Ahab, "You can now have Naboth's vineyard. He is dead." So Ahab got up and took over the vineyard.

I, the LORD, then told Elijah to go to Ahab, who was in Naboth's vineyard and to say to him, "You have murdered a man and stolen his property. And so in this very place where dogs licked his blood, they will lick your blood." Ahab said, "So you, my enemy, have found me." "Yes, I have. You have done everything sinful before the LORD. So every male in your family will die, whether slave or free. You have made the Lord angry by sinning and causing Israel to sin, so your whole family will be wiped out just like the families of Jeroboam and Baasha. And dogs will eat Jezebel's body in Jezreel. Dogs will eat the bodies of your relatives who die in the city, and birds will eat the bodies of those who die in the country."

No one was as sinful as Ahab, and his wife Jezebel influenced him to do all kinds of evil. He was especially sinful in worshiping idols, just as the Amorites had done before I, the LORD, forced them out of the land. In grief, Ahab tore his clothes, put on coarse clothing, and refused to eat. Later I, the LORD, said to Elijah, "I'm sure you've seen how Ahab is sorry. Therefore I won't punish his family while he is alive. I will destroy his descendants."

I am your strength and wisdom. Win battles in My strength and with My guidance. My presence in your life makes a difference.

The Prophet Micaiah Predicts Ahab's Defeat

22For three years there was peace between Israel and Syria. During the third year Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, went to visit Ahab. Ahab said to his officials, "You know that the Syrians took Ramoth-Gilead from us, and yet we haven't done anything about it." Then he asked Jehoshaphat to go with him to Ramoth and attack the Syrians. Jehoshaphat said, "Sure. We can join forces. But first, let's ask the LORD."

So Ahab asked 400 prophets if they should attack the Syrians. They all said, "Yes. The LORD will help you." But Jehoshaphat said, "Isn't there a prophet of the LORD? I'd like to ask him." Ahab said, "Well, Micaiah, son of Imlah, is a prophet, but I hate him. He's always giving me bad news." Jehoshaphat said, "Don't talk like that. Let's see what he says." So Ahab had an official bring Micaiah.

Ahab and Jehoshaphat, dressed in their royal robes, were sitting on their thrones at the threshing floor by the Samaria city gate, and the prophets were prophesying to the kings. Zedekiah, one of the prophets, made horns out of iron and said, "Ahab will destroy the Syrians like a bull killing people with its horns." All the other prophets predicted victory for Ahab too. "Attack Ramoth-Gilead, and you will defeat the Syrians."

The man who went to get Micaiah told him that all these other prophets were predicting victory over the Syrians and that Micaiah should say the same thing. But Micaiah said, "I can say only what the Lord tells me to say." Ahab then asked him if he should go attack the Syrians at Ramoth. Micaiah answered, "Yes. And the LORD will give you victory." But Ahab said, "How many times have I told you to tell me the truth? What did the LORD really say?" Micaiah responded, "I saw Israel scattered on the hills like sheep without a shepherd. Since they have no leaders, they should all go home."

Ahab said to Jehoshaphat, "I told you he would give us bad news." Then Micaiah added, "I saw the LORD seated on his throne in heaven with all the armies of heaven around him. And the LORD said, 'Who can trick Ahab into going into battle so he can be killed there?' They talked about it for a while, and then a spirit said, 'I will trick him.' When the LORD asked

‘How?’ the spirit said, ‘I’ll cause a spirit to lie to the prophets.’ The LORD replied, ‘Alright, go ahead.’” Then Micaiah said, “Ahab, the Lord has made your prophets lie to you, and you will be defeated.”

Zedekiah walked up to Micaiah and slapped him in the face, and said, “What makes you think the LORD left me to speak to you?” Micaiah said, “You’ll find out when you are hiding for safety in a back room of a house.” Ahab shouted, “Arrest Micaiah. And take him to Joash, Jehoshaphat’s son, and to Amon, the mayor of Samaria. Put him in prison, and give him only bread and water until I get back to Samaria.” Micaiah said, “If you come back, then the Lord didn’t speak through me.” Then he told the people, “Remember what I said.”

Ahab and Jehoshaphat went to fight against Ramoth-Gilead. Ahab suggested that Jehoshaphat wear his royal robes and that he, Ahab, disguise himself. The king of Syria told his 32 chariot commanders to attack only Ahab. When they saw Jehoshaphat in his royal robe, they thought he was Ahab. When they started to attack him, he shouted. So the chariot commanders stopped chasing him.

A soldier shot an arrow at Ahab’s troops, and it hit Ahab between the joints of his armor. He told his chariot driver, “I’ve been hit. Get me out of here.” The battle continued on all day, and Ahab was propped up in his chariot so he could see the battle. The blood from his wound covered the bottom of the chariot, and that evening he died. At sunset, someone shouted, “Go home. The king is dead.” Ahab was buried in Samaria. They washed his chariot at a pool in Samaria, and the dogs licked his blood just as I had predicted. The other events in Ahab’s reign, including the towns he rebuilt and the palace he built using lots of ivory, are recorded in the book of the kings of Israel. Ahaziah, Ahab’s son, became the next king.

When Ahab had ruled for four years, Jehoshaphat, son of Asa, became king of Judah. He was 35 years old and ruled from Jerusalem for 25 years. His mother was Azubah, daughter of Shilhi. Jehoshaphat obeyed Me, the LORD, as his father Asa had done, and he did what pleased Me, the LORD. However, he did not remove the hilltop shrines, and the people continued to offer sacrifices and burn incense there. During his reign, he was at peace with the king of Israel.

The events of Jehoshaphat’s reign and his military victories are written in the book of the kings of Judah. He got rid of the male shrine prostitutes

who were still there in his father Asa's reign. Edom had no king at the time, so a deputy ruled. Jehoshaphat built seagoing vessels to sail to Ophir for gold. But they were wrecked at Ezion-Geber. Ahab's son, Ahaziah, suggested that his sailors sail with Jehoshaphat's sailors, but Jehoshaphat refused. Jehoshaphat died and was buried with his ancestors in the City of David. And Jehoram, his son, was the next king of Judah.

Ahab's son, Ahaziah, became king of Israel in Jehoshaphat's 17th year as king of Judah. And Ahaziah reigned for two years. He disobeyed Me, the LORD, just as Ahab, Jezebel, and Jeroboam had done and led Israel to sin. He worshiped Baal and made Me, the LORD, very angry just as his father Ahab had done.

There are false prophets in your world. Judge them by the Bible. Not every preacher who claims to be a Christian actually speaks the truth. See things from My perspective of time.

I AM GOD

The Punisher

The Book of Second Kings

This book records two great tragedies as the result of My people who disobeyed Me and polluted themselves with idols. First, in 723 BC the northern kingdom of Israel fell to Assyria and was carried away in slavery. Second, in 586 BC the southern kingdom of Judah fell to Babylon, Jerusalem was destroyed and the people were carried away in slavery.

This book emphasizes the ministry of Elijah and Elisha (plus warnings from other prophets) to the northern kingdom. It also contains the ministry of Isaiah and Jeremiah (plus warnings from other prophets) to the southern kingdom. The lesson is obvious; when people turn away from Me to give themselves to sin; they end up in slavery to sin.

Elijah Predicts the Death of King Ahaziah

1 After Ahab died, the country of Moab rebelled against his son, Ahaziah. Ahaziah had fallen from an upstairs room of his palace and was badly injured. So he sent messengers to Ekron to ask the god Baal-Zebub if he would get well. I told Elijah to meet these messengers and ask them, “Why are you going to Baal-Zebub instead of trusting Me, the LORD? Because the king has done this, he will die.”

When the messengers went back to Ahaziah, he was surprised they were back so soon. They said, “A man met us on the road and told us that because you are going to Baal-Zebub, you will soon die.” The king asked, “What did he look like?” They replied, “He was hairy and was wearing a leather belt.” The king said, “That was Elijah!”

Then Ahaziah sent 50 men with a captain to arrest Elijah. Finding Elijah sitting on a hilltop, the captain ordered him to go with them to see the king. Elijah responded, “If I am a man of God, fire will come from heaven on you and your 50 men.” Then lightning killed them all. So the king sent another 50

men and a captain to arrest Elijah. Again Elijah said, “If I am a man of God, fire will come from heaven on you and your 50 men.” Again lightning killed them all. A third time Ahaziah sent 50 men and a captain. But the captain begged Elijah to spare their lives. “Please don’t destroy us,” he said. Then I, the LORD, told Elijah to go with them to see the king. So he did.

Elijah asked Ahaziah what the Lord said, “Why did you send messengers to Baal-Zebub to ask about your injury? Why didn’t you ask Me, the God of Israel? Because you did this, I, the LORD, said you will die.” Then Ahaziah died, just as I, the LORD, had said. Since Ahaziah did not have a son to be the next king, his brother, Jehoram, became the king. This was in the second year of the reign of Jehoram, son of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah. The other events of Ahaziah’s reign are recorded in the book of the kings of Israel.

If you’re spiritually blinded to anything like an idol in your life, ask Me to reveal it to you. Repent and put it out of your life. Worship Me alone. Follow Me and serve Me alone.

Elijah Taken Up to Heaven

2I, the LORD, was soon going to bring Elijah to heaven in a strong wind. Leaving Gilgal, Elijah told Elisha, “Why don’t you stay here while I go on to Bethel?” Elisha said, “I prefer to stay with you no matter what.” So they went together to Bethel. Some prophets at Bethel asked Elisha, “Did you know that the Lord will take Elijah from you today?” Elisha replied, “Of course. But I don’t want to talk about it.” Then Elijah said, to Elisha, “Why don’t you stay here in Bethel while I go on to Jericho?” Elisha replied, “I prefer to stay with you no matter what.” So they went together to Jericho. Then some prophets in Jericho asked Elisha, “Did you know that the LORD will take Elijah from you today?” Elisha replied, “Of course. But I don’t want to talk about it.”

Then Elijah said to Elisha, “Why don’t you stay here in Jericho while I go on to the Jordan River?” Elisha replied, “I prefer to stay with you no matter what.” So they went on to the river. As 50 prophets watched from a distance Elijah hit the water with his cloak, and the river divided, and the two of them walked across on dry ground. On the other side, Elijah said to Elisha, “Can I do something for you before I am taken away?” Elisha replied, “Yes, let me

have twice as much spiritual power as you have.” “That’s a difficult request. But it will happen if you see me as I am taken away.”

As they were walking along and talking, a fiery chariot pulled by horses of fire suddenly appeared between them taking Elijah to heaven. Elisha saw this and shouted, “Israel’s chariots have taken my master away.” Then he tore his clothes in grief. He picked up Elijah’s cloak and hit the bank of the Jordan River with it, as Elijah had done. Wondering if I, the God of Elijah, would be with him, Elisha saw that the river divided, and he went across on dry ground.

When the prophets of Jericho saw this, they said, “Yes, Elisha has Elijah’s power.” They bowed down before him in respect, and they said, “Fifty of us will be glad to go hunt for your master. Perhaps the Spirit of the LORD carried him off to some mountain or valley.” Elisha said, “No. There’s no need to do that.” They kept urging him to let them send 50 prophets to hunt for Elijah. So finally he said, “Alright, go ahead.” The 50 looked for three days and couldn’t find him. When they got back to Jericho, Elisha told them, “I told you not to go look for him.”

One day some city officials of Jericho told Elisha, “We have a problem. Our city is in a nice location, but the water is bad, and so we have no crops.” Elisha said, “Bring me a new bowl filled with salt, and they did. Then he threw the salt into the city well, and said, “The LORD has made the water good again. Now crops will grow.” The water was pure ever since then.

As he was walking from Jericho to Bethel, some young boys began making fun of him because of his bald head. He looked at them and cursed them in My name. Just then two bears came out of the woods and killed 42 of them. Then Elisha went to Mount Carmel and then to Samaria.

I want you to experience My presence when I manifest Myself among My people. Since you don’t know when that will happen, always meet Me with other believers on Sunday to worship Me. First, because I command it (Heb. 10:25) and second, I promise to be there (Matt. 18:20). To have the faith of Elisha—a double portion—you will have to pay a price as did Elisha.

Moab Rebels against Israel

Ahab's son, Jehoram, began reigning over Israel in the 18th year of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah. He ruled for 12 years in Samaria. He was evil **3** but not as bad as his parents. For one thing, he tore down the stone column to Baal that his father made. But he kept doing the sinful things Jeroboam, son of Nebat, had done.

King Mesha of Moab and his people raised sheep, and as a subject of Israel, he had to pay Israel 100,000 lambs and the wool of 100,000 rams. But after Ahab died, Mesha rebelled against Israel. So Jehoram got his army together. Then he sent his message to Jehoshaphat, king of Judah: "Moab has rebelled against us. I need your help to defeat him." Jehoshaphat agreed and said, "But which way should we go?" Jehoram said, "Let's go through the Edom Desert south of the Dead Sea."

The king of Edom joined them, and all three armies traveled in a roundabout way for a week. Then the soldiers had no more water for themselves or their animals. Jehoram said, "What can we do? Has the Lord brought us here to be captured by Moab's army?" Jehoshaphat asked, "Is there a prophet of the Lord here so we can ask him what to do?" One of Jehoram's officers said, "Elisha, Elijah's assistant, is here. You could ask him." Jehoshaphat said, "Yes, he can tell us what to do." So the three kings went to see him. But Elisha said to Jehoram, "Don't ask me. Go ask the false prophets of your parents." Jehoram replied, "I can't do that because the Lord has brought us here, so we need His help."

Elisha said, "I wouldn't have anything to do with you except for the fact that Jehoshaphat is here. So bring to me someone who can play the harp." As the harp was being played, this message came to Elisha: "Dig a number of ditches in this valley. You won't hear any wind or see any rain, but this valley will be filled with water, plenty for you and your animals. This is an easy thing for the Lord to do. Greater than that is the fact that He will help you defeat Moab's army. You will conquer the best of their cities. You will chop down every good tree, stop up all their springs, and cover their fields with stones."

Then the next day at the time of the morning sacrifice, water began flowing from Edom toward Moab and water was everywhere. The Moabites had heard that three armies were coming against them, so everyone who could fight was stationed at the border. When they got up the next morning, the sun shining on all the water made it look red. The Moabites looked and shouted, "Blood! Those kings must have killed each other. Let's go take what's left in their camps."

When the Moabites got to the Israelite camp, the Israelites attacked them, and they turned and ran. The Israelites chased the Moabite soldiers all the way back to Moab. They destroyed their towns, tossed stones in their fields, stopped up their springs, and chopped down every good tree. The only city left standing was Kir-Hareseth, but the soldiers with slings surrounded it and defeated it too.

King Mesha of Moab saw that he was almost defeated. So he took 700 soldiers with swords to break through the enemy line next to the king of Edom, but they failed. Then he offered his son as a sacrifice on the city wall, where everyone could see it. The Israelites were so horrified they left and went home.

Pray for spiritual eyes to see your problems. Then pray for faith to obey My commands. Next, ask Me for courage to “dig holes,” and do it quickly before My water of blessing passes you by.

Elisha Helps a Widow

4 One day the widow of one of Elisha’s prophets said to Elisha, “As you know, my husband who served you and the Lord is dead. He owed a man some money, and now that man says he’ll take my two sons as slaves.” “How can I help you?” Elisha asked. “What food do you have?” She said, “I have only a little bit of olive oil.” Elisha said, “Borrow a lot of empty jars from your neighbors. Then pour your olive oil into one jar, and it will fill up. Then keep doing this with all the jars you have.” So she did this, and as each jar was filled, she told her sons to bring her another jar. When all the jars were filled, the oil stopped flowing. When she told Elisha what happened, he said, “Sell the oil and pay what you owe the man. And you and your sons can live on the money left over.”

You need faith to provide “pots and jars” to receive My blessings. I will fill the “pots and jars” you prepare. You must work first before I provide for your needs. Ask for the continued flow of oil into your life.

One day when Elisha was in Shunem, a rich woman invited him to dinner. Then whenever he was there in town, he stopped at her place for a meal. The

woman said to her husband, “Since he is obviously a prophet, we should make a small room for him on our flat roof, and put in it a bed, table, chair, and lamp. Then he can stay overnight whenever he’s in town.” One day when Elisha was staying in this room, he told his servant, Gehazi, to have her come up to see him. Gehazi said to her, “We appreciate your kindness. Now, what can we do for you? Can we put in a good word for you to the king or the army general?” She replied, “No, I don’t need anything.” Elisha then asked Gehazi, “What do you suggest we do for her?” He said, “Her husband is old, and I know she doesn’t have a son.”

Elisha then asked her to come back, and as she stood in the doorway, he said, “Next year at this time you’ll be holding your baby boy in your arms.” She objected, “No. Please don’t lie to me.” Soon she became pregnant, and she gave birth to a son, as Elisha had said. One day when her child was older, he went to a field to see his father who was harvesting crops. Suddenly he said, “My head hurts.” A servant took him home, and about noon the boy died. His mother put him in Elisha’s bed, and then she sent a message to tell her husband, “Send me a donkey so a servant and I can go see the prophet.”

He asked, “Why today? It’s not the new moon festival or a Sabbath.” She said, “That’s not the problem.”

So she saddled the donkey and told the servant, “Hurry. Don’t slow down unless I tell you to.” Elisha was at Mount Carmel, and when he saw the woman coming, he told Gehazi to run and ask her if she, her husband, and son are alright. She responded, “Yes, everyone is fine.” But when she got to Elisha, she grabbed his feet. When Gehazi started to push her away, Elisha said, “Don’t. Something is bothering her, but I don’t know what it is.”

She said to Elisha, “I told you not to get my hopes up. Remember, I didn’t even ask for a son.” Sensing something was wrong with her son, Elisha told Gehazi to hurry and put his (Elisha’s) rod on the boy’s face.” But the woman said to Elisha, “Please come with me.” So he did. Gehazi went on ahead and put Elisha’s rod on the boy’s face, but there was no response. Gehazi ran back to Elisha and said, “The boy is still dead.” Elisha saw the boy lying on his bed. He shut the door so that he could be by himself and the boy, and he prayed for the boy. Then he stretched out on the boy’s body, put his mouth to the boy’s mouth, his eyes on the boy’s eyes, and his hands on the boy’s hands. And the boy’s body became warm.

Elisha walked back and forth, and he stretched out on the boy again. This time the boy sneezed seven times and opened his eyes. “Call the boy’s

mother,” Elisha said to Gehazi. When she came in, Elisha said, “Here is your son.” She bowed down at Elisha’s feet and then took the boy downstairs.

Later Elisha went back to Gilgal, and a famine was in the land. He told his servant to cook some stew for the prophets who were there with him. One of them went out to get some vegetables, and he came back with some gourds from a wild vine. He put them in the kettle, not knowing they were poisonous. When the men began to eat the stew, they knew it was poison, so they stopped eating it. Elisha said, “Put some flour in with the stew.” Then the stew was alright for them to eat.

One day a man from Baal-Shalishah brought Elisha some grain and 20 loaves of barley bread baked from the first barley that was harvested. Elisha told him to give it to the people so they could eat. But the man said, “This isn’t enough to feed 100 people.” Elisha responded, “Just give it to them. The Lord says there will be enough and then some.” And as I, the LORD, promised, they ate, and some were left over.

Naaman Cured of Leprosy

5 Naaman was the commander of the Syrian army. The king of Syria, Ben-Hadad II, appreciated him because I, the LORD, had helped Naaman and his troops defeat their enemies. But Naaman had leprosy. His army had captured a young Israelite girl who became a maid for Naaman’s wife. One day the girl told Naaman’s wife, “Naaman should go to the prophet in Samaria. He could heal him.”

So Naaman told the king what she said. And the king responded, “Fine with me. Go ahead, and I’ll give you a letter of introduction to Israel’s king.” Naaman left with 750 pounds of silver, 150 pounds of gold, and ten sets of clothing. The letter said, “I am sending my servant, Naaman, to you. Please heal him of his leprosy.”

When the king read the letter, he tore his robes in disgust and said, “Who does he think I am? I have no power over life and death. He’s just trying to get an excuse to attack us again.” Elisha heard about the king’s reaction, and he sent him this message: “Don’t be upset. Send Naaman to me, and he’ll see that there is a true prophet of God here in Israel.”

When Naaman arrived with his horses and chariots at Elisha’s place, Elisha sent someone outside to tell him, “You want to be healed? Then go wash yourself seven times in the Jordan River.” This made Naaman angry. He said,

“I thought he would come out and wave his hand over my leprosy and ask his Lord God, to heal me. Why couldn’t I have washed in the Abana River or the Pharpar River in Samaria? They are better than any river in Israel.” So Naaman stormed off mad.

Naaman’s servants said to him, “If the prophet had told you to do something really difficult, you would have done it. So why not just do this simple thing and wash in the Jordan and be healed?” This persuaded Naaman, so he dipped himself seven times in the Jordan. And he was cured right away, and his skin was like that of a young child.

Naaman then went to see Elisha, and he said to him, “Now I know that there is no god in all the world like the God of Israel. So please accept these gifts.” Elisha said, “No, I won’t take any gifts from you.” Naaman kept urging him to take the gifts, but he refused. So Naaman said, “Alright. Then let me take home as much soil as two mules can carry. From now on I will offer sacrifices only to your Lord. However, I pray that the Lord will forgive me if I bow with my king to the temple of the God Rimmon.” Elisha said, “No problem. May you have a safe trip home.” So Naaman started toward home.

Gehazi said to himself, “Elisha should have accepted some of Naaman’s gifts. So I will chase him and get some of those gifts for myself.” When Naaman saw Gehazi running after him, he stopped his chariot, got out, and asked, “Is something wrong?” Gehazi said, “Everything is alright, but my master sent me to tell you that two young prophets have come from Ephraim to see him. So could you spare 75 pounds of silver and two sets of clothing for them?”

Naaman said, “Of course. Here are 75 pounds of silver and clothes for them.” He tied the silver and two sets of clothing in two bags and had two of his servants go back with Gehazi to take the gifts. When Gehazi got back, he hid the silver and clothes in his house and sent the servants away. When he went to see his master, Elisha asked him where he had been. “Nowhere,” he replied. But Elisha said, “Don’t you realize that I was there in spirit when Naaman got off his chariot to meet you. This is not the time to receive money and clothing or anything else like olive groves, vineyards, sheep, oxen, and servants. Because you have done this, you, your children, and your grandchildren will suffer from leprosy.” When Gehazi left, his skin suddenly turned white with leprosy.

An Iron Ax Head Floats

6 One day some prophets said to Elisha, “The place where we meet is too small. We suggest we all go to the Jordan River, get logs, and build a new meeting place.” Elisha said, “Good idea; go ahead.” One of them asked Elisha to go with them, and he agreed. So they got to the Jordan River, and as they began chopping down trees, the ax head of one of the men fell into the river. He shouted, “Oh, no. I had borrowed this ax.” Elisha asked him where it fell. So he showed him the place, and Elisha cut a stick and tossed it into the river at that spot. Then the ax head floated to the top, and the worker grabbed it.

Moving to the Jordan River connected Elisha to major events in his life and his school of prophets. Sometimes it's good to see how far I have taken you in life so you can praise Me for My guidance.

The Syrians and Israelites were at war. The king of Syria would check with his officers and then decide where to have their soldiers set up camp. Elisha would say to the king of Israel, “Don’t go that way because the Syrians are going there.” So the king of Israel would warn the Israelite troops to be on guard in those places. When the Syrian king heard what was happening, he got very mad. He asked his officers, “Which of you has been telling the king of Israel our plans?” One of his men said, “It’s not us. Elisha the prophet tells Israel’s king everything, even what you say in your bedroom.”

The king said, “Go find where he is so I can send soldiers to capture him.” They learned he was in Dothan, so one night the Syrian king sent many soldiers with chariots and horses to surround the town. Early the next morning Elisha’s servant saw this army and said, “What shall we do?” Elisha responded, “No need to be afraid. More troops are on our side than are on theirs.” Elisha prayed, “Lord, open his eyes.” And when the servant looked up, he saw the hillside was covered with fiery horses and flaming chariots.

When the Syrian army marched toward Elisha, he prayed, “Lord, make these soldiers blind.” And I did. Then Elisha told them, “You’ve taken the wrong road. This isn’t the right city. I’ll lead you to the men you are looking for.” And he led them to Samaria. As they arrived in Samaria, Elisha asked Me, the LORD, to let them see. And I did, and the soldiers saw that they were in the middle of the city of Samaria.

The king of Israel asked Elisha if he should kill them, and Elisha said, “No. These are like prisoners of war, and we don’t kill POWS. Instead, feed them and send them home.” So the king gave them a great feast and sent them on their way. Then for a while, the Syrians stayed away from Israel.

However, sometime later King Ben-Hadad sent his army against Samaria. As a result, the people in Samaria had nothing to eat. Things were so scarce that the head of a dead donkey sold for two pounds of silver, and a bowl of pigeon’s droppings sold for about two ounces of silver.

One day the king of Israel was walking on the city wall when a woman shouted, “Help me, my king.” He said, “I can’t help you. Only the Lord can. I don’t have any food or wine to give you. What’s your problem?” she replied, “Another woman and I were so hungry we agreed to eat our sons. So we cooked my son and ate him. Then the next day, when we were to kill her son, she said she had hidden him.” The king tore his clothes in despair, and people could see coarse clothing under his outer cloak. He said, “May God kill me if I don’t kill Elisha today.”

Elisha was meeting in his house with Israel’s leaders when a messenger arrived. But before he arrived, Elisha said, “A man will arrive to kill me. But when he comes, shut the door tight. His master, the king of Israel, will come right behind him.” While Elisha was talking, the messenger came. Then King Joram said, “The Lord has brought this problem on us. Why should I expect any help from Him?”

Open Windows of Heaven

7 Elisha answered, “Listen to what the Lord says. By this time tomorrow, you will be able to buy several quarts of flour or ten quarts of barley for only half an ounce of silver each.” A special assistant to the king asked, “How can that be? Even if the Lord sends a rainstorm that much grain couldn’t be produced tomorrow.” Elisha responded, “You will see it appear, but you won’t eat any of the food.”

Four men with leprosy were sitting just outside the Samaria gate. They said, “The famine is so bad that we’ll die whether we stay here or go in the city. But if we surrender to the Syrians, they might kill us but then maybe they won’t.” So that evening they walked to the Syrian camp, but no one was there. The Syrians had heard what sounded like speeding horses and chariots and a great army. And, thinking the king of Israel had hired Hittite and Egyptian

kings to attack them, they left their tents, horses, and donkeys and ran for their lives. When the men with leprosy got to the Syrian camp, they entered one tent after another eating and drinking. And they carried off clothes and silver and gold and hid them.

Then the four got to thinking, “This isn’t right to keep this good news to ourselves. If we wait until morning, we might be punished. So let’s go to the king’s palace and tell the news.” So they went back to Samaria and told the gatekeepers what happened. They said the soldiers were gone, horses and donkeys were tied up, and no one was there. The gatekeepers shouted the news to the people in the palace. The king got out of bed and said, “It’s obvious what the Syrians have done. They are hiding in the fields, thinking we’ll go there for food and then they’ll attack us.”

One of his officers suggested scouts take five horses and see what happened. He said, “It may be risky, but we may all die anyway.” So they got two chariots, and the king sent them on their way. On the way to the Jordan River, the scouts saw clothes and equipment the Syrians had thrown away as they hurried to leave. The scouts went back and told the king what they saw, and the people in Samaria ran to the Syrian camp and took what was left. They took so much that prices went way down. As I, the LORD, had said, half an ounce of silver would buy several quarts of flour or ten quarts of barley.

The king put his special assistant in charge of the gate, but he was trampled on as people ran out of the city, and he died. This is the man who questioned what Elisha had said about flour and barley selling for so little. This officer had said those prices wouldn’t happen even if I, the LORD, sent a rainstorm. Elisha had said to him, “You will see it happen, but you won’t eat any of the food.” And that is what happened because the assistant was trampled to death.

Some say they want money, but they wrongly want the joy that money gives. Let Me give you My joy so even if you live in poverty on this earth, you will have the satisfaction that comes from My presence.

The Shunammite Woman Returns

8 Elisha had told the woman whose son he brought back to life, “A famine will last here for seven years. So you and your family should move away for a while.” She moved to Philistine territory and lived there seven years.

Then she moved back to Israel and went to see the king about getting back her house and land. The king was asking Gehazi, Elisha's servant, to tell about the things Elisha had done. Just then the woman came in with her son, and Gehazi said to the king, "This is the woman, and here is her son." The king asked her about this, and then he said to an official, "See that she gets back her house and land, and give her the money her crops would have made since she left Israel."

Later Elisha went to Damascus to see Ben-Hadad II, king of Syria, who was sick. When Ben-Hadad II heard Elisha was there, he asked Hazael to take him a present and ask if the king would get well. So Hazael took 40 camel-loads of the best things made in Damascus. Hazael asked Elisha if Ben-Hadad would get well, and Elisha said, "Yes, he will recover, but he will soon die." Elisha stared at Hazael and then started crying. Hazael asked, "Why are you crying?" Elisha replied, "Because I know you will burn down Israel's walled cities, kill their young men, crush their babies against rocks, and rip open their pregnant women." Hazael said, "I'm not a dog. I would never do that." But Elisha said, "The Lord told me you will be the next king of Syria."

When Hazael went back, Ben-Hadad asked him what Elisha said, and Hazael said, "He told me you will get well." The next day Hazael soaked a thick blanket in water and held it over the king's face until he died. Then Hazael became king of Syria.

Jehoram, Jehoshaphat's son, became king of Judah in Joram's fifth year as king of Israel. Jehoram reigned with his father, Jehoshaphat. Judah's King Jehoram began reigning when he was 32, and he reigned in Jerusalem for eight years. He was as evil as Ahab had been in the northern kingdom, and he even married one of Ahab's daughters. But I, the LORD, did not destroy Judah, because I had promised that a descendant of David would always rule in Judah.

When Jehoram was king, Edom revolted from Judah and set up their own king. Jehoram went with his cavalry to Zair, but the Edomites surrounded him. At night he tried to attack the Edomites, but his soldiers escaped. Edom continued to rebel against Judah, and Libnah did the same. Jehoram's other events are recorded in the book of the kings of Judah. He died and was buried in the City of David. And Ahaziah, his son, became the next king. When Ahaziah began to rule over Judah, Joram was in his 12th year as king of Israel.

Ahaziah was 22 years old when he became king, and he reigned only one year. His mother was Athaliah, granddaughter of King Omri of Israel. Ahaziah was an evil king, and this is no surprise because he was related to Ahab by marriage. He joined King Joram of Israel in the war against King Hazael and

his Syrian troops at Ramoth-Gilead. Joram was surrounded in that battle, and Ahaziah, king of Judah, went to Jezreel to see Joram.

I use evil men to punish My rebellious children. I may punish you unless you repent of your rebellion. Look to Me for grace and seek My face.

Jehu is Privately Anointed King of Israel

9Elisha asked a prophet to take some olive oil, go to Ramoth-Gilead and find Jehu, son of Jehoshaphat, and pour oil over his head in a private room. “Tell him he is to be the next king of Israel. Then leave quickly.” So the prophet went to find Jehu and told him he had a message for him. The two of them went into a house, and the prophet poured oil on Jehu’s head, and said, “The Lord says, ‘I anoint you king of Israel. You are to destroy Ahab’s family. This way Jezebel will be punished for killing the prophets and My servants. Every male in Ahab’s family will die, whether slave or free. I will destroy Ahab’s family just as I destroyed the families of Jeroboam, son of Nebat, and of Baasha, son of Ahijah. Dogs will eat Jezebel in Jezreel, and she will not be buried.’” Then the prophet left quickly.

When Jehu went back to his officers, one of them asked, “What did that crazy guy want? Is everything alright?” Jehu replied, “You know who he is.” They said, “No. We don’t. Tell us.” So he told them that he, Jehu, had been made the king of Israel. They quickly put their coats down on the steps where Jehu was standing, and they shouted, “Jehu is king.”

King Jehu formed a plot against King Joram, who had been wounded fighting against Hazael of Syria at Ramoth-Gilead. Joram was in Jezreel, and King Ahaziah of Judah was visiting him there. Jehu told his men, “Don’t let anyone skip out and tell people in Jezreel that I am to be king. Jehu got in his chariot and rode to Jezreel. A watchman on a tower saw Jehu coming, and he shouted, “Troops are coming.” Joram said, “Send someone out to ask him if this is a friendly visit or not.” So a horseman rode out and asked Jehu if he was coming in peace. Jehu said, “What do you know about peace? Get behind me.” Then the watchman told the king the rider wasn’t coming back. So the king sent a second rider who asked Jehu if he was coming in peace. Jehu said, “What do you know about peace? Get behind me.” The watchman told King

Joram, “The second rider isn’t returning either. The chariot driver is so reckless it must be Jehu.”

So King Joram said, “Get my chariot ready right away.” He and Ahaziah rode out together to meet Jehu, and they met at the field of Naboth. Joram asked Jehu, “Are you coming in peace?” Jehu replied, “How can there be peace when your mother Jezebel caused everyone to worship idols and practice witchcraft?” Joram turned the chariot around and said, “Ahaziah, this is a trap. Let’s get out of here.”

Jehu shot an arrow between Joram’s shoulders that went through his heart. He sank down dead in his chariot. Jehu told Bidkar, his chariot commander, to throw Joram’s body out in Naboth’s field. He said, “You’ll remember that the Lord told Ahab he would be punished in the field where he had killed Naboth and his sons. So throw him out.”

Meanwhile, King Ahaziah of Judah had tried to escape to Beth-Haggan. Jehu chased him and shouted, “Kill him too.” So they shot him in his chariot where the road goes up to Gur, near Ibleam. He got as far as Megiddo, but he died there. His officials took him in a chariot back to Jerusalem and buried him in the City of David. His reign over Judah had started when Joram, Ahab’s son, was in his 11th year.

Jezebel heard that Jehu was on his way to Jezreel. So she painted her eyes and fixed her hair. She watched at a window for Jehu, and when he entered the city gate, she shouted at him, “Why have you come here? You are a murderer just like Zimri.” He looked up toward the window and said, “Is anyone there on my side?” Two or three men looked out, and he said, “Throw her down.” So they did, and her blood splattered on the wall and on the horses that trampled on her.

Jehu got something to eat and drink. Then he told some workers, “Even though she was wicked, she was a king’s daughter. So please bury her.” But when they went to bury her, they found only her skull, her feet, and her hands. They told Jehu, and he said, “The Lord told Elijah this would happen. He said her body would be eaten by dogs here in Jezreel, and her bones would be spread out like manure, so no one could tell who it was.”

My prophecies always come true. Ask forgiveness when you don't believe My predictions. You can take comfort in My sovereignty that I rule in the affairs of men and government.

Ahab's Descendants Are Killed

10Ahab had 70 sons living in Samaria. Jehu wrote a letter to the leaders of Samaria, in which he said, “You have chariots and horses, a fortified city, and weapons. When you receive this letter, choose one of Ahab’s sons to be your king and to fight for Ahab’s family.” But they were afraid. They said, “Since Jehu has already killed King Ahaziah and King Joram, how can we stand against him?”

So the city mayor, manager of the palace affairs, and city council members, and others sent this message to Jehu: “We are your servants, and will do whatever you say. We won’t choose a king. You do what you think is best.” Jehu sent this answer: “If you are on my side and will obey me, then bring me the heads of Ahab’s sons in 24 hours.” These sons had been living with some important people in the city. So when the leaders of Samaria read the letter, they murdered all 70 sons, put their heads in baskets, and gave them to Jehu in Jezreel.

When a messenger told Jehu the heads had been delivered, he said, “Put them in two piles by the city gate and leave them there overnight.” Then in the morning, Jehu spoke to the people, “You are innocent. I’m the one who had Joram killed. But I didn’t kill these 70. They were killed because the Lord had told Elijah this would happen to Ahab’s sons.”

Jehu then killed the rest of Ahab’s relatives in Jezreel, and his officials, friends, and priests. Then he went to Samaria. At Beth-Eked of the Shepherds, he met some relatives of Ahaziah, king of Judah. When he asked who they were, they said, “We are relatives of King Ahaziah. We are going to visit his family and the queen mother.” Jehu shouted, “Grab them.” So they took them to a nearby well and killed all 42 of them.

As he left, he met Jehonadab’s son of Rechab, who was coming to meet Jehu. Jehu asked him, “Are you on my side?” Jehonadab said yes. “Then get with me in my chariot, and I’ll show what I have done for the Lord.” When they arrived in Samaria, Jehu killed any remaining relatives of Ahab, just as I, the LORD, had predicted through Elijah.

Jehu called a meeting of the people and said, “Ahab served Baal a little, but I’ll serve him a lot more. So get together all the prophets, servants, and priests of Baal. Have every Baal worshiper here because I will hold a great sacrifice for Baal. I will kill anyone who doesn’t come.” Actually, this was a trick because Jehu was planning to kill all the worshipers of Baal. Jehu said, “Announce the day when all are to assemble to worship Baal.” So they did. All

of Baal's priests came and crowded into the Baal temple. He told the men in charge of the priestly robes to be sure every priest had a robe.

Jehu and Jehonadab went into the temple, and Jehu said, "Allow only Baal worshipers in here. Don't let anyone in who worships the Lord." As Baal's priests began sacrificing to Baal, Jehu had 80 men posted outside and told them, "Don't let any of them escape. If you do, you will be killed." After Jehu sacrificed a burnt offering, he told the 80 men to come in and kill them all. So they did, and they tossed their bodies outside. Then they went back into the Baal temple and brought out the image of Baal and burned it. They broke it into pieces and destroyed the temple. And since then the place has been a public toilet.

That is how Jehu got rid of Baal worship. But he did not stop the people from worshipping the calf-idols that Jeroboam had set up in Bethel and Dan. Later I, the LORD, told Jehu that because he had destroyed all Ahab's relatives, the next four kings in Israel would be Jehu's descendants. Yet Jehu did not obey Me, the LORD, completely. He kept sinning as Jeroboam had done.

Then I, the LORD, began to reduce the size of Israel's territory. King Hazael of Syria defeated the Israelites east of the Jordan, taking over the regions of Gilead and Bashan—the land of the tribes of Eastern Manasseh, Gad, and Reuben—north from Aroer near the Arnon River.

The other events in Jehu's reign are recorded in the book of the kings of Israel. He died and was buried in Samaria, and his son, Jehoahaz, became king. Jehu reigned over Israel for 28 years.

Some will obey outwardly as did Jehu. But I want obedience from the heart. I seek honest worship.

Joash Becomes King

11 Athaliah was the mother of King Ahaziah of Judah. When she heard that he was dead, she killed all his children so she could be queen. But one son she did not kill was Joash. Ahaziah's half-sister, Jehosheba, who was the priest's wife, hid her nephew, Joash, and his nurse in a room in My Temple. And they were there for six years while Athaliah was queen. In Athaliah's seventh year Jehoiada, the priest, sent for the commanders of units of hundreds

and bodyguards to come to My Temple. He made them promise to be loyal to My Temple, and then he showed them Joash. He said, "A third of you are to guard the palace, a third are to be at the Sur Gate, and a third are to be guarding the palace gate. Though two-thirds of you normally go off duty on the Sabbath, please stay here and protect the young king. Surround the king with your weapons in hand. And kill anyone who tries to get near the king. Stay beside him all the time."

The commanders did what Jehoiada, the priest, ordered. Those going on duty and also those normally going off duty were given spears and shields that had been David's and were kept in My Temple. The guards with their weapons in hand surrounded the king from the south of My Temple to the north side and around the altar of burnt offering.

Jehoiada placed a crown on young Joash's head and gave him a copy of My Law and said, "Joash is king." Olive oil was poured on his head, and the people clapped and shouted, "Long live the king."

Athaliah heard all this noise, so she went to My Temple to see what was going on. She saw young Joash crowned and standing by one of the columns, the usual place for the king. The officers and trumpeters were around him, and people were rejoicing and blowing trumpets. When Athaliah saw all this, she tore her clothes in anger and shouted, "This is a trick. You betrayed me."

Then Jehoiada, the priest, told the commanders of units of hundreds, "Take her out of the temple and kill her. Don't kill her here in the temple. And kill anyone who tries to rescue her." So they grabbed her and led her to the gate where horses enter the palace grounds, and they killed her there.

Then Jehoiada encouraged the people to agree to be My faithful people. Then the people tore down the Baal temple, smashed altars to Baal, and other idols, and killed Mattan, the priest of Baal. Jehoiada posted guards at My Temple.

Then the commanders of units of hundreds, and bodyguards, and all the people led the new king from My Temple to the palace, and he sat on the throne. Everyone was glad. And the city was peaceful because Athaliah had been killed. Joash was seven years old when he was made king.

Jehosheba changed history. In a small way, you can change history. Thank Me for Jehoiada the high priest who changed history, and pray you can do the same thing.

King Joash Rules over Judah

12When Joash became king, Jehu was in his seventh year as king of Israel. Joash ruled in Jerusalem from age 7 to 47. His mother was Zibiah from Beersheba. All his life Joash did what pleased Me, the LORD because Jehoiada taught him. But Joash didn't destroy the hilltop shrines, and so people still offered sacrifices and burned incense at the shrines.

Joash told the priests to collect money from the people—money from offerings, payments of vows, voluntary gifts—to repair My Temple. But by Joash's 27th year the priests still hadn't repaired My Temple. So Joash called Jehoiada and the other priests and asked why they hadn't repaired My Temple. He said, "Don't take any more money for yourselves. From now on use the money you receive for temple repairs." So the priests agreed not to use any money for themselves. And they also decided not to do the repairs themselves.

Jehoiada cut a hole in the top of a wooden box and set it to the right of the Altar of Burnt Offering. The priests guarding My Temple put money from the people in the box. When it seemed that the box was getting full, Jehoiada and the royal secretary counted the money and put it in bags. Then they gave money to the construction supervisors who paid the workers—carpenters, builders, masons, and stonecutters. They also bought lumber and stones and whatever else was needed.

Money was not used to make silver cups, lamp snuffers, bowls, trumpets, and other gold or silver articles. The money was paid to the workers, who used it for repairs. The supervisors were honest men, so no one kept a record of money given to them. However, the money the people gave with guilt offerings and sin offerings was given to the priests.

King Hazael of Syria attacked and captured the Philistine city of Gath. Then he went to attack Jerusalem. When Joash heard about this, he gathered up all the objects he and his ancestors Jehoshaphat, Jehoram, and Ahaziah had dedicated to Me, the LORD, and all the gold in the storage rooms in My Temple and the palace, and he sent all these to Hazael. So Hazael did not attack Jerusalem.

The rest of Joash's events in his reign are written in the book of the kings of Judah. But his officials killed him at Beth-Millo, on the road to Silla. There assassins were Jozacar, son of Shimeath, and Jehozabad, son of Shomer. Joash was buried with his ancestors in the city of David. His son, Amaziah, became king.

Be like those carpenters and stonecutters who could be trusted. Commit yourself to honesty. Then I can use you in My work.

Jehoahaz Rules over Israel

13 In the 23rd year of Joash's reign over Judah, Jehoahaz, son of Jehu, became king of Israel. He was king for 17 years. He sinned by following the example of Jeroboam who worshiped idols and led Israel to sin. This made Me, the LORD, angry with Israel, and so I let Hazael of Syria and his son, Ben-Hadad, defeat Israel and rule over them for a long time. Jehoahaz, Jehu's son, prayed for help from Me, and I responded. Seeing how Syria was treating Israel, I, the LORD, rescued the Israelites and Israel lived in peace again. But the people continued to sin following Jeroboam's example. They even set up in Samaria a repulsive pole used in worshiping the goddess, Asherah. Jehoahaz's army had nothing left except ten chariots, 50 cavalymen, and 10,000 regular soldiers. Hazael had killed all the others and made them like dust. Everything else Jehoahaz did as king is recorded in the book of the kings of Israel. He was buried in Samaria. And Jehoash became king.

Jehoash became king of Israel in the 37th year of Joash's rule in Judah, and he ruled for 16 years from Samaria. He did what was evil just like Jeroboam who worshiped idols and led Israel to sin. The rest of his reign, including his war with King Amaziah of Judah, is recorded in the book of the kings of Israel. When he died, he was buried in Samaria. His son, Jeroboam II, became the next king.

Elisha was sick and about to die. King Jehoash of Israel went to visit him, and he cried, and he said, "My father, you are the strength of Israel, like chariots and horsemen." Elisha said, "Get a bow and some arrows." And the king did so. Then Elisha said for the king to hold the bow, and Elisha put his hands on the king's hands. Then he told the king to open the window facing east, and he opened it. And Elisha said, "Shoot." So he did. Then Elisha said, "This arrow means the Lord will give you victory over Syria at Aphek."

Then Elisha said, "Pick up the other arrows and hit the ground with them. The king did this three times. Elisha was disappointed with him. He said, "You should have hit the ground five or six times. Then you would have defeated Syria and completely destroyed it. But now you will have victory over Syria three times." Then Elisha died and was buried.

Moabite soldiers invaded Israel every spring. One time some Israelites were burying a man's body, and they looked up and saw some Moabite soldiers. So they quickly tossed the body into Elisha's tomb, and when the body touched Elisha's bones, the dead man came to life and stood up.

King Hazael of Syria kept controlling Israel all during Jehoahaz's reign. But I, the LORD, in My grace did not let Syria destroy Israel. I was concerned for them because of My agreement with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and so I never completely rejected Israel. After Hazael died, his son, Ben-Hadad, became king of Syria. Jehoash, Israel's king, defeated Ben-Hadad three times and took back from Ben-Hadad all the towns Hazael had captured from his father, Jehoahaz.

Jeroboam II Rules over Israel

14 Amaziah, Joash's son, became king of Judah in the second year of Jehoash, king of Israel. He was 25 years old, and he reigned in Jerusalem 29 years. His mother was Jehoaddin from Jerusalem. He obeyed Me, the LORD, following the example of his father, Joash, but he was not as faithful to Me as David was. He did not destroy the hilltop shrines, and so people continued to offer sacrifices and burn incense there.

Amaziah killed the men who had assassinated his father. But he didn't kill their children for that would have violated the Law of Moses which says, "Parents are not to be put to death because of their children, nor children for the sins of their parents."

Amaziah killed 10,000 Edomites in the Salt Valley, and captured Sela and renamed it Joktheel. One day he wrote to Israel's King Jehoash, Jehu's grandson, and asked him to face him in battle. Jehoash replied, "A small thorn bush in Lebanon said he wanted to marry the daughter of a big cedar tree. But a wild animal crushed the small bush. True, you have defeated Edom, and you are proud of it. But I suggest you stay home and celebrate. Don't bring trouble on you and Judah."

Amaziah didn't listen, so Jehoash marched to Beth-Shemesh in Judah, and caused Amaziah's soldiers to run in defeat. Jehoash captured Amaziah at Beth-Shemesh and went to Jerusalem and tore down 600 feet of the city wall from the Ephraim Gate to the Corner Gate. He took all the gold and silver and valuable articles from My Temple and the palace treasury. He also took hostages and went home to Samaria.

Other events in the reign of Jehoash, including his war with Amaziah, are written in the book of the kings of Israel. After he died, he was buried in Samaria with Israel's king. And Jeroboam II became the next king.

Amaziah lived for 15 years after Jehoash died, and the rest of the events in his reign are recorded in the book of the kings of Judah. Some people in Jerusalem were plotting against Amaziah, and so he escaped to Lachish. But some men caught up with him and killed him. They brought him back to Jerusalem and buried him in the city of David. The people made 16-year-old Uzziah king in Amaziah's place. He recaptured and rebuilt the town of Elath.

Jeroboam II, son of Jehoash, began reigning in Israel in Amaziah's 15th year in Judah. He reigned in Samaria 41 years. He followed the sinful example of Jeroboam I in worshiping idols and influencing Israel to do the same. Jeroboam II recovered the land from Lebo-Hamath to the Dead Sea as I had promised through Jonah, son of Amattai from Gath-Hepher. I, the LORD, saw how the people, both slaves and free people, were suffering and had no one to help them. I, the LORD, had said I wouldn't let Israel be destroyed, so I used Jeroboam II to rescue them. The other events in Jeroboam's reign, including his power and wars and how he recaptured for Israel the towns of Damascus and Hamath, are recorded in the book of the kings of Israel. When he died, he was buried with other kings of Israel. And his son, Zechariah, became the next king.

Uzziah Rules over Judah

15Uzziah, son of Amaziah, became king of Judah in the 27th year of Jeroboam II's reign over Israel. Uzziah was 16 years old when he became king, and he reigned for 52 years in Jerusalem. His mother was Jecoliah from Jerusalem. He obeyed Me, the LORD, as his father Amaziah did, but he did not destroy the hilltop shrines, where people continued to offer sacrifices and burn incense to their idols. I punished Uzziah with leprosy for the rest of his life, and he lived in a house by himself. His son, Jotham, ruled in place of Uzziah. The rest of the events in Uzziah's reign are recorded in the book of the kings of Judah. When he died, he was buried near his ancestors in Jerusalem. His son, Jotham, became Judah's next king.

Zechariah, son of Jeroboam II, became king of Israel in Uzziah's 38th year. And he was king in Samaria for only six months. He sinned against Me, the LORD, as his ancestors had done, following Jeroboam's idolatry and leading

Israel to sin. Shallum, son of Jabesh, assassinated Zechariah as people looked on. And Shallum became the next king. The events of Zechariah's brief reign are recorded in the book of the kings of Israel. I, the LORD, had told Jehu that the next four kings of Israel would be his descendants, and this came true. Those four were Jehoahaz, Jehoash, Jeroboam II, and Zechariah.

Shallum, son of Jabesh, became king in Azariah's 39th year. But he reigned in Samaria only one month. Menahem, son of Gadi, assassinated Shallum and became the next king. The other events in Shallum's short reign are recorded in the book of the kings of Israel.

Menahem destroyed the town of Tappuah and surrounding towns. He killed everyone in Tappuah and ripped open pregnant women. He became king of Israel in the 59th year of Azariah, king of Judah, and he ruled in Samaria 10 years. Like many kings before him, he disobeyed Me, the LORD, by following the sins of Jeroboam who caused Israel to worship idols. Then Tiglath Pileser, king of Assyria, invaded Israel. But Menahem gave him about 37 tons of silver to gain his support. Menahem then required every rich person to give him 20 ounces of silver, and he gave that money to Tiglath-Pileser, who then left Israel.

The other events in Menahem's reign are recorded in the book of the kings of Israel. When he died, his son, Pekahiah, became the next king. Pekahiah began reigning in Uzziah's 50th year in Judah. He reigned in Samaria only two years. He too sinned against Me by following the sins of idol worship Jeroboam caused Israel to commit.

Pekah, an officer of Pekahiah, and 50 men from Gilead assassinated him along with Argob and Arieah in the palace at Samaria. Then Pekah became king of Israel. The other events in Pekahiah's reign are recorded in the book of the kings of Israel. Pekah began his 20-year reign in Samaria in Uzziah's 52nd year. But like many before him, he disobeyed Me, the LORD, by not turning from the worship of idols Jeroboam had caused Israel to commit.

During Pekah's reign Tiglath-Pileser, king of Assyria, attacked Israel again and captured the towns of Ijon, Abel-Beth-Maacah, Janoah, Kedesh, and Hazor. He also conquered the regions of Gilead, Galilee, and Naphtali. And he took people as captives to Assyria. Then Hoshea, son of Elah, assassinated Pekah and began to reign over Israel in the 20th year of Jotham, son of Uzziah. The events in Pekah's reign are recorded in the book of the kings of Israel.

Jotham, son of Uzziah, began to reign over Judah in the second year of Pekah. Jotham was 25 years old when he began to reign, and he reigned in

Jerusalem 16 years. His mother was Jerusha, a daughter of Zadok. Jotham pleased Me, just as Uzziah had done. But like other kings before him, he did not destroy the hilltop shrines where people offered sacrifices and burned incense. He rebuilt the upper gate of My Temple.

The other events of Jotham's reign are written in the book of the kings of Judah. In those days I began to send Rezin, king of Syria, and Pekah, king of Israel, to attack Judah. When Jotham died, he was buried in the city of David, and his son, Ahaz, became king.

I am the ultimate ruler, no matter who sits in power on this earth. I will bless you if you obey Me, follow My commands, and worship My majesty. Let Me come sit on the throne of your life.

Ahaz Rules over Judah

16 Ahaz, son of Jotham, began to reign over Judah in the 17th year of Pekah, king of Israel. Ahaz was 20 years old when he became king, and he ruled for 16 years. But Ahaz did not please Me as David had done. He was even more wicked than Israel's kings because he sacrificed his own son in the fire and he followed other terrible practices of nations I, the LORD, had forced out of the land. He offered sacrifices and burned incense at the hilltop shrines and under every green tree.

King Rezin of Syria and King Pekah of Israel attacked Jerusalem but could not take it. Rezin recovered the Edomite city of Elath, drove out Jews who were there, and sent Syrians to live there. Ahaz sent messengers to tell Tiglath-Pileser that he was his servant and that he was asking the Assyrian king to rescue him from the armies of Syria and Israel. Then Ahaz took silver and gold from My Temple and the palace treasury and sent them to Tiglath, just as Menahem, Israel's king, had done. So the Assyrians left Judah and attacked Damascus and took its people away to Kir. And Tiglath killed Rezin.

Ahaz went to Damascus to meet Tiglath of Assyria, and while there he saw an unusual altar. He sent Uriah, the priest, to make a sketch of the altar, and he asked Uriah to build one like it. So Uriah did, and he finished before Ahaz got back. When Ahaz got back, he made offerings on it, including a peace offering, a burnt offering, a grain offering, and a drink offering. He sprinkled the blood

of the peace offering on the altar. Then he moved the old bronze Altar of Burnt Offering to the north side of the new altar.

Then Ahaz told Uriah the priest, “Offer morning and evening sacrifices and gifts of grain and wine on this new altar. And sprinkle blood from the animal sacrifices on this altar. I will use the old altar to ask the Lord what I should do.” Uriah did everything Ahaz told him.

Then Ahaz removed the side panels and barriers from the moveable stands. He also removed the large water tank that sat on the backs of 12 bronze oxen, and he set it on a stone base. He also removed the canopy that had been built at My Temple and the king’s outer entrance to My Temple. He did all this to please Tiglath-Pileser. The other events in Ahaz’s reign are recorded in the book of the kings of Judah. When Ahaz died, he was buried with his ancestors in the City of David. Hezekiah, his son, became the next king.

You should be afraid of taking that first step away from Me. Ask for ears to hear My warnings, and eyes to see spiritual dangers, and an obedient heart to follow Me.

Hoshea Rules over Israel

17 Hoshea, son of Elah, became king over Israel in Ahaz’s 12th year as king of Judah. He reigned in Samaria for nine years. Though he sinned before Me, he wasn’t as bad as some of the kings before him. Hoshea had to pay heavy taxes to Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, as a result of the Assyrian king’s attack against Israel. Then Hoshea asked So, king of Egypt, for help against Assyria, and Hoshea stopped paying the taxes to Assyria. So Shalmaneser put Hoshea in prison. Then Shalmaneser attacked Samaria for three years. Finally, in Hoshea’s last year, Samaria fell, and the king of Assyria took Israelites away as prisoners to his country. He put some of them in Halah near the Habor River in Gozan and in some towns of the Medes.

This happened because the Israelites sinned against Me, the LORD, who had rescued them from slavery in Egypt. They worshiped the idols of the people I had forced out of their land, and they were sinful like the Israelite kings before them. They secretly had done these sinful things even building hilltop shrines in all their towns, whether small or large fortified cities. They set up sacred stones and poles for worshiping Asherah on every hilltop and

under every open tree. They burned incense at these shrines. Just like the nations, I was forced to leave the land. I was very angry because of all these terrible sins. I kept telling them not to do these things, but they did them anyway. I had sent My prophets to warn them to turn from their sinful ways and obey My commands and laws

But they were as stubborn as their ancestors in refusing to trust Me, the LORD. Rejecting My laws and the agreement I made with their ancestors, they worshiped worthless idols, and they became worthless themselves. I had told them not to follow the ways of the nations around them, but they did anyway. Ignoring My commands, they made two idols shaped like calves, set up an Asherah pole, and worshiped Baal and the stars. They even sacrificed their children and practiced fortune-telling and witchcraft and sold themselves to evil. No wonder I, the LORD, was angry with them.

So in My anger, I the LORD, allowed them to be taken away to Assyria as prisoners. Only the tribe of Judah was left, but they too did not obey Me, their LORD. They sinned just as the Israelites did, so I punished the Israelites by letting them be defeated. When I, the LORD, took the ten northern tribes from David's family, the people there chose Jeroboam, son of Nebat, as their king. And he is the one who led the people away from Me. Stubbornly the people refused to turn from their evil ways, including the worship of idols. So as I, the LORD, had warned through My prophets, Israelites were taken captive to Assyria, and that's where they remained.

The king of Assyria took many people who were living in Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath, and Sepharvaim and made them move to Israel and other towns in Samaria. These people from Assyria did not worship Me, the LORD, so I sent lions to kill some of them. A messenger told the king of Assyria that the people he relocated to Israel did not know how to worship Me, the LORD, so I sent lions to kill them. The Assyrian king responded, "Send back to Israel one of the priests we took captive. Have him teach the new residents how to worship the Lord." One of the Israelite priests went back, and he lived in Bethel and taught the people how to worship Me, the LORD.

However, many of these new residents from Assyria worshiped their own gods, placing their idols in the Israelites' hilltop shrines. People from Babylon worshiped the God of Succoth Beneth, people from Cuthah worshiped Nergal, and the people from Hamath worshiped Ashima. The Avvites worshiped Nibhaz and Tartak. And the people from Sepharvaim sacrificed their children in the fire to their gods Adrammelech and Anammelech. They also worshiped Me, but they chose their own people to serve as priests at the hilltop shrines.

Though they worshiped Me, they followed the religious practices of their homeland nations. And they still do this even now. None of them worships only Me, the LORD. They follow their former practices instead of obeying My laws, regulations, and commands that I gave to the descendants of Jacob, whom I renamed Israel. I, the LORD, had told them, “Don’t worship other gods or bow down to them or serve them or offer them sacrifices. Worship only Me, who rescued you from Egypt with great power. Offer sacrifices only to Me. Always obey My laws, regulations, instructions, and commands, and worship no other gods. And don’t forget the agreement I made with you. Worship Me, the LORD your God, and I will give you victory over your enemies.”

But the people in Israel refused to listen and continued to sin. Instead of worshiping Me, they worshiped their idols. And their descendants did the same thing.

I want the world to see My power in your life and in the church. May the world see My presence in your life, and not focus on you, or your weaknesses. Make your prayer, “Not I, but Christ.”

Hezekiah Rules over Judah

18 Hezekiah, son of Ahaz, began to rule over Judah when Hoshea was in his third year as king of Israel. Hezekiah was 22 years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem 29 years. His mother was Ahijah, a daughter of Zechariah. He obeyed Me, the LORD, just as David had done. He destroyed the hilltop shrines, smashed the sacred stones, and cut down the detestable pole used in worshiping Asherah. He also broke into pieces the bronze snake Moses had made. The people had named it Nehushtan (meaning “Snake” or “Bronze”) and were burning incense to it.

Hezekiah was an unusual king. No king before or after him trusted Me as he did. He was faithful to Me in everything. He carefully obeyed all My commands. So I, the LORD, gave him success in all he did. He refused to pay the king of Assyria tribute. He also defeated the Philistines, destroying their small and large cities all the way to Gaza.

In Hezekiah’s fourth year, which was Hoshea’s seventh year in Israel, King Shalmaneser of Assyria attacked Samaria and finally defeated it after three

years. This was in Hezekiah's sixth year. As noted earlier, Shalmaneser took some Israelites as prisoners and forced them to live in Halah near the Habor River in Gozan and in some cities of the Medes. This is because the people had refused to obey Me and had not kept My agreement given through Moses.

In Hezekiah's 14th year as king of Judah Sennacherib of Assyria attacked every walled city in Judah except Jerusalem. So Hezekiah sent this message to Sennacherib at Lachish: "I admit that I've done wrong in not paying you tribute. But if you stop attacking Jerusalem, I'll pay you whatever you say." So Sennacherib required him to pay 11 tons of silver and a ton of gold. So Hezekiah collected the silver from My Temple and the royal treasury. And he stripped gold from My Temple doors and doorposts, and gave it to the Assyrian king.

But the Assyrian king sent his three highest military officers with many soldiers to go see Hezekiah. In Jerusalem, they stopped outside the city at the aqueduct from the Upper Pool, near the road that leads to the field where cloth is bleached. They called for Hezekiah to meet them. But he sent three officials instead. They were Eliakim, son of Hilkiyah, who was the palace administrator, Shebna, the royal secretary, and Joah, son of Asaph, the royal historian. One of the Assyrian leaders said, "The king of Assyria says, 'Why is Hezekiah so sure of himself? Does he think he can win a battle with mere words? Who will help him? If you depend on Egypt, it will be like leaning on a broken stick that will go through your hand. You can't rely on Egypt's pharaoh. If you are depending on your Lord, didn't Hezekiah tear down His shrines and altar and make everyone worship here in Jerusalem?"

"The king of Assyria says that if you can find 2,000 horsemen, he will give you 2,000 horses to ride on. Then with this small cavalry, you can try to defeat us. But don't get your hopes up. You wouldn't be able to defeat our lowest ranking officer even if you had help from Egypt. Besides that, the Lord has told us to come here and destroy your nation."

Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah said to the Assyrian spokesman, "Speak to us in Aramaic; we understand it. If you speak in Hebrew, our people will know what you are saying." But Sennacherib's representatives said, "My master sent me to speak, so everyone hears this, not just you. These people will soon become so hungry they will eat their own body waste and drink their own urine." Then he shouted in Hebrew, "Listen to what the great king of Assyria says. 'Don't let Hezekiah fool you. He can't save you. Don't trust him when he says the Lord will rescue you and that the city won't be conquered by the Assyrian king. Stop listening to Hezekiah. If you surrender, I will let you eat from your

own garden and drink from your own well. Then I will take you to another land where there is plenty of grain, new wine, bread, vineyards, olive trees, and honey. You can really enjoy life there, but if you stay here, your choice is death.

“So don’t listen to Hezekiah. He says his Lord will save you, but he is wrong. Have the gods of any other nation saved them from Assyria? What about the gods of Hamath and Arpad? And the gods of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivvah? Did they save their nations from me? None of these gods saved their countries from me. So what makes you think your Lord can save Jerusalem?”

The people of Jerusalem kept silent because Hezekiah told them not to say anything. Then Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah tore their clothes in grief and went back to Hezekiah and told him what the Assyrian representatives had said.

King Hezekiah Seeks Advice from Isaiah

19When Hezekiah heard their report, he too tore his clothes in grief and went into My temple to pray. Then he asked Eliakim, Shebna, and the leading priests, all in coarse clothing, to go to the prophet Isaiah, son of Amoz, and tell him, “Hezekiah says we are in difficult and disgraceful times. This is like a woman about to give birth, but she’s too weak to deliver. We hope the Lord your God, has heard the Assyrian representative insulting Him, and will punish him. Pray for those of us who are still alive.” When the leaders told this to Isaiah, he said, “Tell Hezekiah not to worry about the words of these messengers from the Assyrian king. The Lord will cause the Assyrian king to receive bad news from home. So he will leave Jerusalem, and when he gets home, I will have him killed.”

The Assyrian representative heard that Sennacherib had gone from Lachish to Libnah, so he went to Libnah. Then Sennacherib heard that Tirhakah, king of Ethiopia, was on his way to fight the Assyrian king. Then the Assyrian king sent this word to Hezekiah: “Don’t let your God fool you into thinking He can keep me from capturing you. You know how we have destroyed other nations. And your situation won’t be any different. Have the gods of other nations like Gozan, Haran, Rezep, and the people of Eden in Tel-Assar delivered them? No, the former Assyrian kings destroyed them all. Also, think what happened to the kings of Hamath, Arpad, Sephardim, Hena, and Ivvah.”

When Hezekiah read this letter, he spread it in My temple for Me, the LORD, to see. Then he prayed, “O Lord, God of Israel, your throne is above

the winged creatures. You alone created the heavens and the earth. So please listen to the way Sennacherib has insulted You. True, the Assyrian kings have destroyed many nations. And they have burned the idols these other nations have worshiped. Of course, they could do that because those gods were made of wood and stone. Now Lord our God, rescue us from the Assyrians. Then everyone will know that You are the only God.”

Then Isaiah told Hezekiah that the Lord, the God of Israel, said, “I have heard your prayer about Sennacherib, and this is what I say to him: ‘The virgin daughter of Zion despises you and makes fun of you. They laugh behind your back. Who is it you have been insulting, and against whom have you shouted? Against whom have you looked down in pride? The Holy One of Israel!

“Your messengers have insulted Me, and you said, ‘With my many chariots I have gone to the highest mountain in Lebanon. I have cut down its cedars and cypress trees. I have gone deep into its forests. And I have dug wells in several countries and have drunk water there, and I even stopped up the rivers of Egypt.’”

“But have you heard, Sennacherib? I, the Lord God of Israel, planned long ago what I will now make happen. I planned that you will turn fortified cities into ruins. This is why the people have so little power and are ashamed. They are as weak as wildflowers or grass growing on housetops, scorched by the sun before they mature.

“But I, the LORD, know everything about you—when you come and where you go and how you are so angry against Me. Because of your anger and your pride, I will put a hook in your nose and a bit in your mouth, and I will make you go back where you came from.”

Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, “Here is proof that the Lord will protect Jerusalem from Assyria. This year you will eat crops that grow on their own, next year you will eat what springs up from that, and in the third year, you will plant crops and then have a wonderful harvest. Those who survive in Judah will be like a vine that takes root and then bears fruit. Some survivors will leave Jerusalem and Mount Zion. Because of the Lord’s devotion to His people, this will happen.”

I, the LORD, say this about the king of Assyria: “He will not enter Jerusalem and shoot arrows there. He will not surround the city and then build a bank of earth against it. He will go back to Assyria and will not even enter Jerusalem. I will defend this city for My sake and for the sake of My servant David.”

That night the angel of the Lord killed 185,000 Assyrian troops. Some Assyrians survived, and when they got up in the morning, they saw corpses everywhere. Then Sennacherib went home to Nineveh. One day while he was worshiping in the temple of Nisroch, his sons, Adrammelech and Sharezer, killed him. They escaped to the land of Ararat, and his son, Esarhaddon, became the next king of Assyria.

Listen to those who know My Word and do My will. Listen to those who pray to Me and have My best interests at heart. I will speak to you through the godly counsel of My servants.

My Healing Touch on King Hezekiah

20Hezekiah became terribly sick and almost died. The prophet Isaiah went to see him and said, “The Lord says you will soon die, so you need to take care of your affairs.” Then Hezekiah prayed, “Remember, Lord, I have been faithful to You and have done what is right.” Then he cried bitterly.

As Isaiah was leaving, I, the LORD, told him to go back to Hezekiah and tell him, “The Lord says, ‘I have heard your prayer and seen your tears. I will heal you in three days, and you will worship Me in My Temple. I will give you another 15 years to live. And I will rescue you and this city from the king of Assyria. I will do this for My sake and to honor My servant David.’”

Isaiah told Hezekiah’s servants to crush some figs and put them on the king’s sore. They did this, and he got well. Hezekiah had asked Isaiah, “How will I know the Lord will heal me so I can go worship Him in three days?” Isaiah said, “Here’s how: You can ask that the shadow on the sundial go forward on the stairway ten steps or backward ten steps.” Hezekiah replied, “The shadow often goes forward, so please make it go backward.” Isaiah asked Me, the LORD, to do this, and I caused the shadow from the sun to go ten steps backward on Ahaz’s sundial.

Merodach-Baladan, son of Baladan, king of Babylon, heard that Hezekiah had been very sick, and so he sent him a letter and a gift. Hezekiah welcomed the messengers and showed them all the silver, gold, spices, and oils in his storehouse. He also showed them where he kept his weapons, and he showed them everything in his palace. Then Isaiah asked Hezekiah, “What did these men want? And where are they from?” Hezekiah said they came from

Babylon. And Isaiah asked, “What did you show them in your palace?” Hezekiah said, “Actually everything in my palace.” Then Isaiah told the king, “One day everything you and your ancestors have stored up will be taken to Babylon. Some of your own descendants will be taken as captives to Babylon, and they will be made servants in the Babylonian king’s palace.” Hezekiah thought, “At least our nation will be at peace for a while.”

The other events in Hezekiah’s reign, including the pool he built and the tunnel he dug to bring water into Jerusalem, are recorded in the book of the kings of Judah. When Hezekiah died, his son, Manasseh, became king.

You may be in good health today. Use preventive medicine to stay in good health. When you need it, use therapeutic healing to return your health. Yield your body to Me today. I will heal you when you need it, but always glorify Me through your body.

Manasseh Rules over Judah

21 Manasseh was 12 years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem 55 years. His mother was Hephzibah. He disobeyed Me, the LORD, following the disgusting practices of the nations I had forced out of the land. He rebuilt the hilltop shrines his father, Hezekiah, had demolished. He built altars to Baal and made a sacred pole for use in worshiping Asherah, just as Ahab, king of Israel, had done. He worshiped the stars. He even built altars to pagan gods and placed them in My Temple. These altars for all the stars were placed in the courtyards of My temple. He sacrificed his son in the fire, and practiced witchcraft and fortune-telling and consulted mediums and psychics. All these terrible evil practices made Me, the LORD, very angry.

Manasseh even set up an Asherah pole in My Temple, where I had said I was to be honored forever. I had said, “I won’t make My people leave this land if they obey My Law I gave Moses.” But the people disobeyed Me, the LORD, and followed Manasseh’s ways and were more evil than the nations I had destroyed.

Then I, the LORD, said to some of My prophets, “Manasseh has done things more terrible than the Amorites, and he caused the people to worship idols.” So I, the LORD, say, “I will destroy Jerusalem and Judah and those who hear about it will be horrified. I will judge Jerusalem by the same standard

I used for Samaria, and for Ahab's family. I will wipe away the people of Jerusalem as one wipes a dish and turns it over. I will reject even those who survive, and their enemies will rob them. Why? Because all their sins have made Me angry ever since their ancestors left Egypt."

Manasseh killed so many innocent people that the streets of Jerusalem were covered with blood. And this was besides causing so many people in Judah to disobey Me. The other events in Manasseh's life, including his deeds and his many sins, are recorded in the book of the kings of Judah. When he died, he was buried in the Uzza Garden near his palace. Amon, his son, became the next king.

Amon was 22 years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem two years. His mother was Meshullemeth, daughter of Haruz from Jot-bah. He sinned against Me, the LORD, just as his father Manasseh did, worshiping the same idols Manasseh had worshiped. He rejected Me, the God of his ancestors, and he refused to obey Me. Amon's own officials assassinated him. Then the people killed the assassins and made Josiah, his son, king. The events in Amon's reign are recorded in the book of the kings of Judah. He was buried in the Uzza Garden near the palace. His son Josiah was the next king.

The deception of your evil heart will tempt you to sin. My faithfulness will "pull" you toward righteousness. Don't give up; when tempted to sin listen to Me and obey Me. Pray for Me to capture your soul and make you pure.

Josiah Rules over Judah

22 Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem 31 years. His mother was Jedidah, daughter of Adaiah from Bozkath. He obeyed Me, the LORD, as his ancestor David had done. He always did what was right.

In the 18th year of his reign, Josiah told the royal secretary, Shaphan, son of Azaliah, and grandson of Meshullam, to ask Hilkiyah, the high priest, to count the money the gatekeepers had received in donations for repairing My Temple. He then told Shaphan to tell Hilkiyah to give the money to the project supervisors who were to pay My Temple workers, including carpenters, builders, and masons. Also, the supervisors were to buy wood, and stones for

repairing My Temple. “But,” Josiah said, “these are honest men, so the supervisors don’t need to record their responses.”

Hilkiah said to Shaphan, “Guess what I found here in the temple—a copy of the Law of Moses!” Hilkiah gave him the scroll, and Shaphan read it. Then Shaphan told the king that the officials gave the money to the project supervisors who will pay the workers. Then he said, “I have something here you’ll be interested in. It’s a scroll Hilkiah gave me.” Then Shaphan read it to Josiah.

When the king heard what Shaphan read from the Law of Moses, he tore his clothes in despair. Then he told Hilkiah, Ahikam, son of Shaphan, Achor, son of Micaiah, Shaphan, and his personal servant, Asaiah, “Go to the temple and ask the Lord about what we’ve read today. He must be angry with us because we and our ancestors have not been obeying the laws written in this book.”

The five men went to talk with Huldah, the prophetess. Her husband was Shallum, son of Tikvah, and grandson of Harhas, in charge of My Temple wardrobe. She lived in the Mishneh (northern) section of Jerusalem. She said, “Go tell Josiah that this is what the Lord says to him: ‘I will destroy this city and its people, just as this book says. The people of Judah have rejected Me and burned incense to false gods, and I am angry because of everything they have done. I am utterly disgusted with them.’ Tell the king that the Lord says this about what you read: ‘You were sorry when you heard that I will wipe out this country. You tore your clothes in despair, and I heard you cry. So I will not destroy this place while you are still living.’” So they took Huldah’s message to the king.

To revive your life, seek My presence in My Word. Read it to know Me. Memorize it to lodge My presence in your life. Follow its teachings to live for Me. Live your life in Me as you hide My Word in your heart.

King Josiah Enforces My Laws

23 King Josiah called together the older leaders of Judah and Jerusalem. He and they went to My temple with the people of Judah and Jerusalem, and the priests and prophets. Everyone was there, from the least to the greatest. Josiah read to the people the words of My Law by Moses that had been found

in My Temple. Standing by a temple column, he asked the people to promise to obey Me, the LORD, by keeping My commandments, regulations, and laws. The people promised to do everything written in My book.

Then Josiah told Hilkiah, the high priest, and other priests and gatekeepers, to remove from My Temple every utensil used in worshiping Baal, Asherah, and the stars. He had all these things burned in the Kidron Valley, and he had the ashes carried off to Bethel. He also got rid of the pagan priests who burned incense at the hilltop shrines in Judah. These priests also burned incense to Baal, and the sun, moon, and stars. He also removed the Asherah pole that was in My Temple and had it burned in the Kidron Valley. Then he ground the ashes into dust and threw the dust over the public cemetery. He also tore down the houses where the male prostitutes lived next to My Temple, and where the women sewed sacred robes for the Asherah idol.

Priests in many towns of Judah had offered sacrifices and burned incense at hilltop shrines, from Geba north of Jerusalem to Beersheba in the south. He also destroyed the shrines left of the entrance to the Joshua Gate. The priests who had served at these pagan shrines were not allowed to serve in My Temple, but they could eat bread without yeast with the other priests.

Josiah demolished the altar of Topheth in the Ben-Hinnom Valley, so no one could use it to sacrifice a child by fire to the god Molech. Some kings of Judah had dedicated to the sun some horses and kept them near My Temple entrance. Josiah removed them and burned the chariots which also had been dedicated to the sun. These horses were kept near the house of Nathan-Melech, a royal officer.

Josiah also tore down and smashed the altars some kings had built on the palace roof and the altars Manasseh had built in My Temple courtyards. Josiah threw the broken pieces into the Kidron Valley. Solomon had built pagan shrines east of Jerusalem to honor Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Sidonians, and Chemosh, the god of the Moabites, and Molech, the god of the Ammonites. Josiah destroyed these shrines. He also tore down the sacred stones and the pole used in worshiping Asherah, and he scattered human bones over the places where they had been. Jeroboam, son of Nebat, had built a pagan hilltop shrine at Bethel. Josiah tore this down, smashed the stones to dust, and burned the Asherah pole. Seeing graves on the hillside in Bethel, Josiah had bones dug up, and he burned them on the altar at Bethel so the altar could no longer be used. This all happened just as I, the LORD, had predicted. When Josiah asked about a particular grave, the people there told him it was the grave of a man who came years ago from Judah and said that the very things you have done to

the altar would be carried out. Josiah said, “Leave that grave alone. Don’t dig up its bones.” So the people of Bethel didn’t burn his bones nor those of an old prophet from Samaria.

Josiah then sent men to towns in Samaria to destroy buildings near hilltop shrines. These had been built by various kings of Israel, and this had made Me, the LORD, very angry. Josiah killed the priests at these shrines in the towns of Samaria, and he burned human bones on the altars so they could no longer be used. Then he went back to Jerusalem.

Josiah told the people to celebrate the Passover to honor Me, the LORD, just as written in the Law of Moses. This festival had not been celebrated for hundreds of years. But finally, it was, in the 18th year of Josiah’s reign. Josiah also got rid of medicine, psychics, household idols, and every form of idolatry. He did this as instructed in the scroll Hilkiah, the priest, had found in My Temple. No other king before or after Josiah obeyed Me, the LORD, and My law so completely.

However, I, the LORD, was still very angry with Judah because of Manasseh’s many sins. As I had said, “I will reject Judah just as I rejected Israel. And I will reject Jerusalem and this temple which was built to honor Me.” Everything else Josiah did in his reign is written in the book of the kings of Judah.

While Josiah was king, King Neco of Egypt went north to the Euphrates River to help the king of Assyria. Josiah and his troops went against Neco, and in Megiddo, Josiah was killed. Josiah’s servants took his body in a chariot back to Jerusalem and buried him in his own tomb. Then the people found Josiah’s son, Jehoahaz, poured oil on his head, and made him king of Judah.

Jehoahaz was 23 years old, and he reigned in Jerusalem only three months. His mother was Hamutal, daughter of Jeremiah, and she was from Libnah. He sinned against Me, the LORD, just as many of his ancestors had done. Pharaoh Neco of Egypt arrested Jehoahaz and put him in prison in Riblah near Hamath. He demanded that Judah pay Egypt 4 tons of silver and about 75 pounds of gold. Neco then made Eliakim, son of Josiah, king, and he changed Eliakim’s name to Jehoiakim. He took Jehoahaz off to Egypt where he died. Jehoiakim forced the people to pay high taxes so he could pay what Neco demanded.

Jehoiakim was 25 years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem 11 years. His mother was Zebidah, daughter of Pedaiah, and she was from Rumah. He sinned against Me just as his ancestors had done.

Pray for the leaders of your generation so they may be revived so they will lead to revival. Pray that you are revived so you can revive the people you lead. May your life be an example to all and may your words touch their hearts. Be a spiritual leader to those you influence.

Jehoiakim Rules over Judah

24When Jehoiakim was king, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, invaded Judah. Jehoiakim surrendered and paid him taxes for three years and then rebelled. Then troops from Babylon, Syria, Moab, and Ammon attacked Judah, intending to destroy it, just as I, the LORD, had said through My prophets. This was because I had planned it. I intended to wipe out Judah because of Manasseh's many sins. Manasseh had shed a lot of innocent blood in Jerusalem, and I, the LORD, would not forgive that.

The other events in Jehoiakim's reign are recorded in the book of the kings of Judah. When he died, his son, Jehoiachin, became the next king. Nebuchadnezzar defeated Neco of Egypt and controlled the vast region from the brook of Egypt to the Euphrates River.

Jehoiachin was 18 years old when he became king and reigned in Jerusalem only three months. His mother was Nehushta, daughter of Elnathan, from Jerusalem. He sinned against Me just as many of his ancestors had done. When Jehoiachin was king, Nebuchadnezzar sent troops ahead to attack Jerusalem, and he arrived later. Jehoiachin, his mother, his servants, and his officials surrendered to him. This was in Nebuchadnezzar's eighth year as king of Babylon. Then, just as I said would happen, Nebuchadnezzar took all the treasures from My Temple and the royal palace, including the gold objects Solomon had made for My Temple. He took 10,000 prisoners, including officers, soldiers, craftsmen, and skilled workers. He left in Judah, only the very poorest people.

Nebuchadnezzar also took Jehoiachin as a captive to Babylon, with his wives, officials, mother, and leaders. He also took 7,000 soldiers and 1,000 skilled workers and craftsmen. Nebuchadnezzar then made Mattaniah as the next king, and he changed his name to Zedekiah.

Zedekiah was 21 years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem 11 years. His mother was Humutal, the daughter of Jeremiah, from Libnah. Zedekiah and Jehoahaz were brothers. Zedekiah sinned against Me,

the LORD, just as Jehoiakim had done. So I, the LORD, in My anger turned My back on Judah and let them be taken into captivity. Then Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon.

The Fall of Jerusalem

25In the ninth year of Zedekiah's reign, on January 15, 588 BC, Nebuchadnezzar's army surrounded the city of Jerusalem and built ramps up to the city walls. The siege continued for a year and a half. Then in Zedekiah's 11th year (536 BC), the food was entirely gone. On July 18 of that year, the Babylonians broke through the city wall. The soldiers in Jerusalem ran away at night through the gate near the royal garden. They ran toward the Jordan Valley, but the Babylonians caught the king near Jericho, and his men had run off. The Babylonian soldiers brought Zedekiah to Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah, where he was pronounced guilty. Zedekiah's sons were killed as he watched, and then the soldiers gouged out his eyes, bound him with bronze chains, and led him away to Babylon.

On August 4 of that year (586), the 19th year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, Nebuzaradan, captain of the guard, arrived in Jerusalem. He burned down My Temple, the royal palace, all the houses in Jerusalem, and every important building. Then he ordered the soldiers to tear down the city walls. Nebuchadnezzar took as captives the people who were still in the city, along with any who had become loyal to Nebuchadnezzar. Only the very poorest people were left in the city to care for the vineyards and the fields.

The Babylonians broke up the bronze columns, the bronze water carts, and the bronze water tank in My Temple and took the bronze to Babylon. They also took the pots, shovels, wick snuffers, dishes, and all the other bronze utensils used in My Temple. Nebuzaradan also took the fire pans and bowls made of gold and silver.

The bronze from the columns, the water carts, and the huge water tank was too much to be weighed. Each column was 27 ½ feet high. The bronze on top of one column was 4 ½ feet high and was decorated with bronze pomegranates all around it.

Nebuzaradan took as prisoners Seraiah, the chief priest, Zephaniah, his assistant priest, and three gatekeepers. Then he arrested an army commander, the king's five personal advisors, an army secretary in charge of recruitment, and 60 other residents in Jerusalem. Nebuzaradan took them to

Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah where they were all put to death. So the people of Judah were taken captive from their land.

Nebuchadnezzar appointed Gedaliah, son of Ahikam, and grandson of Shaphan, as governor of the people left in Judah. When Judah's army officers heard that Gedaliah was governor, they joined him in Mizpah. These included Ishmael, son of Nethaniah, Johanan, son of Kareah, Seraiah, son of Tanhumeth from Netophah, and Jaazaniah, from Maazah. Gedaliah assured them that the Babylonians did not intend to harm them. He said, "If you settle in Babylon and serve the king, all will go well with you." But in September of that year Ishmael, son of Nethaniah, and grandson of Elishama went to Mizpah with ten men and assassinated Gedaliah and everyone with him, both Judeans and Babylonians. Then the people in Mizpah were afraid of what the Babylonians might do, and so they went to Egypt.

After Jehoiachin was a captive in Babylon for 37 years, Evil-Merodach became king of Babylon. He released Jehoiachin from prison in April of that year (561 BC). He was kind to Jehoiachin and treated him better than anyone else in prison in Babylon. He gave Jehoiachin new clothes so he could put aside his prison clothes, and let him eat with him the rest of his life. Evil-Merodach also gave Jehoiachin a regular allowance to buy whatever he needed the rest of his life.

I punish religious hypocrisy, so seriously seek My presence in your life. Serve Me wholeheartedly, not because of what the world thinks, but because you love Me. Constantly worship Me because your faith is all about your relationship with Me.

I AM GOD

The Shekinah Glory

The Book of First Chronicles

The chronicler wanted to see “all Israel” united because they were My people, and they came from Abraham. First Chronicles traces the genealogy from Adam to Saul (chaps. 1-11). Then it traces David’s life, but was kind to David in not mentioning his sins. The book ends with David’s death.

The Bible is all about how I dealt with My people. You should read about them to avoid their mistakes and follow their good exploits. Then you should commit yourselves in prayer to always be faithful to Me, and to always strive against sin.

Adam to Abraham

1 The sons of Adam were Seth, Enosh, Kenan, Mahalalel, Jared, Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech, and Noah. The sons of Noah were Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

The sons of Japheth were Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras. The sons of Gomer were Ashkenaz, Riphath, and Togarmah.

The sons of Javan were Elishah, Tarshish the Kittim, and the Rodanim.

The sons of Ham were Cush, Mizraim, Put, and Canaan. The sons of Cush were Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah, and Sabteca. The sons of Raamah were Sheba and Dedan. Cush was the ancestor of Nimrod, a heroic warrior.

Mizraim was the ancestor of the Luddites, Anamites, Lehabites, Naphtuhites, Pathrusites, Casluhites (from whom the Philistines came), and the Caphtorites. Canaan’s oldest son was Sidon, the ancestor of the Sidonians. Canaan was also the ancestor of the Hittites, Jebusites, Amorites, Girgashites, Hivites, Arkites, Sinites, Arvadites, Zemarites, and Hamathites.

The sons of Shem were Elam, Asshur, Arphaxad, Lud, and Aram. The sons of Aram were Uz, Hul, Gether, and Meshech. Arphaxad was the father

of Shelah, and Shelah was the father of Eber. Eber had two sons. The first was named Peleg (meaning “Division”) because in his lifetime the people of the world were divided into different language groups. His brother’s name was Joktan. Joktan was the father of Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah, Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah, Ebal, Abimael, Sheba, Ophir, Havilah, and Jobab. So this is the family line descended from Shem: Arphaxad, Shelah, Eber, Peleg, Reu, Serug, Nahor, Terah, and Abram, whose name I, the Lord God, changed to Abraham.

The sons of Abraham were Isaac and Ishmael. The sons of Ishmael were Nebaioth, Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, Mishma, Dumah, Massa, Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah.

The sons of Keturah, Abraham’s concubine, were Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah. The sons of Jokshan were Sheba and Dedan. The sons of Midian were Ephah, Epher, Hanoch, Abida, and Eldaah. Abraham was the father of Isaac. The sons of Isaac were Esau and Jacob, whose name I, the Lord God, changed to Israel.

The sons of Esau were Eliphaz, Reuel, Jeush, Jalam, and Korah. The sons of Eliphaz were Teman, Omar, Zephi, Gatam, Kenaz, Timna, and Amalek. The sons of Reuel were Nahath, Zerah, Shammah, and Mizzah. The sons of Seir were Lotan, Shobal, Zibeon, Anah, Dishon, Ezer, and Dishan. The sons of Lotan were Hori and Homam. Lotan’s sister was named Timna. The sons of Shobal were Alvan, Manahath, Ebal, Shephi, and Onam. The sons of Zibeon were Aiah and Anah. The son of Anah was Dishon. The sons of Dishon were Hamran, Eshban, Ithran, and Keran. The sons of Ezer were Bilhan, Zaavan, and Jaakan. The sons of Dishon were Uz and Aran. These are the kings who ruled in Edom before there were kings in Israel: Bela son of Beor, who ruled from his city of Dinhabah.

When Bela died, Jobab son of Zerah from Bozrah became king. When Jobab died, Husham from the land of the Temanites became king. When Husham died, Hadad son of Bedad became king and ruled from the city of Avith. He had destroyed the Midianite army in the land of Moab. When Hadad died, Samlah from the city of Masrekah became king. When Samlah died, Shaul from the city of Rehoboth-on-the-River became king. When Shaul died, Baal-Hanan son of Acbor became king. When Baal-Hanan died, Hadad became king and ruled from the city of Pai. His wife was Mehetabel, the daughter of Matred and granddaughter of Me-Zahab.

Then Hadad died. The clan leaders of Edom were Timna, Alvah, Jetheth, Oholibamah, Elah, Pinon, Kenaz, Teman, Mibzar, Magdiel, and Iram.

Descendants of Jacob

2 The sons of Israel were Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Zebulun, Dan, Joseph, Benjamin, Naphtali, Gad, and Asher.

Judah had three sons through Bathshua, a Canaanite woman. Their names were Er, Onan, and Shelah. But I, the LORD, saw that the oldest son, Er, was a wicked man, so I killed him. Later Judah had twin sons from Tamar, his widowed daughter-in-law. Their names were Perez and Zerah. The sons of Perez were Hezron and Hamul. The sons of Zerah were Zimri, Ethan, Heman, Calcol, and Darda. Achan son of Carmi, one of Zerah's descendants, brought disaster on Israel by taking items that had been set apart for Me, the LORD. The son of Ethan was Azariah. The sons of Hezron were Jerahmeel, Ram, and Caleb. Ram was the father of Amminadab. Amminadab was the father of Nahshon, a leader of Judah. Nahshon was the father of Salman.

Salman was the father of Boaz. Boaz was the father of Obed. Obed was the father of Jesse. Jesse's sons were Eliab, Abinadab, Shimea, Raddai, Ozem, and David. Their sisters were named Zeruah and Abigail. Zeruah had three sons named Abishai, Joab, and Asahel. Abigail married a man named Jether, an Ishmaelite, and they had a son named Amasa. Hezron's son, Caleb, had two wives named Azubah and Jerioth. Azubah's sons were Jeshur, Shobab, and Ardon. After Azubah died, Caleb married Ephrath, and they had a son named Hur. Hur was the father of Uri, and Uri was the father of Bezalel. When Hezron was 60 years old, he married Gilead's sister, the daughter of Makir. They had a son named Segub. Segub was the father of Jair, who ruled over 23 towns in the land of Gilead. (But Geshur and Syria captured Havvoth Jair and Kenath and its 60 surrounding villages.) All these were descendants of Makir, the father of Gilead. Soon after Hezron died in the town of Caleb, Ephrathah, his wife Abijah gave birth to a son named Ashhur (the father of Tekoa). The sons of Jerahmeel, the oldest son of Hezron, were Ram, Bunah, Oren, Ozem, and Ahijah. Jerahmeel had a second wife named Atarah. She was the mother of Onam. The sons of Ram, the oldest son of Jerahmeel, were Maaz, Jamin, and Eker. The sons of Onam were Shammai and Jada. The sons of Shammai were Nadab and Abishur. The sons of Abishur and his wife Abihail were Ahban and Molid. The sons of Nadab were Seled and Appaim.

Seled died without children, but Appaim had a son named Ishi. The son of Ishi was Sheshan. Sheshan had a son named Ahlai. Shammai's brother, Jada, had two sons named Jether and Jonathan. Jether died without children, but Jonathan had two sons named Peleth and Zaza. Sheshan had no sons, though he had daughters. He also had an Egyptian servant named Jarha. Sheshan gave one of his daughters to be the wife of Jarha, and they had a son named Attai.

Attai was the father of Nathan. Nathan was the father of Zabad. Zabad was the father of Ephlal. Ephlal was the father of Obed. Obed was the father of Jehu. Jehu was the father of Azariah. Azariah was the father of Helez. Helez was the father of Eleasah. Eleasah was the father of Sismai. Sismai was the father of Shallum. Shallum was the father of Jekamiah. Jekamiah was the father of Elishama. The oldest son of Caleb, the brother of Jerahmeel, was Mesha, the father of Ziph. Caleb's second son was Mareshah, the father of Hebron.

The sons of Hebron were Korah, Tappuah, Rekem, and Shema. She-ma was the father of Raham and the father of Jorkeam. Rekem was the father of Shammai. The son of Shammai was Maon. Maon was the father of Beth-Zur. Caleb's concubine Ephah gave birth to Haran, Moza, and Gazez. Haran was the father of Gazez. The sons of Jahdai were Regem, Jotham, Geshan, Pelet, Ephah, and Shaaph. Another of Caleb's concubines, Maacah, gave birth to Sheber and Tirhanah. She also gave birth to Shaaph (the father of Madmannah) and Sheva (the father of Macbenah and Gibeon). Caleb also had a daughter named Acsah. The sons of Hur, the oldest son of Caleb's wife Ephrathah, were Shobal, the father of Kiriath-Jearim, Salma the father of Bethlehem, and Hareph the father of Beth-Gader. The sons of Shobal the father of Kiriath-Jearim were Haroeh, half the Manahathites, and the families of Kiriath-Jearim—the Ithrites, Puthites, Shumathites, and Mishraites, from whom came the people of Zorah and Eshtaol. The sons of Salma were the people of Bethlehem, the Netophathites, Atroth-Beth-Joab, the other half of the Manahathites, the Zorites, and the families of scribes living at Jabez—the Tirathites, Shimeathites, and Sucathites. All these were Kenites who descended from Hammath, the father of the family of Recab.

Descendants of David

These were the sons who were born to David in Hebron: The oldest was Amnon, whose mother was Ahinoam from Jezreel. The second was **3** Daniel, whose mother was Abigail from Carmel. The third was Absalom, whose mother was Maacah, the daughter of Talmai, king of Geshur. The fourth was Adonijah, whose mother was Haggith. The fifth was Shephatiah, whose mother was Abital. The sixth was Ithream, whose mother was Eglah. These six sons were born to David in Hebron, where he reigned 7½ years. Then David moved the capital to Jerusalem where he reigned another 33 years. The sons born to David in Jerusalem included Shimea, Shobab, Nathan, and Solomon. Bathsheba, the daughter of Ammiel, was the mother of these sons. David also had nine other sons: Ibhar, Elishama, Eliphelet, Nogah, Nepheg, Japhia, Elishama, Eliada, and Eliphelet. These were the sons of David, not including the sons of his concubines. David also had a daughter named Tamar.

The descendants of Solomon were Rehoboam, Abijah, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Joram, Ahaziah, Joash, Amaziah, Azariah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, Manasseh, Amon, and Josiah. The sons of Josiah were Johanan, Jehoiakim, Zedekiah, and Shallum. Jehoiakim was succeeded by his son Jehoiachin, who was succeeded by his uncle, Zedekiah. The sons of Jehoiachin (also called Jeconiah), who was taken prisoner by the Babylonians, were Shealtiel, Malkiram, Pedaiiah, Shenazzar, Jekamiah, Hoshama, and Nedabiah. The sons of Pedaiiah were Zerubbabel and Shimei. The sons of Zerubbabel were Meshullam and Hananiah. He also had a daughter named Shelomith. His five other sons were Hashubah, Ohel, Berekiah, Hasadiah, and Jushab-Hesed. The sons of Hananiah were Pelatiah and Jeshaiiah. Jeshaiiah's son was Rephaiah. Rephaiah's son was Arnan. Arnan's son was Obadiah. Obadiah's son was Shecaniah. Shecaniah's descendants were Shemaiah and his sons, Hattush, Igal, Bariah, Neariah, and Shaphat. The sons of Neariah were Elioenai, Hizkiah, and Azrikam.

The seven sons of Elioenai were Hodaviah, Eliashib, Pelaiah, Akkub, Johanan, Delaiah, and Anani.

Descendants of Judah

4 Some of the descendants of Judah were Perez, Hezron, Carmi, Hur, and Shobal. Shobal's son Reaiah was the father of Jahath. Jahath was the father of Ahumai and Lahad. These were the families of the Zorathites. The

sons of Etam were Jezreel, Ishma, Idbash, Hazzelelponi (his daughter), Penuel (the father of Gedor), and Ezer (the father of Hushah). These were the descendants of Hur (the firstborn of Ephrathah), the ancestor of Bethlehem. Ashhur, the father of Tekoa had two wives, named Helah and Naarah. Naarah gave birth to Ahuzzam, Hephher, Temeni, and Haahashtari. Helah gave birth to Zereth, Izhar, Ethnan, and Koz, who became the ancestor of Anub, Zobebah, and all the families of Aharhel, son of Harum.

Jabez was more distinguished than any of his brothers. His mother named him Jabez (meaning “Pain”) because his birth had been so painful. He was the one who prayed to Me, the God of Israel, “Oh, that you would bless me and extend my lands! Please be with me in all that I do, and keep me from all trouble and pain!” And I answered his prayer.

Kelub, the brother of Shuhah, was the father of Mehir. Mehir was the father of Eshton. Eshton was the father of Beth-Rapha, Paseah, and Tehinnah. Tehinnah was the father of Ir-Nahash.

The sons of Kenaz were Othniel and Seraiah. Othniel’s sons were Hathath and Meonothai. Meonothai was the father of Ophrah. Seraiah was the father of Joab, the founder of the Crafts Valley, so-called because many craftsmen lived there. The sons of Caleb, son of Jephunneh, were Iru, Elah, and Naam. The son of Elah was Kenaz. The sons of Jehallelel were Ziph, Ziphah, Tiria, and Asarel. The sons of Ezra were Jether, Mered, Epher, and Jalon. Mered married an Egyptian woman, who became the mother of Miriam, Shammai, and Ishbah. Ishbah was the father of Eshtemoa. Ishbah also married a woman of Judah, who became the mother of Jered, the father of Gedor, Heber the father of Soco, and Jekuthiel the father of Zanoah. Mered’s Egyptian wife was named Bithiah, and she was an Egyptian princess. Hodia’s wife was the sister of Naham. One of her sons was the father of Keilah the Garmite, and another was the father of Eshtemoa the Maacathite. The sons of Shimon were Amnon, Rinnah, Ben-Hanan, and Tilon. The descendants of Ishi were Zoheth and Ben-Zoheth. Shelah was one of Judah’s sons. The descendants of Shelah were Er, the father of Lecah, Laadah, the father of Mareshah, the families of linen workers at Beth-Ashbea; Jokim; the men of Cozeba, Joash, and Saraph, who ruled over Moab and Jashubi-Lehem. They were pottery makers in Netaim and Gederah. They all worked for the king.

The sons of Simeon were Jemuel, Jamin, Jarib, Zohar, and Shaul. The descendants of Shaul were Shallum, Mibsam, and Mishma.

The descendants of Mishma were Hammuel, Zaccur, and Shimei. Shimei had 16 sons and six daughters, but none of his brothers had large families. So Simeon's tribe never grew as large as the tribe of Judah. Before David was king, the people of the Simeon tribe included Moladah, Hazar-Shual, Bilhah, Ezem, Tolad, Bethuel, Hormah, Ziklag, Beth-Marcaboth, Hazar-Susim, Beth-Biri, and Shaaraim. Their descendants also lived in Etam, Ain, Rimmon, Token, and Ashan, and nearby villages as far away as Baal. Other descendants of Simeon included Meshobab, Jamlech, Joshah, son of Amaziah, Joel, Jehu, son of Joshibiah, son of Seraiah, son of Asiel, Elioenai, Jaakobah, Jeshohaiah, Asaiah, Adiel, Jesimiel, Benaiah, and Ziza, son of Shiphi, son of Allon, son of Jedaiiah, son of Shimri, son of Shemaiah. These were the names of some of the leaders of Simeon's wealthy clans, who traveled to the region of Gedor, in the east part of the valley to get pastureland for their flocks. They found good pastures there, and the land enjoyed peace. Some of Ham's descendants had been living in that region. But when Hezekiah was king of Judah, Simeon invaded it and completely destroyed the homes of the descendants of Ham and of the Meunites. They killed everyone who lived there and took the land for themselves because they wanted its pastureland for their flocks. Later 500 men from the Simeon tribe went to Mount Seir (Edom), led by Pelatiah, Neariah, Rephaiah, and Uzziel, the sons of Ishi. They killed the last of the Amalekites who had survived, and they have lived there ever since.

Descendants of Reuben

5 Reuben was the oldest son of Israel. But since he dishonored his father by sleeping with one of his father's concubines, his rights as the firstborn were given to the sons of his brother Joseph. That is why Reuben is not listed as the firstborn son. Judah became the most powerful tribe and provided a ruler for the nation, but the birthright belonged to Joseph. The sons of Reuben were Hanoch, Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi. The descendants of Joel were Shemaiah, Gog, Shimei, Micah, Reaiah, Baal, and Beerah, a leader of the Reubenites. Later King Tiglath-Pileser of Assyria took Beerah away as a prisoner. Beerah's relatives are listed by their clans: Jeiel, the leader, Zechariah, and Bela, son of Azaz, son of Shema, son of Joel. They lived in the area from Aroer to Nebo and Baal-Meon. And since they had so many livestock in the land of Gilead, they spread toward the desert just west of the

Euphrates River. When Saul was king, the Reubenites defeated the Hagarites and then settled on the eastern edge of Gilead.

The tribe of Gad lived in the Bashan region north of the Reuben tribe. Their territory extended past to the town of Salecah. Their leaders were Joel, Shapham, Janai, and Shaphat. Their relatives, the leaders of seven other clans, were Michael, Meshullam, Sheba, Jorai, Jacan, Zia, and Eber. These were all descendants of Abihail, son of Huri, son of Jaroah, son of Gilead, son of Michael, son of Jeshishai, son of Jahdo, son of Buz. Ahi, son of Abdiel, and grandson of Guni was the leader of their clans. The people of the Gad tribe lived in the land of Gilead, in Bashan and its villages, and in the Sharon Plain. Their family records were written when Jotham was king of Judah and Jeroboam was king of Israel. The tribes of Reuben, Gad, and East Manasseh had 44,760 soldiers skilled in combat and armed with shields, swords, and bows. They fought against the Hagarites, the Jeturites, the Naphishites, and the Nodabites. In battle they prayed for Me, the LORD, to help them, and I did. So the Hagarites and all their allies were defeated. The Israelites took from the Hagarites 50,000 camels, 250,000 sheep, 2,000 donkeys, and 100,000 captives. Many of the Hagarites were killed in the battle because I was fighting against them. So the Israelites lived in their land until they were taken as captives.

East Manasseh, a large tribe, settled from Bashan to Baal-Hermon, Senir, and Mount Hermon. The leaders of their clans were Epher, Ishi, Eliel, Azriel, Jeremiah, Hodaviah, and Jahdiel. These men were known as great warriors and leaders. But they were unfaithful to Me, their God, by worshiping the gods of the nations that I had destroyed. So I, Israel's God, sent King Pul of Assyria (also known as Tiglath-Pileser) to attack these tribes and take many of the people as captives. The Assyrians forced them to live in Halah, Habor, Hara, and the area near the Gozan River, where they remain to this day.

Descendants of Levi

6The sons of Levi were Gershom, Kohath, and Merari. The sons of Kohath were Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel. The sons of Amram were Aaron, Moses, and Miriam. The sons of Aaron were Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. Eleazar was the father of Phinehas. Phinehas was the father of Abishua. Abishua was the father of Bukki. Bukki was the father of Uzzi. Uzzi was the father of Zerahiah. Zerahiah was the father of Meraioth. Meraioth was the father of Amariah.

Amariah was the father of Ahitub. Ahitub was the father of Zadok. Zadok was the father of Ahimaaz. Ahimaaz was the father of Azariah. Azariah was the father of Johanan. Johanan was the father of Azariah who was the high priest when Solomon built My Temple in Jerusalem. Azariah was the father of Amariah. Amariah was the father of Ahitub. Ahitub was the father of Zadok. Zadok was the father of Shallum. Shallum was the father of Hilkiah. Hilkiah was the father of Azariah. Azariah was the father of Seraiah. Seraiah was the father of Jehozadak, who was taken into captivity by Nebuchadnezzar.

The sons of Levi were Gershom, Kohath, and Merari. The sons of Gershom were Ladan and Shimei. The sons of Kohath were Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel. The sons of Merari were Mahli and Mushi. The following were the Levite clans, listed according to their ancestral descent: The descendants of Gershom were Ladan, Jahath, Zimmah, Joah, Iddo, Zerah, and Jeatherai. The descendants of Kohath included Amminadab, Korah, Assir, Elkanah, Ebiasaph, Assir, Tahath, Uriel, Uziah, and Shaul. The descendants of Elkanah included Amasai, Ahimoth, Elkanah, Zophai, Nahath, Eliab, Jeroham, Elkanah, and Samuel. The sons of Samuel were Joel and Abijah. The descendants of Merari included Mahli, Ladan, Shimei, Uzzah, Shimea, Haggiah, and Asaiah.

After David moved the sacred chest to Jerusalem, he appointed the following men to lead the music at the tabernacle. Later they ministered with music at My Temple Solomon built. They followed all the regulations handed down to them. These are the men who served, along with their sons: Heman, the musician, was from the clan of Kohath. His genealogy was traced back through Joel, Samuel, Elkanah, Jeroham, Eliel, Toah, Zuph, Elkanah, Mahath, Amasai, Elkanah, Joel, Azariah, Zephaniah, Tahath, Assir, Abiasaph, Korah, Izhar, Kohath, Levi, and Jacob (Israel). Heman's first assistant was Asaph from the clan of Gershom. Asaph's ancestors included Berekiah, Shimea, Michael, Baaseiah, Malkijah, Ethni, Zerah, Adaiah, Ethan, Zimmah, Shimei, Jahath, Gershom, and Levi. Heman's second assistant was Ethan from the clan of Merari. Ethan's ancestral line included Kishi, Abdi, Malluch, Hashabiah, Amaziah, Hilkiah, Amzi, Bani, Shemer, Mahli, Mushi, Merari, and Levi. Their relatives, also Levites, performed various duties in the tabernacle.

Only Aaron and his descendants served as priests. They presented the offerings on the altar of burnt offering and the altar of incense, and they

performed all the other duties related to the most holy place. They provided substitutionary payments for sin by following all the commands Moses had given them. The descendants of Aaron were Eleazar, Phinehas, Abishua, Bukki, Uzzi, Zerahiah, Meraioth, Amariah, Ahitub, Zadok, and Ahimaaz.

This is a record of the towns and territory assigned by casting lots to the descendants of Aaron, who were from the clan of Kohath. This included Hebron and its surrounding pasturelands in Judah, but the fields and outlying areas belonging to the city were given to Caleb, son of Jephunneh. So the descendants of Aaron were given the following towns, each with its surrounding pasturelands in Judah: Hebron, a refuge town, Libnah, Jattir, Eshtemoa, Hilen, Debir, Ashan, and Beth-Shemesh. And from the territory of Benjamin, they were given Geba, Alemeth, and Anathoth, each with its pasturelands. So 13 towns were given to the descendants of Aaron. The remaining descendants of Kohath received ten towns from East Manasseh. The descendants of Gershom received 13 towns in the territories of Issachar, Asher, Naphtali, and in the Bashan area of East Manasseh. The descendants of Merari received 12 towns from the territories of Reuben, Gad, and Zebulun. So the people of Israel assigned all these towns and pasturelands to the Levites. All the towns were chosen by casting lots including towns in the tribes of Judah, Simeon, and Benjamin. The descendants of Kohath received from the tribe of Ephraim these towns, each with its surrounding pasturelands: Shechem (a refuge town in the hill country of Ephraim), Gezer, Jokmeam, Beth-Horon, Aijalon, and Gath-Rimmon. The remaining descendants of Kohath were assigned these towns from the territory of East Manasseh, Aner and Bileam, each with its pasturelands. The descendants of Gershom received from the territory of East Manasseh the towns of Golan in Bashan with its pasturelands and Ashtaroth with its pasturelands. The Gershomites were given four towns in Issachar, Kedesh, Daberath, Ramoth, and Anem, with their pasturelands. From the territory of Asher, they received Mashal, Abdon, Hukok, and Rehob, with their pasturelands. And the Gershomites received three towns in Naphtali: Kedesh in Galilee, Hammon, and Kiriathaim, each with its pasturelands. The remaining descendants of Merari received from the tribe of Zebulun the towns of Rimmon and Tabor, each with its pasturelands. From the territory of Reuben, east of the Jordan River opposite Jericho, the Merari descendants received Bezer in the desert, Jahzah, Kedemoth, and Mephaath, with their pasturelands. And from the territory of Gad, they received Ramoth in Gilead, Mahanaim, Heshbon, and Jazer, with their pasturelands.

Descendants of Issachar

7The four sons of Issachar were Tola, Puah, Jashub, and Shimron. The sons of Tola were Uzzi, Rephaiah, Jeriel, Jahmai, Ibsam, and Shemuel. Each of them was the leader of an ancestral clan. At the time of King David, the number of men available for military service from these families was 22,600. The son of Uzzi was Izrahiah. The sons of Izrahiah were Michael, Obadiah, Joel, and Isshiah. These five became the leaders of clans. All of them had many wives and many sons, so the total number of men available for military service among their descendants was 36,000. The total number of mighty warriors from all the clans of the tribe of Issachar was 87,000. All of them were listed in their genealogical records.

Three of Benjamin's sons were Bela, Beker, and Jediael. The five sons of Bela were Ezbon, Uzzi, Uzziel, Jerimoth, and Iri. These five warriors were the leaders of clans. The number was 22,034. The sons of Beker were Zemirah, Joash, Eliezer, Elioenai, Omri, Jeremoth, Abijah, Anathoth, and Alemeth. The number of soldiers in their clan was 20,200, in addition to their clan leaders. Jediael was the father of Bilhan and the grandfather of Jeush, Benjamin, Ehud, Kenaanah, Zethan, Tarshish, and Ahishahar. They were leaders in their clan, which included 17,200 men available for military service. The sons of Ir were Shuppim and Huppim, and Hushim was the son of Aher.

The sons of Naphtali were Jahziel, Guni, Jezer, and Shallum. They were descendants of Jacob's concubine Bilhah.

The sons of Manasseh, born to his Syrian concubine, were Asriel and Makir, father of Gilead. Makir found a wife for Huppim and one for Shuppim. Makir's sister was named Maacah. One of Manasseh's descendants was Zelophehad, who had daughters but no sons. Makir and his wife, Maacah, had two sons, Peresh and Sheresh. The sons of Peresh were Ulam and Rakem. The son of Ulam was Bedan. All these were descendants of Gilead, Makir, and grandson of Manasseh. Makir's sister, Hammoleketh, was the mother of Ishhod, Abiezer, and Mahlah. The sons of Shemida were Ahian, Shechem, Likhi, and Aniam.

The sons of Ephraim were Shuthelah, Bered, Tahath, Eleadah, Tahath, Zabad, and Shuthelah. Ezer, and Elead, two other sons of Ephraim, were killed trying to steal livestock from local farmers near Gath. Their father, Ephraim, mourned for them a long time, and his relatives came to comfort

him. Later Ephraim's wife gave birth to a son, and Ephraim named him Beriah (meaning "Misery") because of the tragedy his family had suffered. Ephraim had a daughter named Sheerah. She built the towns of Lower Upper Beth-Horon and Uzen-Sheerah. Ephraim's line of descent was Rephah, Resheph, Telah, Tahan, Ladan, Ammihud, Elishama, Nun, and Joshua. The descendants of Ephraim lived in the territory that included Bethel and its surrounding towns to the south, Naaran to the east, Gezer and its villages to the west, and Shechem and its villages to the north as far as Ayyah and nearby villages. Along the border of West Manasseh were the towns of Beth-Shean, West Taanach, Megiddo, Dor, and their surrounding villages. The descendants of Joseph, son of Jacob, lived in these towns.

The sons of Asher were Imnah, Ishvah, Ishvi, and Beriah. They had a sister named Serah. The sons of Beriah were Heber and Malkiel, the father of Birzaith. Heber was the father of Japhlet, Shomer, and Hotham, and a daughter Shua. The sons of Japhlet were Pasach, Bimhal, and Ashvath. The sons of Shomer were Ahi, Rohgah, Hubbah, and Aram. The sons of his brother Hotham were Zophah, Imna, Shelesh, and Amal. The sons of Zophah were Suah, Harnepher, Shual, Beri, Imrah, Bezer, Hod, Shamma, Shilshah, Ithran, and Beera. The sons of Jether were Jephunneh, Pispah, and Ara. The sons of Ulla were Arah, Hanniel, and Rizia. Each of these descendants of Asher was the head of a clan. They were all skilled warriors and prominent leaders. The tribe of Asher had 26,000 soldiers.

Descendants of Benjamin

8 The sons of Benjamin were Bela, Ashbel, Aharah, Nohah, and Rapha. The sons of Bela were Addar, Gera, Abihud, Abishua, Naaman, Ahoah, Gera, Shephuphan, and Hiram. The sons of Ehud were leaders of the clans living at Geba, but later they had to move to Manahath. Ehud's sons were Naaman, Ahijah, and Gera. Gera, the father of Uzza and Ahihud, led them when they moved. After Shaharaim divorced his wives Hushim and Baara, he had children in the land of Moab. He and Hodesh, his new wife, were parents of Jobab, Zibia, Mesha, Malcam, Jeuz, Sakia, and Mirmah. These sons all became the leaders of clans. Shaharaim's wife, Hushim, had already given birth to Abitub and Elpaal. The sons of Elpaal were Eber, Misham, Shemed (who built Ono and Lod and their villages), Beriah, and Shema. They were the leaders of the clans living in Aijalon, and they forced out the inhabitants

of Gath. The sons of Beriah were Ahio, Shashak, Jeremoth, Zebadiah, Arad, Eder, Michael, Ishpah, and Joha. The sons of Elpaal were Zebadiah, Meshullam, Hizki, Heber, Ishmerai, Izliah, and Jobab. Shimei's sons were Jakim, Zicri, Zabdi, Elienai, Zillethai, Eliel, Adaiah, Beraiah, and Shimrath. Shashak was the father of Ishpan, Eber, Eliel, Abdon, Zicri, Hanan, Hananiah, Elam, Anthothijah, Iphdeiah, and Penuel. Jeroham's sons were Shamsherai, Shehariah, Athaliah, Jareshiah, Elijah, and Zicri. These were family leaders in their clans, and they were listed in their tribal genealogy. They all lived in Jerusalem. Jeiel settled the town of Gibeon. His wife's name was Maacah, and his sons were Abdon. Zur, Kish, Baal, Ner, Nadab, Gedor, Ahio, Zeker, and Mikloth, father of Shimeah. All these families lived near each other in Jerusalem. Ner was the father of Kish and the grandfather of Saul. Saul's sons were Jonathan, Malkishua, Abinadab, and Esh-Baal. Jonathan was the father of Meribbaal. Meribbaal was the father of Micah. Micah was the father of Pithon, Melech, Tarea, and Ahaz. Ahaz was the father of Jehoaddah, who was the father of Alemeth, Azmaveth, and Zimri. Zimri was the father of Moza. Moza was the father of Binea. Binea was the father of Rehash.

Rephahwas, the father of Eleasah. Eleasah was the father of Azel. Azel had six sons: Azrikam, Bokeru, Ishmael, Sheariah, Obadiah, and Hanan. Azel's brother, Eshek, had three sons: Ulam, Jeush, and Eliphelet. The sons of Ulam were all skilled warriors and expert archers. They had 150 sons and grandsons.

The Return from Captivity to Jerusalem

9 Everyone in Israel was listed in the family records included in the book of the kings of Israel. The people of Judah were taken as captives to Babylon because they were unfaithful to Me, the LORD. The first to return to their towns were priests, Levites, temple assistants, and others. People from the tribes of Judah, Benjamin, Ephraim, and West Manasseh settled in Jerusalem. One family that returned was that of Uthai, son of Ammihud, son of Omri, son of Imri, son of Bani, a descendant of Perez, son of Judah. Others returned from the Shilonite clan, including Asaiah and his sons. Jeuel and his relatives were from the clan of Zerah. In all, 690 families from the tribe of Judah returned. From the tribe of Benjamin came Sallu son of Meshullam, son of Hodaviah, son of Hassenuah; Ibneiah, son of Jeroham; Elah, son of Uzzi, son of Micri; and Meshullam, son of Shephatiah, son of Reuel, son of Ibnijah.

These men were all leaders of clans. In all, 956 families from the tribe of Benjamin returned.

Among the priests who returned were Jedaiah, Jehoiarib, Jakin, Azariah, a temple official, and son of Hilkiah, son of Meshullam, son of Zadok, son of Meraioth, son of Ahitub. Other returning priests were Adaiah, son of Jeroham, son of Pashhur, son of Malkijah, and Maasai, son of Adiel, son of Jahzerah, son of Meshullam, son of Meshillemith, son of Immer. In all, 1,760 priests returned. They were capable heads of clans, and they served in My Temple.

The Levites who returned were Shemaiah, son of Hasshub, son of Azrikam, son of Hashabiah, a descendant of Merari; Bakbakkar; Heresh; Galal; Mattaniah, son of Mica, son of Zicri, son of Asaph; Obadiah, son of Shemaiah, son of Galal, son of Jeduthun; and Berekiah, son of Asa, son of Elkanah, who lived in the area of Netophah. The gatekeepers who returned were Shallum, Akkub, Talmon, Ahiman, and their relatives. Shallum was the chief gatekeeper. Before this, they had guarded the King's Gate on the east side. These men served as gatekeepers for the camps of the Levites. Shallum was the son of Kore, a descendant of Ebiasaph, from the clan of Korah. He and his relatives, the Korahites, guarded the entrance to My Temple, just as their ancestors had guarded the tabernacle entrance. Phinehas, son of Eleazar, had been in charge of the gatekeepers in earlier times, and I, the LORD, had been with him. And later Zechariah, son of Meshelemiah, guarded the tabernacle. In all, there were 212 gatekeepers in those days, and they were listed by their family records in their villages. David and the prophet Samuel had appointed their ancestors because they were reliable men. These gatekeepers and their descendants guarded My Temple entrance. The gatekeepers were stationed on all four sides of My Temple. Occasionally their relatives in the villages came regularly to share their duties for a week at a time. The four chief gatekeepers were Levites, responsible for the treasuries in My Temple rooms. They guarded My Temple day and night, and they opened the gates every morning. Some of the gatekeepers were assigned to care for the various utensils used in worship, and they counted them before, and after each time they were used. Others were responsible for My Temple furnishings, various items in My Temple, and supplies such as flour, wine, olive oil, incense, and spices. But only the priests mixed the spices and incense. Mattithiah, a Levite, and the oldest son of Shallum, the Korahite, baked bread used in the offerings. And some Levites of the clan of Kohath prepared the bread to be set on the table each Sabbath day. The musicians, all

prominent Levites, lived at My Temple. They were on duty day and night. All these men lived in Jerusalem. They were the heads of Levite families and were listed as prominent leaders in their family records.

Jeiel, the father of Gibeon, lived in the town of Gibeon. His wife's name was Maacah, and his sons were Abdon, Zur, Kish, Baal, Ner, Nadab, Gedor, Ahio, Zechariah, and Mikloth. Mikloth was the father of Shimeam. All these families lived near each other in Jerusalem. Ner was the father of Kish and the grandfather of Saul. Saul was the father of Jonathan, Malkishua, Abinadab, and Eshbaal. Jonathan was the father of Meribbaal and the grandfather of Micah and the great-grandfather of Pithon, Melech, Tahrea, and Ahaz. Ahaz was the father of Jarah. Jarah was the father of Alemeth, Azmaveth, and Zimri. Zimri was the father of Moza. Moza was the father of Binea. Binea's son was Rephaiah. Rephaiah's son was Eleasah. Eleasah's son was Azel, who had six sons: Azrikam, Bokeru, Ishmael, Sheariah, Obadiah, and Hanan.

The Death of Saul and His Sons

10The Philistines attacked Israel at Mount Gilboa and killed many of them. And others ran. The Philistines killed three of Saul's sons, Jonathan, Abinadab, and Malkishua. Philistine archers caught up with Saul and wounded him severely. Saul said to his armor bearer, "Take your sword and kill me. I don't want these pagan Philistines to make fun of me." But his armor-bearer was afraid and would not do it. So Saul took his own sword and fell on it. When his armor bearer realized that Saul was dead, he fell on his own sword and died. So Saul and his three sons died there together. When all the Israelites in the Jezreel Valley learned that their army had run and that Saul and his sons were dead, they ran away too. So the Philistines moved into those towns.

The next day the Philistines went back to the battlefield to get the weapons and equipment of the dead men. When they saw the bodies of Saul and his sons on Mount Gilboa, they took his armor and cut off his head. Then they spread the good news of Saul's death before their idols and to the people throughout Philistia. They placed his armor in the temple of their gods, and they hung his head in the temple of their god Dagon.

But when the people of Jabesh-Gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, some men got the bodies of Saul and his sons and brought them back

to Jabesh. Then they buried them under the oak tree at Jabesh and fasted for seven days.

So Saul died because he was unfaithful to Me, the LORD. He failed to obey My command, and he even consulted a medium instead of asking Me, the LORD, for guidance. So I, the LORD, killed him and turned the kingdom over to David, son of Jesse.

David is King of All Israel

11 Then all Israel went to David at Hebron and told him, “We are your relatives. For a long time, even while Saul was our king, you were the one who really led Israel in our military campaigns. And the LORD promised you that you will be our leader like a shepherd.” So at Hebron, David made an agreement with the elders of Israel. They poured oil on him to show he was now their king, just as the prophet Samuel had said.

Then David and all Israel went to attack Jerusalem (which used to be called Jebus). The people of Jebus said to David, “You’ll never get in here!” But David captured the fortress of Zion, now called the City of David. David had said to his troops, “Whoever leads the attack against the Jebusites will become the commander of my armies.” And Joab, the son of David’s sister Zeruiah, led the attack, so he became the commander of David’s armies. David made the fortress his home, and that is why it is called the City of David. He extended the city from the supporting terraces in the Millo to the surrounding area, while Joab rebuilt the rest of Jerusalem. And David became more and more powerful, because I, the LORD of the heavens, was with him.

Together with all Israel, David’s leaders determined to make him their king, just as I, the LORD, had promised.

The first was Jashobeam the Hacmonite, who was commander of the three—the three greatest warriors among David’s men. He once killed 300 men with his spear. Next in rank among the three was Eleazar, son of Dodo, a descendant of Ahoah. He was with David in the battle against the Philistines at Pas-Dammim. The battle took place in a barley field, and the Israelite army fled. But Eleazar and David stood in the field and defeated the Philistines. So I, the LORD, gave them a great victory.

Once when David was at the rock near Adullam Cave, the Philistine army was camped in the Rephaim Valley. The three (who were among the thirty—an elite group among David’s fighting men) went down to meet him there. David was staying in the fortress at the time, and some Philistines had occupied the town of Bethlehem. David said to his men, “How I wish I had some of that good water from the well by the gate in Bethlehem.” So the three broke through the Philistine lines, got some water from the well by the gate in Bethlehem, and brought it back to David. But he refused to drink it. Instead, he poured it out before Me, the LORD. “God forbid that I should drink this,” he said. “This water is as precious as the blood of these men who risked their lives to bring it to me.” So David did not drink it.

Abishai, brother of Joab and David’s nephew, was the leader of the thirty. In one battle he killed 300 men with his spear. He was not one of David’s three, but he was as famous as they were. But he was the most famous of the thirty and was their commander. Benaiah, son of Jehoiada, was a brave soldier from Kabzeel. He did some amazing things, including killing two of Moab’s best soldiers. Another time he chased a lion down into a pit, and despite the snow and slippery ground, he caught the lion and killed it. Another time he killed an Egyptian warrior who was 7 ½ feet tall and whose spear was as thick as a weaver’s beam. Benaiah grabbed the spear from the Egyptian and killed him with it. These are some of the deeds that made Benaiah as famous as the three, though he was not one of them. Yet he was more famous than the other members of the thirty. And David made him captain of his bodyguard.

These were also included among David’s mighty men: Asahel, Joab’s brother; Elhanan, son of Dodo, from Bethlehem; Shammoth from Haror; Helez from Pelon; Ira, son of Ikkesh, from Tekoa; Abiezer from Anathoth; Sibbecai from Hushah; Ilai from Ahoah; Maharai from Netophah; Heled, son of Baanah, from Netophah; Ithai, son of Ribai, from Gibeah in Benjamin; Benaiah from Pirathon; Hurai from near Nahale-Gaash; Abiel from Arbah; Azmaveth from Bahurim; Eliahba from Shaalbon; the sons of Hashem from Gizon; Jonathan, son of Shagee, from Harar; Ahiam, son of Sacar, from Harar; Eliphai, son of Ur; Hopher from Mekerah; Ahijah from Pelon; Hezro from Carmel; Naarai, son of Ezbai; Joel, the brother of Nathan; Mibhar son of Hagri; Zelek from Ammon; Naharai from Beeroth (Joab’s armor bearer); Ira from Jattir; Gareb from Jattir; Uriah the Hittite; Zabad, son of Ahlai; Adina, son of Shiza, the Reubenite leader who had 30 men with him; Hanan, son of Maacah; Joshaphat from Mithna; Uzzia from Ashtaroth; Shama and Jeiel, the

sons of Hotham, from Aroer; Jediael, son of Shimri; Joha, his brother, from Tiz; Eliel from Mahavah; Jeribai and Joshaviah, the sons of Elnaam; Ithmah from Moab; Eliel and Obed; Jaasiel from Mezobah.

David's Army Expands

12 While David was hiding from Saul in Ziklag, the following 23 men joined David there and fought with him. They were experts in using bows and arrows, and they could sling a stone with either hand. They were all relatives of Saul from the tribe of Benjamin. Their leader was Ahiezer, son of Shemaah from Gibeah, and his brother, Joash, was second-in-command. These were the other warriors: Jeziel and Pelet, sons of Azmaveth; Beracah and Jehu from Anathoth; Ishmaiah from Gibeon, a famous warrior and leader among the thirty; Jeremiah, Jahaziel, Johanan, and Jozabad from Gederah; Eluzai, Jerimoth, Bealiah, Shemariah, and Shephatiah from Haruph; Elkanah, Isshiah, Azarel, Joezer, and Jashobeam, who were Korahites; Joelah and Zebadiah, sons of Jeroham from Gedor. Some brave soldiers from the tribe of Gad also joined David while he was at the fortress in the desert. They were good with both shield and spear, as fierce as lions and as swift as gazelles on the mountains. Ezer was their leader, and Obadiah was second in command. The others were Eliab, Mishmannah, Jeremiah, Attai, Eliel, Johanan, Elzabad, Jeremiah, and Macbannai. All these warriors from Gad were army commanders. The weakest among them could take on 100 regular troops, and the strongest could take on 1,000. They crossed the Jordan River during its seasonal flooding at the beginning of the year and forced out all the people living in the valleys on each side of the river. Others from Benjamin and Judah joined David at his fortress. David went out to meet them and said, "If you have come to help me, you are welcome. But if you try to turn me over to my enemies, the God of our ancestors will punish you." Then the Spirit came on Amasai, who later became a leader among the thirty, and he said, "We are yours, David! We are on your side, son of Jesse. Peace and prosperity be with you, and success to all who help you, for your God is the one who helps you." So David let them join him, and he made them officers over his troops. Some men from West Manasseh left the Israelite army and joined David when he went with the Philistines to fight against Saul. But as it turned out, the Philistine leaders refused to let David and his men go with them. They sent them back to Ziklag because they said, "If David turns against us, he will kill

us.” These are the men from Manasseh who joined David as he was returning to Ziklag: Adnah, Jozabad, Jediahel, Michael, Jozabad, Elihu, and Zillethai. Each commanded 1,000 troops, and as brave men, they helped David defeat raiding bands. Every day more men joined David until he had a great army.

These are the many thousands of armed warriors who joined David at Hebron. They were all eager to see David become king instead of Saul, just as I, the LORD, had promised. These soldiers included 6,800 from Judah, armed with shields and spears; 7,100 from Simeon; 4,600 troops from Levi, including Jehoiada, leader of the family of Aaron, who had 3,700 under his command, and Zadok, a young warrior with 22 of his relatives who were all officers; 3,000 from Benjamin, Saul’s tribe; 20,800 from Ephraim, all famous in his tribe; 18,000 from West Manasseh, chosen to help make David king; 200 leaders and their relatives from Issachar, men who knew the times and the best course of action Israel should take; 50,000 from Zebulun who were skilled, armed for battle, and loyal to David. 1,000 officers and 37,000 warriors from Naphtali, all armed with shields and spears; 28,600 warriors from Dan; 40,000 from Asher; and 120,000 from Reuben, Gad, and East Manasseh, armed with all kinds of weapons. All these men came to Hebron to make David king of Israel. Everyone in Israel wanted David to be their king. They feasted and drank with David for three days, enjoying food prepared by their relatives for their arrival. And people from as far away as Issachar, Zebulun, and Naphtali brought food on donkeys, camels, mules, and oxen. Vast supplies of flour, fig cakes, clusters of raisins, wine, olive oil, cattle, and sheep were brought to the celebration. Everyone in Israel was very glad.

Those who love Me attract followers who love them because they love Me with all your heart. Put good people around you so all can follow Me together.

The Ark is Moved From Kiriath-Jearim

13 David talked with his officials and army commanders and then said to all Israel, “If you approve and if it is the will of the LORD, our God, let’s invite all the Israelites throughout the land, including the priests and Levites in their towns and pasturelands to come join us here. It is time to bring back the sacred chest for it was ignored when Saul was king.” The people agreed to

this, for they could see it was the right thing to do. So David asked all the people of Israel, from one end of the country to the other, to join in bringing the sacred chest from Kiriath-Jearim.

Then they all went to Kinath (also called Baalah of Judah) to bring back the sacred chest. They placed it on a new ox cart guided by Uzzah and Ahio. David and the Israelites sang praises to Me, their LORD, with great enthusiasm, and they played music on lyres, harps, tambourines, cymbals, and trumpets.

When they arrived at Kidon's threshing floor, the oxen stumbled, and Uzzah steadied the chest. I, the LORD, was so angry that Uzzah touched the sacred chest that I killed him right there. David too was angry, and he named the place Perez-Uzzah (meaning "Outbreak against Uzzah"). Afraid of what I, the LORD, might do to him, David asked himself, "Am I really the one to bring the sacred chest to the City of David?" So he decided to take the chest to the house of Obed-Edom, in Gath. The chest was there for three months, and I, the LORD, blessed Obed-Edom and his family.

David Prospers as King

14 King Hiram of Tyre sent masons and carpenters and cedar logs to build a palace for David. David knew that I had made him a powerful king for the benefit of his people.

David moved to Jerusalem, where he married more wives, and had these sons there: Shammua, Shobab, Nathan, Solomon, Ibhar, Elishua, Elpelet, Nogah, Nepheg, Japhia, Elishama, Eliada, and Eliphelet.

Hearing that David was king of Israel, the Philistines went to capture him. David heard they were coming, so he and his men went to meet them. The Philistines were attacking villages in the Rephaim Valley. So David asked Me, the LORD, if he should attack the Philistines, and if I would help him. I, the LORD, said, "Yes, go attack them, and I will give you the victory." So he attacked and defeated the Philistines at Baal-Perazim, and he said, "God has helped me defeat my enemy much like water breaking through a dam." That's why the place was called Baal-Perazim (meaning "The Lord Broke Through"). The people then burned the idols the Philistines left there. Again the Philistines raided the Rephaim Valley, and David asked Me what he should do. I replied, "Circle around behind the mulberry trees and attack them

there. In the treetops, you will hear what sounds like soldiers marching. That will mean I have moved against the Philistines, and so you should attack them.” So David did what I, the LORD, said to do, and he chased the Philistines all the way from Gibeon to Gezer. So David became very famous, and people everywhere feared him.

David Honors Me

15 David built several buildings for himself in the City of David, and then he built a tent for the sacred chest. He said, “Only Levites are to carry the chest because God has chosen them as the ones to carry it and serve Him forever.” David invited all Israel to come to Jerusalem to celebrate bringing the sacred chest to the tent set up for it. The following are the priests and Levites who were there for the occasion: 120 from the Kohath clan, with Uriel as their leader; 220 from the Merari clan, with Asaiah as their leader; 130 from the Gershon clan, with Joel as their leader; 200 descendants of Elizaphan, with Shemaiah as their leader; 80 descendants of Hebron, with Eliel as their leader; and 112 descendants of Uzziel, with Amminadab as their leader. Then David said to the priests, Zadok and Abiathar, and the six Levite leaders, Uriel, Asaiah, Joel, Shemaiah, Eliel, and Amminadab, “As leaders of the Levite families, you must be ceremonially clean, so you can bring the sacred chest to the tent that I have set up for it. Because you Levites didn’t bring the chest the first time, the LORD was angry. We didn’t ask the LORD how to carry it.” So the priests and Levites made themselves ceremonially clean to get ready to take the sacred chest to Jerusalem. The Levites carried the chest with poles that rested on their shoulders, as I had told them to do. David also had the Levites select some of their group to sing and play lyres, harps, and cymbals. The music directors were Heman, son of Joel, Asaph, son of Berekiah, and Ethan, son of Kushaiah, all from the Merari clan. Their assistants were Zechariah, Jaaziel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Unni, Eliab, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattithiah, Eliphelehu, Mikneiah, and two gatekeepers: Obed-Edom and Jeiel. Heman, Asaph, and Ethan were to sound the bronze cymbals. And Zechariah, Aziel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Unni, Eliab, Maaseiah, and Benaiah were to play lyres according to the alamoth tune. And Mattithiah, Eliphelehu, Mikneiah, Obed-Edom, Jeiel, and Azaziah were to play the harps according to the Sheminith tune. The song leader was Kenaniah, a skilled musician. Berekiah and Elkanah were chosen to guard the sacred chest. And

the priests Shebaniah, Joshaphat, Nethanel, Amasai, Zechariah, Benaiah, and Eliezer were to blow trumpets as they marched in front of the sacred chest. Obed-Edom and Jehiah were also chosen to guard the chest.

David, the elders of Israel, and army commanders were very happy when they went to the home of Obed-Edom to bring the sacred chest to Jerusalem. I, the LORD, helped the Levites to carry the chest, and so they sacrificed seven bulls and seven lambs. David, the Levites carrying the chest, the singers, and Kenaniah, the song leader were all dressed in linen robes, and David was also wearing a priestly vest. So the sacred chest was brought to Jerusalem as the people shouted and as the Levites played horns, trumpets, cymbals, harps, and lyres. As the chest arrived in Jerusalem, Michal, David's wife, and Saul's daughter, saw David dancing in honor of Me, the LORD, and she was disgusted with him.

David Writes Me a Song of Praise

16 They put the chest in the tent David had made for it, and they offered burnt offerings and peace offerings.

Come to David's tabernacle to worship Me for that's where My presence dwells.

Then David blessed the people, and he gave each, Israelite a loaf of bread, a date cake, and a raisin cake. David selected the following Levites to lead the people in worshiping at the sacred chest in praising and thanking Me, the God of Israel: Asaph, the leader of the group, sounded the cymbals. His assistants were Zechariah, Jeiel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Mattithiah, Eliab, Benaiah, Obed-Edom, and Jeiel. They played harps and lyres. The priests, Benaiah and Jahaziel, played trumpets regularly in front of the sacred chest.

David told Asaph and his Levites to sing this song of thanks to Me, the LORD.

“Praise the LORD and pray to Him. Tell everyone what He has done. Sing praises to Him. Tell everyone about His miracles. Glory in His holy name, and rejoice in worshiping Him. Seek the LORD and His strength, and seek Him always.

“Remember the wonderful miracles He did and His decisions, O Israelites, and descendants of Jacob. The LORD is our God, and His justice is seen throughout the land. Remember His agreement and His promises to a thousand generations. He made an eternal promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob when He said, ‘I will give you Canaan as yours forever.’

“At the time there were only a few of us, strangers in Canaan. We wandered from one nation to another, and God did not let them mistreat us. He warned their kings not to touch us, the people He had chosen, and His prophets.

“The whole earth should sing to the LORD and say each day that He saves. Tell every nation about His wonderful and marvelous deeds. He is great and is worthy of all praise. He is to be revered above all gods. The gods of other nations are only man-made idols, but the LORD made the heavens. Honor and majesty are around Him, and power and beauty fill His temple.

“Nations of the world recognize His glory and strength. Give Him the praise He deserves. And worship Him with your offerings. Everyone on the earth should tremble before Him. The world is firm and can’t be shaken. Let everyone in the heavens and on the earth be glad. Let all nations know that the LORD reigns. Let everything in the oceans shout praise to the LORD, and let the fields and their crops rejoice. Let all the trees in the forest praise the LORD. He is coming to judge everyone.

“Thank the LORD for being so good. Thank Him that His love endures forever. Say to the LORD, ‘Save us, O God of our salvation. Rescue us from the nations so we can thank Your holy name and praise You with joy.’ May the LORD, the God of Israel, be blessed forever!” And all the people shouted “Amen” and praised the LORD.

David selected Asaph and the Levites in his clan to serve each day in front of the sacred chest, doing whatever needed to be done each day. In this group were Obed-Edom, Hosah, and 68 other Levites as gatekeepers. Also, David left Zadok the priests and his fellow priests on the hill of Gibeon, to sacrifice burnt offerings each morning and evening on an altar there. David also appointed Heman, Jeduthun, and others to praise Me, the LORD, for My loyal love. Heman and Jeduthun played trumpets and cymbals and other musical instruments in praise to Me. Jeduthun’s sons were guards at Gibeon. Then everyone went home, and David went home to bless his family.

My Promise to David

17After David had moved into his palace, he told the prophet, Nathan, that he was concerned that he was living in a beautiful cedar palace, but the sacred chest was still in a tent. Nathan said, “So whatever you’d like, the LORD is with you.”

That night I, the LORD, said to Nathan to tell David, “You are My servant. But you are not the one to build Me a temple. From the time I rescued Israel from Egypt, I have lived in a tent, moving from one location to another. I never complained to Israel’s leaders, shepherds of My people, that they didn’t build Me a temple of cedar. This is what I, the LORD of the heavens, say: ‘When you were a shepherd, I chose you to be ruler over Israel. I have been with you, and I have helped you defeat your enemies. I have made you a very famous person. I have provided a homeland for My people where they can live in peace. Wicked nations won’t trouble them as they did in the past and have done since I appointed leaders over the people. I will conquer all your enemies.

“And I will build a house for you. But this “house” will be a dynasty of kings. When you die, I will place one of your sons on your throne, and he will be a strong ruler. He will build Me a temple, and I will continue his rule from generation to generation. I will be a father to him, and he will be a son to Me. I will never take away My unfailing love as I did from Saul. I will be sure your sons and his descendants will rule My people forever.”

Nathan told David all that I had said. Then David prayed, “Who am I and my family that You have done so much for me? And with everything else You have done, You now promise to make my descendants kings as if I were an important person. How You have honored me. This was Your choice to promise me these things. No one is like You. In fact, there is no other God, as we well know. And no other nation is like Israel, the nation You rescued from slavery in Egypt to be Your own. You became well known because of the great miracles by which You forced out other nations. You have chosen us to be Your own forever, and You are their God.

“Now, please do as You promised about me and my descendants. Then You will be famous forever, and people will know that You, LORD of the heavens, are our God. I’m praying to You because You said You would make my descendants kings. You are the LORD God, and You have given me this

wonderful promise. Now bless my descendants. You have blessed my family, and I know You will continue to bless them.”

David’s Victories in Battle

18 Later David defeated the Philistines, capturing Gath and nearby villages. He also defeated the Moabites and required them to pay him taxes.

Also, Hadadezer, king of Zobah, was trying to control the area near the Euphrates River. But David fought him in a battle at Hamath, and David captured 1,000 chariots, 7,000 chariot drivers, and 20,000 soldiers. He also cut the leg muscles of 100 of the chariot horses.

Syrian troops from Damascus went to help Hadadezer, but David killed 22,000 of them. David stationed some soldiers in Damascus, and the Syrians paid him taxes. I, the LORD, gave David victory in all his battles.

Hadadezer’s officers had gold shields, but David brought them to Jerusalem. He also took a lot of bronze from Hadadezer’s towns of Tibhath and Cun, and later Solomon melted the bronze and used it to make the huge water tank and columns, and various bronze articles for My Temple.

Tou, king of Hamath, heard that David defeated Hadadezer. So he sent his son Joram to commend David for his victory. Joram gave David many gifts made of gold, silver, and bronze. David gave all these gifts to Me, the LORD, along with the silver and gold he had taken from Edom, Moab, Ammon, Philistia, and Amalek. Abishai, David’s nephew, killed 18,000 Edomites in the Salt Valley.

David stationed some troops in Edom, and David was their ruler. I, the LORD, gave David victory in all his battles. David ruled over all Israel and was fair to everyone. His nephew, Joab, was his army commander; Jehoshaphat, son of Ahilud, was government recorder; Zadok, son of Ahitub and Abimelech, son of Abiathar, were priests; Shavsha was court secretary; and Benaiah, son of Jehoiada, was over David’s bodyguard of Kerethites and Pelethites. David’s sons were his chief assistants.

David Conquers Ammon and Syria

Later Nahash, king of Ammon, died and his son, Hanun, became king. David decided to be kind to the new king Hanun because Nahash had been kind

19to David. So David sent some men to express his sympathy to Hanun.

When David's men arrived, the Ammonite leaders said to Hanun, "Surely you don't think David's men are here to express sympathy. They have come to spy on us so David can defeat us." So Hanun arrested David's men, shaved off their beards and cut off their clothes just below the waist and sent them off.

These men were very embarrassed, and so when David heard what happened, he sent messengers to tell them to stay at Jericho till their beards grew back. The Ammonites realized they had made David very mad, so Hanun sent 38 tons of silver to hire chariots and chariot drivers from Mesopotamia and the Syrian kingdoms of Maacah and Zokah. He hired 32,000 chariots and chariot drivers and the king of Maacah with his troops. These all camped at Medebah, and the Ammonite soldiers joined them. When David heard about this, he sent Joab with his army to meet them in battle. The Ammonite soldiers positioned themselves near the city gate, and the others were in the open fields. Seeing that he would need to fight on two fronts, he selected his best soldiers to fight the Syrians in the fields. He put his other troops under Abishai, his brother, to fight the Ammonites. Joab told him, "If the Syrians are too much for me, then come and help me. Or if the Ammonites are too much for you, I'll help you. Be brave and fight hard. May the Lord do what He feels best." Joab and his army attacked the Syrians, and they ran away. When the Ammonites saw this, they too left the battlefield and went into the city. Then Joab went back to Jerusalem.

After the Syrians saw all this, they sent for additional Syrian troops from near the Euphrates River, who were under the Syrian commander, Shophach. Hearing of this, David got Israel's entire army to cross the Jordan River and advance against the Syrians. David fought the Syrians, and they ran from the Israelites. David's men killed 7,000 of their chariot drivers and 40,000 soldiers including Shophach, their army commander. When the kings under Hadadezer saw that Israel had defeated their armies, they made peace with David. The Syrians never helped the Ammonites again.

David Defeats Rabbah

In the spring Joab, not David, led David's soldiers to battle the Ammonites.

20 He destroyed their city of Rabbah, leaving it in ruins. David took the gold crown of their king, which weighed 75 pounds and had several gems in it, and placed it on his head. He took away a lot of valuable things from the city, and he forced the people of Rabbah to work for him with saws, picks, and axes. David did the same thing to people in other Ammonite cities. Then David and his army went back to Jerusalem.

Later Israel fought the Philistines at Gezer. Sibbecai from Hushah killed Sippai, a descendant of the giant Rephaites, and the Philistines were defeated. In another battle, Elhanan, son of Jair, killed Lahmi, Goliath's brother. Lahmi's spear was as thick as a weaver's beam. In a battle at Gath, a tall man had six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot. He too was a descendant of the Rephaites who were giants. When he made fun of Israel, Jonathan, son of Shimea and David's nephew, killed him. These three descendants of the giant Rapha in Gath were killed by David's soldiers.

David Takes a Census

21 Satan encouraged David to take a census of Israel. So David told Joab and his commanders to count everyone in Israel from Beersheba in the south to Dan in the north and to report the number to him. But Joab said, "Why? Even if you had 100 times the present number of soldiers, you would still be their ruler. Why cause Israel to sin?"

But David insisted Joab take the census. So Joab did, and they reported the number to David. He said, "In Israel, there were 1,100,000 men of military age, and in Judah, the number was 470,000." Joab didn't like this idea of counting the soldiers, so he didn't count anyone in the Levi or Benjamin tribes.

I, the LORD, was not happy that David did this, so I punished Israel. Then David said to Me, "I see now that I have sinned. This was foolish of me to take this count. Please forgive me."

I, the LORD, told the prophet Gad to tell David, "I'll let you choose one of three ways in which I will punish Israel." So Gad went to David and said, "God is letting you choose one of three ways for punishment. You may have three years of famine. Or you may be defeated by your enemies for three

months. Or He will send a terrible disease on the nation. Take your choice,” says the LORD.

David said to Gad, “This is a tough decision. The LORD is king, so I prefer to have Him punish me rather than someone else.” So I, the LORD, sent a terrible disease throughout Israel, and 70,000 people died. I sent an angel to destroy Jerusalem, but when I saw the people’s suffering, I told the angel to stop. This was at the threshing floor that belonged to Ornan, the Jebusite.

David saw the angel there holding a sword in his hand over Jerusalem. Then he and his men, all clothed in coarse clothing in grief, fell down. David said to Me, “I admit I am the one who had the soldiers counted. It’s my fault. These people, innocent like sheep, have done nothing wrong. So punish me and my family, not these people.” The angel then told Gad to tell David to build an altar on Ornan’s threshing floor, and David did. While Ornan was threshing wheat, he and his four sons saw the angel and ran and hid. When David arrived there, Ornan bowed to the ground before David.

David said, “Please sell me your threshing floor so I can build an altar to the LORD so that the disease on our people will be stopped.” Ornan said, “It’s yours. Do as you wish with it. You can take my oxen for your burnt offering and use the threshing sledges for wood, and take my wheat for your grain offering.” But David said, “No. I’ll pay you what it’s worth. I can’t just take what is yours and offer a burnt offering that costs me nothing.”

David paid Ornan about 15 pounds of gold for the site. He built an altar there and sacrificed burnt offerings and peace offerings. David prayed, and I, the LORD, sent fire to burn up the offerings. Then I, the LORD, told the angel to put away his sword. When David saw that I answered his prayer, he offered more sacrifices on the altar. The tabernacle and the altar that Moses had made in the desert were at Gibeon. David didn’t want to go there to sacrifice to the Me because he was afraid of the angel’s sword.

David Prepared to Build My Temple

22 Then David said, “The temple of the LORD must be built right here at this threshing floor. And the altar of burnt offering will be here too.” So David ordered all resident foreigners in Israel to go to Jerusalem. He assigned some to cut stones for My Temple. He got a lot of iron for nails and hooks,

and more bronze than could ever be weighed. He also had many cedar logs brought from Sidon and Tyre. David said, “The temple must be great in every way so everyone will know about it. But since my son, Solomon is young and inexperienced, I will get everything ready for it to be built.”

David then told Solomon to build a temple to Me, the LORD, the God of Israel. He said to Solomon, “I wanted to build a temple. But the LORD told me I couldn’t because I had killed many people in many battles. But the LORD said, ‘You will have a son who will have peace throughout his reign. His name, Solomon, (meaning “Peaceful”) will remind you of this peace. He will be like a son to Me, and I will be like his father. One of his descendants will always be on the throne.’”

David said, “Now, my son, may the LORD be with you and give you success in building the temple. And may He give you wisdom and understanding to obey the Law as you lead Israel. If you obey the regulations and laws the LORD gave Moses; you will succeed. So be strong and courageous. Don’t be afraid or discouraged.”

David said, “I have provided for the temple about 3,750 tons of gold and about 37,500 tons of silver, and so much bronze and iron that it can’t even be weighed. I also have much wood and stone, although you may want to get even more. I have assigned many men to be stonecutters, masons, carpenters, and many men skilled in working gold, silver, bronze, and iron. Now as you begin the work, I pray that the LORD will be with you.”

David ordered all the leaders of Israel to help Solomon. He said to them, “The LORD is with you and has given you peace. He has helped me defeat the people who lived here, and now this land belongs to the LORD and His people. Obey the Lord with all your heart. Build the temple of the LORD God so you can bring the sacred chest and items into the temple to honor Him.”

Focus on Me in worship, not on the place, the structure, the method, nor the music. Focus on Me.

The Levites and their Duties

23When David was an old man, he made his son, Solomon, king over Israel. He called together all the leaders of Israel and priests and Levites

for a ceremony to crown Solomon king. The Levites, who were 30 years of age or older, totaled 38,000. Then David said that 24,000 of them would oversee My Temple construction, 6,000 would be officials and judges, 4,000 would be gatekeepers, and 4,000 would be musicians to praise Me, the LORD. Then David divided the Levites into three groups according to the descendants of Levi's three sons, Gershom, Kohath, and Merai.

Gershom had two sons, Ladan and Shimei. Three of Ladan's descendants were Jehiel, Zetham, and Joel. Three of Shimei's descendants were Shelemoth, Haziël, and Haran. Four other sons of Shimei were Jahath, Ziza, Jeush, and Beriah. Jeush and Beriah didn't have many children, so their descendants were counted as one family.

Kohath had four sons, Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel. The sons of Amram were Aaron and Moses. Aaron and his descendants were chosen to be in charge of the sacred things, to offer sacrifices to Me, the LORD, and to bless people in My name. Moses, the man of God, had two sons, Gershom and Eliezer, and their descendants were considered Levites. The descendants of Gershom included Shebuel, the family leader. Eliezer had only one son, Rehabiah, the family leader. Rehabiah had numerous descendants. The descendants of Izhar included Shelomith, Kohath's second son, the family leader. The descendants of Hebron included Jeriah Kohath's third son, Amariah, Jahaziel, and Jekameam. The descendants of Uzziel were Micah Kohath's youngest son and Isshiah.

The descendants of Merari were Mahli and Mushi. The sons of Mahli were Eleazar and Kish. Eleazar died with no sons, only daughters. His daughters married their cousins, the sons of Kish. The three sons of Mushi were Mahli, Eder, and Jerimoth.

These were the descendants of Levi by clans, the leaders of their family groups, registered by name. Each had to be 20 years old or older to qualify for service in My Temple. David had said, "Our LORD, the God of Israel, has given us peace, and He will live in Jerusalem. Now the Levites won't need to carry the tabernacle and its furnishings. All Levites, 20 years of age and older, are to help Aaron's descendants in serving in the temple. They are to keep the courtyards and temple rooms clean and to be sure everything used in worship is pure. They are to be in charge of the bread loaves for the table, the flour for the grain offerings, the wafers without yeast, cakes cooked in olive oil, and other ingredients for baking. Also every morning and evening they are to

thank and praise the LORD. They are to do the same when they offer burnt offerings on Sabbaths and New Moon festivals and other scheduled festivals.”

There were always as many Levites present as were needed for the work in My Temple. The Levites, supervised by the priests took care of My Temple and carried out their duties faithfully.

As the priests and Levites served Me in the right place, you should do the same thing in the right way.

The Priests Are Organized

24 Aaron’s descendants, the priests, were divided into groups for service. Aaron had four sons, Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. But Nadab and Abihu died before their father, and they had no sons. So that left Eleazar and Ithamar to be priests. With the help of Zadok, who was a descendant of Eleazar, and of Ahimelech, who was a descendant of Ithamar, David divided Aaron’s descendants into groups.

Eleazar’s descendants were divided into 16 groups and Ithamar’s into 8, for there were more family leaders among the descendants of Eleazar. Tasks were assigned to the various groups by means of casting lots to be sure the work was divided fairly, for there were many qualified officials serving Me in My Temple. Shemaiah, son of Nethanel, a Levite, was secretary and wrote down the names and assignments in the presence of the king, the officials, Zadok the priest, Ahimelech, son of Abiathar, and the family leaders of the priests and Levites. The descendants of Eleazar and Ithamar took turns casting lots. The lots fell on these priests, in the following order: Jehoiarib, Jedaiah, Harim, Seorim, Malkijah, Mijamin, Hakkoz, Abijah, Jeshua, Shecaniah, Eliashib, Jakim, Huppah, Jeshebeab, Bilgah, Immer, Hezir, Happizzez, Pethahiah, Jehezkel, Jakin, Gamul, Delaiah, and Maaziah. These men were assigned their duties at My Temple, just as I had commanded Aaron.

Here are the other descendants of Levi: Amram was the ancestor of Shubael and Jehdeiah. Rehabiah was the ancestor of Isshiah, the oldest son in his family. Izhar was the father of Shelomith and the grandfather of Jahath. Hebron had four sons: Jeriah, Amariah, Jahaziel, and Jekameam. Uzziel was

the father of Micah and the grandfather of Shamir. Isshiah, Micah's brother, was the father of Zechariah. Merari was the father of Mahli, Mushi, and Jaaziah. Jaaziah had three sons: Shoham, Zaccur, and Ibri. Mahli was the father of Eleazar and Kish. Eleazar had no sons, but Kish was the father of Jerahmeel. Mushi had three sons: Mahli, Eder, and Jerimoth. These were the descendants of Levi, according to their clans. Each one was assigned their duties without regard to age or rank. This was done as David, Zaduk, Ahimelech, and family leaders of the priests and Levites looked on.

Serve Me today according to the task I have given you for this day. I will bless you, use you, and reward you according to My grace.

The Musicians and Their Duties

25 David and his army commanders chose descendants of Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun to proclaim My messages while playing harps, lyres, and cymbals. These are the musicians: From the sons of Asaph, were Zaccur, Joseph, Nethaniah, and Asarelah. They worked under the direction of their father, Asaph, who proclaimed My messages. Jeduthun had six sons: Gedaliah, Zeri, Jeshaiiah, Shimei, Hashabiah, and Mattithiah. They worked under the direction of their father, Jeduthun, who proclaimed My messages to the accompaniment of the harp, offering thanks and praise to Me, the LORD. Heman's sons were Bukkiah, Mattaniah, Uzziel, Shubael, Jerimoth, Hananiah, Hanani, Eliathah, Giddalti, Romamti-Ezer, Joshbekashah, Mallothi, Hothir, and Mahazioth. All these were the sons of Heman, one of the king's prophets, for I had honored him with 14 sons and three daughters. All these men were under the direction of their fathers as they made music at My Temple, playing cymbals, lyres, and harps. Asaph, Jeduthun, and Heman reported directly to the king. They and their relatives—288 of them—were all skillful musicians. Everyone was assigned his duties without regard to age or rank. The 288 musicians were divided into 24 groups of 12 each: they were chosen in the following order: Joseph, Gedaliah, Zaccur, Zeri, Nethaniah, Bukkiah, Asarelah, Jeshaiiah, Mattaniah, Shimei, Azarel, Hashabiah, Shubael, Mattithiah, Jerimoth, Hananiah, Joshbekashah, Hanani, Mallothi, Eliathah, Hothir, Giddalti, Mahazioth, and Romamti-Ezer.

Even when you don't sing perfectly like professionals, may your singing glorify Me and advance My work.

The Gatekeepers and Their Duties

26The gatekeepers were also divided into groups according to clans. Meshelemiah, son of Kore, was from the Korah clan and a descendant of Asaph. His sons were Zechariah, Jediahel, Zebadiah, Jathniel, Elam, Jehohanan, and Eliehoenai.

I had blessed Obed-Edom with eight sons, all of whom were gatekeepers: Shemaiah, Jehozabad, Joah, Sacar, Nethanel, Ammiel, Issachar, and Peullethai. Obed-Edom's oldest son, Shemaiah, had four sons, Othni, Rephael, Obed, and Elzabad. They were capable men who were highly respected. All 62 descendants of Obed-Edom were capable and strong men. Meshelemiah's 18 sons and relatives were capable leaders.

Hosah was from the Merari clan, and his sons were Shimri, Hilkiyah, Tebaliah, and Zechariah. Hosah made Shimri the family leader, though he wasn't the firstborn son. Thirteen of Hosah's relatives were gatekeepers.

These gatekeepers were divided into groups by their family leaders, and they were assigned duties at My Temple. By casting lots, they determined at which gate these men would serve. Meshelemiah was in charge of the East Gate, Zechariah, his son, was to guard the North Gate, Obed-Edom guarded the South Gate, and his sons guarded the storerooms. Shuppim and Hosah were to guard the West Gate and the Shalleketh Gate on the upper road. Six Levites each day were to guard the East Gate, four to the North Gate, four to the South Gate, and two to each of the storerooms. Four were stationed along the road leading to the courtyard on the west, and two guards were in the courtyard itself. These were the duties assigned to the descendants of Korah and Merari.

Ahijah and other Levites were to be in charge of guarding My Temple treasury and gifts given to Me, the LORD. Ladan was a descendant of Gershom and the father of Jehiel. He and his sons Zetham and Joel also guarded the treasury. Other leaders who descended from Amram, Izhar, Hebron, and Uzziel were these. From the clan of Amram, the chief official in charge of My Temple treasury was Shebuel; he was a descendant of Gershom.

Descendants of Eliezer, Gershom's brother, included Rehabiah, Jeshaiiah, Joram, Zicri, and Shelemoth.

Shelemoth and his relatives were in charge of all the gifts David and his family leaders and army officers dedicated to Me, the LORD. These included items soldiers took from towns they captured. Shelemoth and his relatives also took care of items dedicated to Me by the prophet Samuel, Saul, son of Kish, Abner, Saul's uncle, and Joab, David's nephew.

Kenaniah was from the clan of Izhar, and his sons were government officials and judges. They did not work at My Temple. Hashabiah was from the clan of Hebron. He and his 1,700 relatives, all capable men, were in charge of Israelite affairs west of the Jordan River. They were responsible for religious and political matters.

Jerijah was also from the clan of Hebron. In the 40th year of David's reign, he found a list of all capable men from the Hebron clan at Jazer in Gilead. These relatives of Jerijah included 2,700 men. King David sent them east of the Jordan River to be in charge of all religious and political matters in the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and East Manasseh.

I will supply all your needs according to My riches in glory. Guard My money, both when it's in My possession, and after I give it to you.

The Monthly Schedule for the Military

27 Family leaders, army commanders, and other officers supervised the following men who served as soldiers in David's army. Each division served for a month and included 24,000 men.

In the first month, the commander was Jashobeam, son of Zabdiel, a descendant of Perez. Commanders in the other months were these: second month, Dodai, a descendant of Ahoah, assisted by Mikloth; third month, Benaiah, son of Jehoiada, the priest, who commanded David's elite Thirty Warriors, and was assisted by his son, Ammizabad; fourth month, Asahel, Joab's brother, who was followed by his son, Zebadiah; fifth month, Shamhuth of the Izrah clan; sixth month, Ira, son of Ikhes, from Tekoa; seventh month, Helez from Pelon Ephraim; eighth month, Sibbecai from Hushah of the Zerah clan; ninth month, Abiezer from Anathoth in Benjamin;

tenth month, Maharai from Netophah of the Zerah clan; eleventh month, Benaiah from Pirathonin Ephraim; and twelfth month, Heldai from Netophah and a descendant of Othniel.

The leaders of each tribe were these: Eliezer, son of Zicri, was over Reuben; Shephatiah, son of Maacah, was over Simeon; Hashabiah, son of Kemuel, was over the Levites; Zadok was over the descendants of Aaron; Elihu, David's brother, was over Judah; Omri, son of Michael, was over Issachar; Ishmaiah, son of Obadiah, was over Zebulun; Jerimoth, son of Azriel, was over Naphtali; Hoshea, son of Azaziah, was over Ephraim; Joel, son of Pedaiiah, was over West Manasseh; Iddo, son of Zechariah, was over East Manasseh; Jaasiel, son of Abner, was over Benjamin; and Azarel, son of Jehoram, was over Dan.

David did not list anyone 20 years of age or younger because I, the LORD, had promised that Israel would have as many people as stars in the sky. Joab, David's nephew, began to count the people, but he did not finish because I was not pleased that a census was being taken. So the number was not written in the royal records.

David selected a number of men to oversee his property. Azmareth, son of Adiel, was in charge of the palace storage rooms. Jonathan, son of Uzziah, was in charge of the storage rooms in towns, villages, and watchtowers. Ezri, son of Kelub, was in charge of the workers who farmed David's land. Shimei from Ramah was in charge of the vineyards. Zabdi from Shepham was in charge of the wine vats. Baal-Hanan from Geder was in charge of the olive trees and sycamore trees in the western foothills. Joash was in charge of the supplies of olive oil. Shitrai from Sharon was in charge of the cattle on the Sharon Plain; and Shaphat, son of Adlai, was in charge of the cattle in the valleys. Obil the Ishmaelite was in charge of the king's camels, Jehdeiah from Merenoth was in charge of the king's donkeys, and Jaziz the Hagrite was in charge of the king's sheep. These 12 officials were in charge of David's property.

David's uncle Jonathan was a wise advisor and a scribe. Jehiel, son of Hacmoni, taught David's sons. Ahithophel was the royal advisor, and Hushai, the Arkite, was a close friend of David. After Ahithophel, Jehoida, son of Benaiah, was the king's advisor, followed by Abiathar. Joab was commander of Israel's army.

I protected Israel many different ways, just as I protect you in many different ways. Pray for My continued hedge of protection.

David Tells of Plans for My Temple

28David called all leaders to meet with him in Jerusalem. These included tribal leaders, army commanders, men in charge of his property, palace officials, and other leaders and warriors. He said to them, “My people, I wanted to build a temple where the sacred chest will be located. I made plans to build it, but God said, ‘You are not the one to build a temple in My honor, because you have killed many people in warfare.’ Yet God chose me to be king over Israel. He chose Judah, and from Judah, he chose my father’s family, and from my brothers, He chose me to be king. The LORD has given me many sons, and from them, He chose Solomon to be the next king after me. The LORD said, ‘I have chosen your son Solomon to build My temple. He will be like a son to Me, and I will be like a father to him. If he continues to obey Me as he now does, I will make his kingdom last forever.’ So now with God as our witness, promise me that you will obey the LORD’s commands. If you do, this land will always be yours and that of your descendants.

“My son, Solomon, worship and obey the God of your ancestors with all your heart and do so willingly. Remember that the LORD knows our hearts and our motives. If you turn to Him, you will find Him. But if you reject Him, He will reject you. Since He has chosen you to build a temple for worshiping Him, be confident and do the work.”

Then David gave Solomon plans for My Temple and everything around it and in it, including the storage rooms, upstairs rooms, downstairs rooms, and the most holy place where the sacred chest and its lid, the place of substitutionary payment for sin, would be kept. David also gave Solomon the plans I, the LORD, gave him for the courtyards, outside rooms, and rooms for storing valuable items and gifts. David gave Solomon instructions about the work of the priests and Levites, and about the articles to be used in My Temple.

David also told Solomon how much gold and silver were to be used in making various objects including how much gold and silver to use for each table for the bread without yeast, how much silver for the tables made of

silver, and how much gold for the meat forks, sprinkling bowls and cups, and the altar of incense. David also gave Solomon the plans for the gold winged creatures which were to be on the lid of the sacred chest.

I, the LORD, showed David how My Temple is to be built, and so he put this in writing. So be confident and don't get discouraged. "I, the LORD, will help you finish My Temple and I will be with you. The priests and Levites are ready to do their work, and many skilled workers are ready to build. The people and their leaders are willing to do as you tell them."

Offerings for My House, the House of God

29 Then David said to everyone there, "God chose my son Solomon to build His temple, but he is young and inexperienced. This is a big task because this building is for God, not any of us. I have gathered a lot of materials for building the temple, including gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, onyx, turquoise, various gems, and stone and marble. I am also giving all of my own personal treasures of gold and silver for the temple, including 110 tons of gold from Ophir, 260 tons of refined silver, to decorate the temple walls, and to make gold and silver objects. Who else will follow my example and give gifts for building the temple?"

The family leaders, tribal leaders, army commanders, and men in charge of David's property all voluntarily gave gifts for My Temple. They gave over 190 tons of gold, about 375 tons of silver, 675 tons of bronze, and about 3,750 tons of iron. People also donated precious stones, which were kept in My Temple treasury guarded by Jahiel from the Levite clan of Gershon. David and all the people were so glad that so much was given and so willingly.

David praised Me, the LORD, as everyone listened. "LORD, the God our ancestor Jacob worshiped, we praise You forever. You are great and powerful, and Your glory and majesty are everywhere in heaven and on the earth. You are Ruler over everything in heaven and on earth. Riches and honor come from You, the Ruler of everything. You are powerful and strong, and You honor and strengthen everyone. We give You our thanks, and we praise You.

"Why are we happy that we could give anything for Your temple? Everything belongs to You already, so we just gave back to You what already belongs to You. We are only visitors and foreigners here for a while, as were our ancestors. Our days on earth suddenly disappear like a shadow. LORD,

our God, we realize that everything we have given for Your temple has come from You. You know what everyone is like inwardly and You are pleased when people are honest. I gave willingly, and I've seen how Your people have given to You with joy and willingly. LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, help Your people always to have this desire to give and keep them loyal to You. Give my son Solomon the desire to obey Your laws and commands and to build the temple I have provided for."

Then David said to the crowd, "Praise the LORD your God." So everyone praised Me, the LORD, the God of their ancestors. The people bowed down to honor Me and their king. The next day the people sacrificed 1,000 bulls, 1,000 rams, 1,000 male lambs, and drink offerings to Me, along with many other sacrifices. The people ate and drank there in My presence with great joy. Then they made Solomon, king by pouring olive oil on his head. They also poured oil on Zadok, making him their high priest. So Solomon became king in place of his father, David. He had success in everything he did, and all Israel obeyed him. All the royal officials, army commanders, and David's sons were loyal to David. I, the LORD, honored Solomon, and he had greater wealth and honor than David.

David, son of Jesse, ruled over all Israel 40 years. He ruled for 7 ½ years in Hebron and 33 years in Jerusalem. He died at a good old age, having enjoyed long life, wealth, and honor. Then his son Solomon succeeded him as king. All the events of David's reign are recorded in the records of Samuel, Nathan, and Gad, including his great accomplishments and everything that happened to him in Israel and surrounding nations.



I AM GOD

The Builder of My House

The Book of Second Chronicles

Solomon dedicated My Temple in Jerusalem to Me. The word “temple” occurs more in this book than any other Old Testament book, but My Temple is also described as “the house of the Lord” and “sanctuary.” The chronicler saw My Temple as essential for the unity of the people and the strength of the kingdom. While I used human kings to rally My people to spirituality, it was My house where the people expressed their faith and reflected their repentance and/or worship. Therefore 2 Chronicles emphasizes the southern kingdom of Judah and refers to the northern kingdom of Israel only when they interacted with the south. Also, 1 and 2 Chronicles emphasize the priesthood more than the office of king.

The southern kingdom of Judah allowed apostasy to grow by worshiping idols. And apostasy goes hand in hand with immorality. So I judged them and allowed Nebuchadnezzar to destroy Jerusalem and My Temple and take My people into captivity.

Prayer for Wisdom

1 Solomon, David’s son, was in full control of his kingdom because I, the LORD his God, was with him and made him a powerful king. One day Solomon asked all the Israelites, including army commanders, officials, and family leaders, to meet with him at the hill at Gibeon where the tabernacle was located. This was the tabernacle Moses had made in the desert. David had already moved the sacred chest from Kiriath-Jearim to the tent he had set up for it in Jerusalem. But the bronze altar of burnt offering made by Bezalel, son of Uri, and grandson of Hur, was still at Gibeon in front of the tabernacle. Solomon and the people gathered in front of the altar, and Solomon sacrificed 1,000 burnt offerings there.

In a dream that night I told Solomon he could ask whatever he wanted and I would give it to him. Solomon answered, “You have been so kind to my father David, and now you have made me king in his place. You have made me king over these people. And there are so many of them they are like dust particles on the earth. So please keep Your promise to David and make me wise so I can rule this great nation of Yours.”

I, the LORD, replied, “You could have asked Me to make you rich or famous or for you to defeat your enemies or for you to have a long life. But instead, you asked for wisdom to rule My people. So I will certainly make you wise. But I will also make you richer and more famous than any other king before or after you.” Then Solomon left Gibeon and went back to Jerusalem and reigned over Israel.

Solomon had a military force of 1,400 chariots and 12,000 horses. He kept the horses in various cities, including Jerusalem. Silver and gold were as common as rocks. And expensive cedar was as common as wood from ordinary sycamore trees in the foothills. Solomon bought horses from Egypt and Cilicia. His merchants paid about 15 pounds of silver for an Egyptian chariot and about four pounds of silver for a horse. He sold many of the horses to the Hittite and Syrian kings.

Plans to Build My Temple

2 Solomon decided to build a temple for Me and a palace for himself. So he enlisted 70,000 men to carry building supplies, 80,000 men to cut stone in the hill country, and 3,600 men to work as foremen. He wrote this message to Hiram king of Tyre: “Years ago you sent cedar logs to my father David when he was building his palace. Could you now send me some cedar logs? I am planning to build a temple where my people can worship the LORD my God. Incense and sweet spices will be burned there, sacred bread will be set out there daily, and sacrifices will be made every morning and evening and on every Sabbath, the first day of each month, and in our several religious festivals throughout the year. God wants us to do this continuously.

“This will be a great temple because our God is greater than all other gods. Of course, no one can build a temple great enough for Him, because even the highest heavens are too small for Him. Who then am I to build a temple for Him, except as a place to burn sacrifices to Him?

“So please send me a worker who can work with gold, silver, bronze, and iron, who is skilled in working with purple, red, and blue cloth, and who can work with my skilled craftsmen here in Judah and Jerusalem, men my father has already chosen. Also send me cedar, pine, and sandalwood logs. I know your men are experts at cutting down timber. I’ll send some men to work with yours because a lot of lumber will be needed for the large temple I will build. I will pay your workers 25,000 bushels of wheat, 125,000 bushels of barley, 115,000 gallons of wine, and 115,000 gallons of olive oil.”

Hiram sent this reply to Solomon: “Obviously the LORD loves His people because He has made you their king. I praise the LORD, the God of Israel, who made the heavens and the earth. He has given David a wise and intelligent son who has the knowledge to build a temple for the LORD and a palace for himself. As you requested, I will send you an expert craftsman named Hiram-Abi. His mother is an Israelite from the tribe of Dan, and his father is from Tyre. He is skilled in working with gold, silver, bronze, iron, stone, and wood, and he is an expert in weaving with purple, blue, and red cloth and linen. He is also an engraver and can work with your craftsmen and those your father David chose. Go ahead and send the wheat, barley, olive oil, and wine that you mentioned. We will cut down trees in Lebanon and float the logs down the Mediterranean coast to Joppa. Then you can take them from there to Jerusalem.”

Solomon counted all the foreign residents in Israel, just as David had done, and the total was 153,600. He assigned 70,000 of them to carry building supplies, 50,000 to cut stone from the hill country, and 3,600 to be foremen.

I want a place where I am worshiped, a place that reflects My holiness and almighty power. Today, let your physical body—the temple of the Holy Spirit—bring praise to Me.

Construction Begins

3 Solomon began building My Temple in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where I had appeared to David at Araunah’s threshing floor. The work began in the fourth year of Solomon’s reign (966 BC) on the second day of the second month.

The foundation of My Temple was 90 feet long and 30 feet wide. The porch across the front of My Temple was 30 feet wide and 30 feet high. The inner walls of the porch and the ceiling were covered with gold. The inside walls of My Temple's main room were paneled with pine and then covered with gold. Then they were decorated with palm trees and chain designs. All My temple walls were decorated with beautiful jewels and gold from Parvaim. Gold covered all the walls, ceilings, beams, doors, and doorframes, and designs of winged creatures were carved on the walls.

The most holy place was 30 feet wide, the same as the width of My Temple, and it was 30 feet deep, and its walls were covered with 23 tons of gold. Each gold nail weighed about 20 ounces. The walls of the storage rooms were also covered with gold.

Solomon made two figures of winged creatures for the most holy place, and he covered them with gold. The wingspan of the creatures was 30 feet. Each one had two wings, each 7 ½ feet long. One wing touched My Temple wall, and the other wing touched the wing of the other creature. The second figure was like the first, with one wing touching the wall and the other wing touching the first creature. They formed the entrance to the most holy place. Across this entrance, Solomon hung a curtain of fine linen and blue, purple, and red yarn, embroidered with figures of winged creatures.

At the entrance to My Temple were two columns, each 52 ½ feet tall and each with a cap 7 ½ feet high. The columns were decorated with chain-like designs and 100 decorative pomegranates were attached to the chains. One of these columns was south of My Temple entrance and was named Jakin (meaning "He Established"), and the other column was north of My Temple entrance and was named Boaz (meaning "In Him Is Strength").

You must organize your life so you can do more for Me, and do it better. Give attention to details; look for My hand in the minutia of life. Be prepared to work diligently. Yield your gifts to Me. Let Me use you when and where you can do the most good for Me.

My Temple is Completed

Solomon made a bronze altar 30 feet long, 30 feet wide, and 15 feet high. Then he made a large water tank, 15 feet from rim to rim, which he called the “Sea.” It was 7 ½ feet deep and 45 feet around. Just below the tank’s rim **4** were two rows of carved bulls, ten bulls to every 18 inches. They were all made from the same piece of bronze as the tank. The tank was set on the backs of two rows of bulls carved from bronze. The bulls all faced outward, three in each of the four directions. The sides of the tank were about three inches thick, and its rim was shaped like a cup and flared out like a flower petal. The tank could hold up to 17,000 gallons of water.

Solomon also made ten small bowls and put five of them on each side of the water tank. They were to be used for washing the items used in the burnt offerings. The tank itself was to be used only by the priests to wash their hands. Solomon also had ten gold lampstands, made according to the plans. He placed these inside My Temple, five on each side of the main room. He also made ten tables and placed five along My Temple’s south wall and five along the north wall. He also made 100 small gold sprinkling bowls.

He built a courtyard for the priests and a large outer courtyard. He covered the doors to these courtyards with bronze. He placed the large water tank near the southeast corner of My Temple. Hiram made shovels, sprinkling bowls, and pans for the hot ashes. Hiram completed the following items for My Temple: two columns, two bowl-shaped caps for the tops of the columns, two rows of 200 pomegranates each on the chains on the tops of the columns, small water bowls, the water tank and 12 oxen under it, pans for hot ashes, shovels, and meat hooks. Hiram-Abi made all these out of bronze, just as Solomon had asked. Solomon had all these cast in clay molds in the Jordan Valley between Succoth and Zarethan. So much bronze was used that no one ever knew the weight of it all.

So Solomon had these items made for My temple: the gold altar, the tables for the bread without yeast, the gold lamps and lampstands, the floral decorations, lamps, and tongs (all of solid gold), lamp snuffers, small sprinkling bowls, dishes, fire pans (all of pure gold), and the gold doors for the entrance to My most holy place and for My temple’s main room.

Bringing the Ark into My Temple

Work on My Temple was finally finished. Solomon placed in My Temple’s storage rooms everything his father David had dedicated to Me, the LORD,

5 including silver and gold and various utensils. Solomon asked all the tribal and family leaders to meet in Jerusalem for the ceremony of bringing My sacred chest from the City of David to the new temple. This was while everyone was in Jerusalem for the Festival of Shelters in the fall. The Levites took the chest and brought it along with the tabernacle and its utensils to My Temple. King Solomon and the Israelites sacrificed countless numbers of sheep and oxen.

Then the priests carried My sacred chest into My most holy place of My Temple and placed it under the winged creatures. The wings towered My chest and its carrying poles. The poles were so long they could be seen from just outside My most holy place but not from anywhere else. The poles stayed there from then on. The only things in My sacred chest were the flat stones Moses placed there at Mount Horeb (Sinai), where I, the LORD, made an agreement with the Israelites.

The priests then left My holy place and made sure they were ceremonially clean. The Levite musicians, including Asaph, Heman, Jeduthun, and their sons and relatives, were dressed in linen robes and stood to the east of the altar of burnt offering, and were playing cymbals, harps, and lyres. They were joined by 120 priests playing trumpets. Together they praised Me, the LORD, by playing instruments and singing, “The LORD is good. His steadfast love lasts forever.” Then My presence, in a cloud, filled My Temple. The Shekinah cloud kept the priests from their ministry.

Solomon Speaks to the People

6 Then Solomon recognized in prayer that I, the LORD, live in a dark cloud. But Solomon has built a great temple for Me where I can live forever.

Solomon turned toward the Israelites standing there, and he blessed them with these words: “Praise the LORD, the God of Israel, who has kept the promise He made to my father, David. He told my father, ‘When I brought My people out of Egypt, I had not chosen a city where a temple would be built nor had I chosen someone to be king of My people. But now I have chosen Jerusalem as that city, and David as that king.’ My father David wanted to build a temple to honor the LORD, but the LORD said, ‘I appreciate your wanting to build a temple for Me. But one of your sons, not you, will build it.’ Now the LORD has kept His promise in making me king and helping me build this great temple to honor Him, the God of Israel. And I

have placed the sacred chest in the temple, and in the chest is a copy of the agreement the LORD made with our ancestors.”

Solomon was standing on a platform in front of the Israelites. The bronze platform was 7 ½ feet square and 4 ½ feet high. It was in the center of the outer courtyard near the altar. He knelt down, lifted his hands to heaven, and prayed to Me, “O LORD, the God of Israel, there is no God like You in all of heaven and earth. You keep Your promises, and You show Your unfailing love to everyone who obeys You and eagerly does what You want. And You kept Your promise to David, Your servant. You also promised him that his descendants will reign over Israel if they obey You. So now O LORD, God of Israel, please keep this promise You made to Your servant David.

“But will You really live in the temple I built? Even the heavens can’t contain You. Please hear this prayer I, Your servant, am making to You. Please watch over this temple day and night, this place where You have chosen to be worshiped. And may You always hear and answer our prayers. Hear the requests of me Your servant and Your people Israel and answer from heaven and forgive us.

“Suppose someone accuses a person of a crime and the accused stands in front of the altar and says, ‘I am innocent.’ Hear from heaven and decide which person is right. Punish the guilty person, and let the innocent one go free. Suppose your people Israel sin against You, and an enemy defeats them, then hear from heaven and forgive them and bring them back to the land You gave our ancestors.

“Suppose Your people sin, and You withhold rain. Then when they pray and turn from their sin, hear from heaven and forgive them, Your servants. Teach them what is right, and send rain on the land You gave them. If a famine or plagues or crop disease or attacks by locusts or grasshoppers come or if enemies attack our towns, or if some other disaster occurs, if Your people pray to You, raising their hands toward the temple, then hear from heaven, forgive them, and do whatever they deserve since You know what is in every person’s heart. Then they will reverence You and obey You as long as they live.

“Foreigners from distant lands will hear about You and Your power and will come to pray at this temple. When they do, hear from heaven and answer their prayers. That way everyone will know of You and will reverence You, just as Your own people Israel do, and they will know that I built this temple in Your honor.

“Sometimes Your people will fight their enemies. If they pray toward Jerusalem and the temple that honors You, then hear from heaven and answer their prayers and give them victory. When they sin against You—and who hasn’t—You may get angry with them and let their enemies defeat them and take them away as captives. Then if they turn to You and admit they have sinned, and they turn wholeheartedly toward You and pray toward this land You gave their ancestors and toward the temple I built to honor You, then hear their prayers from heaven and help them and forgive them.

“Hear us when we pray to You in this place. And come enter this resting place of Yours, where I have placed Your sacred chest. May Your priests, O LORD God, enjoy Your salvation and be glad because You are so good. Don’t reject Your anointed king, and remember Your steadfast love for Your servant David.”

My Temple is Dedicated

7 The minute Solomon finished praying, I sent fire from heaven to burn up the burnt offerings and sacrifices, and My glory filled My Temple.

I will come as fire to burn up your sin; make you holy. Also, I will send My Spirit to fill the temple of your body to make you spiritual.

The priests could not go into My Temple because of My glory. When the people saw My fire and the glory, they fell with their faces to the ground and worshiped Me, the LORD. They prayed, “God is so good. His steadfast love lasts forever.”

The king and the people offered sacrifices to Me, the LORD. Solomon sacrificed 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep, and he and the people dedicated My Temple to Me, the LORD. The priests were in their assigned places, and the Levites sang, “His steadfast love lasts forever,” and played musical instruments David had made. Opposite the Levites, the priests blew trumpets as the Israelites were standing.

Solomon dedicated the courtyard in front of My Temple so they could offer burnt offerings and fat from the animals for the fellowship offerings there. That’s because the bronze altar was not big enough for all his burnt

offerings, grain offerings, and fat from other offerings. For a week Solomon and the people observed My Festival of Shelters, and people came from as far away as the brook of Egypt in the south to Lebo Hamath in the north. On the eighth day, they had a ceremony that concluded the seven-day dedication of My altar and the Festival of Shelters. Then at the end of the celebration, everyone went home, happy because I, the LORD, had been so good to David, Solomon, and His people Israel.

Solomon had now completed the building of My Temple and the royal palace, as he had planned. Then one night I, the LORD, appeared to Solomon and said, “I have heard your prayer, and I have chosen this temple as the place where you are to offer sacrifices to Me. Sometimes I might hold back rain or send locusts to eat your crops or cause My people to suffer some terrible diseases. Then if My people will humble themselves and pray and turn back to Me and away from their sinful ways, I will hear in heaven and forgive them and make their land fertile again. I will hear every prayer made here in My Temple I have chosen and dedicated so that I will be honored here. I will always watch over this place.

Then I, the LORD, said, “If you, Solomon, obey Me as your father David did, and observe all My laws and commands, I will keep My promise to David that a descendant of his will always rule over Israel. But if you do not observe My decrees and commands and if you worship other gods, then I will pull you out of this land and destroy this temple which was dedicated to honor Me, and people will joke about it. Sure, My Temple is great now, but people who walk by it will be horrified and will ask, ‘Why did I, the LORD, do such a terrible thing to this land and My temple?’ And the answer will be, ‘All these disasters came because My people rejected Me, their LORD, the God of their ancestors, who rescued them from Egypt. They worshiped other gods’”

Solomon’s Other Accomplishments

8 Twenty years after Solomon had become king and he had completed building My Temple and his royal palace, he rebuilt the towns King Hiram of Tyre had given him, and he had Israelites move into those towns. And at that time he conquered the town of Hamath Zobah. He also rebuilt Tadmor in the desert and some towns in Hamath, which he used as supply centers. He added walls and barred gates to the towns of Upper Beth-Horon and Lower

Beth-Horon. He did the same thing for Baalath and other supply centers and built cities where his chariots and horses could be kept. He built whatever he wanted in Jerusalem, Lebanon, and throughout his kingdom.

Some foreigners still living in the land were Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites. They were descendants of those who had not been completely forced out of the land. So Solomon used them as his labor force. But he did not use his own people as laborers; they served as soldiers, army commanders, and chariot drivers. He appointed 250 men as officers to oversee his various building projects.

Solomon moved his wife, Pharaoh's daughter, from the City of David to the new palace he had built for her. He did not want her to live in David's palace in the City of David because My sacred chest had been there.

Solomon offered burnt offerings to Me, the LORD, on the altar of burnt offering in front of My Temple. The number of sacrifices followed Moses' instructions for the daily sacrifices and sacrifices on the Sabbaths, the first day of each month, and the Passover Festival, the Harvest Festival, and the Festival of Shelters. Solomon assigned the priests and the Levites their duties, following the instructions given by his father, David. He also assigned some of the Levites to lead music and to help the priests in their duties. And he assigned gatekeepers to guard the gates, following My commands to David. The priests and Levites followed Solomon's instructions on these matters exactly, including the storerooms. So Solomon finished everything he planned to do in building My Temple, from the laying of the foundation to its completion.

Later Solomon went to the seaport towns of Edom. Hiram of Tyre had sent Solomon some ships and experienced sailors. They went with Solomon's sailors to Ophir and brought back to Solomon about 17 tons of gold.

The Queen of Sheba and Solomon

9When the Queen of Sheba (Ethiopia) heard about Solomon's fame, she went to Jerusalem to challenge him with some difficult questions. She arrived with a large number of attendants and a great caravan of camels loaded with lots of spices, gold, and jewels. She talked with Solomon about many subjects. Solomon answered all her questions, no matter how difficult they were. She was amazed at how wise he was, and also at his palace, all his

delicious food, his officials, his servants in their uniforms, the people who served his wine, and the burnt offerings he made at My temple.

She said to Solomon, “Everything I heard in my country about what you have done and your wisdom is certainly true. I had a difficult time believing it until I saw it with my own eyes. And I hadn’t heard even half of it. Your wisdom is far greater than what I was told. What a privilege for your officials to be here every day, listening to your wise counsel. I praise the LORD, your God, who delights in you and has made you a king because of His love for Israel and His desire to see this kingdom last forever. He has made you king to rule with justice and honesty.”

The Queen of Sheba gave Solomon 4 ½ tons of gold, large amounts of spices, and lots of precious stones. This was the largest gift of spices he ever received.

King Hiram’s and Solomon’s sailors brought gold from Ophir, and they also brought large amounts of sandalwood and precious jewels. Solomon used the sandalwood to make harps and lyres for his musicians. No one in Judah had ever seen such beautiful instruments. Solomon gave the Queen of Sheba everything she asked for, even more than she gave him. Then she and her officials returned to her country.

Every year Solomon received 25 tons of gold, besides what he received from merchants, traders, and the gold and silver given to him by the kings of Arabia and other leaders. Solomon made 200 gold shields, using about 7 ½ pounds of gold for each shield. He also made 300 smaller shields, using about four pounds of gold for each shield. He put those 500 shields in his palace in the Lebanon Forest Hall.

His huge throne was made of ivory and covered with gold. It had six steps, a gold footstool, and armrests on each side with the statue of a lion on each side. Also, Solomon made two lion statues on each step, 12 in all. Nothing in all the world compared with his throne.

All of Solomon’s drinking cups and dishes in his Lebanon Forest Hall were made of gold. They were not made of silver because silver was not considered very valuable in his day. His many trading ships were manned by Hiram’s sailors, and every three years they brought back gold, silver, ivory, apes, and peacocks. King Solomon was richer and wiser than any other king. Kings from every nation came to meet with him and hear the wisdom I had given him. Every year people who came to visit him brought him silver, gold, clothes, weapons, spices, horses, and mules. He had 4,000 stalls for his

chariots and 12,000 horses that he kept in various cities and some in Jerusalem near him. He ruled over all the area from the Euphrates River in the north to the land of Philistia in the south and as far as the border of Egypt. Silver was as common in Jerusalem as rocks, and valuable cedar was as common as the wood of sycamore-fig trees in the foothills. He bought horses from Egypt and many other countries.

Everything Solomon did in his reign is written in the records of the prophet, Nathan, the prophet, Ahijah, from Shiloh, and the prophet, Iddo, who also wrote about Jeroboam, son of Nebat. Solomon ruled from Jerusalem for 40 years. After he died, he was buried in the City of David, and his son, Rehoboam, became king.

Revolt Against Rehoboam

10 Rehoboam went to Shechem where he was to be crowned king. Jeroboam heard about this in Egypt, where he had gone to hide from Solomon. So he returned from Egypt. He and many Israelites went to Rehoboam and said, “Your father was a hard taskmaster. We will serve you only if you lighten our workload.”

Rehoboam told them to come back in three days, and he would give them an answer. He asked the elders who served his father Solomon what they thought. They said, “If you do as they suggest and make their workload easier, they will serve you well.”

But refusing their idea, Rehoboam asked for advice from the young men he knew when he was growing up. “What do you think I should say to these people who want me to lighten their workload.” His young advisers said, “Tell them ‘Compared to the load, I will place on you, my father’s load was light. It will be like saying my little finger is bigger than his waist. He made you work hard, but I will make you work harder. He used whips on you, but I will use whips with sharp metal tips that will feel like scorpion stings.’”

Three days later Jeroboam and all the people went to see Rehoboam in Shechem. He told the people he would follow the advice of the young men. And he said, “My father used whips on you, but I will use whips with sharp metal tips that will feel like scorpion stings.” He refused to do what the people wanted. Actually, this was from Me the LORD because it carried out what I had said to Jeroboam through the prophet, Ahijah.

When the Israelites saw that Rehoboam refused to lighten their workload, they said, “We don’t need to follow David and his family. Let’s all go home, and Rehoboam can rule his own people.” So the Israelites went home, but people in Judah accepted him as their king.

When Rehoboam sent Hadoram, who was in charge of the labor force, to talk with the people, they stoned him to death. Then Rehoboam jumped in his chariot and hurried home to Jerusalem. And Israel has continued to oppose David’s family in Judah.

Shemaiah’s Prophecy

11 When Rehoboam got back to Jerusalem, he called together his army of 180,000 soldiers and planned to force the ten tribes of Israel to accept him as their king. But the LORD told the prophet Shemaiah to warn Rehoboam not to go to war against Israel because they were all his relatives, and to tell him to tell the soldiers to go home because this was planned by the LORD. So the soldiers all went home.

Rehoboam built up towns for defense in Judah, including Bethlehem, Etam, Tekoa, Beth-Zur, Soco, Adullam, Gath, Mareshah, Ziph, Adoraim, Lachish, Azekah, Zorah, Aijalon, and Hebron. After fortifying these cities, he assigned an army commander to each town and gave them plenty of food, olive oil, and wine, and also spears and swords.

The priests and Levites living among the northern tribes supported Rehoboam. The Levites even left their pasturelands and property and went to Judah because Jeroboam did not want them as priests. He appointed his own priests to worship goat and calf idols at hilltop shrines. If an Israelite wanted to worship Me the LORD, the God of Israel, he went with the Levites to Jerusalem and offered sacrifices there. This strengthened the kingdom of Judah and helped support Rehoboam for the next three years as they had followed David and Solomon.

Rehoboam married his cousin Mahalath, the daughter of David’s son Jerimoth and Abihail, daughter of Eliab, and granddaughter of Jesse. Mahalath had three sons, Jeush, Shemariah, and Zaham. Later Rehoboam married another cousin, Maacah, Absalom’s daughter. Maacah had four sons: Abijah, Attai, Ziza, and Shelomith. Rehoboam loved Maacah more than any of his other 18 wives or 60 concubines. He had 28 sons and 60 daughters. His

favorite son was Abijah, son of Maacah, whom he chose to be the next king. Rehoboam wisely put his sons in charge of the fortified cities in Judah and Benjamin. He gave whatever supplies they needed, and he found wives for each of them.

Egypt Invades Judah

12Just when Rehoboam's position as king was strong, he and everyone in Judah stopped obeying Me, the LORD. As a result, King Shishak of Egypt attacked Jerusalem. This was in Rehoboam's fifth year as king. Shishak came from Egypt with 1,200 chariots and 60,000 horsemen, and a vast number of foot soldiers from Libya, Sukktoth, and Ethiopia. After capturing a number of fortified cities in Judah, he went on to attack Jerusalem. The prophet Shemaiah went to Rehoboam and the leaders of Judah who had gone to Jerusalem to escape Shishak. Shemaiah told them, "The LORD has said that since you have left Him, He is leaving you to Shishak." The king and the leaders admitted that I, the LORD, was doing this.

I, the LORD, saw that the people were sorry for what they had done. So I said to Shemaiah, "Since the people are sorry for their sin, I will give them some relief. I won't let Shishak destroy them. But they will have to pay him annual taxes. In this way they will learn that it is better to serve Me than to serve a foreign king."

So Shishak attacked Jerusalem and took away all the treasures in My Temple and the palace, including the gold shields Solomon had made. Rehoboam then made bronze shields to replace the gold shields, and he ordered the guards of the city gate to keep them safe. When Rehoboam went to My Temple, the guards carried the shields and then took them back to the guardroom. Because Rehoboam turned back to Me, the LORD, I was no longer angry with him, and I did not let Jerusalem be destroyed. And Judah enjoyed My blessings again.

Rehoboam was 41 years old when he became king, and he ruled 17 years in Jerusalem, the city I, the LORD, had chosen as the place to honor My name. His mother's name was Naamah, an Ammonite. Though he was a good king in some ways, in other ways, he was evil because he did not obey Me completely.

The rest of the events in Rehoboam's reign are written in the records of the prophet Shemaiah and the seer, Iddo. Rehoboam and Jeroboam were at war continually. When Rehoboam died, he was buried in the City of David, and his son, Abijah, became king.

Abijah is King

13 Abijah became king of Judah in Jeroboam's 18th year. He reigned in Jerusalem three years, and his mother was Micaiah, a daughter of Uriel of Gibeah. Abijah and Jeroboam were constantly at war. In one of their battles, Abijah had 400,000 soldiers, and Jeroboam had twice as many, with 800,000 men. In Ephraim, Abijah stood on Mount Zemaraim and said, "Jeroboam and all Israel, listen. Don't you realize that the LORD, the God of Israel, made a covenant of salt, that is, an unbreakable promise, to David that his descendants will be on his throne forever? Yet Jeroboam, an official under Solomon, rebelled and became a traitor to Solomon. Then a number of rascals joined him and opposed Rehoboam when he was young and inexperienced.

"Now you think you can stand against the LORD's kingdom, which is led by a descendant of David. True, you have a huge army, but your gods are only the gold calves that Jeroboam made for you to worship. You have forced out the LORD's priests and Levites and appointed your own priests. You say that whoever wants to can become a priest by offering a bull and seven rams.

"But the LORD is our God, and we have not turned from Him. Only Aaron's descendants can be priests, and the Levites help them. They offer sacrifices and burn incense twice every day, they place fresh bread each day on the Table of the Bread without Yeast, and they light the gold lampstand. We follow the Lord's commands, but you don't. Obviously, God is our Leader. His priests will blow their trumpets and will sound the battle cry. So Israel, don't fight against the LORD, because you will not succeed."

While Abijah was talking, Jeroboam sent some troops to attack Judah from behind. When Judah realized they were being attacked from the front and the rear, they prayed to Me, the LORD, for help. The priests blew their trumpets, and the soldiers of Judah shouted a battle cry. And I defeated Jeroboam and the Israelite army, and they ran from Abijah and the soldiers of Judah. I handed the Israelites over to Judah. Of Jeroboam's 800,000 soldiers, 500,000 were killed. Judah defeated Israel because they trusted in Me, the LORD, the God of their ancestors. Abijah chased Jeroboam's troops and

captured the Israelite towns of Bethel, Jeshanah, and Ephron and surrounding villages.

Jeroboam never regained his power during Abijah's reign. I, the LORD, caused his death and he died. But Abijah grew more powerful. He married 14 wives and had 22 sons and 16 daughters. The rest of the events in his reign are recorded in the records of the prophet, Iddo.

If you will obey the Bible and fight spiritual warfare by biblical means, I will give you victory.

Asa is King

14 When Abijah died, he was buried in the City of David, and his son, Asa, became the next king of Judah, and there was peace for ten years. Asa pleased Me, the LORD his God, because he destroyed the pagan altars and shrines, smashed the stone images of idols and cut down the poles used in worshiping Asherah. He told everyone in Judah to worship Me, the LORD, and to obey My commands. He also removed the hilltop shrines and incense altars in every town in Judah. So I blessed his kingdom with peace, and he fortified many cities in Judah. No one opposed Judah in war because of My blessing of peace in the land.

Asa said to his people, "Let's build towns and fortify them with walls, towers, gates, and bars to lock the gates. We can be grateful that the land still belongs to us, and the LORD has given us peace, and that is because we have obeyed Him." The people did as Asa suggested in building and fortifying the towns.

Asa had a large army of 300,000 men from Judah armed with large shields and spears, and 280,000 men from Benjamin, armed with small shields and bows. All these men were brave fighters.

Zerah an Ethiopian attacked Judah with an army of a million men and 300 chariots. Asa took his soldiers to meet Zerah's army in Zephathah Valley near Mareshah. Asa prayed to Me, "LORD, no one but You can help us; we are powerless, against this mighty army. Help us because we trust in You, and we will fight this vast army to honor You. O LORD, You are our God, and so we trust that You will not let mere humans defeat You."

I, the LORD, defeated the Ethiopians. Many of them fled, but Asa and his army chased them as far as Gerar. Countless Ethiopians died, and those alive could not fight back. They were crushed by Me, the LORD. The soldiers of Judah carried off much loot. When they were at Gerar, they attacked all the towns in that area, and the people there were terrified. The soldiers of Judah took much loot from those towns also. They also attacked nearby herdsmen and took a lot of their sheep, goats, and camels, and then returned to Jerusalem.

The Reforms of Asa

15 Later My Spirit came on Azariah, son of Oded, and he went to Asa and said, “Listen, Asa, and everyone in Judah and Benjamin. The LORD will be with you as long as you obey Him. When you look for Him, you will find Him. But if you desert Him, He will desert you. For a long time, your ancestors did not worship Him and did not have a priest to teach them the Law. But in their trouble, they turned back to the LORD, the God of Israel, and He responded to their concerns. In those terrible days of confusion, it wasn’t safe to travel anywhere. Nations were destroying each other, and cities were fighting each other because God was causing trouble and distress. But you need to be strong and courageous so that God will bless you.”

Encouraged by Azariah’s words, Asa removed all the terrible pagan idols from everywhere in Judah and Benjamin and from the towns he had captured in the hill country of Ephraim. And he repaired My altar that was in front of My Temple porch. Then he called together all the people of Judah and Benjamin, and people from the tribes of Ephraim, West Manasseh, and Simeon who had settled among them. They saw that I, the LORD, was with Asa. They met in Jerusalem in the spring of Asa’s 15th year as king. That day they sacrificed to Me 700 oxen and 7,000 sheep and goats from what they brought from Gerar. They promised to worship Me, the LORD, the God of their ancestors, wholeheartedly. And they agreed that anyone who did not worship Me, their LORD, the God of Israel, would be put to death, whether young or old, man or woman. They agreed to be loyal to Me, their LORD, and they celebrated by blowing trumpets and horns. Everyone was happy about this promise they made to Me wholeheartedly. They eagerly sought Me, and I responded by giving them rest from all their enemies.

Asa even got rid of his grandmother, Maacah, as queen mother because she had made a disgusting Asherah pole. Asa cut down the pole, broke it into pieces, and burned it in the Kidron Valley. Asa was faithful to Me throughout his life, even though he didn't destroy all the hilltop shrines. He placed in My Temple all the silver and gold objects he and his father had dedicated to Me, the LORD. Judah had peace until Asa's 35th year of his reign.

Search for Me with all your heart. Sometimes you can't find Me because you are not looking at the right place. Go back to search for Me at the place you lost Me. Keep searching, and do not give up.

The Treaty Between Judah and Syria

16In Asa's 36th year as king of Judah, King Baasha of Israel invaded Judah, and he fortified Ramah so people couldn't leave or enter Judah. Asa then sent silver and gold from the temple treasury and the palace treasury to King Ben-Hadad, king of Syria, who was in Damascus at the time. Asa sent him this message: "Let's make a treaty just as your father and my father did. This silver and gold is a gift for you. Please break your treaty with King Baasha of Israel so that he will leave my country." Ben-Hadad agreed and sent soldiers to attack Israel. They captured the Israelite towns of Ijon, Dan, Abel-Beth-Maacah, and storage cities in Naphtali. When Baasha heard of this, he left Ramah. Then Asa ordered the men of Judah to carry away the stones and wood that Baasha used to build up Ramah. Asa used these materials to build up Geba and Mizpah.

The prophet Hanani went to Asa and told him, "You put your trust in the king of Syria instead of in the LORD; now you won't be able to destroy his army. Remember the vast army of the Ethiopians and Libyans with all their many chariots and charioteers. You relied on the LORD, and He helped you defeat them. The LORD knows what's going on, and He gives strength to those who obey Him completely. But because of your foolish action, you will be at war from now on." Asa was so angry with Hanani for saying this that he put him in prison. And then Asa began to be cruel to some of his own people.

The rest of the events in Asa's reign are recorded in the book of the Kings of Judah and Israel. In the 39th year of his reign, Asa got a bad foot disease, but he refused to ask Me, the LORD for help and he relied only on doctors.

Asa died in the 41st year of his reign. He was buried in the tomb he had earlier carved out for himself in the City of David. The tomb was filled with sweet-smelling spices and oils. The people built a huge bonfire in his honor.

Search your heart for unbelief and disobedience. Repent of every rebellious thing you find in your life. Then I, your Lord—My eyes are perfect—will search you thoroughly. I will show you any resistance you have to My will so you can remove it.

Jehoshaphat is King

17Asa's son, Jehoshaphat, became king. He immediately got troops together in case Israel would attack. He put troops in every fortified city in Judah, as well as in towns in Ephraim that his father, Asa, had conquered. I, the LORD, was with Jehoshaphat because he followed the example of his father's early years and did not worship images of Baal. He obeyed Me, Asa's God, and followed My commands and not the sinful practices of Israel. So I, the LORD, helped Jehoshaphat gain firm control of Judah. Many people in Judah brought him gifts, so he became very wealthy, and everyone thought highly of him. He was devoted to Me; he removed the hilltop shrines and destroyed the Asherah poles.

In his third year, Jehoshaphat chose five officials and sent them to teach the Law in every town in Judah. They were Ben-Hail, Obadiah, Zechariah, Nethanel, and Micaiah. He sent nine Levites to go with them. They were Shemaiah, Nethaniah, Zebadiah, Asahel, Shemiramoth, Jehonathan, Adonijah, Tobijah, and Tob-Adonijah. Also, two priests, Elishama and Jehoram, were sent. Traveling from town to town, they taught the people from My book of the Law which they carried with them.

The nations around Judah were afraid of Judah, so no nation fought against Jehoshaphat. Some Philistines brought him silver and gold as tribute money, and the Arabs brought him 7,700 rams and 7,700 male goats. As Jehoshaphat became more powerful, he built fortresses and storage cities, where he kept numerous supplies. He also stationed some experienced soldiers in Jerusalem. These soldiers were grouped according to family clans. Adnah was the commander of 300,000 troops, organized in units of 1,000 each. Next was Jehohanan, commander of 280,000 troops. Under Amasiah,

son of Zicri, were 200,000 troops. Eliada, a brave soldier, commanded 300,000 troops from Benjamin, equipped with bows and shields. Next was Jehozabad who was commander of 180,000 troops. These were the troops in Jerusalem beside those Jehoshaphat placed in fortified cities throughout Judah.

Do not trust in anything that takes My place. Ask forgiveness and cleansing by the blood of Christ. Look to Me, your Lord, for direction.

Micaiah's Prophecy

18 Jehoshaphat had great wealth and was highly respected. He made an alliance with Ahab, king of Israel, by marrying his son to Ahab's daughter. Ahab prepared a big feast to honor him and his officials by butchering many sheep and oxen. Then Ahab suggested that Jehoshaphat go with him to attack Ramoth-Gilead. He asked, "Will you join me in fighting against Ramoth-Gilead?" Jehoshaphat replied, "Of course. We are all Israelites, so my troops can join yours in battle. But first, let's see what the LORD says about this idea."

So Ahab brought together 400 prophets and asked them if he and Jehoshaphat should attack Ramoth-Gilead. They all said, "Sure. Go ahead, and God will give you a great victory." But Jehoshaphat asked, "Isn't there a prophet of the LORD here so we can ask him?" Ahab said, "Yes, there is one prophet of the LORD. But I hate him because he always has bad news for me. He is Micaiah, son of Imlah." Jehoshaphat said, "Wait a minute. There's no need to talk like that. Let's see what he says." So Ahab told an official to go get Micaiah, son of Imlah, right away.

Ahab and Jehoshaphat were dressed in their royal robes and were seated on their thrones at the threshing floor near the gate of Samaria, listening to Ahab's prophets prophesying. One of them, Zedekiah, son of Kenaanah, made some horns out of iron and said, "Ahab, the LORD says that you will kill the Syrians like a bull with horns like these." All the other prophets agreed that Ahab should go attack the Syrians at Ramoth-Gilead and that I LORD would give him a great victory.

The messenger who went to get Micaiah said to him, "All Ahab's prophets are promising him victory. So I suggest you agree with them." Micaiah replied, "I'll say only what the LORD tells me to say." When he arrived in Samaria, Ahab asked him if they should go fight the Syrians at Ramoth-Gilead. Micaiah replied facetiously, "Sure. Go ahead. You'll have a great victory."

Ahab said, "I've told you over and over to tell me only the truth. So is that what the LORD really said?" Micaiah responded, "In a vision, I saw all Israelites wandering on the hills like sheep without a shepherd. And the LORD said to me, 'Their master has been killed so the troops may as well go home.'" Ahab said to Jehoshaphat, "See. I told you he would give me nothing but bad news." Then Micaiah continued, "I saw the LORD on his throne with many angels around him. And the LORD said, 'Can anyone trick Ahab into going to Ramoth-Gilead so he will be killed there?' Many suggestions were given, but finally, a spirit said, 'I can do it.' When the LORD asked how, the angel said, 'I will make all his prophets lie to him.' The LORD said, 'All right. Go ahead and do it.' So the LORD has made all your prophets lie to you, telling you the opposite of what will actually happen."

Zedekiah, son of Kenaanah, walked up to Micaiah and slapped him in the face, and he said to Micaiah, "What makes you think the Spirit of the LORD left me to speak to you?" Micaiah replied, "You'll find out when you have to hide in the back room of a house." Immediately Ahab ordered, "Arrest Micaiah and take him back to Amon, the city's governor, and to my son, Joash. Tell them I said to put him in prison and give him only bread and water until I get back safely from battle." Micaiah said, "If you return safely, then the LORD hasn't spoken through me." Then he told everyone there, "Remember what I said."

So King Ahab and King Jehoshaphat went to Ramoth-Gilead, and Ahab said, "As we go into battle, I'll disguise myself so no one will recognize me, but you, Jehoshaphat, wear your royal robes." So Ahab disguised himself, and they went into battle. The king of Syria told his charioteers, "Attack only the king of Israel." Then when the charioteers saw Jehoshaphat in his royal robes, they thought he was Ahab, and they attacked him. Jehoshaphat prayed, and I helped him by turning the attack away. So I, the LORD, caused the Syrian charioteers to stop chasing him.

A Syrian soldier shot an arrow without even aiming, and the arrow hit Ahab between two pieces of his armor. Ahab told his chariot driver, "Get me

out of here. I've been hit." The fighting lasted all day, and Ahab propped himself up in his chariot so he could see the Syrians. Then as the sun was setting, he died.

Jehoshaphat's Reforms

19When King Jehoshaphat got home in Jerusalem, the prophet Jehu, son of Hanani, went to meet him. He asked the king, "Why did you try to help wicked Ahab and why did you love the people of Israel who hate the LORD? You have caused the LORD to be very angry with you. But a good thing you did was to get rid of the Asherah poles, and you are trying to obey the LORD."

Jehoshaphat lived in Jerusalem, but he went to visit his people, traveling from Beersheba to the hill country of Ephraim, and encouraging them to trust and obey Me, the LORD. He appointed judges in each of Judah's fortified cities, and he told them, "Make your court decisions carefully, keeping in mind that in your decisions you are to please the LORD, not people, and He will be with you in each case. Remember the LORD in every decision, and judge fairly, remembering that He does not tolerate injustice or partiality or the taking of bribes."

Jehoshaphat also appointed some Levites, priests, and clan leaders to settle cases in Jerusalem related to the law and civil matters. He told them, "Always reverence the LORD and serve Him faithfully and wholeheartedly. When a case is brought to you from fellow citizens in other towns, whether a case of murder or some other violation of God's laws, commands, and regulations, warn the person not to sin against the LORD so that He won't be angry with you. Following these instructions will keep you from sinning.

"In religious cases, Amariah, the high priest, will have the final word, and in civil cases, Zebadiah, son of Ishmael, of the tribe of Judah, will have the final word. The Levites will assist you in making sure justice is carried out. So be brave, and I pray the LORD will always help you do what is right."

Pray for My presence for every decision you make, just as judges had to trust Me in Jehoshaphat's time. Ask Me to guide you to always make right decisions in the right way.

The Defeat of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir

20The Moabites, Ammonites, and some Meunites went to war against Jehoshaphat. Messengers told him, “A vast army is coming from Edom across from the Dead Sea. They are already at Hazazon-Tamar. (This was another name for En-Gedi.) Alarmed by this news, Jehoshaphat asked Me, his LORD, about this, and I told the people to fast to show their sorrow. The people went to Jerusalem from every town in Judah to pray for My help. Then Jehoshaphat stood before the people in front of My Temple courtyard, and prayed this prayer to Me: “O LORD, You are the God of our ancestors, You are the God in heaven and You rule over all nations in the world. Because of Your power no one can defeat You. O God, You forced out the inhabitants of this land and gave it to the descendants of Abraham, Your friend. Our ancestors lived here and built a temple to honor You. They said that if war or plagues or famines hit them, they should stand here at the temple and pray for Your help, and You would hear their prayer and save them.

“Now the armies of Ammon, Moab, and Edom are attacking us. Those are nations You would not allow our ancestors to invade when they came from Egypt. So our ancestors did not destroy them. Now they are coming to take back the land You gave us as an inheritance. O our God, please judge them, because we can’t possibly defeat them ourselves. We don’t know what to do, so we are looking to You for help.”

While all men, women, and children stood there before Me, the LORD, I, the Spirit of the LORD, came on Jahaziel, son of Zechariah, grandson of Benaiah, great-grandson of Jeiel, great-great-grandson of Mattaniah, a Levite, and descendant of Asaph. Jahaziel said, “Jehoshaphat and all of you in Judah, God says, ‘I am your God, don’t be afraid or discouraged because of this vast army. The battle is Mine, not yours. Here’s what you need to do. Tomorrow these enemy armies will be going over the Ziz Pass and on to the gorge in the Jeruel Desert. You won’t have to fight this battle. Just take your positions and watch Me rescue you from this enemy. Don’t be afraid or discouraged. Just go out there tomorrow, and I will go with you.’”

Jehoshaphat bowed to the ground and worshiped Me, the LORD, and all the people of Judah and Jerusalem did the same. Some Levites of the Kohath and Korah clans stood up and praised Me with loud voices.

Early in the morning, they all left for the Tekoa Desert. Jehoshaphat said, “Listen, you people. Trust in the LORD and believe what His prophets have

said, and you will succeed.” After Jehoshaphat checked with the people, he appointed some men to march ahead of the army praising Me, the LORD, for My holiness. They sang “Give thanks to the LORD, for His steadfast love lasts forever.” As these men began to sing, I, the LORD, caused the soldiers of Ammon, Moab, and Edom to fight against each other. Not one soldier of the enemy escaped. The Ammonites and Moabites completely defeated the Edomites, and then they started killing each other.

When the men of Judah arrived at the place that overlooks the desert, they saw only dead bodies there. So Jehoshaphat and his men carried off much loot, including equipment, clothing, and many valuable articles. In fact, it took them days to collect it all. On the fourth day, they assembled in the Beracah Valley (meaning “Valley of Blessing”) where they praised Me, the LORD.

Jehoshaphat led all the men of Judah and Jerusalem back to Jerusalem. They were all happy because I, the LORD, had given them victory over their enemies. When they reached the city, they went straight to My temple, playing harps, lutes, and trumpets. All other nations were afraid of Me when they heard how I defeated Israel’s enemies. Jehoshaphat’s kingdom enjoyed peace because I was with them.

When Jehoshaphat became king of Judah, he was 35 years old, and he reigned for 25 years. His mother was Azubah, daughter of Shilhi. He obeyed Me, the LORD, as his father Asa had done. However, he did not get rid of all the hilltop shrines, and many people were still not serving Me faithfully.

Other events in Jehoshaphat’s reign are recorded in the records of Jehu, son of Hanani, and the book of the Kings of Israel. When Jehoshaphat was king of Judah, he made an alliance with Ahaziah, king of Israel, a wicked king. They agreed to build together a fleet of ships at Ezion-Geber. Hearing of this, the prophet Eliezer, son of Dodavahu of Mareshah, told Jehoshaphat, “Because you made an alliance with Ahaziah, the LORD will destroy these ships.” And that’s what happened. The ships were destroyed and never sailed.

Seek My presence for every decision you make just as Jehoshaphat did. Then I will guide you to always make right decisions in the right way.

Jehoram is King

21 After Jehoshaphat died, he was buried with his ancestors in the City of David. And Jehoram, his son, became the next king. Jehoram had six sons, Azariah, Jehiel, Zechariah, Azariahu, Michael, and Shephatiah. Jehoshaphat, their father, gave each of them silver and gold and other valuable items, and he put them in charge of the fortified cities in Judah. Jehoshaphat gave the kingdom of Judah to Jehoram because he was his firstborn son. But when he began his reign, he had all his brothers and some national leaders killed. He was 32 years old when he became king, and he reigned for eight years.

Jehoram, king of Judah, followed the sinful example of the kings of Israel including Ahab's family. And he married a daughter of Ahab. He did evil in My sight. However, I, the LORD, was not willing to end David's dynasty because of My promise that some of his descendants would always rule in Judah.

Edom rebelled against Judah and set up their own king. So Jehoram went to Edom with his officers and all his chariots. The Edomites surrounded his army and chariot commanders, but somehow Jehoram got away at night. Edom has been free from Judah ever since then, and even the town of Libnah rebelled against Judah. All this resulted from Jehoram turning from Me, the God of his ancestors. He also built hilltop shrines in Judah and led the people to worship pagan gods.

One day the prophet Elijah wrote this to Jehoram: "This is what the LORD, the God of your ancestor David, says: 'You have not followed the good example of your father, Jehoshaphat, or your grandfather, Asa. You have been as sinful as the kings of Israel, and you have led the people of Jerusalem and Judah to worship idols just as Ahab did. And you have murdered your own brothers, men who were even better than you. So now the LORD will punish you, your family, and the people in your kingdom and destroy everything you own. You will have a painful stomach disease that will cause your bowels to come out.'"

Then I, the LORD, caused the Philistines and the Arabs who lived near the Mushites to get angry with Jehoram. They attacked Judah and carried off everything valuable in the palace, and his sons and wives. Only his youngest son, Amaziah, was not taken. Then just as Elijah had said, I, the LORD, struck Jehoram with a severe stomach disease. After two years the disease

caused his bowels to come out, and he died in awful pain. The people did not build a bonfire for him as they did for his ancestors. Jehoram was 22 years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem eight years. No one was sorry when he died. He was buried in the City of David but not with Judah's other kings.

Ahaziah is King

22Some Arabs had killed all of King Jehoram's sons except the youngest, Amaziah. So Amaziah was made a king. He was 22 years old when he began to reign, and he reigned one year. His mother was Athaliah, a granddaughter of King Omri of Israel. She influenced Amaziah to sin, and he was wicked just like Ahab and his father. After Ahaziah's father, Jehoram, died, Ahaziah followed the counsel of Ahab's advisers, and this led to his downfall.

Ahab's advisers suggested he make an alliance with Jehoram, Ahab's son. Together they went to fight against King Hazael of Syria at Ramoth-Gilead, and the Syrians wounded Jehoram. So he went to Jezebel to recover. And Amaziah, king of Judah, went to visit him there. Through this visit, I brought about Ahaziah's downfall. Amaziah and Jehoram went to meet Jehu, grandson of Nish. I had already told Jehu to kill Ahab's relatives. While Jehu was killing them, he ran across some of Judah's leaders, and Ahaziah's nephews and Jehu killed them all. He and his men went to find Amaziah, and they captured him while he was hiding in Samaria. Jehu's men brought Amaziah to Jehu, who put him to death. They buried Amaziah only because they respected Jehoshaphat, who served Me, the LORD, with all his heart. No one was left then in Ahaziah's family to become king of Judah.

When Athaliah heard that her son, Amaziah, was dead, she decided to kill every relative of his. But Ahaziah's sister Jehosheba, daughter of King Jehoram and wife of Jehoiada, the priest, took King Ahaziah's infant son, Joash, away from the other children who were about to be killed. She hid Joash and his personal servant. That way Athaliah could not murder him. He hid in My Temple for six years while Athaliah ruled as queen of Judah.

Joash is King

After Joash had hidden in My Temple for six years, Jehoiada decided something had to be done. So he got the support of five army officers: **23** Azariah, son of Jeroham, Ishmael, son of Jehohanan, Azariah, son of Obed, Maaseiah, son of Adaiah, and Elishaphat, son of Zicri. They went throughout the towns of Judah and met with Levites and clan leaders. They all went to Jerusalem, and at My Temple, they agreed to help Joash.

Jehoiada said to them, “Joash will be our next king because the LORD promised that a descendant of David will always be king. So here is what I suggest we do. A third of your priests and Levites are to guard the temple gates on the Sabbath, a third are to guard the palace, and a third are to guard the Foundation Gate. The others will guard the temple courtyards. No one is to enter the temple except the priests and Levites on duty because they are the only ones who will have made themselves ceremonially clean. The others are to follow the LORD’s instructions and stay outside. The Levites must protect King Joash, keeping close to him wherever he goes. And they must have their weapons handy, ready to kill any unauthorized person who enters the temple.”

The Levites and the people of Judah followed Jehoiada’s orders. Each commander had his guards with him, including those going off duty, and those coming on duty. Jehoiada gave the commanders swords and shields that once belonged to David and were stored in My Temple. He had the guards with their weapons positioned around the king and in positions on the north and south sides of My Temple and by the altar. Jehoiada and his sons brought Joash outside, placed a crown on his head, and gave him a copy of My Law. They poured oil on his head, and everyone shouted, “Long live the king!”

When Athaliah heard the noise of the people running and praising the king, she went to My Temple to see what was happening. She saw the king standing by the column at My Temple entrance, surrounded by officers and trumpeters and people rejoicing and blowing trumpets. Singers with musical instruments were leading the people in praise. Athaliah tore her clothes and shouted, “Treason! You betrayed me.” Jehoiada told the army commanders, “Take her out of the temple and kill anyone who tries to rescue her. Don’t kill her in the temple.” So they grabbed her and took her to the horse gate by the palace, and killed her there.

Jehoiada asked the king and the people to be faithful to Me, the LORD. The people then went to the Baal temple and tore it down. They smashed the pagan altars and idols and killed Mattan the Baal priest. Then Jehoiada put in charge of My Temple the Levitical priests, as David had instructed them to

do. He also told them to present burnt offerings to Me, the LORD, as Moses wrote, and to sing as David instructed. He also told the gatekeepers at My Temple gates to keep out anyone who was ceremonially unclean.

Then the army commanders, nobles, rulers, and the people led the king from My Temple through the Upper Gate and into the palace, and Joash sat on the throne. So all the people rejoiced because Athaliah was killed, and Jerusalem was peaceful.

Joash Repairs My Temple

24When Joash became king, he was seven years old, and he reigned in Jerusalem 40 years. His mother was Zibiah, from Beersheba. While Jehoiada the priest was alive, Joash pleased Me. Jehoiada chose two wives for Joash, and he had sons and daughters.

Later Joash decided to repair My Temple. So he told the priests and Levites to go right away to the towns of Judah and collect annual taxes to repair My Temple. But the Levites didn't hurry to follow his orders. So he asked Jehoiada the high priest, "Why haven't you sent the Levites out to collect the taxes? As you know, years ago Moses required this tax of our people for the upkeep of the temple."

Some people who followed wicked Queen Athaliah had broken into My Temple and stole sacred objects to use in worshipping Baal. So now Joash gave instructions for a box to be made and placed outside My Temple gate. Then he sent word throughout Judah telling people to bring their temple tax, just as Moses had required their ancestors to do in the desert. The people and leaders agreed and brought their money and put it in the box.

When the box was full, the Levites took it to the king's officials. Then the court secretary and an officer of the chief priest counted the money and took the box back to My Temple. This happened every day, and soon a large amount of money was collected. The king and Jehoiada gave the money to the construction foreman, who hired masons and carpenters to repair My temple. They also hired men who were experts in working with iron and bronze.

The foremen worked hard, and the workers made good progress. My Temple then looked just like its original design. When they finished the repairs, they brought the rest of the money to Joash and Jehoiada, who then used the money to make utensils for My temple and dishes and various gold

and silver objects. Burnt offerings were sacrificed continually in My temple during Jehoiada's lifetime.

Jehoiada had a full life and died at age 130. He was buried with the kings in the City of David because he had done much good for the people, for Me, the LORD, and for My temple. After Jehoiada's death, the leaders of Judah talked with Joash and encouraged him to let them worship Asherah poles and pagan idols. I was very angry because of this sin. I, the LORD, sent prophets to bring them back to the LORD, but they would not listen.

Then I, the Spirit of God, came on Zechariah, Jehoiada's son. He said to the people, "Why do you destroy the LORD's commands? You can't succeed. You have deserted the LORD, and now He will desert you." The leaders planned to kill Zechariah, and even King Joash ordered the people to stone him in My Temple courtyard. Joash forgot that Zechariah's father had been a good friend. As Zechariah was dying, his last words were, "May the LORD see what you are doing and hold you accountable."

In the spring of the following year, the Syrian army marched against Joash, invaded Judah and Jerusalem, and killed all the nation's leaders. They sent much loot back to their king in Damascus. The Syrians had only a small army, but I, the LORD, helped them defeat Judah's much larger army. This defeat against Judah and Joash was because Judah had deserted Me, the God of their ancestors.

The Syrians left Joash severely wounded. His own officers decided to kill him because he had murdered Jehoiada, the priest. They killed him as he lay in his bed. He was buried in the City of David, but not with the other kings. The assassins were Zabad, son of an Ammonite woman named Shimeath, and Jehozabad, son of a Moabite woman named Shomer. The story of Joash's sons, and the prophecies about him, and the details of his restoring My Temple are written in the history of the book of the Kings. When Joash died, his son, Amaziah, was the next king.

Amaziah is King

25 Amaziah was 25 years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem 29 years. His mother was Jehoaddin from Jerusalem. He did what was right before Me, the LORD, but not wholeheartedly.

He killed the two men who had killed his father. But he did not kill their children because in the Law of Moses I had said that parents are not to be put to death for their children's sins, and children are not to be put to death for their parents' sins.

Amaziah called together the people of Judah and appointed commanders of thousands and of hundreds. Then he counted the men 20 years of age and older and found there were 300,000 men able to fight with spears and shields. He also paid almost four tons of silver to hire 100,000 soldiers from Israel. My prophet said to him, "O king, don't hire these troops from Israel. Why? Because the LORD will not help any of the people from the northern kingdom. Even if you fight well, He will let your enemies defeat you. He has the ability to help or defeat any army."

Amaziah said to My prophet, "But what should I do about the silver I paid to hire troops from Israel?" The man of God answered, "The LORD will give you back a lot more than that." So Amaziah sent the troops from Israel back home. But this made them angry with Judah, and they went home furiously mad.

Then Amaziah led his soldiers to the Salt Valley and killed 10,000 Edomites. His soldiers captured another 10,000, took them to the top of a high cliff, and pushed them over the side. They were all killed on the rocks below. Meanwhile, the troops that Amaziah sent home to Israel raided towns in Judah between Samaria and Beth-Horon, killed 3,000 people, and carried off much loot.

When Amaziah returned to Jerusalem after defeating the Edomites, he brought with him the idols worshiped by the people of Edom. He set them up as his own gods and bowed to them, and offered sacrifices to them. This made Me, the LORD, very angry, and I sent a prophet to Amaziah with these words: "Why have you worshiped these gods who couldn't even save their own people from your attack?" Amaziah interrupted him and said, "Nobody asked you to be my advisor! Don't say another word, or I'll have you killed." So the prophet stopped. But then he said, "I know God will punish you because you sinned in worshiping these idols and now you have ignored my warning."

Amaziah talked with his advisers and then sent a challenge to Israel's king Jehoash, Jehu's grandson, "Come face me in battle." Jehoash replied, "A small thornbush in Lebanon wrote to a big cedar tree, 'Give your daughter to be my son's wife.' But a wild animal crushed the thornbush. You are so proud

because you defeated Edom. But you should just stay home. Otherwise, you and Judah will be destroyed.”

However, Amaziah wouldn't listen because I was planning to punish him for worshiping the gods of Edom. So Jehoash's army attacked Amaziah's army at Beth-Shemesh. Israel's army chased Judah's army, and the soldiers ran home. Jehoash captured Amaziah at Beth-Shemesh and took him to Jerusalem, and he broke down 600 feet of the city wall from the Ephraim Gate to the Corner Gate. He carried off from My Temple all the gold and silver utensils that had been under the care of Obed-Edom. He also carried off treasures from the king's palace, took hostages, and went back to Samaria.

King Amaziah of Judah lived 15 years after King Jehoash of Israel died. The other events in his reign are written in the book of the Kings of Judah and Israel. When Amaziah started disobeying Me, the LORD, some people planned to kill him. Hearing of this, he fled to Lachish, but some men went after him and killed him there. They brought his corpse back to Jerusalem on a horse and buried him with his ancestors in the City of David.

Keep away from the snares of evil men. Ask Me to help you see people as they really are. I can protect you when you can't protect yourself.

Uzziah is King

26The people of Judah then made 16-year-old Uzziah, Amaziah's son, as their king. He recaptured and rebuilt Elath. He ruled in Jerusalem 52 years. His mother was Jecoliah from Jerusalem. He obeyed Me, the LORD, as his father, Amaziah, had done. Zechariah was Uzziah's spiritual adviser, and as long as Zechariah was alive, Uzziah sought Me, and I gave him success.

Uzziah fought against the Philistines and broke down the walls of Gath, Jabneh, and Ashdod. He rebuilt towns around Ashdod and other areas of Philistia. I helped him defeat not only the Philistines but also the Arabs who lived in Gur Baal and the Meunites. He even required the Ammonites to pay taxes to him. People as far away as Egypt heard about Uzziah because he had become very powerful.

In Jerusalem, he built fortified towers at the Corner Gate, the Valley Gate, and at the corner angle in the wall. He also built towers in the desert and dug

many cisterns to catch rainwater for his livestock in the foothills and flatlands. He loved farming, and so he hired people to look after his crops and vineyard in the foothills and fertile valleys.

Uzziah had a well-trained army, always ready for battle. Jeiel, the army secretary, and his assistant, Maaseiah, kept track of their numbers, and they served under Hananiah, a royal official. Clan leaders who commanded those soldiers totaled 2,600. And under their command were 307,500 trained soldiers, powerful troops who were to protect the king against his enemies. Uzziah gave the soldiers shields, spears, helmets, armor, bows, and stones for slings. Some of his skillful men made machines that could shoot arrows and large stones. He set these up at his defense towers and at the corners of Jerusalem's walls. He became very powerful and was known in many countries.

Unfortunately, Uzziah became proud of his power, and this led to his downfall. One day he sinned against Me, the LORD, by entering My Temple to burn incense on the altar of incense. Azariah, the priest, and 80 other priests followed him in and said, "Uzziah, this isn't right for you to burn incense to the LORD. This is to be done only by the priests who are Aaron's descendants. You should leave the temple. You have sinned, and the LORD God will not bless you for this."

Standing next to the altar ready to burn the incense, Uzziah became very angry. But just then leprosy suddenly appeared on his forehead. When Azariah, the high priest, and the 80 priests looked at the king, they saw his leprosy and told him to leave My Temple immediately. In fact, Uzziah was eager to get out because he knew I, the LORD, had caused the leprosy. He had leprosy the rest of his life. He was not allowed in My Temple, and because of his leprosy, he could not even live in his own palace. That is why his son, Jotham, lived there and ruled in Uzziah's place.

The other events of Uzziah's reign were recorded by the prophet Isaiah, son of Amoz. Because of his leprosy, when he died, he could not be buried with the other kings in the City of David. Instead, he was buried in a nearby cemetery the kings owned. Then his son, Jotham, became the next king.

Jotham is King

Jotham was 25 years old when he became king, and he ruled from Jerusalem for 16 years. His mother was Jerusha, daughter of Zadok. He obeyed Me, the **27**LORD, as his father, Uzziah, did but he did not enter My Temple as Uzziah had done. But the people of Judah continued their sinful ways. Jotham rebuilt the Upper Gate of My Temple and did many repairs on the city wall at the Ophel Hill. He built towns in the hills of Judea and made fortresses and defense towers in the wooded areas.

Jotham attacked and defeated the Ammonites. For each of three years, the Ammonites paid him 7,500 pounds of silver, 50,000 bushels of wheat, and 50,000 bushels of barley. Jotham became a powerful king because he was faithful to Me, the LORD.

The other events in Jotham's reign, including his wars and other activities, are recorded in the book of the Kings of Israel and Judah. After he ruled for 16 years in Jerusalem, he died at the age of 41 and was buried in the City of David. His son, Ahaz, became the next king.

Ahaz is King

28Ahaz was 20 years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem 16 years. He did not do what pleased Me, the LORD, as his ancestor David had done. He followed the example of the kings of Israel and also made idols for worshiping Baal. He offered sacrifices in the Hinnom Valley, even sacrificing his own sons in the fire. He copied the awful practices of the nations that I, the LORD, had forced out of the land. He offered sacrifices and burned incense at the pagan hilltop shrines and under every large tree.

Therefore I, the LORD, allowed the king of Syria to defeat Ahaz and to take many people of Judah as captives to Damascus and the Syrian army killed many of Judah's soldiers. Also, Israel's King Pekah, son of Remaliah, killed 120,000 of Judah's soldiers in one day, all because Judah had turned from Me, the LORD, the God of their ancestors. Zicri, a soldier from Ephraim, killed Maaseiah, the king's son; Azrikam, the official in charge of the palace; and Elkanah, the king's second-in-command. Israel's soldiers captured 200,000 wives, sons, and daughters in Judah.

The prophet, Oded, in Samaria met Israel's army as they were on their way back from Judah. He said, "The LORD, the God of your ancestors, let

you defeat Judah because He was angry with them. But you have gone too far, killing many of them without any mercy. If you make slaves of the people of Judah, you will be as guilty as they are against the LORD, your God. Send back these prisoners; after all, they are your relatives. The LORD is very angry with you.”

Four of Israel’s leaders arrived just then. They were Azariah, son of Jehohanan, Berekiah, son of Meshillemoth, Jehizkiah, son of Shallum, and Amasa, son of Hadlai. They agreed with Oded and said to the men returning from battle, “Don’t bring these prisoners here. That will add to our guilt, which is already great, and the LORD is already angry with us.” So the soldiers let the prisoners go, and they handed back all the loot they had taken. The four men took clothes from the loot and gave them to the prisoners who had nothing to wear. They gave them clothes and sandals and something to eat and drink. They also gave them some olive oil to put on their wounds. They put the prisoners on donkeys that were too weak to walk. And they led all the prisoners back to Jericho, the City of Palms, and went back to Samaria.

Later King Ahaz wrote to the king of Assyria, asking for help. That’s because the Edomites had again attacked Judah and took some people of Judah as captives. And the Philistines had attacked towns in the foothills and in the Southern Desert. They conquered and occupied Beth-Shemesh, Aijalon, Gederoth, Soco, Timnah, and Gizmo and their surrounding villages. I, the LORD, was punishing Judah in this way because Ahaz had been encouraging the people to sin and he was very unfaithful to Me, the LORD. Tiglath-Pileser, king of Assyria, went to see Ahaz, but instead of helping him, he gave him trouble. To try to please Tiglath-Pileser Ahaz took some valuable things from My Temple, the palace, and his officials’ homes and gave them to him, but that did not help.

With all this trouble Ahaz became even more unfaithful to Me, the LORD. He offered sacrifices to the gods of Damascus who had defeated him, for he said to himself, “These gods helped the kings of Syria, so I will sacrifice to them so they will help me.” But this led to the downfall of Ahaz and the destruction of Judah.

Ahaz took the furnishings in My temple and broke them into pieces. He shut the doors of My Temple and set up altars at every street corner in Jerusalem. In every town in Judah, he built hilltop shrines for offering sacrifices to foreign gods. All this made Me, the LORD, the God of his ancestors, very angry.

The other events in Ahaz's reign and all his ways are written in the book of the Kings of Judah and Israel. Ahaz died and was buried in the City of David but not in the tombs of the kings. Then his son, Hezekiah, became king.

Examine your life to see if you're compromising your walk with Me or your worship of Me. Open your blind eyes to see if you have compromised anything at all. Repent and give Me first place in every area of your life.

Hezekiah is King

29Hezekiah was 25 years old when he became king in Jerusalem, and he reigned 29 years. His mother was Abijah, daughter of Zechariah. He pleased Me, the LORD, just as David did. In the first month of his reign, he opened My Temple doors and repaired them. He brought in the priests and Levites to the east temple courtyard, and he said, "We need to dedicate ourselves and the Lord's temple to Him to remove all defiled things from the temple. Our ancestors were unfaithful to the LORD and sinned against Him and turned from Him. They shut the temple doors and snuffed out the lamps. They stopped burning incense and offering sacrifices to the God of Israel. Therefore the LORD is very angry with Judah and Jerusalem. Everyone is shocked and horrified at what He did to punish them. Our ancestors were killed in battle, and our wives and children were taken as captives. Now I will renew our agreement with the LORD, the God of Israel so that He will no longer be angry with us. Don't waste any time, because the LORD has chosen you to serve Him and to burn incense."

Then the Levites went to work. From the Kohathites were Mahath, son of Amasai, and Joel, son of Azariah; from the Merarites were Kish, son of Abdi, and Azariah, son of Jehallelel; from the Gershonites were Joah, son of Zimmah, and Eden, son of Joah; from the descendants of Elizaphan were Shimri, and Jeiel; from the descendants of Asaph were Zechariah and Mattahiah; from the descendants of Heman was Jehiel and Shimei; and from the descendants of Jeduthun were Shemaiah and Uzziel.

These leaders gathered the other Levites, and they all made themselves ceremonially clean and then began to purify My Temple as the king had

ordered them to do. The priests took out from My temple everything that was unclean and brought them into the courtyard. The Levites then carried them to the Kidron Valley. Starting on the first day of the first month, the priests took a week to purify the courtyards and another week to purify My Temple itself. Then on the 16th day, they went to Hezekiah and reported, “We have purified the temple and the altar of burnt offering and its utensils, and also the Table for the Bread without Yeast and its articles. We have also brought back and purified all the articles King Ahaz took from the temple when he was king. We put them back in front of the altar.”

The next morning King Hezekiah called together the officials of Jerusalem, and together they went to My Temple. They brought with them seven bulls, seven rams, seven male lambs, and seven male goats as an offering for the sins of the people of Judah and to purify My temple. Hezekiah told the priests, descendants of Aaron, to offer these on the altar. The priests killed the bulls, the rams, and the lambs and sprinkled their blood on the altar. They brought the goats to the king and the people; they laid their hands on them. The priests then killed the goats and sprinkled the blood on the altar as a substitutionary payment for sin for Israel, just as the king specifically commanded for Israel.

King Hezekiah then stationed the Levites in My Temple with cymbals, harps, and lyres, as I had commanded David and the prophets, Gad and Nathan. The Levites stood ready with David’s instruments, and the priests took their positions with their trumpets. Hezekiah gave the order for the burnt offering to be sacrificed on the altar. As the offering was presented, the people began singing as the trumpets, and other instruments of David were being played. Everyone bowed in worship as the singers sang and the musicians played. This continued while all the animals were sacrificed.

Then Hezekiah and everyone there bowed down in worship to Me. Hezekiah and his officials ordered the Levites to praise Me, their LORD, with the words David and Asaph, the prophet, had written. Hezekiah said to the crowd, “Now that you have dedicated yourselves to the LORD, bring sacrifices and thank offerings to the temple.” So the people did that, and some of them willingly brought burnt offerings. The number of burnt offerings they brought were 70 bulls, 100 rams, and 200 lambs. Other sacrifices that were brought included 600 bulls and 3,000 sheep. There were not enough priests to skin all the burnt-offering animals, so the Levites helped them until the work was finished and more priests had been made ceremonially clean. Many

animals were offered as burnt offerings, together with many drink offerings, and a lot of fat from animals for the many peace offerings. So My Temple was again restored and ready for worshiping Me, the LORD. Hezekiah and all the people of Judah were glad because I had helped them finish all this quickly.

Celebrating the Passover

30 Hezekiah invited all Israel and Judah to come to My temple in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover for Me, the LORD, the God of Israel. The king and his officials and everyone in Jerusalem decided to celebrate the Passover in the second month that year instead of the first month. That's because not enough priests had made themselves ceremonially clean, and because not everyone had yet assembled in Jerusalem. This plan seemed the right thing to do. So Hezekiah sent a message to everyone in Israel and Judah, from Beersheba in the south to Dan in the north, inviting everyone to come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. For years the Passover had not been celebrated in large numbers.

Hezekiah's messengers went everywhere in Israel and Judah with this message from him and his officials: "People of Israel, return to the LORD, the God of our ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob so that He will return to us who have survived the invasion of the Assyrian kings. Don't be like your ancestors and your relatives in the north who were unfaithful to the LORD, the God of their ancestors, so that others were horrified by what they saw. Don't be stubborn, as your ancestors were. Come to the temple, and serve the LORD so that He won't be angry with you. If you return to the LORD, the captors of your brothers and children will treat them with mercy and will allow them to return home. The LORD, your God, is gracious and has compassion. So if you turn back to Him, He will not turn from you."

The messengers went to every town in Ephraim and West Manasseh and as far north as Zebulun, but most of the people laughed at them and made fun of them. However, a few men in Asher, West Manasseh, and Zebulun went to Jerusalem. Everyone in Judah united to carry out what the king and his officials ordered according to My word.

On the appointed spring day of the second month, a large crowd of people gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the Festival of Bread without Yeast. They

removed all the pagan altars and incense altars in Jerusalem and threw them into the Kidron Valley.

Each family killed its Passover lamb on the 14th day of the second month. Many of the priests and Levites were ashamed because they had not become ceremonially clean. So they purified themselves and then offered burnt offerings in My Temple. Then the priests and Levites took their places at My Temple, according to the instructions in the Law of Moses.

Many of the people were ceremonially unclean, so the Levites had to kill their Passover lambs for them. Also, many of those who came from Ephraim, West Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun were ceremonially unclean. But Hezekiah prayed for them, and he allowed them to eat the Passover meal, even though this was contrary to My laws. Hezekiah prayed, “LORD, You are so good, and You forgive those who obey You, the God of their ancestors, even though they are not ceremonially clean.” I, the LORD, heard Hezekiah’s prayer and did not punish the people.

The Israelites who were present in Jerusalem celebrated the Festival of Bread without Yeast for seven days with great joy. Each day the Levites and priests sang praises to Me, the LORD, and played their instruments. Hezekiah commended the Levites for their musical skills. For an entire week, the people offered fellowship offerings, ate the sacred meals, and praised Me, the LORD, the God of their ancestors. In fact, everyone was so excited they agreed to celebrate for another week. Hezekiah gave 1,000 bulls and 7,000 sheep and goats for sacrifices by other people, and his officials gave 1,000 bulls and 10,000 sheep and goats. Many more priests made themselves ceremonially clean. Everyone in Judah and Israel, the priests and Levites, and foreign residents rejoiced. This was the biggest and most joyful celebration in Jerusalem since the days of Solomon, King David’s son. The priests and Levites blessed the people, and I heard them from heaven, My holy dwelling place.

When you forget My commands, pray for pardon. When you break My law because you are untaught and ignorant, pray for pardon. I will be merciful to you for I know you are not perfect.

Revival

31 After the festival, the Israelites who were there from some of the northern tribes went to all the towns in Judah, Benjamin, Ephraim, and West Manasseh, and smashed the sacred columns and Asherah poles and tore down the pagan hilltop shrines and altars. Then the Israelites went back to their own towns and homes.

Hezekiah divided the priests and Levites into groups, some to offer burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, and some to give thanks to Me, the LORD, at My temple gates. The king gave animals from his own flocks for the morning and evening burnt offerings, as well as for the Sabbath festivals, New Moon festivals, and several annual festivals. Also, he told the people to bring the designated portion of their income to the priests and Levites, so they could give their time completely to My Law.

The people responded quickly and gave a tithe of everything generously, including the first of their crops, and grain, new wine, olive oil, honey, and other crops. The people of Israel who lived in Judah and the people of Judah themselves brought a tenth of their cattle and sheep and a tenth of anything they had dedicated to Me, the LORD, and they piled them up in big piles. The people started bringing these offerings in late spring, and the piles got bigger for another four months. When Hezekiah and his officials saw these huge piles of gifts, he thanked Me, the LORD, and My people.

When Hezekiah asked the priests and Levites, “Where did all this come from?” Azariah the high priest, a descendant of Zadok, said, “The people have been bringing their gifts to the LORD so that we have more than enough food and supplies. The LORD has blessed us greatly as you can see from all that is left over.”

Hezekiah then had storerooms built in My temple, and when they were completed, the people brought their gifts and tithes to My temple. Conaniah, a Levite, was put in charge of the storerooms, and his father, Shimei, was his assistant. Under them were these ten supervisors: Jehiel, Azaziah, Nahath, Asahel, Jerimoth, Jozabad, Eliel, Ismakiah, Mahath, and Benaiah. Jezekeiah and Azariah, the chief official over My Temple, made these appointments.

Kore, son of Imnah, a Levite, was the gatekeeper of the East Gate, and he was in charge of distributing freewill offerings and other things the people dedicated to Me. His six assistants were Eden, Miniamin, Jeshua, Shemaiah, Amariah, and Shecaniah. They distributed gifts to the priests by their family clans and divided the gifts equally among the young and old. They also gave gifts to all males 30 years of age and older who worked in My Temple. And

gifts were given to the priests who were listed in the records by clans and to the Levites 20 years of age and older who were listed according to their jobs. Gifts were given to all the family members listed in the genealogical records, including babies, wives, and sons and daughters. That's because they had all been faithful in keeping themselves ceremonially clean. Hezekiah appointed men to take food and supplies to the priests who were living in villages around the towns. The priests had to be descendants of Aaron, and the Levites had to be listed in the family records.

In doing all this throughout Judah, Hezekiah was doing the right thing and was being faithful to Me, the LORD his God. Everything he did for My temple followed the commands of the Law, and he obeyed Me with all his heart. As a result, he was successful in all he did.

Bring your tithes and offerings to My church to take care of its needs, and the needs of My workers. Do it because of your obligation. Recognize you can't be spiritual without fulfilling your obligations.

Assyria Invades Judah

32 After Hezekiah had faithfully done all these things, Sennacherib, king of Assyria, invaded Judah, attacking fortified cities and thinking he could break into the cities. Hezekiah realized that Sennacherib planned to attack Jerusalem. So he talked with his officials and military advisors, and they decided to block off the water from the springs just outside the city walls so that the Assyrians would have no water when they attacked. So a large number of men stopped the flow of the springs and streams near Jerusalem.

Then Hezekiah repaired the city wall wherever it was broken down and built defense towers and an outer wall to protect the first wall. He also built up the terraces at the Millo in the City of David and made many weapons and shields. He appointed military officers over the soldiers and then had them gather together in the square by the city gate. He encouraged them with these words: "Be strong and courageous. Don't be afraid or discouraged by the king of Assyria or his vast army, for there is a much power with us. True, they have a great army, but they are just men. We have the LORD, our God, with us to help us and to fight our battles." These words greatly encouraged the soldiers.

While Sennacherib was attacking Lachish, he sent officials to Jerusalem with this message for Hezekiah and his people. “This is what I Sennacherib of Assyria, say to you: ‘What makes you think you can survive my attack on your city? Hezekiah told you the LORD, your God, will rescue you from me. But he is lying, and you will die from hunger and thirst. Don’t forget that He destroyed all the shrines and altars except one and told you to worship only at the altar at the temple. And don’t forget what I and other kings did to other nations. Their gods weren’t able to save them. In fact, no god anywhere has been able to rescue his people from me. So what makes you think your god can do any better? Don’t let Hezekiah fool you or deceive you in any way. Don’t believe him because no god of any nation has been able to rescue his people from me. So certainly your God can’t rescue you from my power.’ ”

Sennacherib’s officials made fun of Me, the LORD God, and his servant, Hezekiah. Sennacherib also sent letters in which he made fun of Me, saying, “The gods of other nations couldn’t rescue their people from me, so the God of Hezekiah will not be able to rescue His people from me.” Then the Assyrian officials shouted this in the Hebrew language to try to scare the people in Jerusalem. These officials spoke about Me, the God of Jerusalem, as if I were no different from pagan gods made by hands.

Then Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah, son of Amoz, prayed to Me, asking for My help. I, the LORD, sent an angel who killed every Assyrian soldier and commander. So Sennacherib returned to Assyria, greatly discouraged. And when he went into the temple of his own god, some of his own sons killed him with a sword. In that way, I, the LORD, rescued Hezekiah from Sennacherib and from other enemies. People brought many offerings to Me, the LORD, at Jerusalem along with valuable gifts for Hezekiah. From then on he was highly respected everywhere.

Hezekiah became very ill and almost died. He prayed to Me who healed him and gave him a sign that he would recover. But in his pride, Hezekiah refused to thank Me for My kindness. So I, the LORD, was angry with him and Judah and Jerusalem. Then Hezekiah and the people of Jerusalem turned from their pride, and so I, the LORD, was no longer angry with them.

Hezekiah was very rich, and people honored him greatly. He built treasury buildings for all his silver and gold, precious stones, spices, shields, and other valuable items. He also built storehouses for his grain, new wine, and olive oil. And he made many stalls for his cattle, and pens for his flocks of sheep and goats. He built many towns and had many flocks and herds because I had

made him rich. He blocked the upper outlet of the Gihon Spring and brought the water through a tunnel into the City of David. I, the LORD, gave him success in everything he did.

However, some men came from Babylon to ask him about his achievements and the sign I, the LORD, had shown him. I then let Hezekiah give his own answer in order to test him and see if he would remain faithful.

The other events in Hezekiah's reign and his faithfulness to Me are recorded in the vision of the prophet Isaiah, son of Amoz, which is included in the book of the Kings of Judah and Israel. When Hezekiah died, he was buried in the upper part of the king's cemetery. All Judah and Jerusalem honored him at this death, and Manasseh, his son, succeeded him as king.

Manasseh is King

33 Manasseh was only 12 years old when he became king of Judah, and he reigned for 55 years in Jerusalem. He disobeyed Me, the LORD, by following the disgusting practices of the pagan nations I had forced out of the land. He rebuilt the hilltop shrines his father, Hezekiah, had destroyed, and he built altars for Baal and set up poles for worshiping the goddess Asherah. And he even bowed down to the stars and worshiped them. He built pagan altars in My Temple where I had said My name is to be honored. In both courtyards of My Temple, he built altars dedicated to the stars. Also, Manasseh sacrificed his own sons in the Hinnom Valley. He practiced sorcery, fortune-telling, and witchcraft, and he asked advice from mediums and psychics. All of these evil practices made Me very angry.

He even made a carved idol and placed it in My Temple, where I had told David and Solomon, "I will be honored here in My Temple and in Jerusalem. If My people obey all the laws, commands, and regulations I gave Moses, then I will never force them out of the land I promised to your ancestors." Manasseh led the people to be more sinful than the pagan nations I, the LORD, had destroyed.

I, the LORD, warned Manasseh and his people, but they paid no attention. So I sent the Assyrian army commanders to invade Judah, and they captured Manasseh. They put a hook in his nose, and tied him up in bronze chains and took him away to Babylon. Coming to his senses, he humbled himself before Me and asked Me for help. I, the LORD, saw how sorry Manasseh was and so

I made the Assyrians release him. He went back to Jerusalem, and he realized from then on that I, the LORD, am the true and only God.

Later Manasseh rebuilt the outer wall of the City of David, making it higher than it was. This section extended west of the Gihon Spring in the Kidron valley to the Fish Gate and continued around the Ophel Hill. He stationed army commanders in all the fortified cities of Judah. He got rid of the pagan idols from the hills and the idol he had placed in My Temple and all the altars he had built near My Temple and elsewhere in Jerusalem, and he dumped them all outside the city. Then he repaired My altar of burnt offering and offered fellowship offerings and thank offerings on it. And he told everyone in Judah to worship only Me, the LORD, the God of Israel. However, though the people worshiped only Me, they did so at their hilltop shrines.

The rest of Manasseh's events, his prayer to Me from Babylon, and the prophet's words to him are recorded in the book of the kings of Judah. His prayers, the way I answered that prayer, and his many sins, and the places where he built pagan shrines and set up Asherah poles and idols are recorded in the record of the prophets. When Manasseh died, he was buried at his palace and not with Judah's other kings. Then his son, Amon, became king.

Amon was 22 when he became king, and he reigned two years. He disobeyed Me just as his father Manasseh did in his earlier years. Amon worshiped the idols his father had made, and he offered sacrifices to them. Manasseh had turned back to Me, the LORD, but not Amon. In fact, he sinned even more than his father. Some of Amon's officials killed him in his palace. Then some people in Judah killed those who killed Amon, and they made his son, Josiah, king.

Josiah is King

34 Josiah was only eight years old when he became king of Judah, and he ruled for 31 years. He followed the example of his ancestor David in obeying Me all the time. In the eighth year of his reign, when he was a 16-year-old, he began worshiping Me, the LORD, just as David had done. Four years later he destroyed all the hilltop shrines, and the poles used in worshiping Asherah, and idols of foreign gods. He had the altars to Baal and incense altars torn down. And he made sure the Asherah poles, carved idols, and cast images were crushed into powder and scattered over the graves of

people who had sacrificed to them. Also, he burned the bones of dead pagan priests on their own altars to help cleanse the people of their sin.

Josiah did the same things in West Manasseh, Ephraim, Simeon, and far north Naphtali. Everywhere in the northern kingdom, he destroyed pagan altars and Asherah poles, crushed idols into powder, and smashed incense altars. Then he went back to Jerusalem.

In Josiah's 18th year of his reign, he sent Shaphan, son of Azaliah, Maaseiah city ruler, and Joah, son of Joahaz, the government recorder to repair My Temple. These three men gave Hilkiyah the high priest the money the Levites had collected when they were gatekeepers at My Temple. This money was collected from the people of West Manasseh, Ephraim, and all the northern kingdom as well from people in Judah and Benjamin. Hilkiyah gave this money to the men who supervised My Temple repairs, who paid the repairmen, carpenters, and masons. Those workers also used the money to buy stone and timber for rafters and beams for My Temple and other buildings Judah's kings had not repaired.

The workers worked hard and were under the leadership of Jahath and Obadiah, Levites of the Merarite clan; and Zechariah and Meshullam, Levites of the Kohathite clan. Other Levites, all skilled musicians, were in charge of the workers and carried supplies. Some of the Levites were secretaries, scribes, and guards.

When the people were bringing money to the supervisors, Hilkiyah, the priest, found the book that had My laws given to Moses. Hilkiyah said to Shaphan, the official, "Look what I found! The book of the Law of Moses!" He gave it to Shaphan, who took it to Josiah and said, "Your workers are doing a good job. And the money that was collected has been given to the supervisors and workers." Then Shaphan said, "Here's interesting news. Hilkiyah the priest found this scroll and has given it to me." And Shaphan read from it to the king.

When the king heard these words of My Law, he tore his clothes in sorrow. Right away he asked that Hilkiyah, Shaphan, Ahikam, son of Shaphan, Acbor, son of Micaiah, and Asaiah, the king's personal aide, come see him. He told them about Hilkiyah finding the scroll, and then he said, "The LORD is probably angry with us for our not obeying the laws written in this scroll. Go to My Temple and ask the LORD what we should do since we have not been doing what the Law says to do."

So Hilkiah and the other men went to the newer (Mishneh) section of Jerusalem to talk with the prophetess, Huldah. She was the wife of Shallum, son of Tokhath (also called Tikrah), and grandson of Harhas. Shallum was the keeper of My Temple wardrobe. She said to them, “The LORD, the God of Israel, has spoken. Give Josiah this message: This is what the LORD says: ‘I will destroy this city and its people. The curses in this scroll will come true. Why? Because the people of Judah have rejected Me and have worshiped pagan idols. So I am very angry, and nothing will stop Me. However, Josiah, listen to what I will say. You were sorry, and you humbled yourself before Me when you heard what I said I will do to these people. You felt sad and tore your clothes in sorrow, and you cried. So before I destroy this place, you will die and be buried in peace. You will not see the disaster I will bring on this place.’” ’ So they told Josiah what she said.

Then Josiah called together the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem, and the priests and Levites. He went to My temple with them and all the people from the least to the greatest. He read to them the entire book of the Covenant that Hilkiah found in My Temple. Then he stood by the column and promised to obey Me, the LORD, and My laws, commands, and regulations with all his heart and soul. He promised to obey all that was written in the scroll. And he asked that everyone there make the same promise, and the people did.

So Josiah destroyed all the idols throughout all of Israel and required everyone to worship Me, the LORD their God. Throughout his life, the people remained true to Me.

The Passover is Restored

35 Josiah announced that the Passover would be celebrated in Jerusalem on the 14th of April. Passover lambs were killed the evening before. He made sure the priests understood their duties, and he encouraged them. He told the Levites, who served Me, the LORD, and taught the people My laws, “You no longer need to carry the sacred chest from place to place. It is to stay in the temple, and so you can spend your time serving the LORD and His people. Serve in the temple by your family clans, as David and Solomon instructed. Stand in your places in the temple and help the families that come to you with their offerings. Kill the Passover lambs, cleanse yourselves, and assist the people when they come. Follow the instructions God gave Moses.”

Josiah gave 30,000 sheep and goats and 3,000 bulls from his own flocks and herds for the people to sacrifice. The king's officials also gave some animals to the people, the priests, and the Levites. Hilkiah, Zechariah, and Jehiel, officials in charge of My Temple, gave the priests 2,600 lambs and young goats and 300 bulls for Passover offerings. Conaniah, his two brothers Shemaiah and Nethanel, and Hashabiah, Jeiel, and Jozabad gave 5,000 lambs and young goats and 500 bulls for Passover offerings.

When everything was ready for celebrating the Passover, the priests and Levites stood in their places as Josiah had ordered. Then the Levites killed and skinned the Passover lambs and gave some of the blood to the priests, who splattered the blood on the altar. They gave the slaughtered animals for burnt offerings to the family groups, so they could present them to Me, the LORD, as Moses instructed. They did the same with the bulls. Then they roasted the lambs on the altar, and they boiled the meat for the other offerings in pots, kettles, and pans. Afterward, the Levites prepared a meal for themselves and the priests: They had been busy all day offering sacrifices and burning the animal fat.

Some of the Levites brought Passover meals to the musicians, descendants of Asaph, and the guards who were in their places all day. The entire Passover celebration was completed that day, and all the burnt offerings were sacrificed on the altar of burnt offering, following Josiah's orders. Then the people celebrated the Festival of Bread without Yeast for the next seven days. Never since the time of the prophet Samuel had the Passover been observed like this. In fact this was the greatest Passover in Israel's history. People from Jerusalem and all over Judah and Israel were there, and all the priests and Levites were involved. This Passover was in Josiah's 18th year as king.

After Josiah had finished with My Temple, King Neco of Egypt led his army to battle the Babylonians at Carchemish on the Euphrates River, and Josiah and his army went out to fight him. Neco sent messengers to Josiah with these words: "I'm not attacking you, king of Judah. I have no quarrel with you. I only want to attack my enemy. God is on my side, so if you don't stop, He will punish you." Josiah refused to listen and to turn back. Instead, he led his army to the plain of Megiddo and disguised himself so the enemy wouldn't recognize him. An Egyptian soldier shot Josiah with an arrow and wounded him. Josiah told his servants to get him out of there because he had been hit. So they took him out of his chariot, put him in another chariot, and

took him to Jerusalem, where he died. He was buried with his ancestors, and everyone in Judah and Jerusalem mourned for him. The prophet Jeremiah wrote funeral songs for Josiah, and choirs still sing those sad songs recorded in the book of Laments. Everything Josiah did including his obeying My instructions in the Law of Moses, and all the events of his reign, are written in the history of the kings of Israel and Judah.

Jehoahaz is King

36After Josiah died, the people of Judah made his son, Jehoahaz, king. Jehoahaz was 23 years old when he became king. King Neco of Egypt captured him and forced Judah to pay about 7,500 pounds of silver and 75 pounds of gold as taxes. Then Neco put Eliakim, Jehoahaz's brother, as king of Judah and changed his name to Jehoiakim. And Neco took Jehoahaz to Egypt as a prisoner.

Jehoiakim was 25 years old when Neco made him king, and he ruled for 11 years from Jerusalem. But he disobeyed Me, the LORD. Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, attacked Jerusalem, and he bound Jehoiakim in bronze chains and took him to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar also took many of the gold objects from My Temple and put them in his palace in Babylon. The other events in Jehoiakim's reign, including all his sinful acts, are written in the history of the kings of Israel and Judah. His son Jehoiachin became the next king.

Jehoiachin was 18 years old when he became king of Judah, and he ruled only three months and ten days. Like his father, he disobeyed Me, the LORD. In the spring of the year Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had Jehoiachin arrested and taken to Babylon, along with more of My Temple's valuable items. Then Nebuchadnezzar put Zedekiah, Jehoiachin's uncle, as king in Judah.

Zedekiah was 21 years old when he was made the king of Judah, and he reigned for 11 years. He disobeyed Me, the LORD, and refused to change even after the prophet Jeremiah spoke to him. Zedekiah also rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar, even though Nebuchadnezzar had forced Zedekiah to promise to be loyal to him. Zedekiah was very stubborn and would not turn back to Me, the LORD, the God of Israel.

The leaders of the priests and many people became unfruitful to Me and worshiped the pagan idols of the nations around them and even made My Temple unfit for worship. I, the LORD, felt sorry for My people and My temple, and so I sent prophets to warn them over and over. But the people laughed at these prophets and hated their words. So I, the LORD, finally got so angry that nothing could now stop Me from punishing My people.

I, the LORD, sent Nebuchadnezzar against Judah. He killed the young men who ran into the My temple, and he killed many men and women, young and old. He took to Babylon what was left in My Temple, and he took treasures from My Temple and from the palace storerooms. He also took the royal princes to Babylon. He set My Temple on fire, broke down Jerusalem's walls, burned the palace, and destroyed everything of value there. He took the few survivors as prisoners to Babylon where he made them his servants until Persia came to power. The land enjoyed its Sabbaths, lying desolate for 70 years, just as the prophet Jeremiah had predicted.

In the first year that Cyrus was king of Persia, he sent a message throughout his kingdom. This was just as the prophet Jeremiah had said would happen. The message said, "I am Cyrus, king of Persia. The LORD, the God of Heaven, has made me ruler of every nation on earth. He has chosen me to build a temple for Him in Jerusalem, in Judah. If any of you want to go back to Israel and rebuild My Temple, you are free to go. And may the LORD watch over you who go back."

I AM GOD

The Restorer

The Book of Ezra

The book of Ezra tells the story of the Jewish people returning from 70 years of captivity in Babylon. King Cyrus of Medo-Persia defeated Babylon and decreed the Jews' return to their land. The first part of Ezra (chaps. 1-6) tells of Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel leading the people back and rebuilding My Temple. The longsuffering prayers of My people are answered (Dan. 9:3-19; Ps. 137). The second part (chaps. 7-10) is a record of Ezra's leadership and the repentance of the people (with fasting) that led to revival.

Ezra's favorite name for Me was "God of Heaven." Since Israel was out of fellowship with Me and didn't have a central place for worship; Ezra worked under My guidance, the God of Heaven.

Ezra teaches you to fast and pray when you face dangerous situations and life-threatening challenges.

The Proclamation from King Cyrus

1 In the first years of the reign of King Cyrus of Persia (538 BC), I, the Lord, fulfilled the prophecy Jeremiah gave decades earlier by having Cyrus send this message to all parts of his kingdom. "I, King Cyrus of Persia, announced that the LORD, the God of Heaven, has made me ruler of all nations. He has chosen me to build Him a temple at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Any Jews may now go back to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple of the LORD, the God of Israel, the One who is in Jerusalem. If Jews are living in your area and they plan to return, give them silver and gold, goods, livestock, and freewill offerings for the temple."

I, the Lord, interested many people in returning, including tribal leaders of Judah and Benjamin and priests and Levites, and so they got ready to go.

Their neighbors gave them silver and gold articles, supplies, livestock, and other valuable items and freewill offerings.

Also, King Cyrus gave the returning Jews the things Nebuchadnezzar had taken from My temple in Jerusalem and had put in the temple of his own gods. Cyrus told Mithredath, his national treasurer, to count these items and to give them to Sheshbazzar, leader of the Jews returning to Judah. These items included 30 gold dishes, 1,000 silver dishes, 29 silver pans, 30 gold bowls, 410 silver bowls, and 1,000 other items. These and others totaled 5,400 items, which Sheshbazzar took with him when he and the others returned to Jerusalem from Babylon.

The chapter teaches you, “The heart of the king is in My hand—I turn whenever I wish” (Prov. 21:1). Just as I used Cyrus to fulfill prophecy, I complete My will in your lives by the things your rulers decide to do. Trust Me to complete My will in your life by the things your rulers do.

The Record of the Exiles Who Returned

2 Here is a list of the Jews who returned to Jerusalem and other towns in Judah, people who had been taken captive to Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar. Their leaders were Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum, and Baanah. This is how many returned from each family group:

The family of Parosh: 2, 172

The family of Shephatiah: 372

The family of Arah: 775

The family of Pahath-Moab (descendants of Jeshua and Joab): 2,812

The family of Elam: 1,254

The family of Zattu: 945

The family of Zaccai: 760

The family of Bani: 645

The family of Bebai: 623
The family of Azgad: 1,222
The family of Adonikam: 666
The family of Bigvai: 2,056
The family of Adin: 454
The family of Ater: (descendants of Hezekiah): 98
The family of Bezai: 323
The family of Jorah: 112
The family of Hashum: 223
The family of Gibbar: 95
The people of Bethlehem: 123
The people of Netophah: 56
The people of Anathoth: 128
The people of Azmaveth: 42
The peoples of Kiriath-Jearim, Kephirah, and Beeroth: 743
The peoples of Ramah and Geba: 621
The people of Micmash: 122
The peoples of Bethel and Ai: 223
The citizens of Nebo: 52
The citizens of Magbish: 156
The citizens of West Elam: 1,254
The citizens of Harim: 320
The citizens of Lod, Hadid, and Ono: 725
The citizens of Jericho: 345
The citizens of Senaah: 3,630
These are the priests who returned:
The family of Jedaiah (through the line of Jeshua): 973
The family of Immer: 1,052
The family of Pashhur: 1,247

The family of Harim: 1,017

These are the Levites who returned:

The families of Jeshua and Kadmiel (descendants of Hodaviah): 74

The singers of the family of Asaph: 128

The gatekeepers of the families of Shallum, Ater, Talmon, Akkub, Hatita, and Shobai: 139

The descendants of the following temple servants returned: Ziha, Hasupha, Tabbaoth, Keros, Siaha, Padon, Lebanah, Hagabah, Akkub, Hagab, Shalmi, Hanan, Giddel, Gahar, Reaiah, Rezin, Nekoda, Gazzam, Uzza, Paseah, Besai, Asnah, Meunim, Nephusim, Bakbuk, Hakupha, Harhur, Bazluth, Mehida, Harsha, Barkos, Sisera, Temah, Neziah, and Hatipha.

The descendants of these servants of King Solomon returned: Sotai, Hassophereth, Peruda, Jaalah, Darkon, Giddel, Shephatiah, Hattil, Pokereth-Hazzebaim, and Ami.

In all, My Temple servants and the descendants of Solomon's servants numbered 392.

Another group returned at this time from the towns of Tel-Melah, Tel-Harsha, Kerub, Addan, and Immer. However, they could not prove that they or their families were descendants of Israel. This group included the families of Delaiah, Tobiah, and Nekoda—a total of 652 people.

Three families of priests—Hobaiah, Hakkoz, and Barzillai—also returned. (This Barzillai had married a woman who was a descendant of Barzillai of Gilead, and he had taken her family name.) But the records of these three families could not be found, so they were not allowed to serve as priests. The governor would not let them eat the priests' share of food from the sacrifices until a priest could consult with Me, the LORD.

So a total of 42,360 people returned to Judah, in addition to 7,337 servants and 200 singers. They took with them 736 horses, 245 mules, 435 camels, and 6,720 donkeys.

When they arrived at My temple in Jerusalem, some of the family leaders gave freewill offerings for the rebuilding of My Temple on its original site, and each leader gave as much as he could. Their gifts totaled 1,100 pounds of gold, about 3 tons of silver, and 100 robes for the priests.

The priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, temple servants, and some of the common people settled in their towns.

These returnees didn't seek money from the nations around them. Those who were most involved gave the most money. That means you should support with your money the projects that are closest to your heart. Give to your church and the projects I put upon your heart. Give willingly and pray for these projects.

The Altar is Built

3 In the fall after the Israelites had settled in their towns, the people gathered in Jerusalem. Jeshua, son of Jehozadak, with other priests and Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, and his relatives rebuilt the altar of burnt offering and sacrificed burnt offerings as I had told Moses. Even though they were afraid of the local residents, they rebuilt the altar at its former site and sacrificed burnt offerings each morning and evening.

They followed the instructions in the Mosaic Law for celebrating the Festival of Shelters, sacrificing offerings each day. They offered other sacrifices, including those for the New Moon celebrations, annual festivals, and freewill offerings. On September 15, the priests began sacrificing burnt offerings even though the Temple foundation had not yet been laid.

It's good to go back to where I revealed Myself to you in the past. The Jews rebuilt the altar on its original site. They didn't try to find a better place, or a new place, or a more convenient place. When you lose Me, you usually search for Me with new methods, or a new organization, or in a new place. But when you lose My presence, I'm usually right where you originally found Me. I may be waiting for you at the place you left. Do again those things you did when you first found Me. Turn your heart to the attitude you had when I first spoke to you.

King Cyrus had said the Israelites could have logs from cedar trees from Lebanon and floated by sea to Joppa. The Israelites hired stoneworkers and carpenters and hired them and the people of Tyre and Sidon to bring the logs to Israel. They paid them with food, wine, and olive oil. In April of 536 BC, the people began rebuilding My temple. This was the second year after the people arrived in Jerusalem. Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the priests and Levites, and everyone who returned from Persia started working on My Temple. Levites 20 years of age and older were put in charge of the work. The Levites who directed the whole project were Joshua and his sons and other relatives, Kadmiel and his sons, descendants of Hodaviah, and the family of Henadad.

When the builders finished the temple foundation, the priests put on their robes and blew trumpets, and the Levites of the family of Asaph played cymbals in praise to Me, as King David had said for them to do. They praised Me and thanked Me as they sang, “The LORD is good. His unfailing love for Israel will last forever.” Then everyone shouted and praised Me, the LORD, that the temple foundation had been laid.

Many of the older priests, Levites, and their family leaders had seen the first temple years before, but now they cried when they saw the new foundation. But others shouted for joy. Both crying and shouting were so loud they could be heard far away.

When touched with sadness, you will weep. Sometimes you're disappointed in what's happening. Thank Me for allowing you to weep. You don't have a sterile dead religion, but you have a vibrant relationship with Me.

Enemies Oppose the Rebuilding of My Temple

4 Enemies of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin heard that the Jews had come back to rebuild My temple. They went to Zerubbabel and family leaders and said, “Let us help you. Ever since Esarhaddon, king of Assyria, brought us here we have worshiped your God and sacrificed to Him.”

Zerubbabel, Jeshua, and the family leaders said, “No. You cannot take part in rebuilding the temple to our God. We will build it ourselves, as King Cyrus told us to do.”

You are not to compromise with other religions or cults. You can't worship idols and Me at the same time. Do not compromise your belief in Me, nor your worship of Me. Jesus is the only way to heaven, and He is My Son, the only true God. All other religions are false.

Then the local residents tried to discourage the Jews and even scare them. They hired people to work against the Jews and to frustrate their efforts; even up to the year Darius became king of Persia (522 BC).

Years later, when Xerxes became king (in 486 BC), Judah's enemies wrote him a letter, accusing the people of Judah and Jerusalem of disloyalty. And later, when Artaxerxes was king of Persia, Judah's enemies led by Bishlam, Mithredath, and Tabeel, sent a letter to him (in 465 BC) in the Aramaic language. Rehum, the governor, and Shimshai, government secretary, wrote a letter which was also sent from their associates, and judges and officials, and leaders over the people of Tripolis, Persia, Erech, Babylon, the Elamites in Susa, and other people Ashurbanipal had relocated to Samaria and other places between the Euphrates River and the Mediterranean Sea. The letter said, “To Artaxerxes, from your servants in the vast area west of the Euphrates River. You should know that the Jews who left your country to go back to Jerusalem are now rebuilding that evil city. They are repairing the city foundation and the walls. If this city is rebuilt, the Jews won't pay you taxes. We are sending you this information because we don't want you to be dishonored in this way. Check your old records, and you'll see that this city has continuously been rebellious and a constant problem to the kings and provinces. And that's why it was destroyed. If this city is rebuilt, you will have no control over the vast area west of the Euphrates River.”

Artaxerxes replied: “To Rehum, the governor, and Shimshai, government secretary, and associates in Samaria and the area west of the Euphrates River, Greetings. After the letter you sent was translated and read to me, I had our old records checked. You are correct in stating that

Jerusalem has rebelled against many kings. Powerful kings have ruled over Jerusalem and the area west of the Euphrates River, and they have received taxes and tolls from Jerusalem. Therefore tell the people to stop rebuilding the city until I say so. Do not delay because we don't want the situation to get out of control."

As soon as this letter from King Artaxerxes was read to Rehum, Shimshai, and their associates, they went to Jerusalem and forced the Jews to stop building the city.

So the work on My temple in Jerusalem stopped and nothing more was done on it till King Darius' second year (520 BC).

No one wants opposition but expect it. I, the Lord, will prepare you for it.

More Questions Concerning the Rebuilding

5 The prophets Haggai and Zechariah, a descendant of Iddo, prophesied for Me to the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem. Then Zerubbabel and the son of Shealtiel and Jeshua, son of Jozadak, urged the people to work again on My Temple. And Haggai and Zechariah encouraged them too.

Tattenai, governor of the area west of the Euphrates River, and Shethar-Bozenai, and their associates went to Jerusalem and asked the workers, "Who gave you permission to rebuild the temple? Give us the names of the workers." But I was watching over them, so the people continued rebuilding until a report could be sent to Darius and a reply received from him.

Tattenai, governor of the area west of the Euphrates, and Shethar-Bozenai, and other officials sent this letter to King Darius: "Greetings to King Darius. We went to where the temple of the God of the Jews is being rebuilt with large stones, and where wooden beams are being set in the walls. The people are working hard, and they are making good progress. We asked the people in charge who said they could rebuild the temple. And we asked for the names of the workers so we could give them to you.

"This is their answer: 'We are servants of the God of Heaven and earth. We are rebuilding the temple that was built years ago by our great king. But

our ancestors made God angry, and so He let Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, destroy this temple and take them to Babylon. However, in the first year of his reign over Persia, King Cyrus said the temple could be rebuilt. He returned the gold and silver utensils that Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple, and he put them in the temple in Babylon. King Cyrus made Sheshbazzar governor of Judah, and he told him to put these gold and silver items back in the temple in Jerusalem.”

Use the law to protect My work. Live by the laws of the land, but also don't be intimidated by those who oppose Me and threaten you by their interpretation of the law.

“So Sheshbazzar went to Jerusalem and enlisted workers to rebuild the temple foundation. The people have been working on this project, and it is still going on. Please have someone look up the old records in Babylon to see if King Cyrus really did order the Jerusalem temple to be rebuilt. Then please send us your decision in the matter.”

King Darius Reinforces the Decree

6 King Darius ordered that the old Babylonian records be searched. Finally, a scroll was found at the fortress in Ecbatana, the capital of Media. It said this:

“In the first year of King Cyrus’ reign, he gave orders to rebuild God’s temple in Jerusalem so that sacrifices can be made there. It is to be 90 feet high and 90 feet wide. Every three layers of stones are to be topped with a layer of timber. All expenses will be paid by the royal treasury. The gold and silver objects that Nebuchadnezzar took from the temple to Babylon are to be taken back to God’s temple.”

Do research to find out how things were done in the past. Serve Me today, the same way it was done in the past. Worship Me the way I want to be worshiped. Worship Me the way it was done in the past.

King Darius sent this message: “To Tattenai, governor of the area west of the Euphrates River, Shethar-Bozenai, and your officials west of the Euphrates River, ‘Stay away from the temple! Don’t get in their way. Let them rebuild the temple at its former site. In fact, I order you to pay their expenses from taxes I collect from your area west of the Euphrates River so that the work won’t stop. Give the priests whatever they need—bulls, rams, and lambs for burnt offerings to the God of Heaven, and wheat, salt, wine, and oil for the priests each day. Then they can offer sacrifices to the God of Heaven. Pray for me, your king, and my sons.

“If anyone doesn’t follow these orders, a wooden beam is to be pulled from his house and sharpened on one end. Then it will be driven through his body, and his house will be torn down and will be a garbage dump. May the God who has chosen Jerusalem destroy any king or nation who tries to change what I have written and destroys the temple. I, Darius, have issued this command. Be sure it is followed carefully.”

Governor Tattenai, Shethar-Bozenai, and their associates followed King Darius’ orders, and the Jewish leaders continued working on My temple and Haggai and Zechariah encouraged all by their preaching. My Temple was finally finished as I had commanded and as kings, Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes had ordered. My Temple was completed on March 12, in Darius’ sixth year as king (515 BC).

With great joy, the priests, Levites, and all the people dedicated My Temple to Me, the LORD. In the dedication, they sacrificed 100 bulls, 200 rams, and 400 lambs, and they sacrificed 12 male goats as a sin offering, one for each tribe. Then the priests and Levites were divided into various groups, as Moses had written.

On April 14 the people celebrated Passover. The priests and Levites were ceremonially clean. Then the priests killed the Passover lamb for the people who had returned from Persia, and for themselves. The returnees ate the Passover meal with others in the land that had turned from their sinful ways to worship Me, the LORD, God of Israel. For seven days they celebrated the Festival of Bread without Yeast. Everyone was happy because I, the LORD, had led the king of Assyria to help them build My Temple.

You should worship and praise Me when things go your way. Recognize that your victories come because I work behind the scenes to make you successful. Thank Me for every victory in your life.

Ezra Goes to Jerusalem

7 Later, when Artaxerxes was king of Persia, Ezra went to Jerusalem from Babylon. His genealogical line was as follows: He was the son of Seraiah, son of Azariah, son of Hilkiah, son of Shallum, son of Zadok, son of Ahitub, son of Amariah, son of Azariah, son of Meraioth, son of Zerahiah, son of Uzzi, son of Bukki, son of Abishua, son of Phinehas, son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the high priest. Ezra knew the law of Moses well. Artaxerxes gave Ezra everything he asked for his trip to Jerusalem because I was blessing him. In Artaxerxes' seventh year (457 BC) many people went with Ezra to Jerusalem, including common people, priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, and temple servants.

Ezra arrived in Jerusalem on August 1 of that year after starting their journey four months earlier on April 1. Ezra studied and obeyed My law and taught those laws and regulations to others.

Ezra had worked hard to know and obey the teachings of the Lord. Study is hard work. I want you to discipline yourself to do what is tedious, that is, to study hard and study long to know all about Me. Change your attitude, so you enjoy studying, then quicken your mind to learn more when you study than if you had not prayed for My help.

King Artaxerxes gave a copy of the following letter to Ezra, the priest, and teacher of My law and commands.

From Artaxerxes, king of kings, to Ezra, the priest and a teacher of My law: "Greetings. Any Jew, including priests and Levites, may go to Jerusalem with you. I and my Council of Seven ask you to see if the law of your God is being obeyed there. Take with you silver and gold which we

are giving as an offering to your God of Israel. Also, collect silver and gold from people in Babylonia and freewill offerings from your people and priests for the temple. With this money buy bulls, rams, lambs, grain offerings, and drink offerings, to be offered on the altar of your temple. If any silver or gold is left over, use it in whatever way you and your colleagues feel is God's will. Also, take with you gold bowls and other items we are giving you for the temple. If you need anything else for the temple, you may request funds from the royal treasury.

"I, King Artaxerxes, order all treasurers in the area west of the Euphrates River to give you, God's priests and teachers of the law of the God of Heaven, whatever you need. They may give as much as 7,500 pounds of silver, 600 bushels of wheat, 600 gallons of wine, 600 gallons of olive oil, and any amount of salt, and whatever the God of Heaven needs for His temple so that He won't be angry with my sons or me. No taxes of any kind are to be paid by the temple workers, including priests, Levites, singers, gatekeepers, and temple servants.

"You, Ezra, using the wisdom the LORD has given you, choose officials and judges to govern the people west of the Euphrates River. If they don't know the laws of your God, teach them."

Two forces were at work here; first, Ezra studied and second, I gave him wisdom. You should know that the more you study, the more wisdom I will give you. I give you wisdom so you can live properly for Me.

"Anyone who doesn't obey the law of your God or of the king will be punished by death, being forced to leave the country, or having their property taken over, or being put in prison."

Ezra said, "Praise the LORD, God of our ancestors, who led the king to honor the Lord's temple in Jerusalem. God has been good to me through the king and his Council of Seven and his powerful officials. The LORD was with me, and so I was encouraged and was able to bring several Jewish leaders with me to Jerusalem."

Ezra responded to Me the way all should respond to Me, your Lord. Thank Me for all I am, and for all I give you. Show Me your great love.

The Men Who Went With Ezra

8 These are the names of the leaders and their family groups who went with Ezra from Babylon to Jerusalem when Artaxerxes was king of Persia. Gershom of the Phinehas family; Daniel of the Ithamar family; Hattush, son of Shecaniah, of the David family; Zechariah and 150 other men of the Parosh family, who had family records; Eliehoenai, son of Zerariah, with 200 men of the Pahath-Moab family; Shecaniah, son of Jahaziel, with 300 men of the Zattu family; Ebed, son of Jonathan, with 50 men of the Adin family; Jeshaiiah, son of Athaliah, with 70 men of the Elam family; Zebadiah, son of Michael, with 80 men of the Shephatiah family; Obadiah, son of Jehiel, with 218 men of the Joab family; Shelomith, son of Josiphiah, with 160 men of the Bani family; Zechariah, son of Bebai, with 28 men of the Bebai family; Johanan, son of Hakkatan, with 110 men of the Azgad family; Eliphelet, Jeuel, Shemaiah who returned sometime later with 60 men of the Adonikam family; Uthai and Zabbud with 70 men of the Bigvai family.

Ezra brought everyone together at the Ahava River and camped there three days. He went over the lists of those who were there, and to his surprise, not one Levite was there. So he sent for Eliezer, Ariel, Shemaiah, Elnathan, Jarib, Elnathan, Nathan, Zechariah, and Meshullam, who were Levite leaders. He also sent for Joiarib and Elnathan who were wise men. He also sent for Iddo, leader of the Levites at Casiphia, asking him and his relatives and temple servants to send temple priests. I, the LORD, was good to them and they sent an outstanding man named Sherebiah with 18 of his sons and brothers. He was a descendant of Mahli, son of Levi and grandson of Jacob. They also sent Hashabiah, with Jeshaiiah, descendants of Merari, and 20 of his relatives. In addition, they sent 220 temple servants, a group of temple workers David first chose years ago, and they were all listed by name.

By the Ahava River Ezra asked the people to fast and pray, and to humble themselves before Me and to ask for a safe journey for them and their children and their belongings. He didn't want to ask the king for soldiers and cavalry to protect them on the way because Ezra had told the king I, the LORD, was with them, but I get angry at those who turn from Me. So they fasted and prayed that I would protect them, and I did.

Fasting takes your prayers to a higher level. When you give up food, it demonstrates to Me that you are absolutely sincere. Fasting shows how desperate you are for Me to intervene in your crisis.

Ezra chose 12 leaders of the priests—Sherabiah, Hashabiah, and ten others—to transport the silver, gold, and gold bowls, and other items that the king, his Council of Seven, his advisers and officials, and the Israelites had given for My Temple. He weighed the gifts and gave them to the 12 priests. They totaled 25 tons of silver, 7,500 pounds of silver articles, 7,500 pounds of gold, 20 gold bowls weighing about 19 pounds, and two articles of polished bronze, as valuable as gold.

He said to these priests, “You belong to the LORD, and the silver and gold are a freewill offering to the LORD, the God of our ancestors. So guard these treasures well and then present them to the priests, Levites, and family leaders who are to keep them safe in the temple storerooms.” So the priests and Levites accepted these gifts to take them to My Temple.

The middle of April they left the Ahava River for Jerusalem. I, the LORD, was with them, and I protected them all along the way. After they arrived in Jerusalem, they rested three days. On the fourth day after their arrival, they weighed the silver, gold, and other items and gave them to Meremoth, son of Uriah, the priest, Eleazar, son of Phinehas, and the Levites, Jozabad, son of Jeshua, and Noadiah, son of Binnui. Everything was counted, weighed, and recorded.

Ezra kept a record to make every person accountable for the money they were carrying. Then when Ezra arrived in Jerusalem, he checked their valuables against the record. Good records keep people honest.

Everyone who returned with Ezra sacrificed burnt offerings to Me, including 12 bulls for Israel, 96 rams, 77 lambs, and 12 male goats as a sin offering. Some of the people told the king's orders to the leaders of the area west of the Euphrates River, and they helped with the rebuilding of My temple.

Ezra Prays for Forgiveness

9 Later the Jewish leaders came to Ezra and said, "Many of our people, and even some priests and Levites, are living like the people around them. They are guilty of some of the horrible customs of the Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians, and Amorites. Some of our men have married these foreign women, and their sons have done the same. So our race has become mixed with these foreign marriages. What's worse, our leaders and officials are some of the first offenders."

When Ezra heard this, he tore his clothing, pulled hair from his head and beard, and sat down shocked. Everyone who feared Me because of this sin sat with Ezra until time for the evening sacrifice.

Sometimes you must confess the sins of your state and nation. At other times you must ask forgiveness for sin when you have done wickedness in My sight.

At the time of the evening sacrifice, Ezra was still sitting there in grief with his clothes torn. He bowed to his knees and lifted his hands to Me, the LORD, and prayed, "O my God, I am so ashamed to face you. Our sins are higher than our heads, and our guilt reaches to the heavens. In much of our past, we have sinned. And that is why we and our kings and priests have been defeated by other kings. We have been killed, taken as slaves, robbed, and made ashamed, just as today. But now You have briefly shown us Your grace by giving us some security here and encouraging us and giving us some relief from slavery."

Ezra acknowledged Me when he prayed, “You have punished us less than our sins have deserved.” They deserved hell because of their sin, but I have given them heaven. They deserved punishment, but in grace, I have been kind to them. Thank Me for My grace and forgiveness.

“We were slaves, but You didn’t turn from us. Instead, You caused the king of Persia to help us rebuild the temple and repair its ruins, and he has helped us build a fence of protection around our people.

“But now after all this, we have forgotten the commands You gave us through Your servants the prophets. You told us the land was full of sinful people who were polluting people with their unclean actions from one end of the country to the other. You told us not to let our daughters marry their sons, and not to let our sons marry their daughters, and not to help them in any way. You promised us that if we avoided these sins, we would become prosperous and leave that prosperity to our children.

“You punished us because of our sins, though not as much as we deserved, and you have brought back some of us to our land. Why are we disobeying your commands again by letting our sons and daughters marry these people who do such awful things? Your anger could destroy us till no survivors are left. LORD, the God of Israel, You are just in letting a few of us survive. But again our guilt makes us ashamed to face You.”

My People Confess Their Sin

10 While Ezra was on his knees in front of My Temple praying and crying, many Israelites—men, women, and children—gathered there and cried with him. Then Shecaniah, son of Jehiel, a descendant of Elam, said to Ezra, “We confess that we have disobeyed God by marrying foreign women. But we believe there is still hope. Let’s agree to divorce these foreign wives and send them off with their children. This will follow your advice and the advice of others who respect the Lord. We will obey God’s law.”

Sometimes sin—like the lust of the flesh—becomes a part of us. Then it's hard to get rid of what will destroy us. Separate yourself from the lust of the flesh so you can walk with Me in purity.

“Take courage. You must do something, and we will support whatever you do.”

So Ezra demanded that the priests, Levites, and all the people do as Shecaniah suggested. Ezra then went to the room of Jehohanan in My Temple and spent the night there. He ate and drank nothing because he was still grieving over the people's sin.

Most of the people were willing for others to live with sin. They didn't make any effort to separate themselves from sin, until one intercessor fasted, prayed, and was willing to stand against sin. Therefore, pray for revival among My people. Be that person who will pray, fast, and seek My face until revival comes.

Ezra had a message sent throughout Judah and Jerusalem that everyone who had returned from Babylon should come to Jerusalem in three days. If someone did not come in three days, he would lose everything he owned and would not be considered part of the Israelites.

In three days in December, the people of Judah and Benjamin arrived and were sitting in front of My Temple. They were shaking because of the serious nature of the meeting and because it was raining. Ezra, the priest, stood and said, “You have sinned by marrying pagan women. Now admit this sin, and separate yourselves from these women.”

The people answered loudly, “Yes, you are right. We will do what you say.”

When the people were willing to do something about their pagan wives, then something happened. As one person, no one may listen to you; but you can pray for Me to change the opinion of the majority. Then the exiles “did what the majority suggested” (Ezra 10:12).

Ezra continued, “But this can’t be done in a day or two because many of us are involved in this. And we can’t stand here in the rain. So let everyone who has sinned in this way meet with the leaders and judges of his city. Then each situation can be cleared up, and God’s anger can be turned away.” Only four people, Jonathan, son of Asahel, Jahzeiah, son of Tikvah, Meshullam, and Shabbethai, a Levite—were against this idea.

So this plan was followed. Ezra chose family leaders, and he listed their names. They began this process in the middle of December and finished three months later in the middle of March.

These are the priests who had married foreign women:

From the family of Jeshua, son of Jozadak, and his brothers: Maaseiah, Eliezer, Jarib, and Gedaliah. They agreed to divorce their wives, and they each admitted their guilt by offering a ram as a guilt offering. From the family of Immer: Hanani and Zebadiah. From the family of Harim: Maaseiah, Elijah, Shemaiah, Jehiel, and Uziah. From the family of Pashhur: Elioenai, Maaseiah, Ishmael, Nethanel, Jozabad, and Elasah.

These are the Levites who were guilty: Jozabad, Shimei, Kelaiah (also called Kelita), Pethahiah, Judah, and Eliezer.

This is the singer who was guilty: Eliashib.

These are the gatekeepers who were guilty: Shallum, Telem, and Uri.

These are the other people of Israel who were guilty:

From the family of Parosh: Ramiah, Izziah, Malkijah, Mijamin, Eleazar, Malkijah, and Benaiah.

From the family of Elam: Mattaniah, Zechariah, Jehiel, Abdi, Jeremoth, and Elijah. From the family of Zattu: Elioenai, Eliashib, Mattaniah, Jeremoth, Zabad, and Aziza. From the family of Bebai: Jehohanan, Hananiah, Zabbai, and Athlai. From the family of Bani: Meshullam, Malluch, Adai, Jashub, Sheal, and Jeremoth. From the family of Pahath-Moab: Adna, Kelal, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattaniah, Bezalel, Binnui, and Manasseh. From the family of Harim: Eliezer, Ishijah, Malkijah, Shemaiah, Shimeon, Benjamin, Malluch, and Shemariah. From the family of Hashum: Mattenai, Mattattah, Zabad, Eliphelet, Jeremai, Manasseh, and Shimei.

From the family of Bani: Maadai, Amram, Uel, Benaiah, Bedeiah, Keluhi, Vaniah, Meremoth, Eliashib, Mattaniah, Mattenai, and Jaasu.

From the family of Binnui: Shimei, Shelemiah, Nathan, Aadaiah, Macnadebai, Shashai, Sharai, Azarel, Shelemiah, Shemariah, Shallum, Amariah, and Joseph. From the family of Nebo: Jeiel, Mattithiah, Zabad, Zebina, Jaddai, Joel, and Benaiah.

Each of these men, a total of 111, had a pagan wife, and some even had children by these wives.

I AM GOD

The Builder

The Book of Nehemiah

The book of Nehemiah covers the period following 445 BC when Israel re-established itself on its homeland by rebuilding the walls and re-creating a vibrant community life. Throughout this book, Nehemiah inserts prayers to Me, the LORD: “Remember me,” “he prayed to Me,” “for good” (13:31). Nehemiah teaches you to write out your prayers and to pray as you go about your daily activities. Whether you’re waiting in line or doing any normal work, pray spontaneously as did Nehemiah.

A “Chance” Conversation So Nehemiah Prays

1 This is the story of Nehemiah, son of Hacaliahi, in November of Artaxerxes 20th year (444 BC) as king of Persia. He was in the fortress in Susa. His brother, Hanani, came from Judah with some other men to visit him. Nehemiah asked them about the Jews who had returned to their land and asked about Jerusalem. They said, “Those who went back to our land are facing a lot of problems. The wall of Jerusalem is still torn down, and the city gates are burned.”

Bad news should drive you to your knees. That’s what Nehemiah did when his brother gave him discouraging news about Jerusalem and its inhabitants.

This news made Nehemiah cry. For several days he mourned and went without eating, and he prayed to Me, the God of Heaven, “The LORD God of Heaven, You are great and awesome, and You keep your promises of

love to those who love You and obey You. Please listen to the prayer of Your servant who is voicing day and night for the people of Israel, Your servants. We have sinned against You, and I include myself and my family. We have been very wicked toward You by not obeying the commands and laws You gave Moses.

“Remember the promise You made to Moses. You said, ‘If we are unfaithful, you will scatter us among the nations. But if we turn to You and obey Your commands, You will bring us from the most distant nations and bring us to the place where You have chosen to be worshiped.’

“These people are Your servants whom You rescued by Your great strength and power. Please hear this prayer of Your servant and others who gladly honor Your name. Please give me, Your servant, success today by having the king respond favorably to my request.” Nehemiah was the one who served the king his wine.

Nehemiah prayed what is called identificational repentance. This is when you confess the sins committed by other people. You can't get forgiveness for them if they do not confess and seek forgiveness. But you can ask Me to deal with the consequences of their sin so that their consequences do not affect them and others.

Nehemiah Arrives in Jerusalem

2In the following spring in Artaxerxes' 20th year, Nehemiah served him his wine. He had never looked depressed before. But the king asked, “Why do you look sad? You aren't sick, are you? You look like something is bothering you.”

Nehemiah's concern for Jerusalem showed on his face. Pray about everything—big things—little things—even things that bother you. It will be seen in your countenance.

Nehemiah said, “May you live forever. Why shouldn't I feel sad when the city where my ancestors are buried is in ruins, and its gates have been

burned?” The king said, “What can I do for you?” Then he prayed a quick, silent prayer to Me, the God of Heaven, and said to the king, “If it pleases you, please let me go to Judah to rebuild the city where my ancestors are buried.”

When given a wonderful opportunity, what's the first thing you do? Nehemiah immediately prayed to Me. Even as he stood in the presence of the king, Nehemiah prayed.

The queen was sitting beside the king, and he asked Nehemiah how long he would be gone and when he would get back. He agreed to let Nehemiah go when he told him when he would be back. Then Nehemiah asked him, “Would you write letters to the governors of the area west of the Euphrates River, asking them to let me travel safely through their territory to Judah? Also, I would like to have a letter to Asaph, manager of the king’s forest, asking him to give me timber to rebuild the gates of the temple fortress and timber to rebuild the city wall and to build a house for me.” I was good to Nehemiah, and the king wrote these letters.

The king even sent some army officers and horsemen along with Nehemiah, and when he got to the area west of the Euphrates, he gave the governors there the king’s letters. But when Sanballat, the Horonite, and Tobiah, an Ammonite official, heard Nehemiah was in Jerusalem, they were very angry because he had come to help Israel.

No matter what you do for Me, there will be opposition, just as Sanballat and Tobiah “were angry” and spoke against Nehemiah’s task. Look beyond opposition to My plan for your life. Be strong when opposition comes, and don’t be dissuaded from doing My will.

Three days after Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem; he got up at night with a few men, not telling anyone what I wanted him to do for Jerusalem. He rode a donkey, and the men walked. He went through the Valley Gate on the west, then South toward the Jackal’s Well and the Garbage Gate. As he rode, he saw the broken down walls and burned gates. On the east side, he headed north to the Fountain Gate and King’s Pool, but his donkey couldn’t

get through all the debris. So he went to the Kidron Valley on the east and viewed the wall from there. Then he entered the city again at the Valley Gate.

The city officials didn't know Nehemiah had been out there. He hadn't told any of the priests, leaders, officials, or those who would be helping him in this project. When Nehemiah got back, he said to those leaders, "You know that Jerusalem is in ruins. Even the gates have been burned. So let's rebuild the city so we can be proud of it again." Then he told them how I had been good to him and what the king had said. They all said, "What are we waiting for? Let's start building now." So they got started.

No one can do My work alone; it takes a team. I love You and want My work done. So learn to work with others—in My church—to get My work done.

When Sanballat, the Horonite, Tobiah, the Ammonite official, and Geshem, an Arab, heard what they planned to do, they made fun of them. They said, "What do you think you are doing? Are you planning to rebel against the king?" Nehemiah answered, "We are servants of the God of Heaven, who will help us rebuild the city. But you fellows have no right to any of this property."

The City Wall is Repaired

3 Many people helped in this rebuilding project. The high priest Eliashib and other priests rebuilt the Sheep Gate. After settling its doors in place, they dedicated it to Me, the LORD, and the wall to the Tower of the Hundred and the Hananel Tower. People from Jericho rebuilt the next section of the wall, and Zaccur, son of Imri, a section beyond that.

The phrase occurs throughout this chapter, "Next to them." This is a wonderful picture of Christian unity, that is, people working together to accomplish My work. Everyone was committed to

helping and they worked in the section of Jerusalem where they lived.

The sons of Hassenaah built the Fish Gate, laying the beams, hanging the doors, and putting bolts and bars in place. Meremoth, son of Uriah and grandson of Hakkoz, repaired the next section. Meshullam, son of Berekiah and grandson of Meshezabel, repaired the next section, and Zadok, son of Baana, was next to him. The men from Tekoa repaired the section after that, but their leaders did not help.

Joiada, son of Paseah, and Meshullam, son of Besodeiah, repaired the Old Gate, laying the beams, hanging the doors, and putting bolts and bars in place along with Melatiah from Gibeon, Jadon from Meronoth, and people from Gibeon and Mizpah, which were under the governor of the area west of the Euphrates. The next section was rebuilt by Uzziel, son of Harhaiah, the goldsmith. Hananiah, the perfume maker, repaired the section after that up to the Blood Wall on the west side. Next to him was Rephaiah, son of Hur, who was mayor of half of Jerusalem.

Jedaiah, son of Harumaph, rebuilt the section of the wall that was close to his house, and Hattush, son of Hashabneiah, was next to him. Malkijah, son of Harim, and Hasshub, son of Pahath-Moab, rebuilt the next section and also built the Oven Towers. Shallum, son of Hallohesh, who was mayor of the other half of Jerusalem, repaired the next section, and his daughters worked with him.

The wall was built with fathers, sons, and grandsons. It was good to see sons and grandsons repair the wall together. The sin of their fathers and grandfathers destroyed the wall. The actions of parents influence their children who then may live godly and serve Me wholeheartedly.

Hanun and people from Zanoah rebuilt the Valley Gate, hanging its doors and putting bolts and bars in place. Also, they repaired 500 yards of the wall all the way to the Garbage Gate. The Garbage Gate was repaired by Malkijah, son of Recab, who was the ruler of the Beth-Hakkerem district. He hung its doors and added bolts and bars.

Shallum, son of Col-Hozeh, who was mayor of the district of Mizpah, rebuilt the Fountain Gate. He put a roof over it and hung its doors and put bolts and bars in place. He also rebuilt the wall at Siloam Pool, a section that was near the king's garden that extended to the stairs that led down from the City of David. Next to Shallum was Nehemiah, son of Azbuk, mayor of half of the Beth-Zur district. He rebuilt the section of the wall to a place opposite the tombs of David and as far as the water reservoir and the army barracks.

This chapter contains a long list of those who worked to repair the wall. It shows that each person was important. It also reveals where they worked and how much they did. I keep a record in heaven of all you do. You please Me by your efforts.

Next were Levites who worked under Rehum, son of Bani. Beside him were Hashabiah, mayor of half of the Keilah district, and Binnui, son of Henadad, who was mayor of the other half of the Keilah district. Next to him was Ezer, son of Jeshua, ruler of Mizpah, who repaired the section across from the armory where the wall turns. Baruch, son of Zabbai, eagerly rebuilt the section of the wall leading from the turn to the house of Eliashib, the high priest. And Meremoth, son of Uriah, and grandson of Hakkoz built the wall to the far end of the priest's house.

This chapter reveals that many people repaired the wall next to or in front of their house. Each would do a better job because he would have to sit on his porch each evening to see the job he did. When someone repaired the wall by his house, he made sure it was strong and beautiful. Then he would be safe and would enjoy looking at it in the future.

Next to Meremoth were these priests from around Jerusalem who worked on the wall: Benjamin and Hasshub rebuilt the wall in front of their houses, and Azariah, son of Maaseiah, and grandson of Ananiah, repaired the wall in front of his house.

Next to him was Binnui, son of Henadad, who rebuilt the wall from Azariah's house to the corner. Palal, son of Uzai, repaired the next section starting at the corner of the wall and going to the tower of the upper level of the palace near the courtyard. Pedaiah, son of Parosh, and the temple servants who lived on the Ophel Hill repaired the wall up to the Water Gate on the east and the tower guarding My Temple. The people from Tekoa had repaired a section of the wall, and now they did another section. This section began across from the tower that guarded My Temple and went all the way to the wall near the Ophel Hill. Other priests rebuilt the section of the wall north of the House Gate. Each priest worked on the wall in front of his house. Zadok, son of Immer, rebuilt the wall next to his house, and beyond him was Shemaiah, son of Shecaniah, guard of the East Gate. Hananiah and Hanun, who had rebuilt some other sections, now repaired a section next to Shelemiah. Meshullam, son of Berakiah, also built another section, this time in front of his house. Malkijah, a goldsmith, rebuilt the next section, as far as the house of My Temple servants and merchants, opposite the Inspection Gate, and on to the room at the corner. Other goldsmiths and merchants rebuilt the last section of the wall from the corner to the Sheep Gate.

This chapter indicated women worked on the wall. It showed their dedication to Me. Politicians got dirty working on the wall but showed "big wigs" cared.

The Wall is Guarded

4 When Sanballat heard that they were rebuilding the wall, he got very angry and upset. He made fun and laughed at them in front of their friends and soldiers and said, "What do these feeble-minded Jews think they are doing? Do they think they can rebuild the wall and start offering sacrifices in one day? How do they think they can use burned stones from these piles of debris?" Tobiah, the Ammonite, said, "Yes, just look at the wall they are building. Even a fox could knock over this wall."

Then Nehemiah prayed, "Hear us, O God, for we are being hated. Please make their mocking turn against them. Let them be taken away as

captives. Don't forgive their sins, for they have insulted You and our workers."

The people worked very hard, and they built up the wall to half its original height. But Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites, and the men from Ashdod heard about these repairs and that holes in the wall were being filled in. So they were mad, and they decided to join forces and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble. But the Jews prayed and guarded the city day and night.

Meanwhile, they were discouraged, and some said, "We are tired, and how can we ever get rid of all this debris? And our enemies are saying, 'Before they know what has happened, we will sneak up on them and kill them and that will put an end to their work.'" And so the Jews who lived nearby told the workers that wherever they turned their backs, the enemy would strike.

There are always complaints from some people about what My people are doing for Me. The people of Judah began to complain that the workers were becoming tired. There was so much rubble. Do not listen to those who criticize. When you focus on problems, I will help you finish what you're doing.

So Nehemiah placed guards from each family behind the lowest places of the wall, ready with their swords, spears, and bows. He looked things over and said to the leaders, officials, and all the people, "Don't be afraid of them. Remember that the Lord is great and awesome. So think of Him as you fight for your loved ones."

The enemies heard that they knew of plans against them, but I kept the enemy from them. And so they all returned to their work on the wall. From then on, Nehemiah had half of the men work on the wall while the other half were on guard with spears, shields, bows, and were wearing metal armor. These guards stood behind the workers, and each worker wore his sword. And the man who was to blow the trumpet stayed with Nehemiah.

Building and battling. About half of the things done for Me is building up My work. The other half is defending My work from the

enemy. You have opportunities to defeat the enemy and defend your work. It's a privilege to be My soldier.

Nehemiah said to the leaders, officials, and people, “Our work is spread out, and we are separated from each other. So whenever you hear the trumpet, come quickly. Our God will fight for us.” Every day from dawn till the stars came out half the men worked on the walls, and the other half stood guard with their spears. Nehemiah asked some men to stay inside the city and help guard the city at night. None—Nehemiah, his relatives, the workers, the guards—changed their clothes. They always kept their weapons with them even when going for water.

I Am God, Who Helps the Poor and Oppressed

5 Some of the men and their wives said, “We have lots of children, and to stay alive we need money to buy food.” Others complained, “During the famine, we had to mortgage our fields, vineyards, and houses to have money to buy food.” Others said, “To pay taxes on our fields and vineyards we’ve had to borrow money. We even had to sell our children as slaves to get some money, and some of our daughters have been raped. We are helpless, and our fields and vineyards have been mortgaged.” When Nehemiah heard all this, he was very angry.

It's alright to get angry at sin, or at other believers who sin; Nehemiah got angry (Neh. 5:6). However, the New Testament directs us, “Be angry and sin not” (Eph. 4:26). How do you sin without anger? You should intercede to Me if you lose control of yourselves, or when you get angry for the wrong reason, or when you harm someone intentionally or unintentionally with your anger. Control yourself at all times. Let Me sit on the throne of your heart and direct all you do. Do not be angry at Me, nor at other people. You can be angry at sin. Use your energy of anger to advance My work.

Nehemiah thought about this, and then said to the leaders and officials, “How can you charge interest of your own people?” He called a public meeting, and said, “We have been trying to buy back our relatives who have had to sell themselves into slavery. But now you are selling them back into slavery. How often do we have to buy them back?” The officials said nothing because they knew what he said was true.

Nehemiah added, “What you have done is not right. We must respect the Lord by the way we live so the Gentiles won’t mock us. I and my relatives and leaders have been lending money and grain to some of our people. But we must stop charging interest on these loans. So give back to their owners the fields, vineyards, olive groves, and houses and also return the interest you charged.”

Nehemiah realized he was guilty of the sin that others were doing. “I myself, as well as my brothers and my workers, have been lending” (Neh. 5:10, NLT). You need eyes to see all that you do. May you not be hypocritical of accusing others of the same sin you commit.

The people agreed, “We will return these things.” Then Nehemiah shook out the fold of his robe, and said, “If you don’t keep your promise may God empty you of your belongings like this.” All the people said, “Amen,” and praised Me, the Lord, and said, “We will do what we have promised.”

In King Artaxerxes’ 20th year (444 BC) Nehemiah was appointed governor of Judah. And during the 12 years, he had that office, he and his brothers never ate the food that was provided for them. This contrasts with the former governor who demanded that the people give him food and wine every day and pay a daily tax of a pound of silver. Even then assistants made things difficult for his people. But because Nehemiah respected Me, he did not act like that. He and his men stayed at work on the wall and did not buy any property.

Nehemiah regularly fed 150 Jewish officials besides visitors who came from other countries. Every day he provided for them an ox, six fat sheep, and lots of chickens. And every ten days they had a big supply of wine. Yet

he never asked that the king give him any food allowance to cover these needs. Nehemiah prayed that I, his God, will remember all he did for these people.

Right in the middle of his actions and writing, Nehemiah broke out into a prayer: "Remember, O my God, all that I have done for those people, and bless me for it." You should pray during your waking hours. Pray when talking to others, and when thinking, and when reading, as well as when writing.

Nehemiah is Not Afraid of His Enemies

6Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem the Arab, and other enemies learned that Nehemiah had finished rebuilding the wall. The only thing yet to be done was to hang the doors in the gates. Sanballat and Geshem sent Nehemiah a message, asking him to meet them in one of the villages in the Ono Valley. He knew they were planning to kill him, so he sent back this message: "I'm doing an important work, so I can't stop just to meet with you two." Four times they sent him the same message, and each time he refused to go. Then Sanballat's servant came with an open letter that said: "Geshem tells me that everywhere he goes he hears that the Jews are planning to rebel and make you their king. And he hears that you have prophets in Jerusalem who are saying you are their king. You can be sure this news will get back to Artaxerxes. So let's talk this over."

Satan tried in different ways to stop the walls from being built. The enemy criticized and complained, then the enemy threatened to attack. Then the enemy tried to get Nehemiah sidetracked in discussion and negotiations. Finally, they threatened to (lie) tell the king of Persia that Nehemiah was planning a rebellion to set up his own kingdom. See how many ways satan will attack you and try to destroy both you and My work. Be wise to satan's tactics. I will give you wisdom, what to do and think when you are attacked.

Nehemiah sent this message back to Sanballat: “You are lying. None of this is true.” They were trying to scare them and keep them from working. So Nehemiah prayed for Me, the Lord, to give him strength. One day Nehemiah went to see Shemaiah, son of Delaiah, and grandson of Mehetabel. The man said to Nehemiah, “Let’s go hide in the temple and lock the doors because tonight some men are coming to kill you.” But Nehemiah said, “Why should I, the governor of our people, run from danger? Why should I go into the temple to save my life? I won’t do it.”

He sensed that I had not sent Shemaiah, but that Tobiah and Sanballat had paid him to try to scare Nehemiah and make him sin by hiding in My Temple, and that would have ruined his reputation. Nehemiah prayed, “O God, please punish Tobiah, Sanballat, and Noadiah the prophetess and other so-called prophets who are trying to frighten us.”

In defeating the enemy’s attacks, Nehemiah did not pay attention to what the enemy said. He focused on doing My work, and he equipped the workers to build and battle at the same time. Then he prayed as he worked. Nehemiah gave all his time and energy to put My work first. Nehemiah focused on finishing, and he did it.

The wall was finally finished in September, just 52 days after they began. When the enemies in nearby nations heard about Your work, they were humiliated because they realized that I, the God of the Jews, had helped them finish this project.

The walls had not been rebuilt for 142 years, but it was finished in 52 days. Don’t procrastinate and put off doing many good things. You need instant obedience to do My will. Let Me transform you from being lazy about some things, and make you into My obedient servant.

In those 52 days, the Jewish leaders had been writing to Tobiah, and he kept replying. That’s because Shecaniah was his son-in-law, and Tobiah’s son, Jehohanan, had married the daughter of Meshullam, son of Berekiah. They all told Nehemiah Tobiah had done wonderful things, and told him

everything he had said. So Tobiah kept sending letters trying to scare Nehemiah.

Nehemiah's Instructions

7 After the wall was rebuilt and the gates hung, Nehemiah assigned work to the gatekeepers, singers, and Levites. He put his brother, Hanani, in charge of Jerusalem, and he made Hananiah commander of the fortress. Hananiah was an honest man who revered Me more than most people do.

Nehemiah placed his brother over Jerusalem, the one who traveled to Persia to tell him about the sad condition of the city of Jerusalem. Since Hanani was burdened for Jerusalem, it was only right he became ruler of Jerusalem. There's a lesson here: don't put a person in a job if that person doesn't have a burden for the job.

Nehemiah told them, "Keep the gates closed till well after sunrise. And before the gatekeepers go off duty at sunset, have them close and lock the gates. Choose Jerusalem residents to serve as guards, some near their homes and others at other positions."

Just because the walls are up around your life doesn't mean the city or you are safe. You have to guard yourselves carefully day and night, and "keep the gates closed at night." Satan is ever vigilant to destroy you and My work. Be just as vigilant to guard yourself and pray for spiritual protection.

The city was large, and not many people were living there yet, and only a few hundred were in the city. I told Nehemiah to register the city leaders and regular citizens. He had found the record of those who had first returned to Judah, and this is what was written in it. These are the people who returned to Judah after being held captives by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. Their leaders were Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Azariah, Raamiah, Nahamani, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispereth, Bigvai, Nehum, and Baanah. This is how many returned from each family group:

The family of Parosh: 2, 172

The family of Shephatiah: 372
The family of Arah: 652
The family of Pahath-Moab, of the family of Jeshua and Joab: 2,818
The family of Elam: 1,254
The family of Zattu: 845
The family of Zaccai: 760
The family of Binnui: 648
The family of Bebai: 628
The family of Azgad: 2,322
The family of Adonikam: 667
The family of Bigvai: 2,067
The family of Adin: 655
The family of Ater of Hezekiah: 98
The family of Hashum: 328
The family of Bezai: 324
The family of Hariph: 112
The family of Gibeon: 95
The peoples of Bethlehem and Netophah: 188
The people of Anathoth: 128
The people of Beth-Azmaveth: 42
The peoples of Kiriath-Jearim, Kephirah, and Beeroth: 743
The peoples of Ramah and Geba: 621
The people of Micmash: 122
The peoples of Bethel and Ai: 123
The people of Nebo: 52
The citizens of Elam: 1,254
The citizens of Harim: 320
The citizens Jericho: 345
The citizens of Lod, Hadid, and Ono: 721

The citizens of Senaah: 3,930.

These are the priests who returned:

The family of Jedaiah (through the line of Jeshua): 973

The family of Immer: 1,052

The family of Pashhur: 1,247

The family of Harim: 1,017.

These are the Levites who returned: The families of Jeshua, of Kadmiel (descendants of Hodaviah): 74

The singers of the family of Asaph: 148

The gatekeepers of the families of Shallum, Ater, Talmon, Akkub, Hatita, and Shobai: 138

The descendants of the following temple servants returned: Ziha, Hasupha, Tabbaoth,

Keros, Sia, Padon,

Lebana, Hagaba, Shalmal,

Hanan, Giddel, Gahar,

Reaiah, Rezin, Nekoda,

Gazzam, Uzza, Paseah,

Besai, Meunim, Nephussim,

Bakbuk, Hakupha, Harhur,

Bazluth, Mehida, Harsha,

Barkos, Sisera, Temah,

Neziah, and Hatipha.

The descendants of these servants of King Solomon returned: Sotai, Sophereth, Perida,

Jaala, Darkon, Giddel,

Shephatiah, Hattil, Pokereth-Hazzebaim, and Amon.

In all, My Temple servants and the descendants of Solomon's servants numbered 392.

Another group returned to Jerusalem at this time from the towns of Tel-Melah, Tel Harsha, Kerub, Addon, and Immer. However, they could not prove that they or their families were descendants of Israel.

This group included the families of Delaiah, Tobiah, and Nekoda—a total of 642 people.

Three families of priests—Hobaiah, Hakkoz, and Barzillai—also returned to Jerusalem. (This Barzillai had married one of the daughters of Barzillai from Gilead and had taken her family name.) But the records of these three families could not be found, so they were not allowed to serve as priests.

The governor would not let them eat the priests' share of food from the sacrifices until a priest could consult Me, the LORD.

So a total of 42,360 people returned to Judah, in addition to 7,337 servants and 245 singers.

They took with them 736 horses, 245 mules, 435 camels, and 6,720 donkeys.

Some of the family leaders gave freewill offerings for the work.

The governor gave to the treasury 19 pounds of gold, 50 gold basins, and 530 robes for the priests. The other leaders gave to the treasury a total of 2,750 pounds of silver for the work. The rest of the people gave 375 pounds of gold, about 2,500 pounds of silver, and 67 robes for the priests.

So the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, My Temple servants, along with all of the people settled in their towns in October.

My Law is Read to the People

8 Then everyone met at the area just inside the Water Gate. They asked Ezra, the priest, and teacher of the law, to read to them the law I, the LORD, had given My people. So on October 1 Ezra stood before all the people, and read the law aloud all morning. And everyone, men, women, and children old enough to understand, listened carefully. Ezra stood on a high platform. On his right were Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah. On his left were Pedaiah, Mishael, Malkijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam.

Standing on the platform so everyone could see him, Ezra opened the scroll, and everyone stood up. He praised Me, the LORD, their great God, and everyone lifted their hands toward heaven and shouted, “Amen.” Then they bowed down to the ground and worshiped Me, the LORD.

When the people heard the Word being read, they lifted their hands and shouted “Amen, amen.” Today when My Word is read, lift your hand in agreement and shout inwardly, “Amen.”

As Ezra read from the scroll, the Levites Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, and Pelaiah went among the people and explained the meaning of the passages being read.

This was preaching at its highest level. Ezra read the Scriptures, and the Levites interpreted them to the people so they could understand. Probably the Scriptures were read in the original Hebrew language, but the people spoke Aramaic or Persian, or some corrupt form of Hebrew. So, the Levites explained what My words meant. You should study the meaning of every word in the Bible because I have inspired every word of Scripture (2 Tim. 3:16).

The people started crying as they heard My law being read. But Nehemiah, Ezra, and the Levites explaining the passages said, “This is a special day for the Lord, so don’t cry. This is a time to enjoy some good food and drink and to share with those who don’t have anything. Don’t be sad, because the joy of the Lord will give you strength.”

The Levites encouraged the people not to be sad because this was a special day. So the people went home and celebrated by eating and drinking and sharing food with those who had none. They were glad because of the words of the law that were read to them.

I planned festivals in the Jewish calendar for the Jews to enjoy themselves. I want them to eat to My glory with enjoyment. Only

once in the Jewish year did I command the people to fast and show remorse for their sin (Lev. 16:29).

The next day the family leaders, priests, and Levites met with Ezra to go over the law in more detail. They learned that My law said they are to live in shelters during the festival to be held that month. They also learned that the people should spread the word in their towns, and in Jerusalem that everyone should go into the forest and get branches from olive trees, myrtle trees, and palm trees to make shelters. So the people got branches from these trees and made shelters on their rooftops, in their yards, and in the courtyard of My Temple, and in the open area by the Water Gate and the Ephraim Gate. Everyone who returned from Babylon built a shelter and lived in it for a week, and everyone was filled with joy. The Israelites had not celebrated like this since the days of Joshua, son of Nun, about a thousand years earlier. Each day of the week-long festival Ezra read from My law to Moses. Then on the eighth day, the people gathered for worship.

The People Confessed Their Sins

9 On the 24th day of the same month the Israelites assembled and refused to eat, and in grief, they were wearing coarse clothing and having dust on their heads. They separated themselves from all foreigners and confessed their sins and the sins of their ancestors. For three hours they stood and listened to My law as it was read. For another three hours, they confessed their sins and worshiped Me, the LORD their God. Eight Levites were standing on the platform and prayed aloud to Me, their LORD God. They were Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, and Kenani.

In the month of October, the Jews fasted on the Day of Atonement. This is when Israelites mourned for their sin. Also in October, the Jews lived in “huts” during the Feast of the Shelters to remind them that their fathers lived in tents when they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years.

Then some of these same Levites and a few there said, “Stand up and praise the LORD your God, who is from everlasting to everlasting.” These men were Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah.

Then the Levites praised My wonderful name saying, “You alone are the Lord, who made the heavens, the stars, and the earth and the oceans, and everything in them. You give life to everything. Many angels worship You. You are the Lord God, who chose Abram and brought him from Ur of the Chaldeans and changed his name to Abraham. Because he was faithful to You, You made an agreement with him to give his descendants the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Jebusites, and Girgashites. Now You have done what You promised; You always do what You say You will do.

“You saw how our ancestors in Egypt suffered, and You heard their pleas for help near the Red Sea. You knew how Pharaoh and his officials and all his people mistreated Your people. And so You performed great miracles against them, and You have a wonderful reputation that still exists today. You divided the Red Sea, so Your people could walk through on dry land. And You destroyed their enemies in the sea, and they sank to the bottom like heavy stones. You led our ancestors by a thick cloud during the day and a column of fire at night.

“At Mount Sinai, You came down from heaven and spoke to our ancestors. You gave them laws and instructions that are fair and commands that are good. You told them about the holy Sabbath and gave them commands and instructions through Moses. When they were hungry, You gave them bread from heaven, and when they were thirsty, You gave them water from a rock. Then you told them to go and conquer the land You promised them.

“But our ancestors became proud and stubborn and didn’t obey You. They did not listen to You, and they forgot all about the great miracles You did for them. In their stubborn rebellion, they even appointed a leader to take them back to Egypt, but that would have put them in slavery again. But You are forgiving, merciful, and loving, You don’t easily get angry, and You are full of unfailing love. You never turned away from them even when they made an idol shaped like a calf and said, ‘This god brought us out of Egypt.’ They sinned against You in terrible ways.

“Yet in Your tender love, You did not leave them to die in the desert. You continued to guide them by a thick cloud in the daytime and by a column of fire at night. Your good Spirit instructed them, and You gave them bread from heaven to eat and water to drink. For 40 years they never lacked anything in the desert. Their clothes didn’t wear out, and their feet were never swollen.

“You helped them conquer many nations, even some remote areas. They defeated Sihon, king of Heshbon, and Og, king of Bashan. You caused our people to grow into great numbers like stars in the sky, and You brought them into the land You told our ancestors to conquer. In possessing the land, they defeated the Canaanite people and their rulers. They captured fortified cities and rich farmland; they took well-furnished houses, and wells, vineyards, olive trees, and many fruit trees, so they had plenty of food and enjoyed Your many blessings.

“In spite of all this, they disobeyed You, rebelled against You, and ignored Your laws. They even killed Your prophets simply because the prophets told them to turn back to You, and they sinned against You in terrible ways. So You let their enemies defeat them and trouble them. But in those troubles, they prayed to You for help, and in heaven, You heard them. Because of Your tender love, You sent leaders to rescue them from their enemies.

“But when things were going well, they sinned against You again. So again You let some enemies rule over them. Then again they asked You for help, You heard their prayers, and because of Your tender love, You rescued them. This happened over and over.

“When You urged them to get back to obeying Your law, they were proud and disobeyed. But if they had obeyed Your commands, they would have had wonderful lives. However, they were stubborn, turned against You, and refused to listen. You were patient for years, and Your Spirit warned them through messages given by prophets. Yet they still refused to listen, so again You let nearby nations defeat them. But because of Your mercy, You did not destroy them or forget them. You are merciful and tender loving.

“Therefore God, the great and awesome God, who keeps His promises of loyal love, don’t overlook the sufferings that our kings, leaders, priests, prophets, and all our people have experienced from the time of the

Assyrians several hundred years ago till now. You have always been fair and reliable even when we sinned. True our leaders, priests, and ancestors didn't obey Your law or listen to Your commands and warnings. You gave them a kingdom, and they enjoyed the many blessings of much fertile land. But still, they did not serve You and did not turn from their sinful ways.

“So now here we are as slaves in this fruitful, productive, land You gave our ancestors. Because of our sins, the harvest of this land goes to the kings You have set over us. They have power over us and our cattle to do as they wish. We are in great misery. Therefore we are making a binding agreement in writing to serve You, our Lord. The Levites, priests, and our leaders are signing this document.”

It was not enough to pray, confess sins, and to vow to repent. The people wrote out a vow and signed it. “On this sealed document are the names of our princes, and Levites, and priests.” It is a vow to Me and promises they will live for Me. It is a sincere pledge of their heart to serve Me.

Their Promise to Obey My Law

10 Nehemiah the governor, son of Hacaliah, signed this agreement:

The priests who signed the agreement were Zedekiah, Seraiah, Azariah, Jeremiah, Pashhur, Amariah, Malkijah, Hattush, Shebaniah, Malluch, Harim, Meremoth, Obadiah, Daniel, Ginnethon, Baruch, Meshullam, Abijah, Mijamin, Maaziah, Bilgai, and Shemaiah.

The Levites who signed were Jeshua son of Azaniah, Binnui from the family of Henadad, Kadmiel, and their fellow Levites: Shebaniah, Hodiah, Kelita, Pelaiah, Hanan, Mica, Rehob, Hashabiah, Zaccur, Sherebiah, Shebaniah, Hodiah, Bani, and Beninu.

The leaders who signed were Parosh, Pahath-Moab, Elam, Zattu, Bani, Bunni, Azgad, Bebai, Adonijah, Bigvai, Adin, Ater, Hezekiah, Azzur, Hodiah, Hashum, Bezai, Hariph, Anathoth, Nebai, Magpiash, Meshullam, Hezir, Meshezabel, Zadok, Jaddua, Pelatiah, Hanan, Anaiah, Hoshea,

Hananiah, Hasshub, Hallohesh, Pilha, Shobek, Rehum, Hashabnah, Maaseiah, Ahiah, Hanan, Anan, Malluch, Harim, and Baanah.

Nehemiah, the governor, was the first to sign the pledge. Leaders always lead, so if you're the leader of a group, be an example to followers.

The rest of the people—the priests, Levites, gatekeepers, singers, temple servants, and all who had separated themselves from their pagan neighbors to obey My law—with their wives and their children who were old enough to understand, all these accepted this agreement. And they placed themselves under My curse if they did not obey all My laws and regulations given to Moses.

The people made these promises: “We promise not to let our sons and daughters marry non-Israelites. If non-Israelites bring any items or food to sell on the Sabbath or any other sacred day, we won’t buy them. Every seventh year we will not plow our fields, and we will cancel debts owed to us. Every year we will donate a small amount of silver for the temple. This will help cover the costs of the bread for the Table of Bread without Yeast; the grain offerings and burnt offerings; offerings for the Sabbaths, new moon festivals, and annual festivals; offerings for substitutionary payment for sin; and all other expenses of the temple worship.

“We have thrown lots to determine when the families of priests, Levites, and ordinary people are to bring wood to burn on the altar of burnt offering, as required in the law. Also each year we will bring to the temple the first part of our harvest of crops and fruits. Also, we will bring to the priests at the temple the firstborn of our cattle, sheep, and goats, as written in the law.

“We will bring to the priests the bread dough from the first harvest of grain, and the first fruit from our trees, and the first of the new wine and olive oil. Also, we will give a tenth of our crops to the Levites, who collect it in our towns. When we give this tenth to the Levites, a priest from the family of Aaron must be present. Then the Levites are to put a tenth of this tenth in the storerooms in the temple. These gifts are to be placed in the temple storerooms where sacred objects are stored and are to be used by the

priests, gatekeepers, and singers. We will not neglect the temple of our God.”

In this chapter, the people promised to bring their tithes. They gave their offering to Me while the gifts were actually to take care of My Temple and pay the priests. Actually, the gifts were to Me.

The People of Jerusalem

11 Only the Israelite leaders and their families were living in Jerusalem. So lots were thrown to choose a tenth of the people in the other towns of Judah to move to the holy city. The people were grateful for those who willingly moved to Jerusalem.

After Nehemiah finished rebuilding the walls, he wanted people to move and live in Jerusalem. It was a huge, empty city with very few living there. It needed businesses to sustain the population and an operative temple where people could worship. Jerusalem is the city where My name dwelt and where My presence came in the Shekinah cloud. It is the place where My Son, Jesus, visited and was crucified. It is the place where He will return. Jerusalem is important to Me.

Most of the people and the priests, Levites, temple servants, and descendants of Solomon’s servants lived in their own towns.

Leaders from the tribe of Judah were Athaiah, son of Uzziah, son of Zechariah, son of Amariah, son of Shephatiah, son of Mahalalel, of the family of Perez; and Maaseiah, son of Baruch, son of Col-Hozeh, son of Hazaiah, son of Adaiah, son of Joiarib, son of Zechariah, a descendant of Shelah. There were 468 descendants of Perez who lived in Jerusalem—all outstanding men.

Leaders from the tribe of Benjamin were Sallu, son of Meshullam, son of Joed, son of Pedaiiah, son of Kolaiah, son of Maaseiah, son of Ithiel, son of Jeshaiiah. After him were Gabbai and Sallai and a total of 928 relatives.

Their chief officer was Joel, son of Zicri, and second in command was Judah, son of Hassenuah.

Leaders from the priests were Jedaiah, son of Joiarib; Jakin; and Seraiah, son of Hilkiah, son of Meshullam, son of Zadok, son of Meraioth, son of Ahitub, the supervisor of My temple. Also, 822 of their associates worked at My Temple. Also, there was Adaiah, son of Jeroham, son of Pelaliah, son of Amzi, son of Zechariah, son of Pashhur, son of Malkijah; along with 242 of his coworkers, who were heads of their families. The other priest was Amashsai, son of Azarel, son of Ahzai, son of Meshillemoth, son of Immer; and 128 of his outstanding coworkers. Their chief officer was Zabdiel, son of Haggadolim.

Leaders from the Levites were: Shemaiah, son of Hasshub, son of Azrikam, son of Hashabiah, son of Bunni; Shabbethai and Jozabad, who were in charge of the work outside My Temple; Mattaniah, son of Mica, son of Zabdi, a descendant of Asaph, who began the thanksgiving services with prayer; Bakbukiah, who was Mattaniah's assistant, and Abda, son of Shammua, son of Galal, son of Jeduthun.

In all, there were 284 Levites in Jerusalem.

Also, the gatekeepers were Akkub, Talmon, and 172 of their associates.

The other priests, Levites, and the rest of the Israelites lived in towns in Judah where their ancestors had property. However, My Temple servants were Ziha and Gishpa who lived on the Ophel Hill.

The chief officer of the Levites in Jerusalem was Uzzi, son of Bani, son of Hashabiah, son of Mattaniah, son of Mica. He was of the Asaph clan who were singers at My Temple. They were under royal orders, which determined their daily activities.

Pethahiah, son of Meshezabel, a descendant of Zerah, son of Judah, was the royal adviser in all matters of public administration.

Some of the people of Judah lived in Kiriath-Arba and its villages, Dibon and its villages, and Jekabzeel and its villages. They also lived in Jeshua, Moladah, Beth Pelet, Hazar Shual, Beersheba and its villages, Ziklag, and Meconah and its villages, in En Rimmon, Zorah, Jarmuth, Zanoah, and Adullam with their surrounding villages. They were also in Lachish and its nearby fields and Azekah and its villages. So the people of

Judah settled in towns from Beersheba in the south to the Hinnom Valley in Jerusalem.

The people of Benjamin tribe lived in Geba, Michmash, Aija, and Bethel and nearby villages, Anathoth, Nob, Ananiah, Hazor, Ramah, Gittaim, Hadid, Zeboim, Neballat, Lod, Ono, and in the Craftsmen Valley. And some of the Levites in Judah settled in Benjamin.

The Priests and the Levites

12 This is the list of the priests and Levites who returned with Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua, the high priest:

Seraiah, Jeremiah, Ezra, Amariah, Malluch, Hattush, Shecaniah, Rehum, Meremoth, Iddo, Ginnethoi, Abijah, Mijamin, Maadiah, Bilgah, Shemaiah, Joiarib, Jedaiah, Sallu, Amok, Hilkiyah, and Jedaiah.

These were the leaders of the priests and their associates in the days of Jeshua.

The Levites who returned with them were Jeshua, Binnui, Kadmiel, Sherebiah, Judah, and Mattaniah, who with his associates was in charge of the songs of praise. Their associates, Bakbukiah and Unni, stood opposite them during the service.

Jeshua, the high priest, was the father of Joiakim. Joiakim was the father of Eliashib. Eliashib was the father of Joiada. Joiada was the father of Johanan. Jonathan was the father of Jaddua.

When Joiakim, Jeshua's son, was high priest, the clan leaders of the priests were as follows: Meraiah was leader of the Seraiah clan. Hananiah was leader of the Jeremiah clan. Meshullam was leader of the Ezra clan. Jehohanan was leader of the Amariah clan. Jonathan was leader of the Malluch clan. Joseph was leader of the Shebaniah clan. Adna was leader of the Harim clan. Helkai was leader of the Meremoth clan. Zechariah was leader of the Iddo clan. Meshullam was leader of the Ginnethon clan. Zicri was leader of the Abijah clan. There was also a leader of the Miniamin clan. Piltai was leader of the Maadiah clan. Shammua was leader of the Bilgah clan. Jehonathan was leader of the Shemaiah clan. Mattenai was leader of the Joiarib clan. Uzzi was leader of the Jedaiah clan. Kallai was leader of

the Sallu clan. Eber was leader of the Amok clan. Hashabiah was leader of the Hilkiyah clan. And Nethanel was leader of the Jedaiah clan.

In the days of the Levites, Eliashib, Joiada, Johanan, and Jaddua and when Darius was king of Persia, a record was kept of the heads of the clans of the Levites and priests. The heads of the Levite families were recorded up to the time of Johanan, grandson of Eliashib. The family leaders of the Levites were Hashabiah, Sherebiah, Jeshua, son of Kadmiel, and who with their coworkers formed two choirs for praise in My Temple, as directed by David. Mattaniah, Bakbukiah, Obadiah, Meshullam, Talmon, and Akkub were gatekeepers in charge of the storerooms at the gates. They served in the days of Joiakim, son of Jeshua, and grandson of Jozadak, and when Nehemiah was the governor and when Ezra was the priest and teacher of the law.

The names and families were written for several reasons. Future generations were able to use genealogies to prove their "Jewishness." Also, priests could establish their "right" to the office. Finally, all Jews studied the records to find out about their promised Messiah.

For the dedication of the new walls of Jerusalem Nehemiah invited Levites throughout Judah to come celebrate by singing songs of thanks and playing cymbals, harps, and lyres. Singers came from towns around Jerusalem, villages they had built for themselves, including the villages of the Netophathites, and Beth-Gilgal, Geba, and Azmaveth. The priests and Levites prepared themselves ceremonially and then did the same for the gates, and the wall.

Nehemiah led the leaders of Judah to the top of the wall and divided them into two choirs. He had one group go south to the right toward the Garbage Gate. This group included Hoshaiyah, half of the leaders from Judah, Azariah, Ezra, Meshullam, Judah, Benjamin, Shemaiah, Jeremiah, and some priests with trumpets. Also in the group were Zechariah, son of Jonathan, son of Shemaiah, son of Mattaniah, son of Micaiah, son of Zaccur, son of Asaph, Shemaiah, Azarel, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethanel, Judah, and Hanani. They played musical instruments ordered by David, their man of God. Ezra led this choir. When they got to the Fountain Gate,

they climbed the steps to the City of David, past David's palace to the Water Gate near the eastern wall of the city.

The second group went in the opposite direction, and Nehemiah followed them with the other half of the leaders of Judah. They went north past the Oven Tower to the Broad Wall, the Ephraim Gate, the Old Gate, the Fish Gate, the Hananel Tower, the Hundred Tower, and the Sheep Gate, and then they stopped at the Guard Gate. Then the two groups went to My temple. Half the leaders and the trumpet-playing priests were Eliakim, Maaseiah, Miniamin, Micaiah, Elioenai, Zachariah, and Hananiah. Also, the singers included Maaseiah, Shemaiah, Eleazar, Uzzi, Jehohanan, Malkijah, Elam, and Ezer, who were led by Jezrahiah. The people were very happy, and they offered many sacrifices to Me, their Lord. Women and children also took part in the celebration. The people's shouts of joy could be heard far from Jerusalem.

Since I love symbols, the people symbolically walked all the way around the city to show the walls were completely finished. In this way, they dedicated every portion of the work done by every person who helped rebuild the walls. Because I prize every person who does any service for Me, I too will appreciate every believer who serves Me in the future. I appreciate jobs that are well done, and jobs that are completely finished.

At that time Nehemiah put several men in charge of the storerooms where people's gifts were kept, including the first part of the harvest and a tenth of the crops and livestock. The law of Moses required that these portions be brought to My Temple. And all Judah was pleased with the priests and Levites.

The people willingly and thankfully gave for the support of temple worship. You worship Me by first offering your body and life to Me. Then you will offer all your material goods to Me. I will use the one-tenth in My service and show you how to spend and use the nine-tenths you need to support yourself.

The priests and Levites faithfully served Me, the LORD. Also, the singers and gatekeepers performed their duties as required by David and Solomon. Centuries earlier in the days of David and Asaph, the people began the custom of having choir directors lead choirs in singing songs of praise and thanks. So now in the days of Zerubbabel and Nehemiah, Israel brought food each day for the Levite singers and gatekeepers. The Levites, in turn, gave a part of what they received to the many priests, who were Aaron's descendants.

Nehemiah Enforces the Law

13 When My law to Moses was being read to the people, they heard that I had said Ammonites and Moabites should never be allowed to enter My temple. Why? Because they refused to give them food and water and even hired Balaam to curse them, though I turned the curse into a blessing. When this rule was read, the Israelites sent away any who were foreigners.

Before this, Eliashib, the priest, had been put in charge of My Temple storerooms and he was a relative of Tobiah, an Ammonite. Eliashib had changed a storage room in My Temple into a nice guest room for Tobiah. That room had previously been used to store grain offerings, incense, temple utensils, and the tenth of the grain, new wine, and olive oil was given for the Levites, singers, gatekeepers, and gifts for the priests.

This happened in the 32nd year of Artaxerxes' rule (432 BC). Nehemiah was not in Jerusalem at the time because he had gone back to Persia. Later Nehemiah asked the king if he could return to Jerusalem, and when he did, he learned about Tobiah having a room in My Temple. Nehemiah was so upset that he tossed Tobiah's furniture out of the room, ordered it to be cleaned, and put back into the room the equipment, offerings, and incense that belonged there.

Nehemiah also found out that the Levites and singers had gone back to work on their farms because they had not received their share of the harvest. He immediately called My Temple officials together and angrily said, "Why is the temple neglected?" Then he told the Levites to return to their jobs in My Temple. Then everyone in Judah brought a tenth of their grain, new wine, and olive oil to My Temple storerooms. He put three men in charge of the storerooms: Shelemiah, the priest, Zadok, the teacher, and

Pedaiah, a Levite. Their assistant was Hanan, son of Zaccur, and grandson of Mattaniah. These men were reliable, and they distributed supplies to Levites.

Nehemiah prayed, “Remember, O my God, what I have done for the temple.”

One day on the Sabbath Nehemiah saw some men trampling grapes, and loading their donkeys with bundles of grain, wine, grapes, figs, and other foods, to sell in Jerusalem. He reminded them that they are not to sell food on the Sabbath. Also, some men from the city of Tyre who lived in Jerusalem were selling fish and other goods on the Sabbath. He scolded the leaders of Judah and said, “Why are you doing this sinful thing in defiling the Sabbath? Don’t you remember that God punished our ancestors when they did these very same things? And you are just about to make God very angry again.”

Then Nehemiah ordered that the gates to Jerusalem were to be closed just before sunset on Friday and not opened till the Sabbath was over. He put some men at the city gates to be sure nothing was brought into the city on the Sabbath. A couple of times some merchants spent the night outside Jerusalem. He spoke sharply to them and said, “Why are you spending the night by the wall? If you do this again, I will arrest you.” Nehemiah told the Levites to make themselves ceremonially clean and to guard the gates to keep the Sabbath day holy. Again he prayed, “Remember, O my God, what I have done, and be merciful to me because of Your unfailing love.”

Nehemiah realized some of the men married women from Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab. Many of their children spoke the language of Ashdod or some other foreign language and could not speak Hebrew. Again he got angry and asked Me to make things difficult for them. He beat some of the men and pulled out their hair. He made them promise they would not let their children intermarry with non-Jews. Nehemiah said, “You know that Solomon was our great king, and God loved him, but marrying foreign women led him into idolatry. Now you are doing the same thing, being unfaithful to God.”

One of the sons of Joiada, son of Eliashib, the high priest had married a daughter of Sanballat the Horonite. Nehemiah forced him to leave My Temple. Nehemiah prayed, “Remember them, O my God, punish them for breaking their vows and dishonoring the Levi tribe.”

So Nehemiah got rid of everything foreign with the priests and Levites and assigned them their duties. He made sure the people brought enough wood for the sacrifices and brought their 10 percent of their harvest to My Temple. “Remember me, my God, because of the good I have done.”

The people had forsaken the Sabbath observance, so Nehemiah instituted a three-step policy. First, he commanded the gates to the city to be shut on the Sabbath so people couldn't enter to sell on the Sabbath. Second, he put members of his staff at the gates to immediately guard it. Third, he got the Levites to come guard the gates on a long-term basis. There is a three-fold principle of separating yourselves from compromise and sin. First, you must make a decision to shut the door of your hearts to compromise and evil. Second, you must use your habits and discipline to keep yourselves from sin. Third, you must ask Jesus, your Priest, to keep your hearts true in all things.

I AM GOD

The Protector

The Book of Esther

While My name, God, is not written in this book, My presence is unmistakably seen in the irreversible tide of events. Queen Vashti was removed from the throne of Persia and My follower, Esther, took her place. Prime Minister Haman hated the Jews and planned their entire extinction. Haman planned to hang Esther's adopted father, Mordecai, but he was hanged on the gallows he built for Mordecai. The Jews were able to successfully defend themselves against greedy, hateful men who intended their destruction. Finally, Mordecai became Prime Minister of Persia. The book of Esther teaches you to trust Me because I control the affairs of this life. Also, it teaches you to fast and pray for My intervention when circumstances seem blackest.

Queen Vashti Defies the King's Command

1 Xerxes, king of Persia, ruled over 127 provinces from India to Ethiopia from his palace in the fortress of Susa. In the third year of his reign (412 BC), he gave a big banquet for all of his officials, military officers, and leaders of the province. He showed off his wealth and the greatness of his kingdom for six months.

Then he gave a week-long banquet for palace servants and officials, from the least to the greatest, in the palace garden. The area was decorated with blue and white linen curtains tied back with purple cords that ran through silver rings attached to marble pillars.

Couches of gold and silver stood on pavements that had designs made from multicolored stones, marble, mother-of-pearl, and other stones. The wine was served in gold goblets, each with a different design. Much wine was available because the king was generous. Each guest could drink as

much as he wanted, and he told his servants to let each guest drink as much or as little as he wanted.

At the same time, Queen Vashti gave a banquet for the women of the palace. On the seventh day when King Xerxes was half drunk, he told his seven personal aides, Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar, and Carcas, to bring him Queen Vashti, wearing her royal crown. He wanted the men to gaze on her beauty. The king's aides told her what he said, but she refused to go, and this made him terribly angry. So Xerxes called in his seven expert advisors. They were Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan. They understood the laws of the land, and the king asked their advice. He asked them, "Queen Vashti has disobeyed my command. What does the law say should be her punishment?"

Memucan answered, "Queen Vashti has done wrong not only to you but also to all your officials and every citizen in your empire. Women everywhere will hear about this and will disobey their husbands. Even before the end of this day, the wives of your officials will talk to their husbands the same way. This will result in a lot of family problems. So he suggested a decree be sent out, a law of the Medes and Persians, which can't be repealed, that Vashti never be allowed to see you again, and that someone better than Vashti be made queen. When the wives in your kingdom read this, they will respect their husbands."

The king and his officials liked what Memucan said, so he sent messengers to every part of his kingdom, with the message in the language of every area, and it stated that every husband should be the ruler of his family.

The book of Esther is a wonderful declaration of My providence. I work behind the scenes to accomplish My will. Xerxes, the most powerful man on earth at that time, was setting the stage to save My people—the Jews—from a holocaust. Even before Haman decided to exterminate the Jews, I set a plan in motion to save the Jews. I prepared the situation and a woman who would "save" My people. I am not surprised by your problems, and I am never caught off guard.

Esther is Made Queen

2 Later King Xerxes got over being angry, but he was thinking about Vashti, realizing he would never see her again. His aides suggested, “Let’s search for beautiful young women in your kingdom and bring them here. Appoint agents in every province to find these girls and bring them here to Susa. Put Hegai in charge of them who will see that they are given proper beauty treatments. Then the girl who pleases you most will be the queen.” Xerxes liked this idea, so he ordered that the plan be carried out.

A Jew named Mordecai was living in the palace at Susa. He was the son of Jair, and grandson of Shimei, and great-grandson of Kish, a Benjamite. He had been captured when Jerusalem was destroyed by King Nebuchadnezzar and had been taken to Babylon with King Jeconiah of Judah and others. Mordecai had a beautiful and lovely cousin named Hadassah, also called Esther, whose parents were dead and so Mordecai adopted her as his own daughter.

I have a special concern for orphans. In this case Esther the orphan became the queen of the most powerful empire in the world. An orphan girl, who was among the most disenfranchised persons in the kingdom, became the most powerful woman in Xerxes’ kingdom. I enjoy taking the weak and using them in a powerful way.

As a result of the king’s order to bring in beautiful women, many were taken to the palace and Esther was one of them. Hegai was impressed with her, and he gave her beauty treatments and special food. Also, he gave her seven maids, and she and the seven had the best rooms in the palace.

Mordecai had told Esther not to tell anyone she was a Jewess. Every day he walked back and forth in front of the court where the women lived and asked how she was getting along.

The young women were given beauty treatments for a year. For six months each woman’s skin was rubbed with olive oil and myrrh, and the last six months she was treated with perfumes and ointments. When it was her turn to sleep with the king, she could choose whatever clothing or jewelry she wanted. The morning after being with the king she would be

under the care of Shaashgaz, another servant of the king. She could not go to the king again unless he called for her by name.

I made Esther beautiful on the outside and inside. This was just one step in preparing her to save the world. I gave her favor with those over her and then I gave her favor with the king. All things work out together to accomplish My will.

When it was Esther's turn to go to the king, she followed Hegai's advice on what to wear. Everyone who saw her was amazed at her beauty. Esther was taken to the king in January of the seventh year of his reign. Xerxes was attracted to Esther more than to any of the other women, and so he put a crown on her head and made her queen. Then he gave a great banquet in her honor for all his nobles and officials. He made that day a special holiday, and he gave gifts to everyone.

When the young women were brought together again, Mordecai had become a government official. Esther still hadn't told anyone that she was a Jewess. One day as Mordecai was on duty at the palace, two of the king's aides, Bigthan and Teresh, were angry at the king and were planning to kill him. Mordecai heard about it and told Esther, who reported it to the king, giving credit to Mordecai for passing along the information. The matter was found to be true, and the two officials were hanged. This was written in the book that records the king's actions.

It was not just chance or a coincidence that Mordecai overheard Bigthan and Teresh's plot to kill Xerxes. This is another piece in the puzzle that I used to save My people, the Jews.

Haman's Plan to Destroy the Jews

3 Later King Xerxes promoted Haman, son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, to the highest position in his kingdom.

One man—Saul, first king of Israel—disobeyed My commands to annihilate all the Agagites, and almost a thousand years later the Jewish nation was almost annihilated by an Agagite. This chapter teaches the awful consequences of disobeying Me. There are consequences for sin.

All the king's officials stationed at the king's gate bowed before Haman whenever he passed by, as the king had told them to do. But Mordecai refused to bow before Haman.

The king's officials asked Mordecai why he was not obeying the king's order. They asked him this every day, but he still refused. So they spoke to Haman himself about this. Mordecai had said he wouldn't bow because he was a Jew, and they wanted to know if Haman would go along with that answer. Mordecai's refusal made Haman furious. So he decided to kill not just Mordecai but to find a way to kill every Jew in the kingdom of Xerxes.

My people suffer when evil men rule over them. But Haman was more than evil he was satanic. Somehow his self-esteem and hatred of My people formed a toxic brew, and then poison spewed out.

In March of Xerxes' 12th year (473 BC) lots were tossed to decide on a day and month to get rid of all the Jews. The time was exactly a year later.

When Haman chose a "lucky number" to punish the Jews, I was behind the choice. Some say, "The devil is in the details," but in this situation, "I was in the details." The chosen date to punish the Jews was almost a year away. That way, My people could have an opportunity to pray and prepare." I was also able to work through Esther to save her people.

Then Haman said to the king, "Some people who live throughout every province of your kingdom won't associate with people of other races. Their customs are different, and they refuse to obey your laws. It would be better

to get rid of them. Why not order that they all be killed. I will put 375 tons of silver into the royal treasury to cover the costs involved in this project.”

Agreeing to this plan, the king gave his official ring to Haman, who hated the Jews, and the king said, “Keep the money, and go ahead and do what you want with these people.” On April 13 Haman met with the king’s secretaries, and had them write orders in every language in the kingdom, and the letters were sealed with king’s ring. They sent these orders to the royal officials and governors and other leaders in every province. Messengers carried the letters throughout the kingdom. The letters stated that about a year later all Jewish men, women, and children were to be killed and their property taken.

These letters were to be posted where people everywhere could read them and be ready to carry out the command on the designated day. The command was sent out by messengers, and it was also read in the fortress of Susa. Then the king and Haman sat down to drink, but everyone was puzzled by all this.

Mordecai Asks Esther to Help Her People

4 When Mordecai heard about the letter, he tore his clothes in grief. He wore coarse clothing made from goat’s hair and put ashes on his head. He went into the city crying loudly. But he couldn’t go past the palace gate because no one wearing coarse clothing was allowed in the palace. As the letters were read in all the provinces, the Jews mourned and cried and fasted, and many of them lay in ashes and wore coarse clothing.

When Esther’s servant girls and others told her about Mordecai, she sent him some clothes to put on in place of the coarse clothing. But he refused.

Esther sent respectable clothes for Mordecai to wear, not realizing the distressing circumstances. Mordecai had to open Esther’s blind eyes to see spiritual danger around her. And when her blind eyes were opened, she was willing to die for Me.

Esther had a servant named Hathach, and so she asked him to find out what was wrong with Mordecai. Hathach went to the open area by the king's gate and found Mordecai; who told him about the king's order and how much Haman had promised to give to the royal treasury for aid in destroying the Jews. Mordecai gave Hathach a copy of the king's order issued in Susa to kill all the Jews. He said, "Show this to Esther, and ask her to go to the king and beg him to have mercy on her people, the Jews."

Hathach told Esther what Mordecai had said, and she answered, "Tell Mordecai that as everyone knows if a person goes in to see the king and hasn't been invited, he will be put to death. The only way to see him is if he holds out his gold scepter. And it's been 30 days since he has asked for me."

So Hathach gave her response to Mordecai. Then he sent back this reply: "Don't think that because you are in the king's palace, you won't be killed. If you don't speak up, we will get help somehow. But it may well be that God has made you queen for a time such as this."

Then Esther sent a reply to Mordecai. "Bring together all the Jews in Susa and tell them to fast (not eat or drink anything for three days). I and my servant girls will do the same. Then I will go see the king, even if it means I die."

Esther was willing to die, "If I perish, I perish." When I ask you to surrender everything, you must be willing to die, so much so that you actually die to your ambitions and desires, long before you actually die.

Mordecai went and told all the Jews in Susa what Esther said.

Esther's Banquet

5 Three days later Esther, dressed in her royal robes, entered the inner court of the palace across from the royal hall. The king was seated on his throne, facing the entrance. Pleased to see her, he held out his gold scepter to her. When she went toward him she touched the scepter.

Esther wore the correct clothes, her royal clothes and stood at the right place near the pillar in the court. She used common sense to help accomplish My will to save the Jews.

And he said, “What is your request? Ask, and I will give you half of my kingdom.”

Esther replied, “I invite you and Haman to a dinner today that I will prepare.”

The king got Haman to go with him to the dinner Esther had cooked. While they were drinking wine, the king said to Esther, “What is your request? As I said, I will give you whatever you wish, even up to half my kingdom.” Esther replied, “This is my request. I would like for you and Haman to come here again tomorrow for another dinner I will prepare. Then I will answer your question.”

I used Esther’s womanly ways to save My people. Use all your personality to accomplish many good things for My kingdom.

All this made Haman feel great. But he quickly became furious when he saw Mordecai at the king’s gate and noticed that Mordecai did not stand up before him. He didn’t say anything, but when he got home, he got his friends and his wife, Zeresh, together. He bragged about his great wealth and his many sons and how the king had honored him in many ways and how the king had promoted him over all the king’s officials. Then he added, “What’s more, I am the only one Queen Esther invited for dinner with her and the king. And we are invited there for dinner tomorrow too. But there is a problem. All this is nothing as long as I see Mordecai by the king’s gate, refusing to bow down to me.”

When it seems like sin has gone as far as it can go, I step in to put a stop to the madness. I can do the same thing in your life.

His wife, Zeresh, and his friends made a suggestion: “Make a tower about 75 feet high, and in the morning ask the king to hang Mordecai on it. Then later you can enjoy dinner with the king.” Haman liked this idea, so he had the tower built.

Mordecai is Honored

6 That night the king had insomnia. So he had a servant bring the written record of his reign and read to him. When the servant read the record about how Mordecai kept Bigthan and Teresh, guards at the king’s doorway, from killing the king, Xerxes asked, “What reward or honor did we give Mordecai for doing this?” His servants said, “Nothing has been done.” Just then Haman arrived at the palace to ask the king to have Mordecai hanged on the tower he built. When the king saw Haman was there, he asked Haman to come in. He asked Haman, “What is a good way to honor a person the king is pleased with?” Haman thought, “He must be wanting to honor me.” So he answered the king, “Put on him some royal robes, and bring him the king’s own horse with a fancy headdress, and lead him through the streets with people shouting, ‘This is the way the king honors those who please him.’”

“Alright, go take these robes and my horse for Mordecai the Jew, and do all that you suggested.” So Haman put the robes on Mordecai, and put him on the king’s horse, and led him through the streets, shouting, “This is how the king honors someone who pleases him.”

Later Mordecai went back to his post at the king’s gate, but Haman went home with his head covered in grief. He told his wife and friends what had happened. They said, “If Mordecai is a Jew, you cannot oppose him successfully. Try to be against him, and you will be ruined.”

While they were discussing these matters, the king’s servants arrived to take Haman to the dinner Esther had prepared.

Haman is Executed

At this second dinner, the king again asked Esther, “What is your request? I will give you whatever you wish, even up to half of my kingdom?” She

7 answered, “If you really care for me, please save my life and the lives of my people. People have been hired to kill my people and me. If the plan was to sell us as slaves, I wouldn’t have bothered you.”

There comes a time in life when you must remove your mask and tell the truth. Esther could no longer keep her Jewish identity hidden. She told all. And I used her honesty to save My people. Learn what to say when the time arrives and how to say it, and when to say it. I will guide your words as you speak honestly.

King Xerxes asked her, “Who would dare do such a thing? She answered, “This wicked Haman is our enemy.” Then Haman was terrified. The king got up in anger and went out to the palace garden. Haman, realizing the king would take his life, begged Esther to save his life. Just as the king came back, Haman fell on the couch where Esther was reclining. The king shouted, “Will you even try to rape the queen here in my palace as I look on?” As soon as the king said this, his servants covered Haman’s face, a sign he would die. Then Harbonah, one of the king’s servants, told the king, “Haman has made a 75-foot tower near his house, and he plans to hang Mordecai on it. And as you know, Mordecai is the man who saved your life.” Immediately the king ordered, “Hang Haman on his own tower!” Right away Haman was hanged on the very tower he built to hang Mordecai, and the king was no longer angry.

Xerxes was angry when Vashti refused him. Then he was angry when Haman deceived him. And Xerxes’ rage built when he thought Haman was trying to rape his wife. I use the anger of some for My own special purpose. Learn how to deal with angry people who keep their anger hidden, and learn how to deal with rage when you confront it. May you always control your temper for My glory.

The Jews Are Allowed to Fight Back

That day the king gave Haman's estate to Esther. She had told the king that Mordecai was her cousin, and so the king made Mordecai a high-ranking official. He gave Mordecai his official ring that Haman had worn, and Esther put him in charge of Haman's estate.

Again Esther went to the king. She fell at his feet crying and begged him to stop Haman's plan to kill all the Jews. When the king held out the gold scepter to her, she stood up and said, "If it is all right with you, please send out a letter that will reverse Haman's plan to destroy all the Jews. I can't stand the thought of my people being destroyed."

King Xerxes said to Esther and Mordecai, "As you know, I have given Haman's estate to you, Esther, and he has been hanged to death."

If you hate anyone in this life, be careful; one day they may own all you have and your estate. The estate of Haman ended up belonging to Mordecai. Don't look for wealth on this earth; look for My reward in heaven.

"Now send out a message to save your people. Send it in my name and seal it with my official ring so that the order can't be changed." Immediately in July, the royal secretaries were called in to write Mordecai's orders as he dictated them to the Jews, officials, governors, and local leaders of all 127 provinces from India to Ethiopia. The orders were written in every language of the kingdom, including Hebrew. Mordecai wrote the orders in the name of the king, sealed them with the king's official ring, and sent them by messengers who rode the king's fastest horses.

Sometimes it's not enough to stop an evil person. Their evil influence must also be stopped. Apparently the night Haman was hanged didn't stop the coming genocide. Esther went to the king a second time to get a letter written and sealed with the king's ring that allowed the Jews to protect themselves on the coming day of judgment.

The king's orders gave the Jews in every city the right to defend themselves and to kill anyone who might attack them, including women and children, and to take their property. The day for this event was in March; exactly one year after Haman chose that date. The orders were to be issued as law in every province and posted everywhere so everyone could read it.

So the king ordered the messengers to ride his fastest horses and get the message out quickly. The orders were also posted in the Susa fortress.

When Mordecai left the palace, he was wearing a blue and white royal robe, a gold crown, and a cloak of purple linen. Everyone in Susa was glad about this new law. And the Jews were filled with joy and gladness and were honored everywhere. In every province and city where the orders were read, the Jews had parties and celebrated. And many people became Jews.

The Jews Defeat Their Enemies

9 On March 13th the king's order to kill all the Jews was to be carried out. But now on this very day, when their enemies had hoped to destroy them, the opposite happened.

There comes a time when one's enemies come out in the open, and they must be opposed. Be humble and pray for them. Do not knowingly make an enemy of anyone. Do good to all, and "live peacefully with all men" (Heb. 12:14).

In every city, the Jews on that day got together to attack those who wanted to destroy them. But no one made a move against the Jews because they were afraid of them. The leaders of the provinces, rulers, governors, and officials helped the Jews out of respect for Mordecai, who had been promoted by the king and given a lot of power.

The Jews killed their enemies with the sword and showed them no mercy. Even in Susa, they killed 500 men. They also killed Haman's ten sons, Parshandatha, Dalphon, Aspatha, Poratha, Adalia, Aridatha, Parmashta, Arisai, Aridai, and Vaizatha; but they didn't take any of their belongings.

The Jews did not make monetary gain for themselves when they defeated their enemies. Even though some were going to attack the Jews for loot— not just for ethnic hatred—the Jews didn't retaliate.

Later that day the king heard that a number of people had been killed in Susa. He said to Esther, "The Jews have killed 500 people and Haman's ten sons. What has happened in the other provinces? If you want something else done, just tell me, and I will do it." Esther answered, "Let the Jews in Susa fight tomorrow as they did today, and have the bodies of Haman's ten sons hanged in public." Xerxes did what she asked, and Haman's sons' bodies were hanged. The next day, March 14th, the Jews in Susa killed another 300 men, and they did not take any of their belongings. On March 13th Jews in the other provinces killed 75,000 of their enemies, but didn't take any of their belongings. On March 14th, the same day Haman's sons were hanged, the Jews celebrated with a great festival.

Then on March 15th, the Jews in Susa celebrated a holiday after killing their enemies the two days before. Jews in rural villages celebrated their victory on March 14th, making it a great time of joy, feasting, and sending gifts of food to the poor.

Mordecai wrote down all that happened, and sent letters to Jews everywhere, encouraging them to celebrate on March 14th and 15th, as the time when they defeated their enemies, and their sorrow turned into joy. He encouraged them to celebrate with feasting, joy and giving gifts to each other.

The Jews followed his suggestion and held this celebration every year. Haman, son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, hated the Jews and had planned to destroy them. To find out the best time to do it, he threw lots, called Purim. When the king learned of this, he gave orders that Haman and his sons be hanged in the same way Haman had wanted Mordecai hanged. Therefore this celebration is called Purim from Pur, the Babylonian word for dice. So because of Mordecai's letter and what the Jews experienced, the Jews decided that they and their descendants would celebrate these two days every year, just as they were told to do. Every Jewish family from now on was to celebrate Purim. This is to keep alive the memory of what happened.

Queen Esther wrote a letter in support of Mordecai's letter about this festival. Mordecai sent copies of the letter to the Jews in all 127 provinces. He wished them well. The letter stated that the Jews and their descendants were to celebrate Purim at the time and in the way Mordecai and Esther said and that they were to follow their instructions about mourning and

going without food. Esther's command confirmed these regulations about Purim, and it was written down as law.

King Xerxes and Mordecai

10 King Xerxes made everyone in his kingdom pay taxes, even people in distant coastlands. All his great deeds and the account of Mordecai's greatness and honors are written in the books of the kings of Media and Persia. Mordecai was second in rank to the king. He was highly respected by the Jews because he helped them in many ways and even spoke to the king for them.

Mordecai became the second most important person in Persia because of his honesty and character. This last chapter shows how I honored faithfulness.

I AM GOD

The Comforter

The Book of Job

The book of Job tells the amazing story of a man who held tenaciously to his integrity in the face of pain, loss, darkness and even death. Job's integrity tells its own story that a man's relationship to Me, God of the universe, is more important than anything else, even his own physical life.

The book of Job teaches its own lesson that in this world there is sickness, pain and loss. Trouble comes to the just and unjust. This story also tells that friends can give the wrong advice to those who are sick.

The book of Job deals with one of the greatest issues in life: why do bad things happen to good people?

The Book of Job was the first book written in the Bible. It represents the thoughts and logic of the early patriarchs. It is written in Hebrew poetry. It's not like English with rhyme and meter. The Hebrew writer compares the content of the first phrase with the next. Hebrew poetry matches thoughts, not rhyme, or meter.

When Job died (1516 BC), Moses was 55 years old and had already spent 15 years in the Sinai Peninsula watching his sheep. Job and Moses not only overlapped each other because they lived in the same area, they knew each other.

The fact that Job is the son of Issachar accounts for him being a worshiper of the God of Abraham and accounts for his multiple use of the term El Shaddai—translated Almighty—a name for Me, the one Abraham used in Genesis 22:14 (El Shaddai means the Lord will provide).

The first of Job's friends—Eliphaz—was a son of Esau (Gen. 36:10-11). Eliphaz was one generation older than Job. Therefore,

Eliphaz who rebuked Job was really a crotchety old uncle who thought his family ties gave him the right to criticize Job.

The second “comforter” was Bildad, probably the one mentioned as a son of Abraham and Keturah (Gen. 25:5). Bildad would have been a great uncle to Job. Bildad’s advanced age (two generations older than Job) would have explained why he was so abrupt with Job.

Zophar was the Naamathite, from Naamek six miles south of Lod, in the lowlands of Judah. He is from the area of Edom and is a descendant of Esau.

The Enemy Attacks

1 I, the LORD, will teach you from the book of Job how to deal with trouble. Job was My faithful servant living in the land of Uz.

He was blameless, upright, and he trusted in Me;
Job had seven sons and three daughters,
And his vast herds indicated he was wealthy.
He lived in a very large house
And enjoyed an extensive reputation from surrounding neighbors.

Job would pray to Me for his children and
Sacrifice in case any of them sinned against Me.
They invited their brothers and sisters
To enjoy a sumptuous feast on their birthday.
Job was concerned a child might sin against Me
So, he sacrificed for them on a regular basis.

When the angels came into My presence,
Satan came also with them.
I asked satan why he was there;

The adversary answered and said he had been examining the brethren
To determine their sincerity and godliness,
I held up Job as an example of righteousness,
But the accuser of the brethren criticized Me
For putting a protective hedge about Job.
Satan claimed Job was righteous because
He prospered and had many possessions.
Satan challenged Me to take away Job's possessions,
And he would curse Me to My face.
So I allowed satan to test Job;
To take away everything he owned,
But I wouldn't let satan harm him physically.

"Hedge," a protective shield that I put around the person who follows Me. A "hedge" begins when a person worships and serves Me, as did Job. Then I bless the person. Quickly let it be added that no "good works" can demand My blessings because some serve Me in persecution and suffering. When I place a "hedge" around My child, satan is not allowed to touch them without My permission; then only for a purpose. However, the sin or unbelief of a Christian can remove My protective hedge. The person is then open to attacks from the evil one.

A messenger arrived to tell Job an enemy-raiding party
Stole all his donkeys and oxen, then killed all the servants.
Another messenger arrived simultaneously to tell how lightning
Killed all his sheep and shepherds.
A third messenger arrived to tell how
The Chaldeans stole all the camels and killed the servants.
A fourth messenger arrived to tell that all Job's children
Were killed when they were feasting together;

A powerful tornado collapsed the house, crushing them to death.

Job's faith in Me was not shaken,

But his immense grief was evident to all.

Job cried, "Naked came I from my mother's womb,

And I shall be naked when I die.

The Lord gave me all things

And the Lord has taken all things away;

I praise the name of the Lord."

Job refused to blame Me for his trouble,

Nor did he sin in his heart against Me.

The Enemy's Second Attack

2 The enemy came into My presence again with the angels
And satan said he was still looking to accuse My people.

I pointed out Job still worshiped Me in integrity;

Even though Job lost everything, he remained faithful to Me.

Satan said, "skin for skin;" if Job lost his health

He would curse Me because of physical troubles, saying;

"A man would give up everything to save his skin."

I told satan he could take away Job's health,

Only the Enemy couldn't take away his life.

And Job was inflicted with terrible boils from head to toe,

What people of that day called black leprosy.

To get relief, Job sat in ashes to absorb the mucous

And he scraped himself with broken pottery to deal with his pain.

Job's wife tried to help him maintain his integrity;

She said, "Curse God and die."

But Job accused her of limited thinking,

“Are we to receive only from God, and reject Him when bad days or troubles come?”

In all his pain, Job did not sin with his mouth
But kept his integrity before Me.

Job’s three friends came to see him:

Eliphaz the Tamarite,
Bildad the Shu'tite,
and Zophar the Naamathite.

They could hardly recognize Job because of his affliction;
They grieved loudly and were emotionally upset.
Then they sat in silence with Job for seven days;
His suffering was too great for words.

Job’s Lament

Job is about to speak. This man who had innumerable blessings ripped from him. When Job curses the day he was born, it is not a curse against Me, nor is it a curse against his sickness. Job has lost hope in having a good life—but not hope in Me. He says, “Why is light given to a man whose way is hidden, and whom I had hedged in?” (Job 3:23). In this prayer, Job doesn’t try to analyze why he is sick; he doesn’t try to explain his conditions, nor does he assume sin brought this calamity upon him. Job’s opinion is quite different from his three friends who say I, the LORD, had punished him because of his sin, so the three friends don’t console Job in his pain, they end up criticizing him.

3 Job denounced the day of his birth
Because his life didn’t have hope that’s promised with each new baby.

Job was sorry he was conceived, and he wanted to forget
That he was born into meaningless suffering.
Job said, "Let my birthday become black, and shrouded in darkness;
Don't even let God know about it.
Let a dark cloud overshadow the events,
And erase it off the calendar so no one will remember.
Don't let anyone rejoice on my birthday
And let everyone hear words from the pessimist about how bad it is.
Don't let the morning stars give any hope to that day,
And may the sun not welcome my birth."
Job denounced the opening of his mother's womb
And the fact he was born into all this trouble.

Job asked, "Why didn't I die at birth?
Why did my mother let me live?
If I had died at birth, I wouldn't be suffering now,
But I would be at peace and resting in the grave.
I would be resting with the world's dead rulers,
Those who are famous for what they did.
I would be resting with dead wealthy people
With their enormous bank accounts and expensive possessions.
Why was I not born like a still-born baby,
Like a child that never saw the light of day?"

Job said, "In death, the wicked don't trouble anyone
And the weary of this life find rest.
Those who have been in prison no longer fight,
There's no one in the grave to accuse or to curse them.
The rich and the poor are alike in the grave,
And the slave is free from his master."

I, the LORD, give light to the miserable
And life to those who are bitter?
They search for death, but can't find it;
They look for it as the greatest treasure in life.
They think death is a blessed relief when it finally comes;
They actually shout for joy because death is a blessing.
I, the LORD, give life to those with no future;
Why are some destined to live in pain?
Job said, "I cannot eat because I continually cry and mourn,
My groans pour out like water.
The thing I feared most has happened to me;
What I dreaded now gives me pain.
I have no peace, no escape, and no quietness;
But I only see anguish and trouble in the future."

Why Believers Suffer

1. *Most physical pain and suffering are natural in human life. You get sick because of germs and exposure to bacteria, toxic material; or you come in direct contact with disease. Sometimes you eat improperly, or are exposed to adverse weather conditions, i.e., rain, extreme cold, etc. there are many things in this world that make both the righteous and ungodly suffer.*
2. *Some suffering is disciplinary; I use pain to teach lessons (2 Cor. 12:7-10) or to prepare you for greater service (Gen. 50:20).*
3. *In almost the same emphasis as above, some suffering is to teach important lessons. "Behold, happy [is] the man whom I correct; therefore do not despise chastening from Me, the Almighty" (Job 5:17). A person goes through the calisthenics of pain to become a stronger person.*

4. *Some suffering comes from the enemy—satan—to discourage or thwart you (2 Cor. 12:7; Job 1, 2).*
 5. *Sometimes I use suffering as an example to others (James 5:11).*
 6. *Some Christians suffer persecution for their faith and/or godly living (1 Pet. 4:12-19). I predicted My followers would be persecuted and suffer in many ways, even being martyred (John 16:1-4).*
 7. *Some suffering comes from your mistakes, omissions, or hardheaded obstinacy. You speed too fast resulting in an accident. You use a tool wrongly and hurt yourselves. You refuse to take medicine or take proper care of your body; i.e., My temple.*
 8. *Sometimes you suffer because you are being punished by Me. Sin has consequences, and those who violate My principles suffer pain, loss, or physical damage; not to mention, psychological and social embarrassment (Gal. 6:7, 8; 1 Cor. 11:30-32).*
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Eliphaz's First Counsel

Eliphaz was a son of Esau (Gen. 36:10-11), and was the old uncle who visited a distant nephew—Job. When Eliphaz sees Job's wretched condition and that he has become an outcast, suffering from elephantiasis, also called during that day "black leprosy." This was a disease that made a person a social outcast and traditionally people of that day believed it was caused by the sin of the victim. Eliphaz believed that Job's sickness was nothing but My immediate judgment upon him.

Eliphaz was so "shaken" by the sight of Job that he sat for seven days without saying anything. He was probably debating in his mind how he should respond to Job. Usually, comforters come to bless those who are sick, but Eliphaz rationalizes, "How can I bless Job?" If Eliphaz blessed Job, he would be taking sides with the Evil One. So it was Eliphaz's duty to condemn Job and forget about

giving any sympathy. The way Eliphaz condemns Job is how many people feel about sickness.

Eliphaz claims that his wisdom is the result of ages of thought and experience (15:17-19) and that he has spent his life in study to learn these things (5:27).

Eliphaz also claims that his opinion about Job is right because he had a revelation, i.e., a vision (4:12). Eliphaz is arguing that I, the LORD, told him in a vision that Job was wrong.

Finally, Eliphaz uses logic, arguing from effect back to cause. He tells Job that his impurity and sin are the cause of all his troubles (4:7-11). Eliphaz wants Job to be quiet rather than expressing his wrath and anger (5:2, 3; 6:2, 3; 30:24). In conclusion, Eliphaz promises that Job will be restored as soon as he repents and submits to My will.

At the end, Eliphaz does not have any human feelings for Job; rather, he can only criticize his nephew.

4 Eliphaz finally spoke to Job after seven days
Because it took him that long to arrive at what he would say.

Eliphaz said, "If I tell you what's wrong, you will get mad

Yet, I can't keep my opinion to myself.

Job, you have given moral instruction to many;

You have strengthened feeble hands.

You have strengthened those who were faltering

But now misfortune has come to you,

And you are surprised.

Shouldn't you trust God the One you fear?

And shouldn't your integrity be your hope?"

Eliphaz told Job to think about the reasons

That may have caused his trouble.

Think about how God always judges sin,

How God even destroys the guiltless.
Those who plough sin in their life
Reap the whirlwind of God's punishment.
The guilty perish, judged by God's breath;
At the blast of His anger, they are consumed.
The lions may growl, the young lions roar,
And the old lion's teeth are broken;
But lions scatter when there is no prey,
And God would not have judged you if you had not sinned.

Eliphaz claimed to have a vision,
As he said, "A word was brought to me silently,
My ears caught only a whisper of the message.
I received a vision in the night,
It came to me when other people were sleeping.
I was scared-to-death when I saw the vision
And my bones shook uncontrollably in fear.
A spirit passed in front of my face
And the hairs on my skin stood up.
It stopped in front of me, but I couldn't discern it;
There was a shadow without form.

"Then I heard the voice speak to me,
'Can a human man be more righteous than God?
Can a human stand pure before God, the Creator?'
I know every one of God's servants is a sinner,
Even the angels are not perfect.
How much more sinful are those who live in houses of clay?
They are all created out of dust.
They are crushed as easily as a worm;

They can be destroyed between sunrise and sunset.
They perish forever, and no one notices;
They die ignorantly not realizing
Their sin has caused their death.”

Eliphaz told Job he had pain because of his sin,
“Yell for help, but no one will come to you.
You can turn to the angels,
But they won’t help you.
Resentment kills those who won’t listen to counsel
And arrogance destroys the ignorant.”

Eliphaz told Job that even a fool could turn to God
And have momentary success and prosperity
Just as Job had temporary wealth but lost it all.
The children of fools have no one to help them;
They lost their money, possessions, and reputation.
Evil doesn’t come from the ground
And trouble doesn’t come from the earth.
No, people are born to cause trouble and problems
Just as surely as sparks fly upwards.

Eliphaz told Job, “Beg God for forgiveness for your sin;
Humbly present your case before God
For He is more compassionate than you understand;
He performs wondrous things without number.
He gives rain to the thirsty fields,
He sent water to grow your crops.
He raised up those who are humble,
And lifts those who mourn to safety;
And He will do the same for you—Job.

But He frustrated the plans of the devious
So that they fail with their schemes.
He catches the deceiver in his own trap
And works their plans against them;
You are guilty because you are being judged.
Schemers grope in the sunlight as though they were blind;
They see no better in the daylight than in darkness.
God rescues the poor from the enticing words of schemers
And saves them from their snares.
God gives hope to the poor
But He breaks the fangs of the wicked.”

El Shaddai

One of the favorite names for Me in this book is El Shaddai. I first revealed My name, El Shaddai, to Abraham (Gen. 17:1) and was My primary name for Me until Exodus 6:3 when the name LORD (Jehovah) became My predominant name.

The root to Shaddai is shad which means breast. It shows a child getting nourishment and comfort from a mother's breast. So, El Shaddai means I satisfy and comfort. I reminded Job in his darkest hour of suffering that I would refresh Job and see him through his trials.

El Shaddai also reflects the strong chest of a man to protect and provide for His people. The name is translated Almighty in the King James and shows how I strengthen My children. The name El Shaddai occurs 31 times in Job, reflecting I am your all-sufficient source when you suffer.

5 Eliphaz told Job he would be happy if he repented,
“Happy is the one whom God corrects,

So don't despise the punishment of El Shaddai.
Because God gives both wounds and He gives bandages,
God strikes but also heals.
God will rescue you again and again
So that no evil can harm you.
God will save you from six disasters;
Yes, God will deliver you from seven so you're not harmed.
God will save you from death in famine
And from the sword in time of war.
He will protect you from slander
And you won't fear when destruction comes.
You will laugh at judgment
And wild animals will not scare you.
Your crops will prosper and give a good harvest;
God will shield you from evil threats.
Your home will be safe
And when you go away, nothing will be stolen from you.
You will live to a ripe old age
And you will not die before your appointed time."

Eliphaz told Job to listen to his advice,

Repent of his sin that caused his troubles and turn to God with all his heart.

Then God would restore his prosperity
And again bless his life.

Job's Answer to Eliphaz

This is Job's first defense against his three accusers. Up until now Job probably didn't know how they would attempt to console him. But Eliphaz deduced that Job is suffering because he had sinned. Job rejects that accusation. Job accuses Eliphaz of being insipid, trivial and not sincere. Job says that Eliphaz has a false view of Me.

Job says their effort is like "flavorless food," the white of an egg, and Eliphaz's consolation makes him lose his appetite (6:6-7). Second, Job says their criticism is so painful that it makes him want to die rather than go on living (6:8-13). Eliphaz has not encouraged Job to overcome his troubles, nor even to endure his pain, but Eliphaz has accelerated a death wish. In the third place, Job feels he can't even trust himself. "[Is] my help not within me? And is success driven from me?" (6:13).

The thing that most bitters Job is that the friends on whom he has counted for support are deceitful like a dried up brook (waddi). Instead of giving life-giving water, they make him want to die (6:15-21).

Job notices they are not using honest words, for he asked, "How forceful are right words! But what does your arguing prove?" (6:25). They are not sensitive to his sickness, nor are they sympathizing with Job but using him for their cold, calculated purposes (6:27).

Job tries to tell his friends that the severity of his punishment is out of proportion with the integrity of his life, but they will not listen to him. Job tells them he has no hope, and that when he lies down to sleep, he looks for the dawn; and with the rising sun, he looks to go to sleep the next night" (7:3-4). He then ends up by describing how terribly painful is his physical torment.

From this point on, Job will pay little attention to what they say. As a result, Job's comforters will become more exaggerated in their statements to him and rather than offering help and comfort. The chasm will grow wider throughout the book.

"If my troubles could be weighed

And my difficulties stacked on a scale,

6 They would be heavier than the sand of the seashore.
No wonder my words came out rashly
And I speak so harshly;
The arrows—from El Shaddai—have pierced my heart.
I have been poisoned by my calamities
And my fate is worse than death.”

Job asked a question,

“Does an animal bray when it has enough food?
Can food be enjoyed without salt?
Do egg whites have any taste?”
Job draws the conclusion, “No!”
These things caused Job to lose his appetite
Just as Job’s troubles took away his desire to live.

Job told his friends he has only one desire,
That I, the LORD, would take away his life
Then Job would feel consoled
Because that would end his unending pain.
Then Job said he would be able to rejoice
Knowing he hadn’t denied Me—the Holy One.
Job asked, “Do I have enough strength to keep suffering?
Do I have any hope to keep enduring my troubles?
Can my body throw off storms like a rock?
Am I made of bronze to blunt attacks?”
Job answers his own hypothetical question,
“No! I am utterly defenseless.”
Job told his accuser,
“You should be kind to someone in trouble.

But you are as unreliable as a flood of water
That runs dry when you run out of words to say.
You're like ice that dams up the streams;
You'll vanish when the hot weather arrives.
When desert travelers come to drink of you,
They'll die in the sweltering wilderness
Because you have no water to give those in trouble.
You have become a dry waddi without life-giving water,
You saw my calamity and gave me no hope or comfort;
You have heaped trouble upon my trouble.”

Job turned to rebuke his friends,

“Did I ever ask you to give money to help me?
Did I ever ask you to save me from the enemy?”

Job told Eliphaz, “I want a straight answer:
Tell me what I have done wrong;
List the sins you say I've committed.”

Job explains, “If you speak honest words, they'll be forceful,
But your speech doesn't convince me of anything
Because you didn't listen to my cry for help.

I have not sinned, and that is the truth;
Would I lie to your face
Especially when I'm in this terrible torment?

Quit telling me I'm guilty of sin,
I've lived by my conscience before my God.”

Job's Answer Continued

Job told Eliphaz,

7 “Life is like serving in the army,
Life is long and hard, and it’s a struggle to stay alive.
Life is like working all day for wages,
My life’s work is drudgery and futility;
I don’t have hope for wages, only more pain, and trouble.
When I go to bed, I only hope for the morning;
When the sun comes up, I only hope to sleep at night.
My skin is full of worms and poison;
When a scab breaks open, pus runs out.
My days fly swifter than a hand weaving loom,
Each day ends without hope.
My life is just one breath at a time;
I will never see good times again.
You see me now, but not for long;
Pretty soon I’ll die and pass on
And my life will not come back.
I’m like a passing cloud, gone forever,
Never to be seen again.”

Job spoke harshly against his accuser,

“I cannot keep quiet while you complain;
I’m not some type of monster you have to guard
But I am bitter at what you’ve said.
I try to get some relief by sleeping,
But your vision scared me to death;
I don’t think God was speaking by your vision.
I’d rather die than have you comfort me,
So, leave me alone!”

Job asked his tormentor,

“What is a man that you should care about him?

You come here every morning looking for my sin.

You analyze every word I speak looking for mistakes;

Leave me alone, just for a few minutes.

Why is my sin so important to you?

What have I done to make you attack me?

Why have you come to make my troubles more unbearable?

Why don't you just forgive my sin?

If you think I've committed sins, you haven't seen,

Wouldn't your forgiveness help take away my pain?

But no, you keep accusing me of sins I haven't committed;

Someday I'll die and be buried in the ground.

You'll look for me, but I will be gone.”

Bildad's First Counsel

Bildad is the second of Job's three friends and is a Shuhite, coming from the area of Shuhan, named for another of the sons of Keturah (Gen. 25:2). Being Abraham's descendent, Bildad, would have known My people and become acquainted with Job. Family members tend to know their rich relatives. Bildad was the great uncle to his “rich” nephew, Job.

Bildad's three speeches are contained in Job 8, 18, and 25. The content of his speeches is largely an echo of what Eliphaz said, but he somewhat increases the vehemency (Job 8:2; 18:3, 4), because he accuses Job of being wrathful and revengeful in the things he is saying.

While Eliphaz implies Job is a sinner, Bildad attributes Job's calamity to his wickedness, and suggests indirectly that his children

were destroyed as a punishment of their sin (Job 8:4).

While Eliphaz appealed to logic and the vision he claimed he had from Me, Bildad seems to appeal to tradition (8:8-10). He also emphasized the precarious state of the wicked that they are always on the edge of judgment: implying that's where Job is located.

8 Bildad began speaking sarcastically,

“How long will you huff and puff?

Does God twist the truth?

Does the Almighty turn wrong into right?

Your children were guilty of sin against God

So they deserved the punishment they got.

If you will earnestly seek God,

If you will beg for His favor,

If you will live a pure, honest life,

God will restore your home and family.

Even though your beginning was small,

Your end can be great.”

Bildad appealed to tradition to make his point,

“Ask the previous generations what is right,

Listen to the wisdom you can learn from tradition.

Those who were born yesterday know very little,

Their days are like a passing shadow.

The ancient elders will tell you the truth;

They will not be reluctant to tell what is wrong.

(The elderly Bildad claims to know the truth).

Can marsh grasses grow where there is no water?

Can bulrushes live in dry sand?

No—they die if there is no water to keep them alive,
And you are dying because you've denied the truth of God.

“The godless have no hope because of their sin,
Everything they count on will crumble;
They are trusting spider webs to hold them up.

The godless think their home is secure
Trying to hold on to their houses,
But the ungodly will eventually lose everything.
Job, that's why you lost your possessions and home,
You are guilty of hidden iniquity.

The ungodly seem to be strong like a mighty tree
That prospers in the sunshine
And spreads its branches out over the ground.
Its roots go down through the rocks to give it strength
But it's forgotten when it's cut down.
Job, that's a picture of your destiny
When you're cut down, no one will miss you;
Another tree will grow to replace you.”

Bildad offers his view of hope after condemning job.

“God will not reject a blameless man,
Nor will He prosper one who sins against Him.
God can give you laughter again,
Your lips can sing praises and shout for joy.
Then those who have criticized you will be embarrassed
And you will be vindicated anew.”

Job's Answer to Bildad

Job begins his answer to Bildad with a question, “How should man be just with God?” (9:2, KJV). Job is suggesting Bildad can’t answer this question. Then Job said he is blameless; the word Job used is “integrity.”

Job never questions My existence (9:4-10), his question has to do with whether I have dealt rightly with him (9:12-14). This question by Job is often asked by those in pain, “Why am I suffering?” Pain and suffering don’t come from Me, I only allow it. Pain comes from our finite body that will eventually die, probably in pain. Pain may come from internal disease, or from external viciousness of other humans.

Job says he would like to summon Me into court (9:15, 16) to ask, “Why am I suffering?” Yet Job knows, “If I justify myself, mine own mouth would condemn me” (9:20).

So Job says pain comes on all, “You cannot judge one’s moral quality by his outer appearance” (9:22-24). Finally, Job knows suffering is universal because he sees others suffering like himself.

Job says life is like a runner (9:25), a ship (9:26), an eagle that kills its prey (9:26). These illustrate that life is brief, precarious, and cruel.

Job wearily maintains his innocence, “You know that I am not wicked” (10:7). Yet Job complains that I have “hunted him down as a fierce lion” (10:16, KJV).

9 Job admitted the truth of fallen humanity;
How can anyone declare he is perfect before Me?
Job said, “If I could answer God in a courtroom,
I could never claim to be perfect in His sight.
God’s choices are wise; God’s ability is mighty,
No one could ever successfully challenge Him.
God moves mountains without asking anyone,
They quake because He speaks.
God shakes the earth according to His will;

The foundations tremble.
God could command the sun not to shine
And the stars not to shine.
God alone spread the hemisphere in creation,
He alone can walk on the waves of the sea.
God created the stars—the Great Bear, Orion, the Pleiades;
He made the constellations we can't see.
God's purpose in creation is unsearchable,
We can't count all the things He has done.”
I, the LORD, am omnipotently powerful, yet no one can see Me;
Job agreed, “Yet I can't see the Creator
Nor recognize Him when He passes by.”
I send death to take people away
And no one asks, “What are You doing?”
I do not withdraw My anger;
The mightiest contenders are crushed by Me.

I, the LORD, am greater than you can comprehend;
Job said, “How can I answer God?
How can I argue with God?
Even when I have my integrity
I wouldn't try to answer God;
I would throw myself on His mercy.
Even if I summoned God to the courtroom
He wouldn't listen to my plea of innocence.
God could break me with a storm,
He doesn't need a reason to wound me.
I wouldn't even have time to catch my breath
For God could send the sorrows of this life.
If it's a matter of omnipotent power,

God can do it all.
If it's a matter of justice,
I can't challenge Him.
Even if I proclaim my innocence,
I fall short of God's standards.
Even if I said, 'I am innocent,'
It means I don't really know my own heart.
So the story of life is very simple:
The wicked have troubles just like the innocent;
Life is the same for all God's creatures.
When disaster suddenly brings death,
The innocent along with the wicked dies.
Yet, this life is controlled by wicked people
And God lets them do what they want;
He lets them break every law."
Life is finite,
And life isn't fair.
Job said life is like three things:
"Life goes by swiftly like a sprint runner,
Life comes apart like a boat made of reeds,
Life swoops down to eat you up like a hungry eagle,
Life is brief, precarious, and cruel."
Job said, "If I decide to stop complaining
And start living as though nothing is wrong,
I'll still suffer from my pain,
And I'll know I'm not perfect in 'God's sight.'
I'd be condemned by a perfect God,
So why should I keep quiet and act like normal people?
Even if I washed myself in newly fallen snow
And scrubbed my hands with lye,

I'd probably fall into a muddy ditch
And I'd be filthy again."

Job admitted, "God is not a human
So he couldn't argue with Him in a trial.
If only I had a mediator to plead my case
Who could bring me to God;
But in this life there is none.
I need a mediator to deal with my punishment
Then I could speak to God without fear,
But I can't do it in my strength."

Job's Weariness

10 You sometimes get tired of all your struggles;
Job agreed, "I am worn out
So I keep complaining.
I want to tell God, 'Don't keep punishing me,
Let me know what I've done wrong.'
Is there a purpose to my suffering?
What advantage is there in my pain?
God, why do You allow me such agony
And You let the wicked have a good life?
You made me who I am.
God, You see me as others see me;
Can You feel for me as other mortals?
Why do You ignore my pain
As others in life don't care about my suffering?
God, You know I am not guilty
Yet, there is no relief for my agony."

Job said, “God You formed me with Your hands,
You can destroy me when You want.
God, You formed me from the dust of the ground
And one day I’ll return to dust.
God, You were present when I was conceived,
You saw me become skin and bones.
God, by Your grace, You gave me life;
You preserved me to this minute.
Yet, You had plans for me I didn’t know about,
You watch to see if I’ll sin against You
And You’re ready to punish me when I sin.
If I have sinned against You
Then I deserve my suffering.
But I know I am innocent,
Yet I still suffer in pain.
I can stand before You blameless
Because I know I have lived in integrity.
Yet, You allow pain to hunt me like a tiger,
Pain is one way Your power is shown.
I can’t get away from my predicament;
My pain keeps growing
Like troops attacking me, wave after wave.”

Job questioned, “God why was I brought from the womb?
Why didn’t You let me die at birth
Then I wouldn’t have this suffering.
Could I have gone from the womb to death?
I only have a little time left
So I want you false comforters to leave me alone
And go away.

When you leave, I'll be happier
Before I go to my grave.
It is a land that is dark as night itself
Where even the light is black like midnight.”

Zophar's First Counsel

Zophar, the youngest of the three friends, is called “the Nammathite” (2:11). He is from Naaneh, six miles south of Lod, in Judah's Negev Desert. He has the youthful attributes of sarcasm and bitter criticism. Zophar thinks Job is disrespectful of Me, i.e., a complaining old man.

Zophar doesn't bother with an introduction, perhaps because his two friends, Eliphaz and Bildad, have already spoken. Zophar doesn't cite a night vision like Eliphaz, nor does he appeal to tradition like Bildad; he uses worldly wisdom and common sense to condemn Job.

Zophar is a dogmatist. Everything is either right or wrong, black or white. So he assumes Job is not innocent but guilty.

11 Zophar jumped into his accusation,
“Job, you talk too much;
I can't remain silent while you babble on,
No one is ever proven innocent by much talking.
Is your ceaseless talking supposed to shut us up?
You ought to be ashamed for mocking God.
You claim your words are right,
You tell God you are upright in your heart.
I wish God would talk so He would answer you;
He would tell you what is right.
Doesn't that make common sense to you?

God is punishing you for your guilt;
Your suffering is less than you deserve.

“Can you understand the depths of God?
Can you discover the mysteries of El Shaddai?
God’s ways are higher than the heavens,
His purposes are deeper than hell.
God’s plans are wider than the universe
And broader than the seas.
If God allows a person to be called in judgment
Of if He allows one to be put into prison,
Who can stop Him?
God knows those who are not true;
He writes a record of their sins
So God knows your heart, Job.”

For Zophar said, “No human knows everything
Any more than a donkey can give birth to a man.
If you will straighten out Your heart before God,
If you will lift your hands to Him,
If you will repent of your iniquity,
And quit living in a house of sin,
Then, when you seek God, you will find Him
And you will be free from your pain.
Then your misery will finally come to an end
Like a flood, your troubles will pass away.
Your life will be bright like the sun
And your darkness will be like the morning.
You will have courage because there is hope
And you can sleep securely.

Many will come again to seek your advice
But the wicked will not listen to you.
The wicked have no hope;
They have nothing but despair.”

Job’s Answer to Zophar

Job doesn’t single out Zophar in his answer, but Job speaks to all three of his counselors because each has had their say. So Job answers them sarcastically, “I realize you (all) know everything” (Job 12:2, LB). Then Job boasts, “I know a few things myself—you are no better than I am” (Job 12:3, author’s translation). But then Job lapses back into self-pity, “I am one mocked” (Job 12:4).

In chapter 12:7-25 Job repeats what the friends said about Me, proving his belief in Me is not the problem. Job has never doubted My power, so Job gives his own views of Me (Job 12:13-25).

At the beginning of chapter 13 Job defends himself, “I am not inferior to you” (Job 13:2). Job says his friends have not said any new thing and they’ve failed miserably to find out what is his problem.

Job turns his attention to Me (Job 13:13-28) and makes a faith-statement, “Though I slay him, yet will he trust in Me” (Job 13:15).

12 Then Job answered his three friends,
“You think you know everything
And that all wisdom will die with you.
I can think rationally, and I know a lot of things;
You three are no better off than I am.
Everyone knows what I’ve been saying all along;
I ask God for help in my suffering
But I’ve become a laughing stock to them.

Yes, I have kept my integrity before God
And people ridicule and mock me.
The rich ridicule those in trouble
And despise the poor because they have nothing;
Yet, in spite of their prejudice, the rich prosper.
The thief also prospers,
Even those who despise God prosper.
So the three of you are wrong,
A person doesn't have to be righteous to prosper;
You provoked God with your silly talk.
Go ahead, ask the dumbest animal,
Then study the birds flying in the sky;
Also, look at the fish of the sea.
Every one of them knows
God's hand has created everything.
Just as my mouth knows what food it tastes,
So my mind knows the truth it hears.
Older men—like me—may be wise,
But all true wisdom comes from God;
He alone knows what we should do.
God has great strength;
When He destroys something,
No one is able to rebuild it.
When God withholds the rain,
The earth becomes a desert.
When God sends the rain,
A flood destroys all within its path.
When God limits a man,
He cannot escape.
With God is all wisdom and all strength;

He does what He wills with deceivers and the deceived.
God can take away the good judgment of counselors
So that their decisions are illogical.
God can take away the judgments of kings
So that their office is taken from them.
God can disgrace the strong men of the king
And take away their weapons in which they trust.
God can silence the trusted counselors
Which He should do with your three comforters.”

Job said,
“God makes light to overcome darkness
And God shines light in the blindness of men.
God lifts nations, and God puts them down;
God lets nations conquer, and God lets them collapse.
God takes away the wisdom of leaders
So they stagger in the wilderness without a path.
They search for light in the darkness
And stumble as a drunkard.”

Job’s Faith in Me, His God

In Chapter 13 Job directs the attention of his three friends toward Me, just as he did at the end of Chapter 12. But in this chapter, Job expresses his faith in Me.

13 Job said, “I have seen the things You describe
So I know what you are trying to do to me.
I have as much learning as you do;
You are not wiser than I am.

I want to talk directly to El Shaddai,
I want to explain to Him my case;
Apparently you three have not understood my case.
You are telling me things that are not true;
As teachers, you have failed the course you teach.
Keep quiet, and don't show your ignorance;
Listen to what I have to say.”

Job focused his friends on Me.
“Don't try to defend God with your counsel
Because you are dishonest, you don't tell the truth.
You should be objective when talking about God,
But you twist the truth about Him,
Giving your false interpretation of El Shaddai.
You think you are presenting the truth from God;
Be careful God doesn't find out the errors you're saying.
You cannot mislead God like you try to mislead me.
You will be judged by God for your hypocrisy.
Doesn't the thought of a holy God scare you?
Be careful God doesn't judge you for your slander.
Your arguments are like burned-out ashes
Blown away by the wind.
Your reasoning has crumbled
Like a broken clay pot that shatters into pieces.”

Job told his comforters, “Be quiet.
I will tell you the truth as it is,
And I will take my punishment
If I am wrong and you are right.
I will stand on my faith in God;

I am ready for what comes my way.
I will take responsibility for my life
 But I'll believe and say what I think.
Though God may slay me,
 Yet I will trust Him
 And I will affirm my faith in God.
God is my salvation
 But you hypocrites will be judged by Him.
In my integrity, I believe in God;
 If I were not, He'd cast me out of His presence."

Job told his three counselors, "Hear me out,
 I will prove my innocence.
You haven't proved me wrong;
 I would keep silent if you did."

Job's prayer,

"O God I want You to do two things for me;
 First, remove your hand of affliction from me
 And don't torment me with this suffering.
Second, invite me into Your presence
 So You will see my faith and integrity.
If I have done anything wrong,
 Show me my sin and transgression.
Why have You hidden Your face from me?
 Why have You treated me like an outcast?
I am as worthless as a dry leaf or as dead grass;
 Why am I suffering?
My feet are chained, and I am in prison;

I am afflicted with this torture.
I am as useless as rotten wood;
I am like a moth-eaten coat.”

Suffering

14 Job said, “Those born of a woman only have a few days,
And their life is filled with suffering.
We are born with the beauty of a new flower
But quickly we are cut down and die.
We are like shadows that creep across the ground,
Then we disappear as though we had not been here.”

Job said, “You three friends know life is frail,
What more do you expect of me?
Those born in iniquity cannot be perfect,
So I’m not sinless, but I can live without blame.
You, Lord, have determined the years we should live,
And You know when we will die;
We will not live longer than You decree.

“So give me a little room to be human
And quit looking at me as though I’m guilty.
We are all employees of God;
Let’s finish the task He’s given us in life.
When a tree is cut down
The roots can sprout again.
But there must be water to give it life
So it can grow into a new tree.
When a person breathes his last and dies

Where are they when their life is gone?
As water evaporates in the hot sun
And as a steam disappears when there is no rain,
So a person dies, is buried and is gone.
They will not awake or return from the grave
Until heaven passes away
And the resurrection gives them new life.
And keep me there until the resurrection
So I can rid myself of this agony.
I know God has an appointed time for me to die
And I am ready to go,
But think of me in the final day.
Because righteous mortals die, so they can live again,
This gives me hope in suffering and death.
When You call for me in death, I will answer;
Then You'll know my integrity
And my sin will no longer be a question.
When mountains crumble, and rocks tumble,
When water wears away the stone, and the earth erodes,
Then the hope of the resurrection comes.”

I, the LORD, let death overtake all people
And the body rots away to nothing.
In death, no one knows what happens to their children,
They leave this earth in pain and grief.

Eliphaz's Second Response

Eliphaz is irritated because he feels Job is blasphemous against Me (15:4). He says that every time Job speaks, he reflects the sin in his

heart (15:4, 5) and since no man is completely cured, Job should confess that he is a sinner and take responsibility for all his sickness (14:15). Eliphaz says Job will continue to suffer because he refuses to admit that he is a sinner.

15 Eliphaz sarcastically answered Job,
“If you are as wise as you claim,
Why are your words so foolish?
You are full of the east wind that is hot air.
What good is all your talking
When you don’t know what you’re saying?
You have no fear of God
And you don’t know how to pray to God.
You are justifying your sin
And you deceive yourself.
I don’t have to condemn you,
Your speech proves you are guilty.”
Job had to listen to Eliphaz,
Eliphaz asked if Job were the first person born,
Or if he was born before the hills were created.

“Do you think God speaks only to you?
Do you think you’re smarter than everyone?
What insights do you think you have
And what do you know that we don’t?
The three of us are older and wiser than you;
We are older than your father.
Why don’t you respect us and listen to us
As you would your father?”

Eliphaz asked, “Why don’t you let God comfort you;

Are you hiding a secret sin?
What has blinded you to the truth?
Why are you looking the other way?
Your stupid words and arguments prove
You have turned against God.
What person goes through life without sinning
And who is perfect and righteous?
Even the heavens are not clean;
God can't even trust His angels.
So how much more corrupt is a sinful person
Who always seeks his selfish pleasures?"

Because Eliphaz had more experience,
He demanded Job should listen to him.
"Wise people have been my teachers
And they learned their wisdom from their fathers.
God gave the earth to our forefathers
Not to these strangers who are moving in."
Eliphaz falsely accused Job
Of suffering in pain because of his sin.

"Wicked people are tortured in this life,
They are scared to death all the time;
Even in prosperity, they fear the Destroyer."
Wicked people are scared of the darkness,
They think they'll be killed.
They are always hanging on to their money
Thinking they'll end up in poverty.
They know the darkness of death is coming
So they are constantly terrified.

They clench their teeth at God
And dare the Almighty to judge them.
With their fleshly weapons of war,
They want to fight against God.
Job, you are that foolish man
Who won't admit he's wrong;
You are fighting against God."

Eliphaz criticizes Job because he lost everything,

"Wicked rich people blind themselves with money
And think it will protect them.
But their houses crash in around them
And the world they build also collapses,
As did your wealth disappear.
The wicked rich will not endure;
Their money will slip through their fingers
And their possessions will disappear.
They can't escape darkness;
The flames will lick about them
And the breath of God will destroy them.
They are deceived who trust in self-effort,
They are only fooling themselves;
They have no reward beyond the grave.
The wicked shall die before they are ready;
What will his possessions do for him then?
They shall be like green grapes
Picked too early, only to spoil.
They shall be like an olive tree
That sheds its flowers

So no olives grow on the tree.
The ungodly will not have anything in death
Because the flames will burn everything up
Just as you—Job—have lost everything.
Evil people think up evil to satisfy their flesh,
It all comes out of an evil heart;
That’s your problem, Job.”

Job’s Second Answer to Eliphaz

Job exchanges insults with his three friends. They say Job is a sinner; he says, “What miserable comforters you are” (16:2). Job is not looking for their pity; he wants them to feel his righteous indignation because he feels an injustice has been done to him. But injustice comes from satan himself.

16 Job told Eliphaz, “I’ve heard this stuff before,
You’re a bunch of lousy comforters.
Is there no end to your constant criticism?
What motivates you to keep up your attacks?
I could criticize you if I were in your place;
Also, I could describe your sin eloquently
Or share my negative opinion of you.

“But that’s not what I would do;
I would say things to help you,
I would try to ease your grief.
But you three counselors haven’t helped me,
I still am grieving over my loss;
It doesn’t help when I have to defend myself.”

Job told his critics, “You have stomped on me
And said I have destroyed my family
Because of my sin.

You say I am a skeleton, just skin, and bones
Which proves I am a sinner.

You say God hates me;
He’s eating me alive
And is tearing me apart because of my sin.”

Job told his critics,

“Everyone laughs and makes fun of me,
They constantly take jabs at me.

Everyone has turned against me,
They say God has thrown me to the dogs
And delivered me into the hands of the executioner.

In my integrity I know I have not sinned
But I don’t understand why I’m suffering.”

Job said, “I was minding my own business
Yet God allowed the Destroyer to attack me.

I became a target for the Evil One
Who attacked me with a vengeance;
My blood spilled on the ground.

He attacked me again and again
With an unrelenting assault.

Now I sit in sackcloth and ashes,
My body is ravished with pain.

My face is tired of weeping
And my black eyes look like I’m dying.

Yet, my hands are free from violence
And my prayer is pure.”

Job prayed in the valley of the shadow of death,

“The grave hasn’t covered me yet;

I’m not dead,

I’m still continually praying for a miracle.

Everyone in heaven knows my good witness

And I need an intercessor before the throne

Pleading my case before God.

But my three friends don’t pray or plead for me,

Even when I ask sincerely for their help with tears.

I need an arbitrator between me and God

As a man pleads for his neighbor.”

Help Me!

17 Job prayed, “My spirit is broken
And I’m about to die.

These three mockers sit all around me

And I can see bitterness in their eyes.

You must defend me, O God,

Because no one else will take my side.

The minds of my three friends are blinded to the truth;

Don’t let them get the best of me.

They have flattered me to my face

But their angry hearts denounce me;

Their children will be just as blind.”

Job said, “God, why have You let people mock me

And spit in my face?
I am almost blinded with my tears
And I'm a skinny bag of bones.
The upright are angry because of what's happened to me;
The average person is angry at my three friends.
The righteous people will still believe in You
And those with clean hands will grow in spirit.”

Job told his three critics,

“Turn around and look at me,
I don't see an honest man among you.
My days are almost over,
And my life-dreams are crushed.
You critics don't know the difference between night and day;
You are blinded to the truth.
You say light is coming
But I'm going to a dark grave.
I might as well call the grave my home
And the worms my provider.
Where then is my hope in this pain?
Who can find some hope to give me in this world?
Will you three comforters follow me into the grave
To see if I have found my hope?”

Bildad's Second Speech

Bildad doesn't begin kindly, and he ignores Job's plea in the last chapter for sympathy. Bildad lashes out at Job, "How long till you put an end to words?" (18:2). He accuses Job of insulting the

intelligence of his three counselors. Then Bildad continues calling Job a sinner, giving a severe picture of those who refuse to repent, "He is driven from light into darkness, and chased out of the world" (18:18).

18 Bildad attacked Job asking,
 "How long will you keep justifying yourself?
 When you wise up, we'll talk.
Do you think your three counselors
 Are as stupid as dumb animals?
You can split hairs all you want,
 But you won't change anything on earth;
 Not one rock will be moved.
It's still clear; the light of the wicked goes out
 And sparks in a fire will die;
 And you, Job, are being punished for your sin.
The lamp in your house will go out
 And glowing embers in your fireplace will become black.
Your wickedness will destroy your confident swagger
 And your scheme will collapse.

"You, like the wicked, will be ensnared in a trap;
 A rope will grab you by your foot,
 When the noose tightens, you'll not get away.
Dangers surround the sinner on every side;
 It's waiting to eat you alive.
Suffering wants to make a meal of you;
 Destruction will consume the sinner.
Disease already is eating your skin
 And death is gradually devouring you.
All your arguments will be ripped to shreds

And you'll be dragged terrified before the destroyer.
Strangers will live in your earthly home
But you'll be like ashes, burning in brimstone and sulfur.
"Your roots below will dry up and rot,
Your branches above will wither.
All memory of you will be erased,
No one will even know you ever lived.
You will be thrown out of the light
And you'll be cast into eternal darkness.
You will not have a son or posterity,
Your line will be snuffed out.
People in the West are astonished at your fate,
People in the East are horrified.
Everyone will remember you were a wicked man,
They will say you rebelled against God."

Job's Reply to Bildad's Second Attack

Job continues his defense that he made previously. To Job, their attitude is incomprehensible. He strongly defends his innocence.

19 Job robustly defended himself saying,

"How long will you irritate me?
How long will you keep up your attacks?
You've assaulted me ten times with your accusations,
You ought to be ashamed of yourselves.
Even if I've got hidden sin
That is none of your business.

You've taken a pious attitude about my suffering
And you use my suffering to prove your point.
It's not my sin that's done this to me,
It's all within God's sovereignty;
He's put me in this hole for a reason."

Job cried out, "When I yell for help
No one seems to hear me;
Life is not fair.
God has me pinned up behind a fence,
It's too dark to see any escape route.
God has stripped me of my position and respect,
He's taken away all the authority I had.
God has broken down all my defenses,
He has uprooted me like a tree;
It is finished, I have no hope.
God seems to be angry with me;
He treats me like an enemy
And sends attackers to destroy me."

Job prayed, "God has kept my brothers
From helping me in my troubles;
He won't let my friends come to my rescue.
My relatives have let me down,
My close friends have forsaken me.
Those living in my house treat me like a stranger,
My servants won't even attend to me.
When I call for my staff,
They won't come
Even when I beg for help.

My wife rejects me because I have bad breath,
My sores are repulsive to children,
And they laugh at me.
All my close friends turn their backs on me,
Those I love have turned away.
I'm nothing more than skin and bones,
I stay alive by the skin of my teeth."

Job asked his three friends for help,

"I need your comfort, not your criticism,
Why are you causing me grief?
Hasn't God given me enough grief?
I wish my defense were written in a book
Or carved on a monument
So everyone would know eternally.
Oh, that everyone would realize I trust God;
I know that my Redeemer lives
And that in the resurrection I'll stand on this earth.
After my body decays in the grave,
In my flesh, I'll see God.
I'll stand before God and see Him with my eyes;
This is my only hope.
If you keep accusing me of evil
You three will suffer the punishment
That you wish for me."

Zophar's Second Speech

Zophar ignores the lofty statement of faith by Job, “I know my Redeemer lives.” Zophar thinks the only thing Job has done is to insult him. “I have had to endure your insults” (20:3, NLT). So Zophar replies, “But now my spirit prompts me to reply” (20:5). Zophar still thinks Job had his wealth taken from him because he is wicked. Then Zophar concludes Job “will perish forever like his own refuse” (20:7).

20 Zophar ignored Job when he said,
“You make me angry with your rebuttals
I’ve endured your drivel long enough;
Now I’m going to tell you what I really think.
Don’t you know that from the very beginning
The wicked prosper for only a short time?
Just as you prospered but lost everything,
The ungodly are not happy very long.
The wicked man thinks he is the biggest thing in the world,
He thinks his head reaches to heaven.
But the ungodly disappears like garbage;
His friends ask, ‘Where did he go?’
He is like a night dream that is forgotten,
Like a thought that is fleeting;
No one will see him anymore.
His children will beg for food,
They will have to pay back his debts.
The wicked may have been a young man
But his bones rot in the desert.”

Zophar thought Job was suffering because of his sin
So he said,

“Wickedness tastes sweet in your mouth.

You savor its delicious taste; you roll it on your tongue;

You keep it in your mouth to enjoy its flavor.

Yet your wickedness makes you sick to your stomach;

It’s like a snake’s venom that will kill you.

Your wickedness is eating up your wealth,

You vomit your sin up, but it’s still there.

Your money is like the poison of asps,

The viper’s fangs will kill you.”

Zophar said, “You will never again enjoy the rivers

Even when streams flow with honey and cream.

You’ll have to give away money, the money you worked for;

You won’t get to enjoy any of it.

Your hard work will not be rewarded,

Your wealth will not give you any joy.

“Because you have oppressed the poor,

You’ve taken away their homes.

Because your greed is unquenched,

You’ve never been satisfied with what you got.

You eat up everything in sight because of your sin and callousness,

You’ve lost your wealth and health.”

He prayed, “May God give Job a belly full of pain;

May God rain trouble on Job,

The trouble he planned for other people.

When arrows are pulled from Job’s body,

May they sparkle with his blood

Telling Job he’s dying.

May his treasures be lost in the darkness,
And may a forest fire destroy everything he has.
May heaven reveal Job's guilt
And may the earth agree by washing away everything that he has;
This is the way God deals with sin."

Job's Second Answer to Zophar

Job directs his answer to all three comforters, telling them all the wicked and righteous prosper all their life until they are buried in peace. And on the other hand, some righteous and wicked both suffer, so the three comforters are wrong when they say Job is suffering because of his sin. Job asks, "How then can you comfort me with empty words since falsehood remains in your answers?" (Job 21:34).

21 Job answered Zophar, saying,
"Listen to every word that I say
So you won't misunderstand what I mean.
When you know how God deals with people
Then you can continue your mocking if you wish.
My complaint is with the way people react,
I have reason to be short-tempered;
I'm not complaining about the way God treats me.
When you look at me, you'll be shocked
So hide your eyes with your hands.
When I realize what's happened to me,
I'm stunned and I tremble with fear."

Job clearly presented his case to Zophar saying,

“Do not some wicked people grow to a ripe old age?
And don’t some get wealthy and have good health?
They see their children prosper
And they enjoy their grandchildren.
Their houses are safe from thieves and destruction,
God does not seem to punish all the wicked in this life.
Their businesses succeed and become larger,
They enjoy the fruit of their labors.
Their little children laugh and play around the home,
There is the sound of happiness in the home.
They spend their days enjoying their life
And they die a peaceful death.

“These are the same wicked who reject God saying,
‘Leave us alone; we won’t follow You.’
These wicked sarcastically ask, ‘Who is El-Shaddai
That we should obey and serve Him?’
They ask, ‘What advantage is there for us to pray?
Why should we pray to God?’”

Job concluded, “Don’t the wicked prosper?
It doesn’t seem the sinner always suffers,
You three are wrong in your arguments.
The wicked seem to get away with doing wicked things,
They are not punished each time they sin.
God seems to let some of them get away with sin,
They just bounce along like straw in the wind.
Some foolishly say, ‘God will at least punish their children,’
But each one is accountable for his sin;

Their children are not punished for their father's iniquity.
Each one will suffer for his wrong doing,
El Shaddai will eventually judge the sin of each."

Job said to Zophar,

"No one can teach God anything,
He knows perfectly how to deal with everyone.
One person gets very rich and dies in perfect health,
Another dies poor, never having had an easy life."

"Both are buried in the earth,
Both pass from this life and are gone."

Job then confronted his three counselors,

"I know what you're thinking,
You're plotting a scheme against me.
You will tell me about rich people who lost everything,
You say it was because of their wickedness.
But, everyone knows rich people don't have it hard,
Punishment by-passes them.
No one ridicules the rich to his face,
No one punishes him for what he has done wrong.
When the rich are buried
Everyone shows up for their funeral.
The earth receives his body just as sweetly
As it receives the poor.
No, you three are wrong in your logic;
God does not punish all the wicked rich,

Your words are no comfort to me.”

Eliphaz’s Third Counsel

Eliphaz began immediately attacking Job; no niceties here. Eliphaz does not believe Job is being tested for his integrity (Ch. 1, 2). Therefore he has only two alternatives. First, God is unjust, and to Eliphaz that is impossible. Second, Job is unrighteous, and to Eliphaz, this was the answer. So Eliphaz began a new attack with four rhetorical questions, each suggesting Job is guilty.

22 Eliphaz didn’t understand My ways when he asked Job,

“Can your actions help God in any way?

No! Your actions benefit only yourself.

Is El Shaddai pleased when you try to act righteous?

That would make no difference to God.

Is God punishing you severely

Because you never reverence Him?

Is not your wickedness great

And your sin without limits?

Did you lend money to a friend

Then keep his clothing that you took as collateral?

Did you refuse to give water to a tired traveler

Or a meal to a homeless vagrant?

You were a wealthy landowner

Who was respected and powerful.

You refused to contribute to widows

And you sent orphans away empty.

You’re surrounded with danger because of your sins

And you're scared of more suffering to come.
Your sin has blinded you to the causes of your problem,
You're covered with problems because you won't repent."

Eliphaz asked, "Isn't God in the heights of heaven,
Higher than the farthest star?
Job, don't say that's why God can't see you;
God can see through the blackness of the universe.
Job, you think the clouds block God's view;
El Shaddai just wanders around in heaven
But God knows everything you do.
Are you going to keep believing in the old traditions,
The ones that deceive wicked people?
Those traditions didn't work for them,
They failed, and now the wicked are gone.
They said to God, 'Leave us alone.
El Shaddai can't do anything for us.'"

Eliphaz said, "I can't see why the wicked said this,
El Shaddai has filled their houses with good things.
When the righteous see the wicked destroyed
And the last of them burned up in fire,
They will laugh and rejoice."

Eliphaz told Job, "Stop fussing with God,
You will have peace when you yield to Him."
Listen to what the Spirit is saying to you
And He will prosper you again.
If you return to El Shaddai, He will receive you
And restore your life to you.

Quit lusting after riches

And give away all the money you've hoarded.

Then El Shaddai will be Your Reward

And you'll have more happiness than money can buy.

El Shaddai will be your delight

And you'll be able again to see God.

When you keep your vow and pray to God,

He will hear you and answer you.

Your plans will be successful

And God will shine His light on your path.

You will then realize why God has brought you low,

It was because of your past pride

But you'll be saved if you'll be humble.

If your hands are clean and your heart pure,

God will deliver you from this mess.”

Job's Third Answer to Eliphaz

Job tackles one of the most perplexing questions of all time, “Why am I hidden or silent?” Job wants Me to tell him exactly why he is suffering. What Job doesn't know is that I, the LORD, have removed the “hedge” and have allowed satan to “try” him. I seemingly hide Myself because I want people to trust Me in the darkness when they can't see My hand or hear My voice. People must practice in the darkness what they have learned in the light.

23 Job told Eliphaz,

“I'm complaining like a bitter old person,

And groaning like a broken man.

But I'm looking for God and can't find Him;

I need to talk to Him about my troubles.
I would like to tell Him my side of the story,
Then I'd listen to His explanation
And understand why I'm suffering.
I don't think God would argue with me,
He would pay attention to what I've got to say.
God would be fair and honest with me,
We'd both know that's it's not because of any sin."

Job said when searching for Me,

"I search for God in the East, He's not there;
I didn't find Him in the West.
I didn't find God when I searched in the North,
And I still didn't see Him in the South.
Yet, God knows the way I take,
And when He has tried me in the fire
I shall come out like purified gold.
I have followed God's footsteps,
I didn't turn to the right or the left.
I have not disobeyed the commands of His mouth,
But have guarded His words in my mouth."

Job recognized My sovereignty in His life
When he said, "No one can change God,
And He does not change His mind;
He accomplishes what He wants to do.
So God controls my life,
He will do with me what He wills.
When I think of God's awesome sovereignty,

I am terrified and worship Him.
God, can make my heart tender to do His will;
I am afraid to disobey Him.
My suffering has imprisoned me,
I am surrounded by impenetrable gloom.”

Questions

24 Job asked, “Since God knows what will happen every day,
Why doesn’t He tell those who know Him
What is going to happen each day?

“Why doesn’t God punish the wicked
Because they move the stakes that mark property?
The wicked rustle flocks and sell them for profit,
They steal welfare from the poor.
The wicked foreclose on the property of poor widows
And push away the needy.
The wicked force the hungry to scrounge for food
In garbage dumps or any place they can find it
So they have just enough for their family.”

Job said, “The poor work to make money
For their boss, but don’t get a bonus or raise.
The poor don’t have clothes to keep them warm,
They shiver in the storms and rain.
They try to get protection any way they can,
It’s almost impossible to keep warm.
The wicked rich force the poor to hock their clothes
Before they will loan them any money

So the poor have to freeze in cold weather.
The wicked rich force the poor to serve their tables,
But won't give them any food.
The wicked rich make the poor work in their shops,
But won't give them fair wages for their work.
The poor everywhere are crying for help,
Yet God apparently does nothing about it."

Job said, "Wicked people rebel against the light;
Evil people refuse to learn what is right,
They will not live by God's rules.
The murderer rises from his bed
To kill the innocent and needy,
When it's dark, he becomes a thief.
The adulterer waits till no one sees him,
He doesn't want people to know what he does.
They commit their crimes under the cloak of darkness,
They sleep in the daytime.
None of them knows what is right or wrong,
They can't tell the difference between dark crimes,
And doing good things in the morning light.
They use people's fear of darkness
To cover their wickedness."

Job says, "The wicked will disappear from the earth.
The wicked are scum that's washed away with the flood;
All they acquire is cursed.
The wicked will melt away
Just as the heat melts the snow,
Hell will eat them up.

The wicked will be forgotten by his mother
And the worms of death will feed sweetly on him.
No one will remember the sinner,
They will be broken like a limb
Is snapped in a wind storm;
For they have taken advantage of the orphans,
And refused to help widows.”

Job understood My justice,

Job said, “God puts down the wicked
Even if they rise for a short time.
God allows the wicked to live for a time
But He constantly watches their actions.
Though the wicked may be momentarily powerful,
They’re gone in the twinkle of an eye.
They are gathered in death like everyone else,
Then their bodies shrivel up and die.
Job challenged his three counselors, ‘Tell me if I’m wrong;
No one can prove otherwise.’”

Bildad’s Third Response

Bildad has nothing new to say to Job. He just repeats what has already been said by the other counselors; i.e., since I am sovereign and man is nothing, “How does Job dare claim to be righteous before Me, the LORD?”

25 Bildad said, “God has all power and dominion,
He rules in high places;

Men should fear Him.
God has more armies than anyone can number,
And He gives light to all on the earth.
How can you, Job, possibly stand before God
And claim to be righteous?
No one on earth is pure.”
Even the moon that shines at night
Or the sparkling stars are not pure.
How can you claim to be pure?
You’re just a worm in God’s sight?”

Job’s Response to Bildad

Job sarcastically suggests I, the LORD, will be God without Bildad’s help; I don’t need someone to defend Me. Then Job displays in this chapter an impressive understanding of My majesty and power. Finally, Job ends by stating no one can fully understand what I am doing in the world.

26 Job told Bildad, “You haven’t done anything.
You haven’t given help to the helpless,
Nor rescued a person who was lost.
You give me un-needed advice,
You haven’t said anything that makes sense.
Where did you get all these ideas?
Are you repeating what you’ve heard from others?”

Job declared, “The dead tremble before God;
Even hell can’t hide from Him.
God hangs the earth on nothing,

And spreads the northern sky in empty space.
God fills the thick clouds with rain,
And they do not burst with its weight.
God covers His throne so no one can see it;
No one can see God and live.
God fixed a boundary between light and darkness,
He determined the oceans would not flood the dry land.
By His power, God stirs up the seas with a storm,
And by His skill, He stills the face of the waters.
By God's Spirit, He makes the heavens beautiful,
And His power restrains the slithering serpent.
We see only the edges of His power,
And we hear only a whisper of His voice.
When His power thunders across the land,
Who can fully know His greatness?"

Job Maintains His Integrity

Job again proclaims his innocence. Job seems to say, "Yes, I agree that the wicked will be punished, but if anyone needs to be reminded of this, you three need it; not me."

27 Job took an oath,
"I swear by the Living God
Who has taken away my rights,
And I vow by El Shaddai
Who has dealt bitterly with me,
That as long as I live and as long as I have breath
I will not curse or speak evil
Nor will I tell a lie.

So, I can't say what you three want me to say;
That would be telling a lie.
I will not disobey my conscience,
I will keep my integrity till I die."

Job said, "May you three be like the wicked
Who will suffer the fate of the unrighteous.
What hope will you hypocrites have
When God takes away your life?
Will God hear the cry of the wicked?
Will God help them when trouble comes?
The problem with the wicked,
They will not call upon El Shaddai;
They will not turn to God."

"What will the wicked receive from El Shaddai?
The unrighteous will be judged by Him.
If the wicked are rewarded with many children,
They will still die by starvation or illness;
No one will grieve them.
If the wicked have lots of money and clothes,
Someone else will spend their money and wear their clothes.
If the wicked build a large mansion,
It will collapse like their evil reputation.
The wicked will go to bed rich,
But all their wealth is gone when they wake up.
The wicked are fearful of everything all the time,
They can't sleep at night for worry.
The Eastern sandstorm blows everything away,
They are battered by the storms of life.

The hurricanes pound them without mercy,
The wicked only struggle to survive;
What kind of life is that?"

Job Discusses Wisdom

Job describes various precious metals and stones but declares wisdom is more valuable than them all. So, "Where can wisdom be found?" The answer, "Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding."

28 Job said, "Silver is found in the deep mines,
And gold is hidden in veins within the earth.
Iron must be dug from the earth,
And copper must be smelted from rocks.
Miners must use light to dig in dark caverns,
So they can dig ever deeper for earth's treasures.
They break open new shafts in the earth;
Yet those walking on the earth's surface
Don't know what's beneath them;
Just as people in this life
Don't realize the valuable things about them.

"The ground above grows bread to eat,
The earth below is mined into precious metals.
Men have learned how to find sapphires,
And how to dig gold out of the ground.
No high flying falcon can see these precious things,
No birds of prey can dig them up.
No wild beast can unearth them,

The lion does not know their value.

“People can crush the rocks to find sapphires,
They can overturn mountains to find valuable things.
They can cut ditches to discover precious stones,
And dam up streams to unearth precious treasures.
But they do not know where to find wisdom,
And they can’t unearth understanding.
No one realizes the value of wisdom,
It can’t be found anywhere in the earth.”

The heart of the earth says,

“‘Wisdom is not here,’
The depth of the sea says, ‘Wisdom is not here!’
No one can buy wisdom with gold,
And there’s not enough silver to purchase it.
There’s not enough gold in the richest mine
To trade for wisdom,
Neither can onyx or sapphires get it.
There is no comparison of wisdom to gold;
A chest of gold could not substitute for it,
Let alone crystal or any other valuable thing.
The price of wisdom is far above rubies,
Not to mention coral or quartz.
The topaz of Ethiopia is not its equal,
Wisdom is the most valuable thing on earth.”

Job asks, “Where does wisdom come from?
What is the source of understanding?”

Inasmuch as the birds of the sky can't see it,
It—like jewels and precious metals—is hidden from the eye.
Only when one dies, and it's too late,
Do people understand the truth of wisdom.
God alone understands the value of wisdom,
He manifests it throughout the earth.
God who determines the direction and power of the wind,
Also puts the oceans and rivers in their place.
God who made laws for the rain,
Also determines when lightning shall strike.
God who did all this knows
That wisdom is the most important thing in the world.
God established everything on earth by wisdom,
And He tells everyone on earth about its value.
To obey the Lord is the wisest thing in life,
And those with understanding run from evil.”

Job's Nostalgic Soliloquy

In this chapter, Job describes his past prosperity and former happiness, while in the next chapter he bewails his present suffering. Many writers call this chapter Job's soliloquy, i.e., to talk to oneself in dramatic monologue.

29 Job reflected, “I remember the past days in my life
When God watched over me,
When I had God's light shining on my path,
And I walked easily through the dark night.
I remember when I was young
And felt the presence of God in my life.

I remember El Shaddai guiding my decisions,
And I had all my children around me.
My businesses prospered,
And everything went well.
I went to places where important people gathered,
And they considered me one of them.
The young people respected me,
And the aged were glad to see me.
The city officials would listen to me,
And they wanted to know my opinions.
Those who heard me listened to my thoughts,
Everyone spoke well of me
Because I gave to the poor who asked for help,
And I gave to orphans when no one else would do it.
I gave help to those about to die,
And widows were appreciative of my assistance.
I did the right thing, and people called me righteous,
My reputation was like a robe and crown.
I was eyes for the blind,
And feet for the lame.
I was a father for the needy,
And made sure that everything was done right.
I broke the fangs of the wicked,
And took victims from their mouth.
I thought I would die comfortably in my own bed
Surrounded by loving family and friends.
I was like a spreading fruitful tree
Whose branches were refreshed by the rain.
I was constantly renewed,
And I kept getting more power.

People listened to me for my wisdom,
They didn't say anything against my opinion.
My words were like the rain
That refreshed everyone who heard me.
I encouraged all those who were discouraged,
And my optimism lifted them up.
I could tell people how to live,
And they listened to me;
I comforted the mourners."

Job Describes His Pathetic Condition

In the previous chapter, Job reviewed his past blessings, but in this chapter, he contrasts his pathetic state. Job not only is suffering, but he feels mental and emotional alienation. The downtrodden he previously helped, now reject him. Job's former wealthy friends scorn him. All who previously respected Job now turn their backs on him, even his wife has abandoned him. But in spite of every downturn, Job lifts his head to reaffirm his integrity before God.

30 Job lamented, "I am now mocked by young men,
Those thugs who are the lowest in society.
They have attacked and hurt me,
Their assaults do me no good;
They have done nothing to help me.
Their ethical character has gone,
They are devoid of spiritual appetite.
They gnaw in the dirt for a depraved bone,
There is no integrity in any of them.
They live in holes in the ground or among the rocks,

They hide in the bushes like animals.
They are foolish nobodies
Completely empty of human virtues.”

Job said, “Now they taunt me,
They even use my name as a curse word.
They won’t come near me
Except to spit in my face.
Because God has allowed these troubles to afflict me,
They have rejected me and hated me.
These wretched people attack me,
They trip me up, so I fall helplessly on my face.
They block my way so I can’t get through,
They laugh at me in public places,
Knowing I can’t help myself.
They attack me from the front and behind,
And kick me when I fall down.

“I am scared of them
Because I can’t defend myself.
My honor has gone,
Blown away by a strong wind.
Now I’m a broken old man,
Because of my desperate condition
And no one helps me.
I can’t sleep because of my pain,
Like something eating on my bones.
My clothes stink and are stained with my sores,
My coat hangs on me because I’ve lost so much weight.
God has thrown me into this hog pen,

I've sunk into the mud and mire."

Job cried, "God, I need You,

But You do not answer me.

God, I stand before You,

But You do not see me.

Why are You cruel to me?

Your powerful hand is persecuting me.

I'm tossed to and fro by every wind,

I don't know where I'm going.

The only thing I know for sure is that

I'll die just as every person must die.

Surely, God, You would not punish

A man who is already ruined!

If a man cried for mercy,

I know You, God, wouldn't destroy him.

"Have I not wept for those in trouble?

Was not my soul grieved for the poor?

Yet, when I looked for something good,

All I got was bad treatment.

When I expected light,

Darkness came, and everything was black.

My mind is all confused, and I don't understand

Why am I suffering all this misery.

I look for the sunshine, but get gloom;

I cry for help, but no one answers.

Instead, people consider me crazy like a hyena,

Or I've stuck my head in the sand like an ostrich.

My flesh is black with infection,

My skin rots and falls off,
And I'm burning up with a fever.
My harp only plays mournful tunes,
And my flute accompanies my weeping."

Job's Final Plea of Innocence

31 Job stated, "God has given to each one of us a choice,
It comes with His gift of life to us.

God will destroy those who work iniquity,
And He rewards those who obey Him in integrity.

I made a vow to have integrity before God;
That vow includes not lusting after a woman,
And I have kept that vow.

I have not been a hypocrite or lied to anyone,
I have kept my word and done my duty.

I have always paid my debts,
And kept honest books before God.

If I didn't walk a straight path,
But turned to the left or to the right,
May I lose everything I gained.

"If I have given into the enticement of women
Or lustfully flirted with another man's wife,
May I lose my family and be humiliated
For sexual sin is a crime that should be punished.
Sexual lust burns like a devastating forest fire,
Devouring everything it touches.

I have not mistreated my servants,
And I carefully listened to their complaints.

How could I face God who created masters and servants,
If I did not treat them fairly?
I have not refused to give help to the poor,
Nor have I crushed the expectation of widows who need help;
I have always given to orphans and widows.
I have given clothes to the homeless who were naked,
And they have always thanked me
For keeping them warm and protected.
If I have ever hit an orphan or the poor,
Let my arm fall off in judgment.
That would be better than letting God judge me,
Because I can't endure His punishment.

“Making money has never been my life's passion,
Nor have I placed my confidence in my checkbook.
My life is not based on my wealth,
Nor is my happiness dependent on riches and possessions.

“I have never been enticed to worship idols, nor have I done so;
I have admired the setting sun and bright morning,
But never have I thought of making an idol of them.
Anyone worshiping idols deserves judgment from God,
For they would have denied God who created them.

“I have never rejoiced when my enemies failed,
Nor was I glad when they were punished.
I would have sinned with my mouth,
If I cursed those who hate me.
My servants have never turned away the hungry,
And I have opened my doors to travelers.

I have not tried to cover my sins

As most people do.

I realize sin can't be covered or ignored;

Everyone eventually will find out,

And I would be ashamed to show my face in public.

“If only there was someone who would listen,

And not judge me before learning the facts.

If only El Shaddai would show me my sins,

Or someone prove in a court of law

That I have broken the moral law.

Even if my financial record shows I've stolen,

Or, they find stolen goods in my possession,

Or, they find a dead body that I've murdered,

Then, I would admit that I have sinned;

I wouldn't deny it!

Then, let me be judged according to my sins,

And let me be punished according to my crime.

But, I stand by my actions and my testimony,

I have integrity with God.”

Elihu's Response

Elihu is the youngest comforter to visit Job, so he waited until the original three visitors had finished speaking before he spoke. Elihu has the characteristics of youth; he is egotistical, very sure of what he's saying and has an inordinate opinion of himself. Elihu is argumentative and emotional.

Elihu reviews what the three comforters were saying. He agrees with their condemnation of Job (34:34-37). Although he thinks he

gives a better presentation because of their inconclusive results.

Elihu believes affliction from Me, the LORD, is good. He describes how I speak through dreams and visions, and the need of a friend (himself) to interpret them (33:13-28). He tries to set himself up as Job's mediator (33:5-7), yet his remarks about My power and wisdom are filled with self-importance.

The name Elihu means "He is my God." He has a biblical name because he is a distant relative of Job. Elihu is from the same family as Abraham. Elihu is a descendent of Buz, a son of Abraham's grandfather (32:2; Gen. 12:24; Gen. 22:21). Elihu has come the longest distance from the Euphrates River region, i.e., the area from which Abraham came.

Like a young man when he runs out of content, Elihu begins to ramble. His words become disjointed and incoherent. Then I, the LORD, cut Elihu off with the sarcastic observation, "Who is this who darkens counsel by words without knowledge" (38:2)?

32 Elihu: The Last Counselor

Job's three counselors refused to say any more to Job

Because he kept maintaining his integrity.

Then young Elihu became very angry at Job

Because Job kept maintaining he was innocent,

And because Job felt God was wrong for punishing him.

Elihu was also angry with the three counselors

Because they hadn't proven their point,

But they unjustly condemned Job anyway.

Elihu had waited until the three quit speaking

Because of their advanced age,

Then he was ready to speak.

Elihu, a distant relative, told the three,

“I am young,
And you’re too old to understand the problem.
So I held back until you were finished,
I didn’t dare express my opinion before now.”
I thought, “Age should speak first
Because the aged has more wisdom.
But wisdom comes from the spirit of a man,
Wisdom comes from the breath of El Shaddai.
Therefore, the elders are not automatically wise,
And no one automatically gets smart
By living a long time.
As a result, listen to me—because I know the answer,
I will now tell you the truth.

“I have patiently listened to your words,
And tried to follow your arguments
As you were searching for the right words.
I paid careful attention to all three of you,
But none of you refuted Job’s reasoning;
You lost the argument.
Don’t tell me Job is too smart for you,
And only God can defeat Job.
If I had been arguing against Job
I wouldn’t have used your weak rebuttals.
You sat there in defeat with no response,
And you didn’t have anything else to say.
Must I remain silent because you lost the argument?
No! I will tell you what I think.
I understand Job’s problem,
And I can explain the answer to all.

I feel like a barrel that's about to explode;
I have to speak before I burst.
I've got to tell you what's on my mind
To get any relief for myself.
I won't flatter anyone with what I'll say,
And I'll show no favor to any.
If I did play favorites—and not speak the truth—
My Creator would soon push me aside.”

Elihu's Charge Against Job

Elihu's Problem

What Elihu says about Me, the LORD, in this chapter is right, but what he says about Job is wrong. Elihu commits the sin of a young man; he talked before he listened. Elihu judged Job before he listened to him.

33 Elihu said to Job,

“Listen to what I am going to say,
And do what I tell you to do.
The truth is on the tip of my tongue,
My words come from a sincere heart.
The spirit of God has made me,
The breath of El Shaddai gives me life.
See if you can answer me and
Express your thoughts in logical order.
You and I are the same before God,
We are both molded from clay;

But I will be your spokesman to God.
You don't need to be afraid of me,
I will treat you right.”

Elihu said to Job,

“I was previously listening to you,
And I heard what you said.
You said you were pure, without transgression,
You maintained your integrity.
You claimed God was punishing you,
And had made you His enemy,
That God had made you His prisoner.”

Elihu told Job,

“You are wrong in your opinion,
Let me show you where.
‘You, Job said God is greater than any person
So why do you fight God?’
God does not need to defend Himself;
God has spoken once, sometimes twice
Yet, you still miss the point.”

Elihu explained,

“God speaks to the minds of people
When they are asleep.
God speaks in a dream or a vision at night,
When a person is sleeping deeply;

God warns them of their actions.
God wants people to change their mind,
So they won't be proud and rebellious.
God warns so they won't die,
Or so they won't go to hell."

Elihu told Job,

"God also warns with pain
So that the body suffers continually
And they waste away to skin and bones.
They stand at the doorway to death,
Ready to be cast into hell;
Job, is this your problem?"

"Before God, you will need an intercessor
Who can vouch for your integrity,
Who will plead for God to be gracious to you,
Because the intercessor has paid a ransom for you,
And will redeem you from being cast into hell?
When your body is then redeemed by God,
Your flesh will be as youthful as a child's.

"You will pray and God will hear you,
You will see God's face,
And God will reward your faithfulness.
But you must declare before everyone,
'I have sinned before God;
I deserve my punishment.'
Yes, God redeems those heading to hell,

God can fill their life with light.
God can accomplish all these things for you,
He'll do it twice, even three times,
To bring you back from the edge of hell
So you can live in the light.

“Job, pay attention to what I am saying,
Keep quiet and don't interrupt me.
So if you will acknowledge your sin,
Speak, because I want to hear it from your lips.
If not, then keep quiet;
Listen to me, and I'll tell you the truth.”

Elihu Tells of My Justice

34 Then Elihu said to Job and the three counselors,
“Listen to me, you aged men of wisdom;
You don't know as much as you think you do.
Just as the ear knows good music,
And the mouth knows good food,
Let us choose what is good in my words.
Job says, ‘I am righteous
But God is not treating me fairly.’
Job thinks people accuse him of hiding his sin
Because he still suffers under God.
Has there ever lived a man as stubborn as Job
Who denies the truth of his suffering?
Job probably has evil friends,
And he probably parties with lawbreakers.
Didn't Job arrogantly say

It's impossible to please God?

“Listen to what I think,

You'll agree with me if you have understanding.

God cannot sin, nor can El Shaddai do evil;

He punishes people when they sin,

And He rewards people who do the right thing.

Job, it's obvious you'd sinned

Because God is judging your life;

If you did good, God would reward you.

Read my lips, ‘God will not do wrong,

The Almighty will always reward righteousness.’

Everyone would perish if God judged sin;

If God took back the Spirit, He gave us,

No one would live.

“If you have understanding, Job, listen to me;

Could God control the world if He did not punish sin?

You make God look foolish by saying,

‘I am righteous, but I'm also suffering.’

“Kings who are wicked and unjust

Will not cause a righteous man to suffer.

God punishes the lawbreakers

Whether they are rich or poor;

God treats them all alike.

All were created by God and at death's house,

They all pass away and are removed from this life.

“God's eyes see all that people do,

Nothing they do escapes God's watch.
There is no darkness in death
Where the unrighteous can hide themselves;
No darkness is thick enough to hide from God.
No one has any warning when death comes,
And they appear before God for judgment.
God allows the mighty to be destroyed,
And places another person in their place.
God knows everything they do,
And in one night they lose everything they have.
God openly judges the sin of the sinner,
So all can learn from what happened.
God judges them openly because they
Have turned aside from following Him.
God judges the mighty because He has ignored
The cries of the poor and oppressed them.

“But if God were absent, and hid His face,
We could blame Him with the trouble
We see on earth.
Just as when an evil person becomes ruler,
We could blame Him for our suffering.
But God sees all we do,
He punishes all our sin.
So you, Job, are punished because of sin;
God has not hidden His face from judgment.

“No one can ever say to God,
‘You have chastened me, but I haven't sinned.’
Nor have they said to God, ‘I will stop sinning

If you tell me what to do.’

“Must God punish according to your standards?

The answer is No!

But, Job, you think your standards are God’s standards.

Wise people will say you—Job—are not thinking clearly,

Intelligent people will agree with me.

“Job you will be on trial for a long time

Because your answers come from your wicked heart.

You have added rebellion to your sin,

And now you are blaspheming God.”

Elihu Condemns Self-Righteousness

Elihu pauses at the beginning of this chapter to see if Job or the three counselors would answer him. They don't, so Elihu speaks directly to Job. He begins with three questions: (1) Why live a righteous life? (2) Does your sin hurt God? (3) How do the good things you do help God?

35 Elihu tried to point out Job’s inconsistencies,

“First you claim you are righteous before God,

Then you say living a righteous life has no benefits;

Let me ask you three questions.

What’s the use of living a righteous life?

Elihu told Job, ‘Is God pleased?’

If you sin, how does it hurt God?

If you sin many times

How will it affect God?
If you do good, how does it help God?
Could your goodness
Possibly contribute anything to God?

“No! Your sins hurt only yourself,
And your good works only help other people.
The oppressed suffer from tribulations,
They mourn under those with power.
Yet, they never cry out for God, their Creator
Who gives songs in the night.
The oppressed never ask, ‘Where is the Creator
Who makes us smarter than birds and animals?’
When a person cries out to God,
The Lord does not answer that one person
Because that one finite person would think
He alone could get God’s attention.
Yet, God does listen to what we say;
El Shaddai is concerned about our problems.
And further, God sees what happens down here,
And He will judge all evil in this world
But you must wait for His time.
Job, do not complain to God
Because He does not get angry,
As you have gotten angry.
You have made yourself look foolish
By protesting because you’re suffering.”

Elihu Claims to Speak for Me

Elihu pauses to see if Job or the three counselors have anything to say. Again, silence. So Elihu continues speaking, claiming to speak for God.

36 Elihu asked Job, “Bear with me,
I still have words to speak on God’s behalf.
I have learned from many sources
About the way the Creator does things right.
I am not stretching the truth,
My knowledge about God is true.
God is almighty in knowledge and power,
So He does not despise anyone.
He does not let the wicked get away with their sins,
And the oppressed will eventually get justice.
He sees everything the righteous do,
And rewards rulers who do things right.
When trouble comes upon the righteous, and they suffer affliction,
God lets them know why they are oppressed.
God shows them their sin when they misbehave,
He uses suffering to get their attention
So they will repent and turn from evil.
Job, why can’t you see your condition?
God is punishing you because of sin.

“Those who listen and obey God are blessed by Him,
God prospers them throughout their life.
If they refuse to listen to God,
They will die violently before their time,
And they won’t realize it’s because of their sin.
The evil person hates God; they won’t ask for mercy;

Even when God punished them for sin,
They die prematurely because of their wasted life.
But God gets the attention of sinners through suffering,
And their affliction turns them around.

“And now Job, your wickedness has corrupted your thinking;
You have refused to acknowledge the punishment of God.
God would have brought you out of this distress,
And given you a table full of delicious food,
But you have refused to repent.
The wrath of God is coming shortly,
And when it does, it will fall on you
Because when God punishes the unrighteous,
There is no way you can escape it.
Job, you have wrongly claimed to be righteous,
Because God blessed you with wealth and position.
Don't pray for the night to come,
Because that's when most people die.
Don't turn to evil because you feel cut off,
For God originally sent you suffering
To keep you from evil.
Remember, God has all power,
No one can teach lessons like God.
No one can tell God what to do,
No one can tell God He made a mistake.

“Always sing the praises of God,
Magnify His works in the world.
I'm telling you things that everyone knows,
But no one knows the way of God completely.

God is exalted greater than our understanding,
No one can number His years.
God draws water into the clouds,
Then He distills it into rain that falls from heaven
And benefits all below.
Can anyone understand how the clouds spread out over heaven,
Or how thunder rolls over the earth,
Or how it replenishes the ocean depths?
By these mighty demonstrations of power,
God provides abundant food for us to eat.
His hand is evident in the crashing thunder,
The storm demonstrates His power to judge.”

Elihu Continues His Speech

37Elihu continued his speech,
“The power of God thrills my heart,
And I jump for joy.
Listen, you’ll hear God speaking through thunder,
It rumbles from His mouth across the valleys.
God’s thunder is heard every place under heaven,
His lightning spreads out over the whole earth.
Next comes the echo of the thunder,
It returns as a roaring voice,
And God does not hold back its volume.
God’s voice is glorious and majestic,
We humans cannot fathom the greatness of His power.

“God tells the snow to fall in the winter upon the earth,
In the spring he directs both the gentle and heavy rain.

Then everyone stops working till the rain is over,
They watch God's power with amazement.

When winter comes, animals go into their dens
And remain there for the season.

Storms come from the south,
Biting winter winds come from the north.

God blows upon the ponds of water,
And they freeze, turning to ice.

The clouds roll and swirl in the air,
They go where God commands.

God causes things to happen on earth
Either to correct His people,
Or to bless them for His mercy.

Job, you need to listen to me,
Think about all the works of God.

Can you control the storms like God?
Can you bring lightning flashing from the clouds?

Can you place the clouds in the sky like God?
Don't you know that God has perfect knowledge and power?

Can you bring the sweltering heat from the sky,
So that your clothes are wet with perspiration?

Can you make the cooling wind die down,
So that people are baked by the sun,
Like a giant fire that burns the skin?

Job, you think you are so smart,
Tell us what to say to God;
Are we left in the darkness?

Job, tell God we want to speak to Him;
Don't let God eat us up alive.

We cannot look into the face of God,

Just as we cannot look into the bright sun
When there's not a cloud in the sky.
Golden splendor comes from God's presence,
He is surrounded by awesome majesty.
We cannot begin to conceive His majesty,
Yet in His power, God doesn't squash us.

“And in His mercy, God doesn't oppress us
(As you, Job, think God oppresses you).
Therefore, people everywhere fear God;
Wise people will honor Him.”

I Challenge Job with My Power

I, the LORD, spoke directly to Job, not to Elihu or the three counselors, although they probably heard what Job heard, and saw what Job saw. None actually saw Me, for I am Spirit, and “there shall no man see me, and live” (Exod. 33:20). They saw only a storm (whirlwind, KJV) just as another place some saw only fire, “And the LORD spoke to you out of the midst of the fire. You heard the sound of the words, but saw no form; [you] only [heard] a voice” (Deut. 4:12).

I rebuked Elihu for speaking out of his ignorance. When I said, “Stand up,” I told them, “Get ready, I'm coming, ready or not.”

The remainder of Chapters 38-39 reveals My majesty and mystery. Only My wise-knowing nature could weave all the intricate parts of the universe into a beautiful coherent pattern. In contrast, man is limited, weak and finite. Compared to Me, man can't do anything, and man knows nothing. This is My way of explaining to Job and his comforters that they can't explain the reason for pain, the source of goodness or the purpose of life. Man is completely finite in My presence, all he can do is listen and worship.

38 I answered Job out of the storm,
I am the LORD, I asked,
“Who is this Elihu who speaks out of his ignorance
To question My way of doing things?
Stand up like a man to take My criticism,
I will ask the questions
And you must answer Me.
Where were you when I created the earth?
You must answer that question,
Since you think you’re so smart.
Do you know who determined how big the earth would be,
And who drew its design?
Do you know who laid the earth’s foundation,
Or who laid the cornerstone?
The angels were watching My acts of creation
From the first row of heaven,
Applauding and singing for joy.

“Who kept the seas inside the shore
As I created it from nothing?
And I covered it with clouds
And wrapped it in a heavy blanket of fog.
I limited the sea to its bed,
And locked it in place.”
I commanded, “Thus far and no farther;
Here the crashing waves must stop.
Can you command a new morning to dawn,
And give to the world a new day,
So that the wickedness done at night
Is brought to an end?”

“Can you make the red sun rise
To shine its golden rays to all,
So that light dispels wickedness,
And stops acts of violence?

“Do you know the source of the waters of the sea,
Have you explored the depths of the oceans?
Do you know the location of the doors of death,
Or can you find the gates to hell?
Do you understand everything about the earth?
Tell Me if you know the answer.
Do you know where light comes from?
Where does darkness go where there is light?
Can you lead someone to the home of light?
Do you know where to find it?
Do you know all these answers?
Were you living when I created everything?
Are you old enough to know all things?

“Have you gone to snow houses to get snow?
Do you know where to find hail?
I keep the snow and hail to send
In a time of trouble,
To carry out My purpose in the world.

“Where does light come from?
And where is the east wind when it’s not blowing?
Who cuts the channels where rivers flow,
And who controls where lightning strikes?

Who makes rain fall in the barren desert
Where no one lives,
Soaking the dry, desolate earth
Until grass sprouts out of the ground?
Does the rain have a father,
Or does the dew have a mother?
Who gives birth to the frost that falls around you,
And ice that becomes hard as stone,
And who freezes solid the surfaces of water?
Can you tie the stars into a cluster,
Or hold back Pleiades and Orion?
Can you make sure the seasons come in proper order,
Or guide the stars across the sky?
Do you know the laws of the heavens
That control the universe,
So that it properly influences the earth?

“Can you yell loud enough to make it rain?
Will the lightning go where you command it to strike?
Who created people with the capacity to know things,
And gave them the ability to understand things?
Can you count the number of all the clouds?
Can you tilt over the water jugs of heaven
To turn dust into mud?
Can you provide food for the lioness
To feed her young lion’s hunger?
Can you provide food for the ravens
To give to their young, hungry children?”

I, The LORD, Continue

39 I asked,

“Do you know when the wild mountain goats give birth?
Do you know how many months they carry their young?
Or when they crouch down to give birth?
Their young grow up in the open,
Then become strong and leave, never to return.

“Who makes the wild donkey roam freely,
Who gives him the freedom to roam anywhere?
I made the desert its home
And allowed it to live there.

The donkey is stubborn
And will not heed the shouts of its drivers.

It ranges over the hills for food,
Searching for anything green to eat.

Will a wild ox willingly serve you,
And listen to your directions?

Can you tie a rope around his neck
To make him plow straight rows?

Can you trust him to do your heavy work
Because of his great strength?

Can you rely on him to gather grain
And bring it to your threshing floor?

“Do you know why the ostrich flaps its wings?
It can't fly like the stork.

She lays her eggs in the sand
For the warm ground to hatch them.

She doesn't realize a foot could crush them,

Or a wild animal could destroy them.
The ostrich treats its young heartlessly,
As though they were not her own.
She doesn't worry about those things;
Once she lays her eggs, she goes her way.
I have not given wisdom to the ostrich,
It is devoid of understanding.
But when she gets up to run,
She is faster than a horse with a rider.
Did you give the horse its strength,
And did you clothe its neck with a mane?
Did you create the horse to leap like a locust,
Isn't its snorting majestic?
The horse paws the ground to show off its strength,
Then it charges unafraid into battle,
Not fearing imminent danger.
When arrows fly in the heat of battle,
And swords slash around it,
The horse rushes fiercely into danger.
When the trumpet sounds to attack,
The horse senses the battle is on,
And charges toward the enemy.

“Were you wise enough to create a hawk
That spreads its wings,
And soars in the sky?
Can you command the eagle to fly into the heavens,
And build its nest in the heights?
It lives on the rocky crag,
From there it spots its prey afar off.

The eagle brings back the spoils of war
To feed its young.”

I, The LORD, Speak Clearly

40Moreover, I said to Job,
“Do you still want to debate with Me?
Those who argue with Me, El Shaddai,
Must still answer to Me.”

Then Job replied to Me,

“I am vile and ashamed to speak,
I have no answer for You;
I cover my mouth and won’t speak.

Once I have said too much
So I won’t make a second mistake
By talking too much.”

After Job humbles himself, I realize Job has not come to the end of himself. I accuse Job of trying to “play God” by “trying to prove Me wrong, that he may be right.” I challenged Job to demonstrate his power if he thinks he is equal to Me, “Is your arm as strong as Mine?”

Now I ask 20 questions that demonstrate Job’s finiteness. Job doesn’t know the answers, and he can’t do what I can do.

I use two illustrations from My creation to demonstrate My power, i.e., the hippopotamus and the crocodile. These beasts are more powerful than any man, because they were created by My power. This is a picture of how I show My omnipotence.

I, the LORD, answered Job out of the storm,

“Stand at attention like a man,
I have some more questions that you must answer.
Are you trying to reverse My decisions,
Are you trying to prove Me wrong
That you may be right?
Is your arm as strong as Mine?
Can your voice thunder like Me?
If you think you can, then robe yourself in splendor
And show your majesty.
Display your anger against sin
And all who are proud
To bring them down.
Let your glance punish the wicked,
Walk on those who oppose you
And bury them in the dust.
If you—Job—can do these things,
You are strong enough to survive.

“Look at the mighty hippopotamus,
Just as I created you, I created it.
He eats grass like an ox,
He has great strength in his loins
And muscles in its stomach.
He moves his tail like a cedar,
The muscles in his thighs are strong.
His bones are like bronze pipes,
His limbs are like bars of iron;
Only His creator can frighten him.

“The mountains grow food for the hippopotamus

Where all the wild beasts live.
He lies quietly under the thorny lotus bushes,
And is hidden by the reeds in the swamp.
He is not concerned when the floods rage,
Even when the water rushes into his mouth.
Can anyone tame him to follow them?
Can they lead him with a nose hook?"

My Dissertation Continues

41 "Can you fish for a crocodile with a hook,
Can you tie his mouth with a rope?
Can you put a ring in its nose,
And lead him about like a tamed animal?
Can you play with him like a house animal,
Can you work him on the farm?
Could you put a string around its neck,
And let little girls play with him?
Will merchants try to sell them,
And would customers buy them?
Can an arrow penetrate his skin,
And can a spear his head?
If you even touch one,
You'll have such a terrible fight
You'd never want to do it again.
No, you can't capture the crocodile
Without a great fight.
Since you wouldn't disturb a crocodile,
Then who is able to stand up to Me?"

Who has ever fought against Me and prevailed?
I am describing the awesome power of the crocodile;
He has strength throughout his huge body.
Who can penetrate his scales,
Or open his massive jaws.
His protection is the row of scales,
One so close to the other
That no air can get through.
Light flashes out when he sneezes,
He sees through the slits in his eyelids
Like the sliver of the sun as it rises.
Steam rises from his nostrils
Like a pot boiling on the fire.

“The crocodile has a hard, strong neck
That scares those who meet him in the way.
His heart is as hard as a stone,
Even the mighty are afraid of him.
A sword is useless against him,
Neither will arrows or spears harm him.
He bites through iron as if it were straw,
And bronze as if it were rotten wood.
He doesn't run from arrows
And stones from a slingshot are nothing;
Clubs are useless, and he laughs at sticks.
His belly is slick like pottery,
He easily glides across the mud.
The crocodile stirs the river like boiling water,
He leaves a wake when swimming.
There is no creature on earth like him,

He fears no one and no other animal.
He looks up at all the tall animals,
But he is king over these proud beasts.
Since I created the small and great
And put them all in their place,
Do not I have the right to do as I please
With people I have made on this earth?"

Job's Repentance and Restoration

If Job previously had any misunderstandings about Me, his Creator, now he has a full understanding. Previously, Job had second hand knowledge about Me, now Job knows Me personally and firsthand. Job has experienced Me. This is one of the purposes of this book, that you may know Me in a real and experiential way.

After I had answered Job, I turned his attention to Job's three friends. I told them they had not spoken correctly (42:7). I called Job "My servant," acknowledging Job has a relationship with Me (42:8). I commanded the three to take seven bulls (expensive) and get Job (the family priest) to sacrifice and pray for them, i.e., Job was their intercessor.

I healed Job and restored his fortune and his family. Satan was defeated and I was glorified. Job's sisters and brothers returned for a feast with Job, bringing gifts with them. In due time Job had the same amount of children lost in the cyclone (1:13, 19).

Since "I gave Job twice as much as he had before" (42:10), then it is assumed Job was 70 when trials hit; because afterward "Job lived an hundred and forty years" (42:16). Since Job was the son of Issachar (Gen. 46:13), and a grandson of Jacob, then his life stretched halfway through the 400 years the nation of Israel was in Egypt. It was possible for Moses to meet Job and get information to write the book of Job.

42 Then Job replied to Me,
“I now realize You can do everything
And no one can obstruct what You do.
You asked, ‘Who is this that ignorantly wants to know what I can do?’”
Then Job admitted to Me, the LORD.

“I asked foolish questions,
I did not understand Your wonders,
Your wisdom is far beyond me.
I, Job, had only heard about You
With the hearing of my ears.
But now I have seen with my eyes,
Now I have experienced Your presence personally.
I’m sorry for my rash statement,
I repent in dust and ashes.”

After I, the LORD, finished speaking to Job, then I said to Eliphaz,
The leader of the counselors,
“My anger is directed toward you,
And the two counselors with you,
Because what you said to Job was wrong;
My servant Job said the right things about Me.

“Now the three of you must get seven sacrifices,
Give them to my servant, Job.
My servant, Job, will offer these sacrifices for you,
And I will accept Job’s intercession
When he prays on your behalf.
I will not punish the three of you
With the treatment you deserve,
For you have not spoken rightly about Me,

As my servant, Job has demonstrated faith.”

So Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar obeyed Me, and I accepted Job’s prayer for them,

After Job interceded for his counselors,

I restored his wealth,

Giving him twice what he previously had.

Then Job’s brothers, sisters, and former friends

Returned to eat a meal in Job’s home.

They comforted Job because of all the sufferings

He had endured,

Bringing him money and gifts.

— Job’s Unanswered Prayers —

Job prayed for immediate death, but I didn’t answer. Also, Job didn’t get an answer to his prayer for Me to curse the day he was born. When you are going through pain and suffering, you may say things you don’t mean, and you may even pray wrongly for things that I don’t want you to have. Then, after your trial is over, you may look back to see that I had better things in store for you than the things you asked.

I blessed Job’s latter life

More than before his trials,

Giving him twice as much wealth.

Now Job had 14,000 sheep, 6,000 camels, 2,000 oxen

And 1,000 donkeys.

He had seven more sons

And three more daughters.

(Serves Job's wife right for criticizing him.
She had to have these babies in her old age.)

Job named the first daughter Jemimah,

The second, Keziah,

The third, Kereu-Hapukh.

Job's daughters were the most beautiful in the land,

And he gave them an inheritance

Along with their brothers.

After this, 70-year-old Job lived another 140 years;

I doubly blessed his faith.

Job was able to see his sons and grandchildren

Up to the fourth generation,

Then Job died after having a long, good life.

The Septuagint adds,

And it is written

That he shall rise again

With those whom I raise up.

I AM GOD

The Object of Worship

The Book of Psalms

The Psalms were written as prayers for the Hebrew people to sing. Their music was their deep feeling about Me, the LORD, or a prayer to Me. Therefore each psalm is a worship event. Thus some psalms are re-written into prayers. Instead of reading “The Lord is my shepherd,” you’ll pray, “Lord, You are my shepherd.”

Each psalm is a mirror that reflects your soul. As you pray them, you’ll see in these mirrors your sin and hypocrisy more clearly than ever before. So pray the psalms of repentance and turn to Me. But you’ll also see in these mirrors the essence of a godly life. Then pray with the psalmist, “As the deer pants for the water brooks, so pants my soul for You, O God” (42:1). Look deep into each mirror and you’ll see Me, the LORD. While this is not a theology textbook, you’ll see many aspects of My person and attributes.

The Psalms are poetry, not like English poetry with rhyme and meter, for example, “Roses are red, violets are blue, the angels in heaven, know I surely love you.” Hebrew poetry had neither rhyme nor meter. Their poetry had rhythm as they accentuated different phrases, so that the poetry was matched phrases. The secret of Hebrew poetry is that thoughts matched no matching rhymes or meter.

The Psalms are written in prayers so you can identify with them and pray them. But not all the psalms were originally prayers to Me. Some psalms were originally written as devotional thoughts about Me (Psalm 23); a few psalms pour out anger at enemies (Psalms 3 and 4). Some psalms are instructional (Psalm 119), teaching My law. But in this book all of them are transposed into prayers in modern language so you can pray the words to talk to Me, the LORD.

PSALM 1

Your life will be happier

If you don't follow the advice of sinners,

If you don't loiter with the wicked,

If you don't become a part of an evil group.

You will discover happiness by obeying My laws

And thinking right day and night.

You will be like a tree rooted by living waters,

Bearing fruit at the right seasons.

Your leaf will not wither

And you will prosper in what you do.

The wicked are blown about like worthless trash,

I will judge them for their rebellion and wasted life.

They will not stand with the godly before Me

For I take care of those who live right,

But the evil doers will be destroyed.

PSALM 2

Why do all people groups rebel against Me, the LORD?

Why do they doubt and fight Me?

Their leaders always fight against Me;

They plot ways to deny My existence,

They rebel against My anointed Son.

"Let's get rid of God's laws," they cry;

They want to be free of My requirements.

But I, the LORD, laugh at these rebellious people

Because I rule everything in heaven and earth.

I am angry at the skeptics who deny Me;

I will deal with them in wrath.

I have made My Son the King of all kings;

He will rule all people groups from His throne in Jerusalem.

This is My decree to all groups of people:

I am the Father of the universe, the Anointed is My Son,

He is My only begotten Son.

He will rule all people groups as His inheritance,

He will punish all the rebels,

He will smash them like clay pots.

Therefore, you leaders better make the right decisions;

Your leadership will be examined,

You will be held accountable.

Serve Me with reverent fear;

Rejoice in My goodness.

Submit to My Son, or He will be angry

And destroy you in spite of your activities.

He gets angry quickly at rebellion

But you will be happy by obeying Him.

— SELAH —

The word *Selah* comes from two roots, i.e., *Selah*, which means, “to praise,” and from *Salai*, which means “to lift up.” Therefore, you don’t have to guess that this word means “to lift Me up in praise.”

However, some think the word *Selah* is a musical note. But when examined carefully, it deals with the subject matter of the psalms, not its musical expression. It deals with truth, not tunes.

Sometimes the word Selah occurs at the beginning of a phrase, at other times at the end, and sometimes it comes in the middle of a verse. What does this mean? It does not end a verse, nor does it begin a phrase. Rather, it connects two thoughts or phrases together. Therefore, Selah is a thought-link. When you see the word Selah look back at what has been said as a basis to praise Me. Then mark that thought, and connect it with the thought that follows.

Some think the word means “to pause.” It’s maybe that, but it is not a pause for the instruments of music, but it is a pause for the singer to think about what he has been singing. That way the singer can understand it; and connect it with what is going to be sung.

Some have said the word Selah is “to lift up,” therefore, it means to sing louder. Today in piano we use the term crescendo. But it is not the music that becomes louder, our hearts are to be lifted up higher in worship and praise to Me for the truth that connects your life to Me.

When you see the word Selah in the psalms, “Stop and meditate,” which is another way of saying, “Stop and think about what you have just prayed.”

PSALM 3

I saw David running to escape from Absalom,
His son was the enemy trying to kill David, his father
Everyone is telling David,
“I will not rescue David,”
They don’t believe I look out for My own.

I am a shield to David, I protect him;
David glories in Me, so I give him strength.
When David cried out to Me from My Temple,
I answered him from My holy mountain.

So David is able to lie down and sleep
Because I am watching over him.
David will not be afraid of 10,000 enemies
Because I am beside him to protect him.

I will arise to help David,
I will defeat his enemies;
They will suffer the pain they plan for David.
Victory comes from Me;
I will protect and give happiness to My people.

PSALM 4

I, the LORD, will hear when you call,
I will answer when you pray sincerely.
You called Me when you were in trouble,
You wanted My mercy.

You were distressed because your enemy attacked you,
They were making groundless accusations.
You asked, "How long will they lie about me?"
You can be assured
I, the LORD, have special regard for the godly,
I will answer when you call.
Don't surrender to your anger
And hurt yourself by sinning.
Take time to think about it
And don't run off at the mouth.
Bring sacrifices with a repentant heart

And put your whole trust in Me, your Lord.

Many people will try to cheer you up,
They will try to make you happy.
But when I smile on you,
You will experience transformed joy.
My happiness will be greater
Than all the food and drink in the world.
You will lie down to sleep in confidence,
I alone can give you serenity.

PSALM 5

I, the LORD, will hear you when you pray
When you intercede with intensity.
I will listen for your purposeful cry because
I am your king and your God.

I will be ready to hear you each morning
Because I will be waiting for you.

I take no pleasure in wickedness,
And have no patience with the sin of sinners.
Therefore I will not allow arrogant sinners
To come into My presence.
I will destroy those who live by lying
And those who murder and destroy others.

You can enter My presence because of My unfailing love;
I am open to worshipers who come in deepest awe,

Who attempt to walk in right paths,
And overcome the temptations to sin,
And are committed to walk godly before Me.

My enemies don't speak truth;
They live by stepping on others.
Their cursing poisons the air like rotting garbage
And they flatter others to get ahead.
They are guilty of the sin they see in others;
They will be punished with the condemnation they want for others.
Their passion for sinful pleasure
Shows their rebellion against Me.

Those who take refuge in Me
Will sing praises into eternity.
I will extend My protection over them;
Those who love Me will be happy forever.
I will take care of those who live godly
And surround them with My love.

PSALM 6

I, the LORD, will not rebuke you in anger,
Nor will I correct you in rage.
I will love you because you are weak;
I will heal you when you hurt.
I know you are overwhelmed with your failures,
You will eventually overcome your weaknesses.

I will come deliver you from human frailties,

I will help you because of My unfailing mercy.
If you go to the grave, you will not be victorious
And you will not praise Me for deliverance if you die.
I know you are sick from discouragement;
You cry all night long from your bed.
Your eyes are red and swollen from your grief,
Grief will make an old person out of you.

I will drive away all your accusers;
I will listen to your confessions and repentances.
I will receive your honest prayers;
Your enemies will be ashamed of their attacks.
I will punish them with the suffering
They had wished for you to endure.

PSALM 7

This is a Shiggaion Psalm, which means “a variety of petitions.”
Some of the stanzas are petitions, others are woeful, still others
triumphant.

David approached Me begging for protection from
Cush the Benjamite, a man close enough to damage David.
He cried, “Save me from the one who constantly persecutes me;
If I didn’t protect David, he would be mauled
Like a lion will maul its victim for its own pleasure.

I knew David hadn’t done anything wrong;
He was betrayed by one who should have been his friend,

He was vandalized and didn't deserve it.

David wanted to give up, saying, "Let my enemy win,
Let him trample me in the dust,
Let him strip away all my honor."

Then David had a change of heart, crying out to Me,
"Lord, attack him in Your anger;
Stand against his furious attacks on me."

I, David's Lord, answered his prayer saying,
"I will gather all people groups into My presence,
I will judge them for their evil.
I will tell them David is innocent, and has acted righteously.
Because I know the inward intent of all people
I will stop the wickedness of the unrighteous;
I will help all those who obey Me.

I am David's shield of protection
I will protect those who do right.
I will be perfectly fair with all people,
Even when I am angry with those who do evil.
If any person does not repent of their rebellion
I will send a sharp sword against them.
I will send an army with bows and arrows to punish them;
I will use an army of deadly weapons against him,
I will punish them with fire.
The wicked think up evil traps for My people,
Their plans are motivated by their lies.
They dig a trap to catch the godly

But they are caught in their own devices.
They plan trouble for My people,
But trouble backfires on them.
They plan to hurt My followers,
But they end up hurting themselves.

David is thankful that I will do the right thing.
Therefore, he sings praises to My holy name.

I am the LORD your God in whom you trusted;
I will save you from those who persecute you.
They want to rip you in pieces
Thinking no one will help you.
I am the LORD, if you deserve punishment
I will let them deliver it.

If you have sinned
And attacked those who are at peace with you,
I will let him trample you under foot
And drag your good name through the mud.

But I will awaken My righteous anger at your enemies
Because they attack you without a cause.
I will arise in answer to your prayers
So your intercessors will rejoice in My presence.
I will judge all people because I will do right;
I will punish because of My righteousness.
I will save you because of your upright heart;
Examine Me to see My integrity.

I am continually angry at those who continually sin
Because they do not repent of their iniquity.
I will bring a sword against them;
My bow and arrow will be ready to attack.
I am preparing a death for them;
I will send My army to deliver it.
Your enemy is a friend of wickedness;
He is constantly harming others.
He is constantly digging a trap to trap you,
But he will fall into it and suffer its consequences.
His violent ways will come down on his head;
His wounds will be self-inflicted.

Because I will treat everyone fairly,
You can trust and praise Me;
You can praise My name, the LORD Most High.

PSALM 8

I am the LORD, your Lord, My name fills the earth,
My glory is seen in the highest heaven.
Teach your children all about My strength,
My strength will silence the enemies who oppose you.

Look into the night sky to see the work of My fingers;
I set the moon and stars in their places.
Humans can only think about what I've done;
There is nothing they can do about them.
I made people lower than Myself
Yet I crowned them with glory and honor.

I made people to have dominion over all creation,
Putting all living things under their authority
Including cattle, wild animals, and fish in the waters.

My majestic name fills the earth.

PSALM 9

Praise Me with all of your heart;
Tell everyone all the marvelous things I have done.
Be filled with joy and happiness;
Praise My name, the Most High Lord.
Your enemies will retreat before you;
They will stagger when they retreat and die.
For I have judged the truth of this battle,
From My throne I will give the fair verdict.
You can rebuke the enemy and destroy the wicked;
You can erase their names forever.
Your enemy is destroyed in meaningless ruin;
Their cities are uprooted and forgotten.

I reign from heaven forever;
I will execute justice from My throne.
I will punish fairly,
And I will rule the people perfectly.
Those who know My name will trust Me
So don't abandon your search for Me.

Sing praises to Me when I reign in Jerusalem;
Tell everyone about My wonderful deeds.

I care for the helpless and will avenge murders;
I will not ignore the cries of the sufferers.

I will have mercy on you
When I see how your enemies punish you.
I will snatch you back from the jaws of death;
I will save you to praise Me in Jerusalem's gates.

The evil ones have fallen in the pit they dug for others;
Their feet were caught in the trap they set.
I will be recognized for doing the right thing;
The wicked will be caught in their own trap.

The wicked will be thrown into hell,
The fate of all who ignore Me.
But those who have remembered Me,
Their hopes will not be crushed.

I will arise to the challenge;
I will judge them according to their sins.
I will make them tremble in fear
Then all will recognize they were created by Me.

PSALM 10

You think I, the LORD, am standing far off;
You think I'm hiding when you are in trouble.
The wicked are arrogantly hunting you down,
But I will catch them in their evil plan
They plan to use on you.

They brag about the evil they plan to do;
They praise others who are greedy for sin.

The wicked are too proud to seek Me;
They think I am dead because they can't see Me.
They seem to succeed in everything they do
And they sneer at all their enemies.
They do not see the punishment I plan;
They sneer at anyone opposing them.
They think no one will catch or punish them;
They think they can get away with anything.

The wicked lie, cuss, and threaten everyone;
They have evil plans on the tip of their tongues.
They lurk in ambush
And murder innocent people.
They are always searching for their next victim;
Like a hungry predator
They are waiting to eat up helpless victims.
They are like hunters who capture their prey
And lead them away in nets.
Their pathetic victims fall to their schemes;
The victims fall to their strength.
The wicked think I'm dead, and I don't see them;
They think I'll never do anything.

I will arise in judgment;
I will punish the wicked.
I will not ignore the helpless;
I will not let the wicked continue hating Me.

They think they can get away with murder;
They think no one will see their evil deeds.
But take note, I will punish them;
I will take care of the helpless who trust Me,
I will defend the orphans.

I will break the bones of those wicked people;
I will go after them until the last one is destroyed.
I am the LORD of the universe, I am the king of people;
I am aware of the hopes of the hopeless.
I have heard the cries of the downtrodden;
I will bring justice to all who are oppressed
Then my people will no longer be terrified.

PSALM 11

Everyone tells you to run and hide in the mountains;
They say fly away like a bird for safety.
They say evil people are coming with weapons;
They are ready to kill anyone trusting in Me, the LORD.
The wicked are out to kill anyone
Whose heart is right with Me.
They say society is falling apart; law and order are gone;
What can the righteous do?

But I am still in My holy temple;
I still rule from heaven.
I am watching everything carefully,
Examining every person on earth.
I will inspect everyone, the good and the bad;

I hate the violence I see on earth.
I will throw the wicked into burning sulfur and fire;
I will punish them with what they deserve.
I am a righteous God who loves righteousness,
But only the righteous will see My face.

PSALM 12

You will call to Me for help
When the number of godly seem to disappear.
People seem to only lie to one another
Or they flatter each other with deceitful compliments.
I will shut them up;
They won't be able to keep boasting.
People think they can lie all they want
Saying, "No one can keep us from talking."

But I have seen the violence done to the helpless;
I have heard the groanings of the poor.
I will arise to come to their rescue
Just as they pray for Me to do.

You can count on My promises;
They are as pure as refined silver.
Even though the wicked surrounded you,
Their lies and flattery are praises.
I, the LORD, will come help you when you are oppressed;
I will protect you from this lying generation.

PSALM 13

When it seems like I, the LORD, have forgotten you,

Do not think I have hidden My face.

When you struggle with a doubting heart,

And all you see are struggles and defeat,

Is it because the enemy is tempting you?

Turn to Me when you need help;

I'll show you what to do so you won't die.

I won't let your enemies make you surrender

Thinking they have won a victory.

Trust My unfailing love to save you;

I will come deliver you.

Then you can sing and worship Me

Because I have blessed you abundantly.

PSALM 14

Only fools privately say to themselves,

"There is no God," saying I don't exist.

They are not honest, but corrupt in their heart;

They don't want to do the right thing

So they deny Me and become the standard.

I look down from heaven to examine everyone's thoughts

To see if they really want to know truth,

To know if they are really seeking Me.

No, they all have rebelled against Me;

They choose to do filthy things

Because their hearts are corrupt,

None of them is trying to do right.

PSALM 15

I, the LORD, am looking for you to come live with Me
So you can worship in My presence.
You can come who live blamelessly and obey Me,
And tell the truth from a sincere heart.
You must not lie about your neighbor
And not sin against them.
You must know what is a sin against Me
And not retaliate when people do you wrong.
You must not loan money for exorbitant rates
And never take bribes.
You must love those who serve Me;
These are the ones who will live with Me forever.

PSALM 16

I, the LORD, will keep you safe in death
Because you come to Me for refuge.

You said, "I, the LORD, am your Master
And every good thing you have comes from Me.
There are godly people living all around you;
They will be inspired by your faith in Me.
Don't search for any other way to heaven;
Those other gods will not give you what you want.

Choose Me first, and make Me your only choice

And I will choose you as My own.
You will eternally regret it if you search for another god
Because I will not recognize your false worship.
Make Me your choice and I will guarantee
You an inheritance with other saints,
And I will protect you in death.

I, your God, will give you a good life on earth,
And will guide you throughout life,
And show you what to do in hard times.
Because you put your hope in Me,
I will not leave you in a cold lonely grave,
Nor will I allow your body to rot in corruption.
I will raise you up to live with Me after death,
In My presence you will find full joy;
At My right hand you'll have pleasure forevermore.

PSALM 17

I, the LORD, listen to the prayers of those who live right
But I don't answer those who pray hypocritically.
I have measured the words of your mouth
To determine if you would transgress with words.
I have listened to your thoughts in the night
To see if you sin with intention.
I have examined your heart
Searching to find any rebellion against Me.

I know many intend to do evil in their hearts
So I don't come to hear their prayers.

Keep walking in the right paths
So you won't slip and fall into sin.

Call to Me because I am still listening;
I will answer the requests of your heart.
I will show you My love
By saving you from the enemies who attack you.
You are the apple of My eye;
I will hide you under the shadow of My wing.

There are wicked people ready to attack you;
They surround you and are ready to move in for the kill.
They are big and powerful;
They brag that they can eliminate you.
They are ready like a lion to pounce on you
And will eat you up.
I will come to your rescue and defend you;
I can defeat the wicked.
They live for the pleasures of this world;
They think only of themselves, not of others.

You shall see My face because you live right;
You will be happy when you become more like Me.

PSALM 18

I, the LORD, will be your strength, your rock, and your fortress
Because you love and seek Me.
I will protect you from your enemies
Because you call for Me to deliver you from your enemies.

When death scares you,
 And the ungodly terrorize you,
When you are afraid of dying,
 Even though you are in My presence,
When the sorrows of hell surround you,
 Leaving you in terrible distress,
I will hear your cry from heaven
 And I will come to your rescue.

When I am angry, the earth will quake and tremble;
 The foundation of the earth will move.
I will come down from walking in heaven
 And will set on fire the surrounding hills.
I will come to you flying on the wind;
 I will ride on the clouds to your rescue.
I will fold My glory behind darkness;
 I will be accompanied by black clouds, and thick night.
My voice will thunder from heaven;
 Hail and coals of fire will rain down.

They will be terrorized at My rebuke,
 I will defeat and kill those who rebel against Me.
The floods of judgment will wash them away;
 You will see My anger like never before.
I will save you from drowning;
 I will rescue you from an enemy too powerful for you.
Your enemy will almost overwhelm you,
 But I will save you and lift you to a secure place.
I will receive you because I delight in you,

Because you lived by My principles and kept yourself from sin.
I will show mercy to those who deserve mercy;
I will judge righteously by your desire for righteousness.
You shall be pure, because you sought purity;
I will save those who are sorry for sin.

I will punish those who exalt themselves;
They refuse to humble themselves in My presence.
I will be a candle to those who seek light
So they will not walk in darkness.

With My help, you can defeat a whole troop of men,
By My strength you can jump over a wall.
If you seek My principles, you can live correctly;
Those who ignore them will walk in darkness.

I am the Lord, who is your God;
I am your only stability in life.
I make your feet like the young deer
Who is able to climb the highest mountain.
I will teach your hands how to fight triumphantly
So you can defeat the enemy and his weapons.

I will protect you with the shield of My salvation;
I will help you stand against your enemy.
My gentleness will make you strong
So you won't slip, nor will you fall.
I will help you chase your enemies and catch them;
You will have stamina to destroy him.
You will wound him so he can't fight back;
You will stomp him into the ground.

Your enemies will cry out in pain;
They will pray to Me in heaven,
But they will be heard only in hell
Because it is too late for them.
Your enemy will be like dust,
They will be lower than the dirt of the street.

I will make you a leader over the nations,
Those I don't know will serve you.
They will submit to your authority;
They will obey your orders.
Strangers will be afraid of your authority;
They will hide when they see you coming.

I will bless you by giving you life and strength;
I will give you eternal life.
I will deliver you from your enemies
And give you authority over them.
I will exalt you over those who reject you;
Give thanks and praise My name.
I will deliver David your king and be merciful to him;
I will preserve his descendants forever.

PSALM 19

I am the LORD, the heavens declare My glory;
The stars reveal My craftsmanship.
Each new day tells I am the Creator,
Each new night shows My mighty power.
No one on earth can debate that I began all things

Because the universe answers all their arguments.
My hand in creating the universe is seen everywhere,
My majestic plan extends to the last detail.
I made the night as a tent for the sun,
Sunrise is like a bridegroom coming out of that tent.
The new day is like a runner beginning a marathon,
The sun races from one horizon to the other.
The sun gives life to everything it touches.

My Scripture, like the universe, is perfect;
Converting the soul when applied.
My principles never change,
Making the ignorant wise when learned.
Fearing Me takes away doubts and ignorance,
Those who apply My truth live forever.
My decisions are always accurate,
Those who obey Me live right.

My truth is better than riches;
Obeying My principles is more satisfying than sweets.
My truth keeps you on guard against danger,
Your satisfaction of obedience is its own reward.
Keep from making ignorant mistakes
Because my Word is able to teach your slightest deviation from
truth.

Also, keep you from making presumptuous errors;
Don't be controlled by your faults.
You must live blamelessly by My principles,

They will keep you from making life-destroying decisions. May the words that you speak,
And the thoughts that you think,
Be acceptable to Me, your Lord and Redeemer.

PSALM 20

I, your Lord, hear your prayers when pressures come;
I will defend you by the power of My name.
I will come to you with help from the sanctuary,
I will give you strength to endure rejection.

I will remember when you pour out your heart to Me
And know that you come with a yielded spirit.
I will give you what your heart desires to have,
I will carry out My plans in your life.
Then you will rejoice when I save you;
You will tell everyone what I have done,
That I have carried out My will in your life.

Know that I have cared for My chosen ones,
I hear their prayers in heaven;
And save them by My strong hand.
Some trust in chariots, some trust in horses;
But you trust in My name, I am the Lord your God.
Then will your enemies be defeated and eliminated,
Then will you be vindicated when you stand before Me.

I, the LORD, will hear when you call to Me.

PSALM 21

I am the LORD, be encouraged when your leaders rejoice in Me

When they shout “Amen” after a victory.

Give your leaders what they want;

Hold back nothing from them. Selah!

Rejoice with them when they have spiritual victories,

I will give them recognition and honor.

When leaders ask Me to preserve their life,

I answer their request;

I give them long life.

Actually, it was My victory they achieved,

I gave them ability and success.

I gave them the enablement to win each victory,

I give them the privilege of ruling for Me.

But your leaders must trust in Me

If they expect to keep their position.

I will defeat all My enemies,

My strength will overcome all who hate Me.

I will destroy them in a flaming furnace,

I will consume them in hell’s fire.

One day there will be no wicked people on earth,

They and their descendants will be gone.

Although the wicked plot against My principles,

Their rebellious plans will not succeed.

The wicked will be completely defeated

When I judge them.

Worship Me for My great strength;

With singing celebrate My power.

PSALM 22

I am crying, My God, My God,
 Why have You forsaken Me?
I cried to the Father that day, but He didn't hear
 And in the night seasons, He was silent.
The Father proclaimed I was holy
 Enthroned in the praises of Israel.
The leaders of Israel trusted in their God,
 Who delivered them because they trusted in Him.
But I, the Son, confessed I am full of sorrow and grief;
 Their faces reveal their hatred for Me.
They say I trusted My Father; why didn't He save Me?
 I trusted the Father from the time I was a baby,
 I relied on Him from My birth.
My heavenly Father has been My God since the womb;
 Don't stand so far away because trouble is near
 And there is no one to help Me.
My enemies are charging Me like a herd of bulls;
 My powerful enemy has encircled Me.
They try to tear Me with their mouths
 Like a roaring, raging lion.
I am poured out like water on the ground;
 Every bone in My body has been pulled apart.
My heart is like melted wax,
 It is poured out in death.
My strength is dried up like burnt bread;
 My tongue is as dry as a dead leaf,
 I am returned to dust.
These dogs have surrounded Me
 Like a pack of hungry wolves they snap at Me.

They pierced My hands and My feet;
I am nothing but a sack of bones.
They stand around to stare at Me
Then they gamble for My clothes.
Father, You are My strength, come help Me;
Deliver Me from My persecutors.
Save My life from their evil intentions
And from those who would eat Me up.
Father, You have answered My pleadings,
Now I will tell everyone Your name;
In the church I will praise You.
Everyone join Me in praising the Father;
All Israel come glorify the Father.
The Father will not turn away from Me,
Nor hide His face from Me.
I will praise the Father in the church,
I'll do there what I promised.

The spiritually poor will eat and be full;
Those who seek the Father will praise Him.

Father, I will live forever;
At the end of time all will recognize You.
All the families of the earth shall worship You.
Father, the kingdom shall be Yours.
You rule over all the ethnic peoples of the earth;
All who believe shall praise and worship You.
All unbelievers who will be thrown in hell
Will one day bow before You.
Future generations will serve You;

They will come and declare My righteousness
And because of their faith, My righteousness
Will be counted to them,
All because of what I, the Son, have done.

PSALM 23

I am your shepherd;

I will find a place for you to lie down
And rest comfortably in a green pasture.

I will restore your soul,

I will lead you in right paths
As surely as My name is the Lord.

I will guide you through death's valley

And bring you out on the other side;

My rod will protect you from danger

And my staff will rescue you when you are in trouble.

I will prepare a meal for you that will become your favorite,

I will satisfy your thirst with a cup that is full and running over;

My goodness and mercy will be like sheep dogs,

Keeping you from straying and leading you to the perfect place of
rest;

It is My house, My home in heaven and you can live there forever.

PSALM 24

I, the LORD, cause My earth to give good things,

I also own everyone who lives on this earth.

I created the earth as a watery sphere

And on the first day, I divided the waters from the land.

Who can come into My presence;
Who is able to stand before Me?
Only those who have clean hands and a pure heart,
Those who separate themselves from sin.

Those standing in My presence receive My blessings,
I declare them righteous through salvation.
These are the ones who seek to know Me,
These are the ones who want to stand in My presence. Selah!
I, the LORD, will open wide the eternal gates
And enter because I am the King of glory.
My enemies ask, "Who is the King of glory?"
I am the Lord, mighty to destroy them.

So I will march through the eternal gates
And enter triumphantly as the King of glory.
In judgment they continue to ask, "Who is the King of glory?"
I, the Creator of all the universe, am the King of glory. Selah!

PSALM 25

Come to Me in prayer;
Trust Me, do not be embarrassed,
Nor be defeated by your enemies.

I won't let any of My children be embarrassed
Because they put their trust in Me;
Let those who rebel against Me be embarrassed.

I will show you the principles to follow in life
And teach you to obey My truth.

I will encourage you to follow My principles
Because I am the God that has salvation;
You can come to Me for your deliverance.

I, the LORD, will remember My tender mercies for you
Because I have always shown My love to you.

I won't remember the sins you committed as a youth
And will deal with you according to My mercy.

In My goodness, I always do right;

Therefore, rebels see My way of living.

Know that I will take care of the meek in judgment
And I will teach them how to obey My way.

I always do the right thing

And show mercy to those who obey My principles.

I will forgive your sin for My name's sake,

Because you have not been perfect in many ways.

The ones who will fear My name,

I will guide them to do the right things.

I will give them peace because of their obedience

And let their children prosper.

I, the LORD, have the secret to life;

I have agreed to give life to those who obey Me.

You can always look to Me for deliverance;

I will lead you through trouble.

Look to Me for future deliverance,
Sometimes you are too dumb and weak to do it.
Your heart deceives you about decisions,
I will help you follow Me out of your problems.

You have many enemies that hate you,
They want to destroy you.
Keep Me close to you when trials come,
You don't want to be embarrassed;
Trust Me to deliver you.

I will always help you tell the truth
And guide you always to do the right thing.
I will save My people out of their trouble.

PSALM 26

I, the LORD, will examine you to see your integrity
Because when you put your trust in Me, you did not slip.
Examine your intentions thoroughly
Because you have not willingly sinned in your thoughts and intents.
You have meditated on My love to you
And you have tried to live by My principles.

You have not listened to My enemies,
Neither have you had fellowship with them.
Don't hang out with those who disobey Me
And do not let them influence you.
You have tried to always live innocently,
Therefore, walk in My forgiveness.

Tell everyone you are thankful for Me
And that you are grateful for My work in your life.

You have to come into My presence
To spend time with Me in My home.
Don't lump yourself in with disobedient sinners,
Nor with murderers who take innocent lives.
They constantly reject My truth,
They lie when they break My law.
As for you, be true to your integrity,
I will redeem you because of My mercy.
You know you are on solid ground,
So join other believers to bless Me.

PSALM 27

I, the LORD, am your light and salvation;
Whom shall you fear?
I am the strength of your life;
Why should you be afraid?
When evil persons come to eat you up,
They stumble and fall.
Though a host of evil people attack you,
Do not be afraid of them
Because you know I will protect you.

There's one thing you want from Me;
You will want to be in My house to see My beauty
And delight in My presence.
When troubles and problems attack you,

Hide in My presence,
And I will set you on a rock, so your enemies can't reach you.
I will lift you up above your enemies
So bring the sacrifices of joy to Me,
And sing praises to Me.

I will hear when you cry unto Me
And send you the help you need.
When I said to you, "Seek My face;"
You answered, "Your face will I seek."
I will not hide My face when you're searching for Me,
You need Me because only I can save you.
Even if your mother and father forsake you,
You know I will not leave you.
I, the LORD, will teach you how to successfully follow My way;
Because your enemies are waiting to attack you,
I won't let your enemies capture you
Because they tell lies about you and threaten your life.
You would have fainted and given up
If it hadn't been for My goodness to you.

Wait courageously for Me because
You know I will deliver you,
And you know I will come to you.

PSALM 28

When you pray to Me for help, I won't be silent;
If I don't hear and answer your prayer,
You'll be like the unsaved who can't pray.

I hear your prayers when you plead with Me,
 When you stretch out your hands toward My presence.
I won't treat you like I treat the wicked
 Who lie and violate My principles.
I will judge them because they commit sin
 And punish them with the anguish they curse others.
The wicked do not live by My principles,
 Nor do they care how I run the world;
 They destroy all that I've done.

Bless Me for hearing your prayers,
 I am your strength and protector.
Because you trusted Me, you were delivered,
 Therefore, sing praises for My protection.
I will give you the ability to overcome difficulties
 Just as I gave My Anointed strength during His suffering.
I save My people and bless them with My presence,
 Give them food to eat on life's journey;
 And when they die, take them to My eternal home.

PSALM 29

Glorify Me, your Lord, because of My awesome creation;
 You recognize My demonstrated power in this created world.
All of you who enjoy this earth
 Are obligated to worship Me because it reflects the beauty of My
 holiness.
Hear Me speak in the sound of powerful rivers;
 Hear My thunder in the storms
 And feel My presence when the floods sweep things away.

You are awed by My powerful voice in the storm,
My presence is majestic and compelling.
I, the LORD, speak when storms uproot trees;
I speak when trees are snapped and broken.
My storms skip playfully through meadows like a calf,
My winds tear up the bushes like a young ox.
My voice pierces like the lightning,
My voice like the wind sweeps across the desert.
I speak when the oaks are broken,
And My sound is heard as the forest is stripped bare.
All in My temple cry “glory!”
Because I rule over the storms.
I sit enthroned in heaven
And rule over all that happens on earth.
I give you strength
To live through the storms of life;
I give you inner peace while the storms rage.

PSALM 30

You lift Me up because I have protected you;
I have not allowed the enemy of death to conquer you.
When you were sick, you begged Me to let you live
And I healed you.
I, the LORD, delivered you from dying;
I kept you alive for a purpose.
Sing unto Me with the saints
And remember My majestic holiness.
I have allowed you to be sick for only a moment
And now I have allowed you to live.

You wept throughout the night,
 But joy came in the morning.
When you were healthy, you thought you'd live forever;
 You said you would never get sick.

Now you realize you live by My pleasure,
 I have made you as strong as a mountain.
When I withheld My spiritual blessings from you,
 You were scared that you might die.
Then you begged Me to let you live,
 You prayed for Me to hear you.
You said there is no reason for you to die
 Because you cannot praise Me if you are in the grave.
I heard your urgent prayer for mercy
 To come heal you in your hour of need.
You thanked Me for turning your mourning into dancing,
 I let you take off your hospital gown and put on happiness.
I want your healing to praise Me,
 You give Me thanks forever.

Praying to Face an Enemy

PSALM 31

When you face an enemy, you feel scared, and you don't like feeling terrified. Pray about your anxiety, "I will not let you be embarrassed, I will come down to listen to you, you need Me quickly" (v. 1, 2).

It's hard to get your attention off your oppressors. They seem so strong, and the fact you are distressed shows they have the upper

hand. “I hate those who tell lies” (v. 6). “My enemies keep chewing on me” (v. 11). When you focus on your adversary, you don’t have your focus on Me. “You want to see My face, so My mercy protects you” (v. 16).

You need to trust in My plan for your life, even in difficulties. You need to know that I will keep you when you are going through danger, even though you are hurt. “I, your Lord, will bless you, I will show you mercy, because I will protect you from all kinds of danger” (v. 21).

When you face an enemy, you need to be courageous. But strength is not within. “I will make you courageous in the face of lies, I will strengthen you to deal with them” (v. 24). Sometimes you get mad at them, but that’s not courage. When you get angry, you just give into your emotions. When you react, “shut up their lying mouth” (v. 18), You need to look beyond your angry petition and look for My presence. “I will give you access to My secret presence” (v. 20).

When you face an enemy, you need to trust in Me. “I am the only One you can trust, I am your Lord and your God” (v. 14). When you don’t have courage or self-control and you are frustrated and don’t know what to do, you need to trust Me. “I will strengthen you to deal with them, because you put your hope in Me” (v. 24).

PSALM 31

You can trust Me to deliver you;

I won’t let you be embarrassed.

I will come down to listen to you,

You need Me quickly.

You need Me to be as strong as a rock

To keep you from being defeated.

You need to hold My hand,

So I can lead you out of this trouble.

I will get you out of this predicament,

You know I can do it.

Put yourself into My hands

Because I am your Redeemer.

You hate those who tell lies

Because you serve Me, the God of truth.

You happily depend upon My mercy

Because I know the mess you're in

And I know how miserable you feel.

I have not boxed you in with your enemies,

I have given you lots of space.

I will be merciful to you in your trouble

Because you are eaten up with anxiety.

Your eyes are swollen from crying,

You're so tired you can't do anything.

Your enemies kept chewing on you,

Even your friends turned against you;

They avoided you, walking the other way.

Seems no one cares what happens to you,

You are thrown in the trash like a broken glass.

When you heard the lies your enemies told about you,

You were scared to death.

Then your enemies began planning together

How to get rid of you.

I am the only One you can trust,

I am your Lord and your God.
Commit your life to Me;
I will deliver you from your enemies who hate you
And from those who are trying to get you.

You want to see My face,
In My mercy I will protect you.
You don't want to be embarrassed;
Ask Me to protect you.
I will embarrass your enemies
And confuse their plans against you.
I will shut up their lying mouth,
So they can't tell lies against those who live by My principles.

I, the LORD, am good to you when you obey Me;
Therefore, trust Me with your reputation.
I give you access to My secret presence,
You feel protected when you're near Me.

You bless Me for My mercy
Because I protect you from all kinds of danger.
You're sorry for complaining about being cut off,
But in spite of your complaint, I answered you.

You love Me for protecting you
And for punishing those who lie about you.
I will make you courageous in face of lies
And strengthen you to deal with them,
Because you put your hope in Me.

PSALM 32

You are blessed

Because I forgave all your rebellion,

You are blessed

Because I covered your sin,

Now you can enjoy My presence.

I bless you by erasing your errors from My books;

I don't even remember them.

When you refused to recognize your sin,

Your whole body cried out with conviction.

Day and night, you were racked with pain by your guilt,

Your mouth was so dry you couldn't speak. Selah!

You recognized your sin that made you a wreck,

You could no longer hide your faults from Me. Selah!

So you confessed your transgression to Me and repented,

Then I forgave your terrible sin.

Because I am gracious to forgive your iniquity,

Every godly person will rest securely in Me

When judgment comes upon you.

You will hide in Me when that day comes,

You will worship Me with songs of deliverance. Selah!

I, the LORD, will teach you the proper principles of living

And guide you so you don't make mistakes.

You don't want to be like a horse that can't understand,

So I have to jerk you about with a bit in your mouth.

Those who rebel against Me have a hard life,

But I show mercy to those who trust Me.
You are happy because you follow My principles
And you shout for joy because I make you do right.

PSALM 33

You rejoice because I allowed you to approach Me;
You worship Me as you come to Me.
Everyone should praise Me with stringed instruments,
With instruments they should magnify Me.
You write new songs to worship Me,
You sing praises to Me from the bottom of your heart;
Because everything I say is right,
Everything I do is perfect.

I love to do right things and make right decisions,
I have made everything on earth good.
I spoke, and the hemisphere just appeared,
I breathed life into all the angels.
I scooped all the earth's water into My hands,
I planned the deepest part of the oceans.

Therefore, everyone on earth ought to recognize My power;
They should be afraid of My authority.
Everything I spoke was done just like I said,
Everything happened just as I wanted it to happen.
I, the LORD, mess up the plans of the ungodly
When they try to go against My principles.
My decisions are always right;
Anyone, who wants to, can know My principles.

I will always bless any group that follows My laws,
I will make them My people.

I look down to find conscientious worshipers,
I examine every heart to see who is sincere;
Not a single person escapes My scrutiny.

I gave everyone the same opportunity to seek Me,
Now I want to see what they have done with their chances.
No leader is saved just because he has a big following,
I do not save anyone by their ability.
No one can put their trust in earthly transportation,
Because that won't get anyone into My presence.

I see everyone who reverently follows Me,
I know those who trust in My mercy.
I will deliver their soul from hell,
I will take care of them on this earth.

You humbly wait for My blessing,
I am your help and your protection.
You will rejoice in what I give you
Because you trust Me to protect you and give you good things.
I will show you My mercy in this life
Because I am the only one you can trust.

PSALM 34

You will worship Me at all times;
My praise will continually be in your mouth.
You will tell everyone that You trust in Me,

Those who continually obey Me will rejoice with you.
You magnify My greatness;
I want everyone to join you in praising Me.
You searched for Me when you were scared to death,
I took away your anxiety.
Others looked to Me when they were afraid,
I did not disappoint them.

When you were scared, you cried to Me for help;
I heard you and delivered you from all your troubles.
I sent angels to protect you,
I told them to surround you and deliver you.
You have eaten the good food I provide,
Thank Me for satisfying you with My presence.
You want all your children to trust Me
Because you know I will take care of them.

The young rebellious lions go hungry,
But My children enjoy the good things I give.
So you want everyone to listen to you
Because you can teach them how to find satisfaction.

You know the average person doesn't want to die;
They want to live a long time and have a good life.
To get it they must quit speaking evil
And begin seeking the truth found in Me.
They must repent of their evil ways
And live peacefully according to My principles.

You know I see everything that My children do

And I hear everything that they say.
But My face is against those who do evil,
They die and I kick them out of My presence.

My children that live right cry to Me
And I deliver them out of all their troubles.
I am near to those who have a broken heart,
I save those who are sorry for their sin.
You know those who try to live right have many afflictions,
But I deliver you out of them all.
I protect you when they want to kill you,
They don't do you any permanent harm.
The sinners will agonize in their sins,
Those that hate peace-loving people will never have peace.
But, I will redeem the life of you who serve Me;
I will never abandon you.

PSALM 35

You will want Me on your side,
Against those who are out to get you.
I will protect your back side against your enemies
And oppose their evil plans against you.
I will use their lying tactics to confuse them
And give you confidence to deal with them.

I, the LORD, will undermine their arrogance and evil determination
And make them suffer the humiliation they plan against you.
Cut them down like weeds,
And let My angels blow them away like the wind.

Blind them so they stagger like a blind person,
Let My angels punish them.
Your enemies didn't have any reason to attack you.
You didn't do anything to make them mad.
I will punish them when they don't know it's coming
Just like they attacked you when you didn't expect it.

You rejoice in Me
Because I have saved you from your enemies.
You thank Me deeply for delivering you
From an enemy that was too strong for you.
They lied about you behind your back,
You didn't even know they were plotting against you.
You had been kind to them and helped them,
But they returned evil for the good you did for them.
When they were in trouble,
You spent your time praying for them;
You went without food fasting for them,
Did you waste your time caring about them?
You treated them like a friend,
You pledged yourself to them with a hand shake.
But when you got in trouble,
They spread bad news about you when you weren't around.
You didn't know they were plotting against you,
They did everything possible to destroy you.
To your face they were hypocrites,
But behind your back they ripped you to shreds.

Am I going to just watch their treachery from heaven?
I will come help you in your struggle against them.

Then you will tell all who trust Me
How I defeated them to save you.
Don't let your enemies be the ones rejoicing,
Make them howl with pain for what they've done.
Because they don't want to follow Me,
They want to turn My followers against each other.
They keep pointing out your troubles to other people,
Saying you deserve to be punished.

I've seen what they've done to you;
I won't keep still in heaven,
I won't turn My back on you.
I will get up and do something about it,
I will come to your defense.
I will examine you to see if you are sincerely following Me,
I won't listen to their lies about you.
I won't let them convince others you are a fraud,
I won't let them eat you up.
I will embarrass them because they lied about you,
They tried to make you look bad;
I will now let everyone see their lies and hypocrisy.

I, the LORD, will let My followers rejoice because I stepped in;
Letting them know that I will do the right thing
And that I will punish those who will not follow Me.
Praise Me because I will do right;
You will praise Me all day long.

PSALM 36

I, the LORD, see that the wicked do not respect Me;

Nor do they fear Me and what I do.
They build up themselves in their own esteem;
They think their wickedness will never be seen.
They love to think evil and speak wickedness;
They don't care about eternal things.
They go to bed to think evil plans and sinful pleasures,
But they plan things that will harm themselves,
And they do not fear evil consequences.

But My heart is filled with mercy for all,
My faithfulness reaches the clouds.
My righteousness is as firm as the mountains,
And My judgment is as deep as the ocean.
I preserve the life of people and animals,
I am loving and kind to them.

Therefore, My children put their trust in Me;
They are happy with things I provide them.
They drink from the rivers of My provision;
In Me they find the fountain of life,
And in My light, they are able to see things as they are.
I will continue to show loving-kindness to My own,
And those who are honest in heart.
I will not let the feet of proud people step on you,
Nor will I let their hand hurt you.
Those who serve iniquity will fall,
They will be thrown forever into the pit.

PSALM 37

You should not be afraid of evil doers,
Nor should you want to act like them.
The wicked will be cut down like grass at the harvest,
They shall wither like a limb cut from a tree.
You should trust in Me and do good with your life,
Live where I put you, and feed on My faithfulness.

Delight yourself in Me and make Me number one in your life, I will give you the desires of your heart.

Commit yourself to Me in faith,
Trust Me for all your present and future needs
And I can make it happen.

I will shine My light on your good acts,
And your good decisions will shine like the noon day sun.
Rest in Me, and wait patiently for Me;
And do not fret when evil doers prosper
For they shall have their reward.
Don't be angry and don't try to get even,
Your anxiety only makes matters worse.
Evil doers will one day be cut off,
But those who wait on Me
Will one day inherit the earth.

In a little while the wicked will be gone;
When you go to look for him
He shall be cut off and gone.
The meek shall inherit the earth
And they shall enjoy My peace.

The wicked will continue to plot against good people,
And they shall bite them with their teeth.
But I will laugh at the wicked
For I see their punishment coming.

The wicked have planned to harm the righteous
And they plan to hurt him.
They want to cast down the poor and needy
And destroy those with upright character.
I will punish them with the punishment
They planned for My people.
When the righteous have only a little in life,
It is better than the riches of the wicked.
I will break the arms of the wicked,
And I will uphold those who love righteousness.
I know how the righteous live and what they do,
And their inheritance shall be forever.
They shall not be ashamed when judgment comes,
What they have done will not be forgotten
Even in famine they will have something to eat.
But the wicked will die in their sin,
My enemies are like flowers in the fields;
They will be burned up in fire.
The wicked borrow and never repay,
But the godly are generous to others.

Those that I bless will eventually inherit the land;
Those that I curse will die in their sin.
I direct the steps of the godly
And delight in every aspect of their life.

If they stumble, they will not fall
For I hold them by their hand.
Once you were young, now you are old,
Yet you will never see Me abandon the godly,
Or their children going hungry.
The godly are willing to give generous loans to others
And their children are a blessing to them.

Turn from evil and always do the right things
And you will live in the land forever.
For I love those who do the right things,
And I will never abandon the godly.
I will keep them in My land forever,
But those who do evil will die.

The godly will possess the land
And live there forever.
The godly will give good counsel to others,
Teaching them right from wrong.
They like to obey My laws
And they do not stray from the narrow path.

The wicked wait to ambush the godly,
Looking for an excuse to kill them.
But I will not let the wicked succeed
Or let the godly be condemned by them.
Put your future hope in Me,
Walk carefully on the straight and narrow path.
I will honor them and reward them
And see that the wicked are destroyed.

You may have seen wicked and ruthless people
 Flourishing like a tree near streams of water.
But when you looked again, they were gone;
 You can search for them, but won't find them.

But look at those who are honest and good,
 They have a wonderful future waiting for them.
But those who rebel against Me
 Will be destroyed and heard from no longer.

I will rescue the godly
 And be their fortress in a time of trouble.
I will help them, and rescue them
 From the wicked plans of evil men.
I will save them
 And they shall find shelter in Me.

PSALM 38

I will not rebuke you in anger,
 Nor will I discipline you in a rage.
You may hurt like an arrow wound,
 Or you feel like a fist beating up on you;
Because your sin makes you feel sick all over,
 And your health is broken.
Your guilt overwhelms you
 And you feel your burdens are too heavy;
Because of all your foolish sin
 Your body hurts all over.

You are bent over and racked with pain,
And you walk around all day overcome by grief.
A fear rages within you
And your strength and energy are gone.
You are exhausted and your spirit is crushed,
And your heart groans with anguish.
Here is what you should look for,
You need to know My love and compassion.
You must turn your love toward Me
And seek My face and fellowship.

Your loved ones abandoned you fearing your disease,
Even your family stays their distance.
At the same time your enemies want to kill you;
They plan to ruin you,
And they plot treachery against you all day long.

You must turn a deaf ear to them
And not answer their complaints.
You must choose to not hear their criticisms
And don't reply to their accusations.

Wait for Me, your Lord and Deliverer,
I will answer them for you.
I will not let your enemies gloat over you
Nor will I let them rejoice over your downfall.

You must honestly confess all your sins
And be sorry for what you have done,
Before you face more pain and suffering

And collapse to rise no more.

You have many aggressive enemies

Who hate you from the bottom of their hearts.

When you do good to them, they repay with evil

And they oppose all your good works.

I will not abandon you because I am your God,

I will not stand far away.

I will come quickly to deliver you

Because I am your Lord and Savior.

When You Need Guidance

There comes a time when you need My direction in your life. Maybe you've made a mistake; maybe you've sinned and are in trouble, maybe you just haven't been listening to Me. But now you need Me to show you what to do. So pray the psalms, "I will lead you and guide you" (Ps. 37:3). Haven't I promised, "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye" (Ps. 32:8)?

The first step to finding My will for your life is to take responsibility for your life. No one else will answer to Me for your action, I hold you responsible. "You must guard your ways, lest you sin" (Ps. 39:1).

The second step in finding guidance is meditation. "My heart was hot within me; while I was musing, the fire burned" (Ps. 39:3). Because the psalmist was agitated or worried, he began thinking about a solution to his problem. But thinking is not enough; you've got to think about My solution to your dilemma.

The third thing is to ask Me for direction. "I your Lord, will make you know My end" (Ps. 39:4). Remember, the New Testament

exhorts, “You do not have because you do not ask” (James 4:2).

Next, realize I am in control, even though you think everything is out of control. “I have made your days” (Ps. 39:5). Even though you are in trouble, you can’t help yourself. “Every man at his best state is but vapor” (Ps. 39:5).

The fifth thing is to ask Me to help you keep from making mistakes. And when you do make mistakes, ask Me to help you overcome their consequences. “I will deliver you from the consequences of your sin” (Ps. 39:8).

The sixth thing is to ask for My strength to do the things I direct. Many people pray for My guidance, but after they know what to do, they don’t do it (disobedience) or they can’t do it (inability). “Lord, I’m just a traveler in this life—spare me from the afflictions, so I can get strong again” (Ps. 39:13).

PSALM 39

Here is My advice to you

So you can live holy and happy.

Remind yourself constantly to watch what you do

So you don’t sin in word or deed.

Be careful what you say and how you say it

When ungodly people are around you,

Sometimes you must stand there silently

And think about what you are going to say

So that you speak good words from positive thoughts.

The more you think about it

There grows an agitation within you,

So think before you blow up

And spew fiery words without thinking.

Remember how brief your time on earth

And that your days are numbered,
And your life is fleeting and swift.
Your life is not as wide as the width of My hand,
Your whole life is lived within a second of the universe;
At best you are just a breath of air.
You are just a shadow moving on a well,
And your busy work adds up to nothing.
You give your time and energy to make money,
But you don't know who will spend it when you are gone.
So put your trust in Me,
Your only hope is following My plan for your life.
Let Me rescue you from your rebellion
And deliver you from the attacks of foolish people.

Stand silent before Me, don't say anything;
When I have to punish you, take it like a man.
Sometimes you will be disciplined for your sin
To help you see the error of your ways.
Remember you are but a breath
And your life should be extremely precious to you.

I will hear your prayers,
Especially when you cry for help.
I will not ignore your tears of repentance;
You are just a stranger traveling your path through life
Just as your parents before you traveled their path.
So rejoice and be glad for your life
Before you make your exit and are gone.

PSALM 40

I, the LORD, will wait patiently for you
And listen to you and hear your request.
I brought you up out of a horrible pit,
I set you on a rock and established your life.

I put a new song in your heart,
Even praises to Me for delivering you.
Many will hear your song of worship to Me,
They will also put their trust in Me.

I bless all those who trust Me for salvation
And those who repent from their lies and arrogance.
I have done many wonderful works;
I have kept you in My thoughts.
You cannot understand all I do for you,
The things I do for you cannot be remembered.
I do not want you to bring sacrifices to Me,
Come to Me the way I command in Scripture.

I want you to obey My will,
Your heart delights to do My command.
You have told everyone to live right,
I know you were never ashamed to testify for Me.

You have not been a “secret believer,”
I know you told everyone about My faithfulness to you.
You didn’t keep quiet about your faith,
You told everyone you were My follower.

Therefore, I won’t withhold My tender mercy from you;

I will preserve you as I have promised.
There are so many temptations you can't count them,
They make you feel guilty and discouraged.

I, the LORD, will come deliver you from the Evil One;
I will come quickly as you need Me now.
I will embarrass them that are trying to defeat you
And let them suffer the defeat they plan for you.

I will let them experience the misery of their sin
That they plan for you to experience.
I will let all that seek Me rejoice in My salvation
And let them have the pleasure of magnifying Me continually.

I, the LORD, know you are poor and needy;
Look to Me in your time of need.
I will come and help you get through your difficulties;
I will come quickly because you need Me now.

PSALM 41

I, the LORD, bless those who look after the poor;
I promise to deliver those who defend the poor.
I also promise to preserve that person's life
And I will not deliver them to their enemies.
When that person gets sick, I will take care of them;
I will be with them in their illness.

You are that person who needs My mercy,
I will heal you, even though you have sinned against Me.

Your enemies tell everyone about your troubles,
They are anxious for you to die.
They lie when they come to pay a sick call on you,
They are just gathering gossip to spread to your enemies.

Everyone that hates you continues to spread dirt,
So they can destroy your reputation and your life.
They claim you are about to die because of your sin
And that you cannot recover from this problem.
Even some close friends that you used to trust
Are trying to knife you in the back.

Now I, the LORD, will be merciful to you in your sickness;
I will raise you up so you can go after them.

When I raise you up it will be a signal,
That your enemies cannot defeat you.

I will judge you with integrity
And that you will enjoy My presence.

Bless Me, the Lord of Israel,
I am the same from everlasting to everlasting.

When You Want to Know Me

The passion of the sons of Korah was to know Me intimately. These are the psalms to pray when you feel separated from Me, alienated or alone. Perhaps the sons of Korah continually sought My presence because their family namesake wouldn't come to the tabernacle. He alienated himself from Me.

Originally, Korah was born into the family of Levi and became My priest (see Exod. 6:24). He was a young man delivered from slavery in Egypt. Korah saw My power when he walked through the

Red Sea on dry land. He ate the manna that I supernaturally supplied and drank the water from the rock. He had seen one miracle after another. As a priest, Korah sacrificed to Me for his sins, as well as for the sins of his family and others.

But Moses and Aaron became My leaders, not Korah. Korah became jealous, and along with two of his companions, Datham and Adirom, resisted Moses' leadership (see Num. 16, 26:9-11; 27:3; Jude 11). Korah rebelled against Me. I saw the sin of Korah and commanded him to appear before Me at the tabernacle. But Korah, Datham and Adirom refused to obey Me and were swallowed up by the earth in an earthquake. However, his sons were spared (see Num. 26:11).

Apparently, the sons of Korah were ashamed of their father's rebellion to Me. In reaction, they became meek and obedient. Because their father refused to come to the tabernacle, the sons of Korah stayed as close to the tabernacle as possible. Never again did a son of Korah become a prideful leader. They served Me without recognition or fanfare. Therefore, when they wrote a psalm, it was about knowing Me. They didn't attach their individual names; rather, their psalms are ascribed to all of them "the sons of Korah."

The sons of Korah saw Me everywhere, and they passionately desired to experience My presence. The story is told of two priests from the sons of Korah who had been away from My Temple for a long time. They had not been able to sacrifice to Me, nor to hear the great psalms sung by the Levitical choir in My Temple. As they were returning through the wilderness, they saw a young deer being chased through the woods by dogs. It is here that the sons of Korah wrote:

As a young deer, running through the woods looking for water,

So pants my soul after You, O God,

My soul is thirsty for You.

I have been away from Thy temple, now I want to worship You,
my God,

I want to appear in Your presence,

And pour out my soul to You.
Some saw my discouragement and I said, “Where are You, my
God?”,
As deep calls to deep, I call to You,
I will go up with worshipers this day.
—Psalm 42 (Amplified)

The Psalms of the Sons of Korah

- 42 Longing for God
- 43 Hoping in God
- 44 A Prayer for the Distressed
- 45 The Beauty of the King
- 46 Our Refuge and Strength in God
- 47 Celebrating the LORD God Most High
- 48 The Beauty of the City of Zion
- 49 Discerning Real Value in Life
- 84 Enjoying the House of God
- 85 The Prayer of the Returned Exiles
- 87 Zion, the City of God
- 88 A Lament over Affliction

PSALM 42

Just as a young deer thirsts for streams of water,
So I want worshipers to long for Me.
I want them to pant for Me, the living God,
So they desire to come stand in My presence.
Enemies taunt My people, “Where is your God?”
But those who seek Me day and night find Me.

When your life is barren and your heart lonely,
Remember how it used to be.
You gathered in a great procession
Coming to worship Me in My house.
You were singing with spontaneous joy
Because of the great celebration.

Why are you discouraged and so sad?
Put your hope in Me and praise Me again;
I am your Savior and your God.
But you are downcast and depressed,
Remember the Jordan River, the source of the surging seas.
It started in the land of Mizar, on Mount Hermon,
Then gushes down the Jordan River renewing life as it goes.
Each day I will pour My unfailing love on you,
And each night you can sing songs to Me
Because I give songs in the night.

I am your Rock, why have you forgotten Me?
Why are you filled with grief and your enemies defeat you?
They question, "Where is your God?"
Don't give into discouragement, and sadness,
Put your hope in Me, your Savior and God
And praise Me with your whole heart.

PSALM 43

I, the LORD, will declare you are innocent
And will defend you against ungodly people.
I will rescue you from unjust liars

Because I am your God, your only safe haven.
You think I have to put you aside
And you are tormented with grief,
Then attacked by your enemies.
I, the LORD, will cause you to see the light and the truth
That will guide you into fullness of life.
My Scriptures will lead you to the Holy Mountain
When you gather at the place of My presence.
There you will go to the altar for cleansing,
Then you will praise and worship Me.
So, don't be discouraged and sad,
Revive your hope, praise and worship Me,
Your Savior and God.

PSALM 44

Have you heard from your ancestors
What I have done for you?
It was a long time ago
That I did miracles for you.
I drove evil nations out of your land
And I gave your country to you.
I crushed your enemies
And gave freedom to your forefathers.
They did not conquer the land with their might,
Nor did it happen with their military strategy.
It was My strong right arm,
And My face shined on you
Because I loved you.

I am your King and your God,

I make Israel victorious.
My power can push back your enemies
By My name you can achieve victory.
Do not trust in your bow and arrows
And do not count on your sword to save you,
I am the One who will give you victory;
I will put your enemies to shame.
Give Me glory for all your success
And constantly praise Me for all you have.

But you have dishonored Me by your sin;
You no longer call on Me to lead you into battle.
So now you run from your enemies
And they plunder your land.
I have let them butcher you like sheep
And scattered you among the nations.
Your people are sold like slaves
And your enemies make money on the dead.
Your neighbors mock you,
You are the object of their laughter.
They constantly make fun of you
And wonder why you are so weak.
You are constantly humiliated
And everyone sees your shame.
All you hear is mocking
And your enemies are ready to get even.

I have not forgotten you through all your problems;
Now you are trying to keep our covenant.
Your hearts are turning back to Me

And you are attempting to walk righteously.
Yet you are still living in a crushed home
And you are surrounded with death and darkness.
You have remembered to call on My name
And not spread your hands to foreign gods.
I will surely see your attempts to return to Me
And I know the secrets of your heart.
Even as you suffer physically each day,
In truth you are suffering for your sins.

I am not asleep, and I know your plight;
I will not reject you; forever I will come to you.
I will not look away from you,
And I will not ignore your suffering
When you collapse in the dust.
I will rise up to help you;
I will redeem you because of My unfailing love.

PSALM 45

Let your heart overflow with prayers
For the one who is your King.
Tell everyone with your tongue, write it on papers,
That your Messiah is the fairest of all.
He came speaking grace to you,
Therefore, I bless you through Him.
Your Messiah will strap on His sword for battle,
He will glorify Himself in victory.
He will ride majestically in truth, humility, and righteousness,
And will teach you great truths.
His arrows will strike His enemies

And they shall fall under Him.
His throne is forever and ever,
He shall rule by His scepter of righteousness.
I, the Father, have anointed Him
With the oil of righteousness.
His garments are scented with myrrh and aloes;
He emerges out of His ivory palace with His bride.
She is honored by all who see her;
She stands at the right hand of Messiah.

Listen O bride to wise advice,
Think about what you should do;
Forget about your friends and family.
Because your Messiah has made you His prize
Therefore, worship Him because He is your Lord.
Many will come with a wedding present;
They will glory in your day.
You are clothed in the garments of righteousness,
His glory became your glory,
And His righteousness has become your righteousness.
You shall be faithful to your Messiah
And all who come with you will be the same.
With joyful songs you shall be presented to Messiah
As you enter the sanctuary of His presence.
His family shall be your family,
Not those in your physical life
But all those who worship Messiah with you.
You will be remembered continually,
And you will please Messiah forever and ever.

PSALM 46

I, the LORD, am your refuge and strength,
A very present help in times of trouble.
Therefore, do not be afraid,
Even though earthquakes come.
Even when the mountains are carried into the sea,
And storms trouble the face of the waters,
And the ground is no longer stable.

There is a happy river flowing from My city.
It comes from My tabernacle.
I made My home in the midst of that city,
She should not quake or be moved;
I will help you at the beginning of the day.
The heathen fight against Me and My laws,
The kingdoms are cast down;
I speak, and the earth obeys.
I—the Lord of Host—will be with you,
I—the God of Jacob—will protect you.

Come, see what I am doing,
I have made desolation of the earth.
There will be no more wars, and time will cease;
I will destroy all the weapons of war,
There will be no way to make war.

Be still and know that I am God,
I will be exhaled among all tribe of people;
I will be glorified in all the earth.
I—the Lord of Host—will be with you,

I—the God of Jacob—will be your refuge.

PSALM 47

I—the Lord Almighty—am awesome;
I am the King of the earth.
Come everyone shout your praises
And clap your hands in joy.
I subdue nations that oppose righteousness,
And destroy those who are My enemy.
I have selected the Promised Land for My people,
It is the inheritance for the children of Jacob.
I will be lifted up with a mighty shout of praise
When the trumpets announce My arrival.
Sing praises to Me, sing heartedly,
For I am your King and God.
Recognize I am the ultimate ruler of the earth
As I sit on My Holy throne in heaven.
All people who love Me gather together,
Gathering with the children of Abraham.
Authority over all people belongs to Me
And I will be honored everywhere.

PSALM 48

I, the LORD, sit on My throne in the Holy Mountain,
It is high and magnificent
And the whole earth rejoices to see it;
Mount Zion is My Holy Mountain.
It is the city where I choose to dwell;
I will be worshiped there in greatness.

Direct your praise to Me there
For I myself live among Jerusalem's towers
And I will defend this city.

The kings of the earth will join forces
To attack Me and My city;
But when they saw I was there,
They got scared and ran away.
Terror seized them
Like a woman writhing in pain with childbirth;
I will destroy them with My mighty breath
Like a storm destroys a mighty armada.

You have heard about Jerusalem's glory,
You will realize it when you see it.
Heaven's army is located there,
It is My city,
I will keep the title deed forever.
Think about my unfailing love
As you worship in My Temple;
Praise Me from the ends of the earth.
As My name deserves your honor,
My strong right hand will lead to victory.
Let the people of Mount Zion rejoice;
Let all the towns of My land be glad
Because I will rule with justice.
Go look at My city of Jerusalem,
Walk around the city and see the towers.
See the strong walls that defend it,
Remember what you see in Jerusalem

So you can tell future generations.
Remember, I will be your God forever,
Israel will be My people till the end of time.

PSALM 49

Listen, everyone in the world,
Rich and poor, upper class and lower class.
The message you hear will be true
And these thoughts are filled with wisdom.
There are many proverbs that are told,
And there will be many questions that are asked
But listen to My truth!

You don't have to fear when facing trouble,
Nor should enemies scare you.
Some people put their trust in money,
And they boast of their great wealth.
Yet they cannot redeem themselves from death
By paying a ransom to live.
Salvation does not come cheaply
And no one has enough money to buy it.
No one ever lives forever
And escapes the final day of death.

Look, all wise people eventually die
Just like fools and the ignorant.
They both leave their wealth to others;
They think they will live forever
And their houses will always be there for them.
They name houses and property by their name

But no one remains alive on this earth.
Every person is just like all animals,
The aged get weaker and eventually die.
What happens to those who live for themselves?
Even though they are honored by others,
They eventually must face death.
Like cattle they walk blindly towards death,
And they end up in the grave
Far from their wealthy home and resources.
But, I will redeem the soul of those who trust Me,
I will lift them from the grave to My presence.

So don't get envious when the rich get richer,
And their homes become bigger and more expensive.
When they die, they take none of it with them;
Their money will not go with them.
In this life they thought they were lucky
Because others praise them for their money.
But all will die someday, just as their fathers,
And they won't see again the light of day.
These respected persons who do not trust Me
Are just like an animal that will also eventually die.

THE PSALMS OF ASAPH

WHEN YOU NEED DELIVERANCE

Asaph wrote twelve psalms to reflect his fears and frustrations in life. These Asaph Psalms focus on how I intervened for him in

difficult situations. Asaph was a priest of God who fled Jerusalem with David, the future King of Israel. Saul chased David all over the Judean hills trying to kill him. During these thirteen difficult years in exile, Asaph was chased with David. During the long cold nights sleeping on the hard ground, Asaph remembered My presence in My Temple, and he thanked Me for preserving his life each time the enemy almost killed him. Many times, Saul almost caught David, and if Saul had captured him, he would have killed David and Asaph. So Asaph prayed these psalms of gratitude for My constant deliverance.

Night after night Asaph was separated from friends and home. He might have wondered if he would ever be returned to the priesthood and My Temple. During these nights of solitude, he prayed for My intervention. “In the day of my trouble he sought Me—he complained, and his spirit was overwhelmed. And he said, this is my anguish; but he remembered the years of My right hand his Most High. He determined to meditate on all My work and talk of My deeds” (Ps. 77:2-3, 10, 12).

However, when Asaph returned again to My Temple, he sang psalms about those cold, lonely nights in the open fields, where he was separated from his family, and My Temple. It is here that he prayed: Asaph remembered in times of trouble, his songs in the night,

He prayed constantly to Me, his Lord,

“Will you cast me away forever,

Is your mercy gone forever?”

Asaph remembered in infirmity, My right hand protected him,

He remembered My past wonders,

He meditated all night on My works.

—Psalm 77, author’s translation

Asaph is called the chief musician by David and by Solomon. The sons of Asaph continued to serve after he died (see 2 Chron.

35:15). They continued into and through the exile (see Ps. 74, 79, 81, 83). These psalms could have been prayed by the sons of Asaph during the Babylonian captivity. A few others think that Asaph might have written these psalms by prophecy. Perhaps these psalms expressing his experiences when he and David were exiled from Jerusalem but were predictive of the nation's exile from the Promised Land.

When you begin to pray the Psalms of Asaph, remember how I delivered you in the past. How I have protected you in the past is predictive of how I will deliver you in the future. By remembering what I have done in the past, I can take away fear of the future, or discouragement in the presence.

Maybe you don't understand what I am doing in your life. Then pray the Psalms of Asaph. Why? Because Asaph had trouble understanding what was happening in his life. "Until he went into My sanctuary; then he understood their end" (Ps. 73:17).

The Psalms of Asaph

Psalm 50: God Himself Is Judge

Psalm 73: Prayer for Forgiveness

Psalm 74: Remember Your People, O Lord

Psalm 75: God Is Judge

Psalm 76: The Lord Is to be Feared

Psalm 77: Remembering the Works of God

Psalm 78: Teach the Next Generation

Psalm 79: David, the Shepherd of Israel

Psalm 80: Prayer for Restoration

Psalm 81: Israel, God's Ruined Vine

Psalm 82: Defend the Poor

Psalm 83: Prayer for the Lord To Pursue the Wicked

PSALM 50

I am mighty God, I have spoken;

I have called everyone from one end of the earth to the other
Out of beautiful Mount Zion where I live;
My glorious radiance is shining.

I am not silent about what's coming,

A fire will burn away everything that is hidden.
Heaven and earth will really see how everything comes out
As I judge My people, Selah!

I will gather everyone in My presence,

Even those who made a covenant to worship Me.
Then the heavens will testify if they were obedient,
Then I will reveal everything in their hearts.

I, the LORD, call My people to listen

As I bring charges against them;
I am the Lord, their God.

I know My people have sacrificed;

They continually brought burnt offerings to Me.
But I don't need their animals
Because all the cattle on a thousand hills are Mine;
I know all the birds of air,
All living creatures on the earth belong to Me.

If I needed meat for satisfaction,

I wouldn't need people to bring it to Me.
Because the earth is Mine and everything in it,
I don't need the animals that My people sacrifice
And I don't need the blood offerings they bring.

What I want is the gratitude of thankful hearts,
I want My people to do what they promised Me.
I want them to trust Me in the day of trouble;
I want them to glorify Me.

But I tell the disobedient
Don't pretend You obey Me by reciting My laws
Because they refuse to love My ways,
They never pay attention to what I want.
When they saw a thief, they helped him,
And they got involved in adultery.
They repeated all the evil things they heard,
And they lied when confronted with their actions.
They accused others of the evil they did,
They even lied about their brothers.

I, the LORD, kept silent while they did these things
And they thought I didn't care.
Now I am calling them to account for their actions,
Now I am looking at their crimes.
They must realize they have ignored Me,
They must realize I can tear them into pieces
And no one will be able to help them.
I am pleased with grateful hearts that accompany sacrifices,
I accept those who worship Me honestly;
These are the ones I save.

When You Need Forgiveness

PSALM 51

When you feel guilty, nothing feels better than My forgiveness. David asked Me to “Hide My face from his sins and blot out all his iniquities” (Ps. 51:9).

It doesn’t make any difference what you’ve done. Sometimes a small sin will rip your soul apart, especially if it’s something you can’t quit. Then the small sin gets bigger. When you feel terrible—small sin or big sin—you still feel like you’ll die. What should you do? Begin where you feel worse, begin with your sin. “Acknowledge your transgressions” (Ps. 51:3).

Right now, your cup is empty; all your goodness is gone. You feel like you’ve poured out milk and your cup is filled with garbage. “I will have mercy upon you, I am your God” (Ps. 51:1). Isn’t that what you need, My mercy? Also, you need your cup cleansed. “According to the multitude of My tender mercies, I will blot out your transgressions” (Ps. 51:1).

Yes, that’s what you need more than anything else—purity. “I will cleanse you from your sin, so you can be clean, I will wash you so you can be whiter than snow” (Ps. 51:7).

When you feel bad, you want some happiness in your life. You want the peace you had before you sinned. “I will restore unto you the joy of My salvation and give you a new spirit to obey Me” (Ps. 51:12).

When your sin oppresses, you feel I will never use you again. You think that you’ll never be able to serve Me again. But with forgiveness comes restoration to service. “I will not cast you away from My presence, and I will not take My Holy Spirit from you. Then you will teach transgressors My ways” (Ps. 51:11, 13).

PSALM 51

I will have mercy on you

Because of My unfailing love.

I will have compassion on you,
And blot out the stain of your sin.
I will wash you clean from your guilt,
And I will purify your soul.
Because you recognize your rebellion against Me
Your sin haunts you day and night.
Your sin was against Me, not others, but against Me;
You have done evil in My sight.
You realize I am right in what I do
And My decisions about you are correct.
You are a sinner, and were born in sin;
You have sinned since your mother conceived you.
But I desire honesty even in the womb,
I began teaching you what to do even there.

I will purify you and you shall be clean,
I will wash you so you are whiter than snow.
Yes, I have broken you because of your sin,
But I will give you back your joy and rejoicing.
I will not constantly remind you of your sin,
I will give you a clean heart
And renew an obedient spirit in you.
I will not throw you out of My presence
And I won't take the Holy Spirit from you.

I will restore the joy of your salvation,
And give you a willing spirit to obey Me.
Then you can teach sinners My way,
And they will come to Me for forgiveness.

I will forgive you for shedding blood,
Then you can joyfully sing My praises.

I will open your mouth to speak for Me,
And your lips will sing My praises.

I do not want blood sacrifices
Nor do I want burnt offerings.
I want you to have a broken and repentant heart,
I want your spirit yielded to Me.

I will look with favor on the work you do;
I will help you complete your ministry.
Then I will accept sacrifices offered with the right spirit
And I will accept your burnt offerings and blood sacrifices
And I will forgive you because you offer proper sacrifices.

PSALM 52

When your enemies boast about your sins and crimes,
Remember My justice still continues.
All day long your enemies plan your destruction,
His tongue cuts like a razor
And he is an expert at telling lies.
He loves evil more than he loves righteousness,
He loves to tell a lie more than the truth
And to destroy others with his lies.
But I will destroy him forever,
I will pick him up from his home and move him far away
So he will not have eternal life with the righteous.

My righteous people will see what happens,

Then they shall fear Me,
And they will laugh at that wicked person
Saying, "Look what happens to the one who does not fear the Lord."

He trusted in his own strength
And grew bolder in wickedness.
They who fear Me will be like olives trees
Whose trust in Me causes them to thrive.
They shall praise Me forever
For what I have done for him.
They will trust in My good name
In the presence of My other children.

PSALM 53

Only fools say in their hearts
I—the LORD God—do not exist.
Their heart thinks corruptly,
They intend to do evil in life;
Not one of them can be trusted.

I look down from heaven to see
Every person who has ever lived
To see if anyone is entirely honest,
If any of them are seeking Me.
But not one is honest, they have turned away
Following their corrupt conscience and mind.
None of them wants to do good,
Not a single one.

When will those controlled by evil ever learn?

They reject and ignore My principles
And would never pray to Me,
 But one day terror will seize them,
 Fear that will violently shake them;
I will scatter them like ashes on a grave,
 They will be afraid for rejecting Me.

I will come again to Mount Zion
 To rescue and restore My people.
Then all Israel will shout for joy
 And all My people will rejoice.

PSALM 54

Strangers have attacked you
 And they are trying to kill you;
Strangers who care nothing for Me, the LORD,
 They will not let anything stop them,
I will display My power to rescue you,
 I will defend you in My own way.
I am listening to your plea for help;
 I will hear your prayers.

I, the LORD, will help you defend yourself,
 I am your life and strength.
The evil plans of your enemies
 Will be turned against them,
I will judge them accordingly.

I will make a way through your troubles,
I will help you win over your enemy.
You will praise My name for My goodness,
You will bring your voluntary offerings.

PSALM 55

I will listen to your prayers
And will not ignore your cry for help.
I will answer your heartfelt request
When you are overwhelmed with problems.

When your enemies are yelling at you,
Threatening your body and soul;
And when they hurt you and cause pain
And angrily try to kill you,

Then your heart pounds with fear
And you think you will die.
You are overwhelmed with terror
And you can't control your emotions.

And you want wings like a dove
To fly away from all your troubles,
To fly far away into the hills
Where it is peaceful and quiet,
So you could quickly escape
From the wild storms that are threatening you.

I can confuse and frustrate your enemies

Who attack you within your city
Even when the city walls are patrolled
 Against attacking enemies from without.
The real threat is evil and trouble within the city
 Where normal life is coming unglued,
Because lying and cheating is everywhere
 And there is no one to trust.
It's not your enemy who scares you,
 You could fight against them.
It's not those who hate you and lie against you,
 You could ignore or run away from them.
Instead, it is your friends and fellow workers
 That threaten your peace and life.
You once had close companionship with them
 And you went with them to the house of God.

Now you pray for death to catch them,
 And the grave to swallow them,
 Because of evil within their hearts.
Call upon Me your Lord and God
 And I will save you.
Cry out to Me, morning, noon, and night;
 Cry and when distressed I will hear you.
I have redeemed your soul
 So I will keep you safe in life's battle.
Though many still oppose you,
 I am your God who has ruled forever;
 I will hear and humble them.
I will deal with your enemies
 Because they do not fear Me.

Your enemy is a companion who has betrayed you,
He lied and did not keep his promise.
His words were charming and friendly,
But his heart was filled with hypocrisy.
He poured those wounds on you like lotion,
All the while sticking a dagger in your soul.

Leave your burdens at My feet;
I will take care of you.
I will not let you slip and fall;
I will send the evil hypocrite
Down to the pit of destruction.
They will not live out their allotment of days,
So trust in Me to deliver you.

PSALM 56

I, the LORD, will be merciful when your enemy tries to capture you;
They have oppressed you a long time.
They have been out to get you all the time,
And there are many enemies against you.
But whenever you are afraid,
Put your trust in Me, your Lord.
You can trust Me to keep My word,
You can praise Me for what I do.
Do not fear what a human can do to you,
They will put lies in your mouth.

They will think up evil things

To do to hurt you.
They will get others to help them
And try to stab you in the back
When you do not know they are around.
You pray angrily for Me to trip them up;
You don't want them to get away with evil.

I know all your sorrows,
And I have recorded them in a book.
I have collected your tears, all of them,
And kept them in a bottle.

Your enemies will run away
When you call on Me for help.
Know that I am on your side;
I will come to help you.
Praise Me for what I have promised;
Yes, praise Me for I keep My Word.
Trust in Me and don't be afraid,
What can a mere human do to you?
Fulfill the vows you made to Me,
Offer sacrifices with thanksgiving for My help.
I have rescued you from the depths of death;
I have kept your feet from slipping.
Now you can walk in My presence;
You can walk in life-giving light.

PSALM 57

I, the LORD, will have mercy on you
When you call on Me for protection.

I will hide you under My wings
 Until the danger passes by.
When you cry out to Me, the Most High God,
 I will fulfill My plans and purposes for you.
I will move heaven and earth to protect you
 From those who constantly try to hurt you.
I will love you with unfailing love
 And you can count on My faithfulness.
When you are surrounded by wild animals
 Who want to eat you up,
Whose teeth rip you like a hungry predator
 And whose teeth pierce your soul,
I will exalt Myself above the highest heaven,
 My glory shall shine over all.

When your enemies set a trap for you
 And you are afraid and distressed,
And they dig a deep hole to hurt you,
 They themselves will fall into it.

Let your heart be confident in Me,
 Rest assured, I know their intent.
You can sing praises to Me in the morning;
 You can wake up your heart to praises.
Get up early each morning to praise Me;
 Offer thanksgiving among the assembly
 And sing My praises to all people.
My unfailing love is as high as heaven,
 And My faithfulness reaches the clouds.

PSALM 58

I, the LORD, have a gracious reward for the righteous
And will accurately judge all the rest,
Including rulers who do not lead according to truth,
Who are not fair with those they rule.
These rulers plan to rip off those under them
And get what they want with force.
They were born sinners, and they live by violence;
They have lied from their birth for selfish reasons.
Their words are like deadly venom from a snake;
They refuse to listen to the truth.
They ignore everyone who tries to reason with them
Or explain the truth to them.

I will break their snake's fangs;
I will smash their mouths.
They will disappear like water poured into sand;
Their arguments will be useless.
They will be like worms that crawl into mud,
And like a stillborn baby, never to see the sun.
Like a cooking pot that never reaches the fire
I shall blow them away in a storm.

When the righteous see My anger to their enemies,
They shall be vindicated for standing for truth.
I have a gracious reward for the righteous
And will accurately judge all the rest.

PSALM 59

When your enemies set an ambush to trap you
And they are lurking outside your door,
I, the LORD, will defend you from strong men who would destroy you
And rescue you from their trap.
These fierce enemies are out to get you
Even when you are innocent and have not attacked them.
I see everything that is happening;
I know what they are trying to do to you.
I will punish them for the evil they plan to do
And will show no mercy to them;
I am the Lord of heaven's armies, the God of Israel.

Your enemies sneak out at night
Prowling around like hungry wild dogs.
Their mouths are full of filthy words
And they plan to trap you with their speech.
They think no one hears what they are saying
But I hear and will laugh at them.
I am your strength, let Me rescue you for I am your fortress of safety;
Cling to My unfailing love
For I will be victorious over your enemies.

I will not kill them immediately;
Their punishment will be a lesson to all.
My power will force them to their knees
Because of their sinful words and deeds.
Their pride will destroy them;
Their lies and curses will add extra punishment.
It's My anger that will bring them down
Not just the prayer you ask.

They will be punished so all the world will know
That I—the Lord God—reign over all.

Yet your enemy prowls under the cover of darkness;
After the sun goes down they scavenge the garbage
Eating the hand that feeds them,
But they are never satisfied with the food of sin.

Sing praises about My power,
Each morning sing of My unfailing love.
I have always been your refuge,
I am your safe fortress in times of trouble.
Sing praises for My power to save
For I am your rock during the storm;
Sing praises for My faithfulness for I will deliver you.

PSALM 60

I, the LORD, have rejected you when you reject My leadership;
I have been angry with you because of your sin,
Because you refused to seek My favor.
I have stirred up your nation
And divided your people
Because you would not seek My unity.
I, the LORD, have been hard on you
So that you stagger and can't walk.
But I will raise My banner over those who fear Me,
Because they rally to Me when attacked.
I, the LORD, will come rescue My beloved people,
Answering their prayers,

And saving them by My power.
I made promises to you because of My holiness;
I will divide Shechem
And walk through the valley of Succoth,
Gilead is Mine, so is Manasseh.
Ephraim is My crown,
Judah will reinforce My laws.
Moab is My wash pot,
I claim Edom as My possession.
Philistia will also be My victory;
Who will win strong cities for Me?
Who will win the battle for Edom?
I will now fight for you.
Even though I rejected you for rejecting Me,
Because you called upon Me in your trouble,
And you realized help from others was useless,
You shall win battles through Me
Because I will tread down your enemies.

PSALM 61

Because your heart is overwhelmed,
And you cry unto Me, your Lord, for help,
I will lead you to a rock
That is higher than you.
I will hear your cry and listen to your prayer,
No matter where you are when you call.
Because I am your shelter,
And a strong fortress when the enemy attacks.
Come rest in My tabernacle
And find protection in the shelter of My wings.

For I have heard your vows,
 You have My heritage because you fear My name.
I will preserve the life of your leader,
 And give him many generations in the future.
The king will abide in My presence,
 My mercy and truth will preserve him forever.
So sing praises to Me continually
 And faithfully serve Me all the days of your life.

PSALM 62

Let your soul silently wait for Me, your Lord,
 For salvation comes from Me alone.
I, the LORD, am your rock and your salvation,
 You shall not be moved because I will defend you.

People will continually attack you,
 But eventually I will slay them.
They are like a rotten fence with no protection
 And a broken wall that keeps out nothing.
They plan to tear you down,
 Lying about you when you are not present.
They compliment you to your face,
 But lie about you behind your back
 And pronounce curses on your life.

Wait silently for Me your God,
 Put your expectations in Me alone.
I am your only rock and salvation,

You shall not be moved.
I am your salvation and glory,
The rock of your strength,
So your refuge must be in Me alone.
Trust in Me at all times,
Pour out your heart to me in prayers
For I am your refuge.

Men of low degree are like hot air,
And men of high degree are not what they appear.
Put them both together,
They are nothing times nothing.
Do not try to make a living deceitfully;
Do not try to live by stealing.
Even when you make a living honestly,
Do not let money be the center of your life.

I have spoken plainly in many ways,
You have heard it many times.
Power belongs to Me in heaven and earth,
Unfailing loves comes from Me.
I will reward all people
According to what they deserve.

PSALM 63

I am the Lord your God,
You shall find Me when you search with all your heart.
I will fill your longing for My presence
When you thirst for Me as one in a parched and weary land.
You can find Me in the sanctuary,

There you can see My power and glory.
Then you can praise Me for My unfailing love
Which is better than life itself.
Lift up your hands to Me in prayer,
Praise Me as long as you live.
I will satisfy you with the greatest pleasure
As you praise Me with songs of joy.

When you lay awake thinking on life,
Meditate on Me throughout the night
Because I am your helper;
Sing for joy in the shadow of My wings.
Cling to Me when afraid
For My strong hand holds on securely.

Those planning to ruin you will come to ruin;
They will be cast into the pit.
They will die by the sword
And become food for the scavenger animals.
But those who rejoice in Me,
They will live by the truth and praise Me
But liars will be silenced.

PSALM 64

I, the LORD, have heard your cry for help,
For protection from your enemies' threats.
I will hide you from the plans of the evil ones
Who always do wrong and reject My truths.
They sharpen their tongues like swords
And plan to plunge their evil words into your heart.

They aim their arrows at innocent people
And attack suddenly without warning.
They get their encouragement from their evil,
And they plan to secretly trip you up.
They think no one ever sees their evil,
So they plan the perfect trap,
Thinking they are too smart to get caught;
But I will turn their arrows against them.
Suddenly wounding them with their own schemes,
I will make them stumble over their own words.
And their friends will forsake them,
Then all people will fear Me,
And admit that I work behind the scenes;
Then they will see the working of My hand.
But the righteous will trust in Me and rejoice,
They will praise Me for My work.

PSALM 65

I, the LORD, will receive praise in Zion
When My people perform their vows.
All people will come to Me
Because I hear their prayers.
When you offer a sacrifice for your sins,
I will forgive your iniquities and transgressions.
Blessed is the one I allow
To approach Me and dwell in My courts.
He shall be satisfied with the good things
He finds in My house.
I will answer him with awesome deeds,
And in righteousness give him salvation.

You can have confidence in Me
 To the ends of the earth and to the farthest sea.
I have established the mountains by My strength;
 I am clothed in power and might.
I can still the storm on the seas,
 To quiet the roar of the waves,
 And the angry voices of the crowd.
Those who live in distant places fear my signs
 Like the coming and going of morning and evening.
I send rains to water the earth
 And enrich the soil to grow things.
My rivers have plenty of water,
 I order them to grow crops and provide food.
I drench the parched earth with rain,
 Opening the clouds to soak the ground,
 And bring forth a fruitful crop.
Each year there is another great harvest,
 Even growing things in hard-packed roadways,
And the grassland outside your farms will grow,
 And the hills will turn green with new life.
The pastures will have flocks of sheep
 And the fields will be covered with grain;
 All growing things shout glory to Me.

PSALM 66

All the people of the earth will gather
 To shout glory to My name,
Telling everyone how glorious I am,
 And how awesome are My works.

The enemy will retreat

Before My powerful acts.

Everyone on earth will worship Me,

They will sing praises to Me,

They will sing loudly their praise music.

Come see all the things I, the LORD, have done;

See the awesome acts I have done for My people.

I made a dry road through the Red Sea,

My people walked all the way through.

On the other side they rejoiced in My provision,

For My display of power to save them.

I watch every move by their enemies

And kept them from attacking My people.

Let the whole world praise My power,

Shout loudly their songs of praise.

Their lives are in My hands,

I keep their feet from stumbling.

I have tested their integrity by fires,

I have purified them by the refiner's fire.

I let a heathen nation capture them

And they were beaten and driven as slaves.

Then I gave them a leader

Who took them through the fire and flood

And led them to a land of milk and honey.

Now bring burnt offerings to Me in My Temple,

Fulfill the vows you made to Me.

Remember the heartfelt vows you made

When you thought you would die.

Yes, bring the thank offerings you promised,
Sacrifice the best as a pleasing aroma.
Your prize animals demonstrate the sincerity
Of your love and worship to Me.
Come into My presence all who fear Me;
Listen as I tell you what I did for you.
You cried out for My help,
Praising Me as you made your request;
If you had not confessed the sin of your hearts
I would not have listened to you.
But I did listen to your confessions
And paid attention to your request.
You praised Me, so I did not ignore your prayer
But kept loving you with My unfailing love.

PSALM 67

I will be merciful to you and bless you,
So all on earth will learn to fear Me.
I will open My face to shine on you
So My ways may be known on earth,
And all know that I only have salvation.
Let all the people on earth praise Me,
Let the people of the earth be glad and sing,
For I treat everyone rightly,
And I will judge all the earth by truth.

Let all the people on earth praise Me
So they know I am their God.
Then the earth will have a great harvest
Because I—your God—have blessed you.

Yes, I—your God—will bless you,
And all the people on earth will fear Me.

PSALM 68

Cry unto Me when your enemies attack you,
I, the LORD, will arise to scatter them away.
Those who hate you will run from Me
Like smoke driven by an angry wind,
Like wax that melts in the flame,
The wicked will perish in My presence.

But the righteous will rejoice in My presence;
Yes, they will rejoice exceedingly.
Sing to Me, yes sing praises to My name
For I come riding on the clouds.
Know that My name is THE LORD,
Then rejoice in My presence.

I, the LORD, will be a father to the fatherless,
A defender of the defenseless widows,
And bring them into My holy sanctuary.
I will bring the lonely into My family,
I will give prosperity to the poor,
But the rebellious will have nothing.
I marched before My people through the wilderness,
I went before them in the Shekinah Glory cloud.
The earth shook when I showed up;
The heavens poured rain at My command.
Sinai shook in an earthquake
When My presence sat on the mount.

When My people finally settled in their inheritance
And they came into the land,
I sent plenty of rain
That confirmed My promises would be kept.
There My people had a great harvest
That provided for all their needs.

When I gave the word,
There was a great army who defended My people.
Kings and their armies fled from them,
The women who remained home divided the spoils.

When you lay down to sleep in the sheep pen,
I will be the wings of a dove to cover you.
It shall be covered with silver,
Its wings are like gold
When I scattered the kings before Me.

It will be like snow blowing in the desert;
The mountains of Bashan are regal.
Her many peaks are majestic
But they look with envy on Mount Zion,
Because that is where I choose to live,
I will live there forever.

I left the top of Sinai surrounded by the armies of heaven;
I entered My sanctuary in the tabernacle.
When I ascended up on high,
I led the prisoners as My captives.

I received gifts from all the people,
Even those who rebelled against Me.
Now I live among My people,
Let all praise Me for their salvation.

Each day I load them with benefits,
Each day I carry them safely in My arms.
I will smash the heads of My enemies,
Especially those who loved their sinful ways.
I will bring My enemies back from the grave,
I will even bring them from the bottom of the sea.
They will be judged for their rebellion against Me;
They will be judged before all.

When I go out in a glorious parade,
I will walk triumphantly in the sanctuary.
The singers will march in front, musicians are behind,
And the young marchers will dance and worship.
Then all My people shall rejoice in Me,
They shall praise Me as the source of life.
The small tribe of Benjamin will lead out front,
Then the great rulers of Judah will follow them.
Next the rulers from Zeballun and Nephtal.

I will display My power;
You will see My might as I did in the past.
The kings of the earth will bring tribute to Jerusalem;
They will bring their treasures to My Temple.

I will rebuke all the enemy nations;

The crocodiles of Egypt are lurking in the reeds of the Nile.
The other nations are wild scavenger animals,
They will bring gifts to My Temple.
Egypt will bring all the gold she had stolen;
Ethiopia will bring bars of silver.
Everyone will sing of the greatness of My kingdom;
They will sing praises to Me.

Let them sing to Me who marches across heavens,
Their mighty voices thundering in the sky.
Let everyone know My mighty power,
My majesty shining on My people.
My strength displayed in the heavens;
I stand awesome in My sanctuary.
I give great power and strength to My people,
Sing praises to Me.

PSALM 69

I, the LORD, will save you when the flood reaches your neck,
I will reach out when you sink in the mud.
When the floods threaten to drown you,
And the waters are deep, I will save you.
When you are exhausted from crying,
And your eyes can shed no more tears,
Wait for My redemption.
When you have more enemies that hate you,
More than the hairs on your head,
And powerful people are trying to destroy you,
And you haven't stolen anything but you are innocent,
I know all about your foolishness,

And not one of your sins are hidden from Me.
But I am the Almighty Lord of heaven,
I will forgive and save you from embarrassment.
You have endured attacks for My sake,
And the world has humiliated you.
Even your family members will not recognize you,
And they turn their backs on you.

I know the deep love you have for My temple,
Even when you are criticized for worshiping Me.
I know you weep and fast for an answer
When everyone is ridiculing you,
When you dress in sack cloth and pray for relief,
And your enemies continue to make fun of you,
When everyone gossips about you,
And they continually make fun of you.

It is then you pray for My acceptance;
I will save you in an acceptable time.
My mercy will help you and deliver you;
I know the truth about you,
I hear your complaints and will deliver you,
I will lift you from the mire.
You will not sink;
I will deliver you from those who hate you.
The flood will not drown you,
And death's grave will not swallow you up.
I will hear your earnest prayers,
For My loving kindness will heal your wounds.
I will come to you in your trouble,

For My tender mercies will sooth your pain.
I will not hide My face from your trouble,
I will hear you quickly and come to you instantly.
I will come near to your soul with a word of redemption,
And deliver you from your enemies.

I know your reproach and your shame,
All your enemies will answer to Me.
When reproach has broken your heart,
And your life is weighted down with grief,
And you feel no one will pity you,
And there is no one to comfort you,
Remember, they gave Me vinegar when I was thirsty,
And poison soup when I was hungry.

Your enemy's full table of food will be a snare,
And their money will cause their downfall.
Their eyes will be blinded by the things they have,
And illness will keep them from their pleasures.
I will pour out punishment on them;
Their homes will be empty, and their family will desert them.
The ones who have added insult to your punishment,
I will add your pain to their punishment.
Their sins are stacked up
So they will not go free.
Their names are not in the Book of Life,
They are not gathered with the righteous.

I will rescue you from your pain and suffering,
My saving power will set you free.

Then you can praise Me with singing,
And honor Me with thanksgiving.
This will please Me more than the sacrifice of animals,
No matter how much you offer to Me.
The humble will know this is the way to worship,
May all who seek Me be encouraged with this example.
I hear the impassionate cry of the needy
And will not disappoint those who sincerely approach Me.

All heaven and earth will praise Me,
Including the seas and everything in them.
For I love Israel and will save it;
I will rebuild the towns destroyed in Judah.
My people will settle down in the land I promised them,
And they will live there permanently.
Their descendants will inherit the Holy Land,
And those who love Me will dwell there forever.

PSALM 70

I, the LORD, will come quickly to help you,
I will deliver when you call for help.
Those who seek to destroy you will be confused,
They will be turned back upon themselves.
I will confound them,
And they shall be ashamed;
They who laugh at you will become the object of shame.

All who seek Me will rejoice and be glad
Because I will hear in their hour of need.

They will constantly say, "Let God be magnified,"
Because they love the salvation I give them.
They may confess to be poor and needy,
But I will quickly come to their defense.
I will be their help and Deliverer,
I will not delay.

PSALM 71

Put your trust in Me, your Lord,
So you won't be disappointed with life.
I will deliver you because of My righteousness,
And will hear when you call to Me.
Because you come continually to Me,
You will find rest in My strong presence.
I will deliver you out of the hand of the wicked
Because they are unrighteous and cruel.
You have put your hope in Me
Since you were a youth.
I have guided you from your mother's womb,
Let your praise ring from your heart.
People don't know what to think about you
Because you have made Me your stronghold.
I will not reject you in old age,
I will not forsake you when your strength fails.

When your enemies plan together against you,
And they wait for the right opportunity to destroy you,
When they say, "I have forsaken you,"
Also, they say no one will help you,

I will not stand by and ignore you;
I will come to your rescue,
Disgracing and destroying your enemies,
Shutting them up so they can't hurt you.
Keep trusting Me to come to your rescue,
And praise Me for what I will do for you.

Tell everyone how I come to you,
And proclaim My saving power.
Even though you are not a good public speaker,
Offer praise for My mighty acts,
Telling everyone what I have done for you.

I have been teaching you since childhood
So you could tell others about Me.
Now that you are old and grey,
Do not forget what I did when you were young.
Tell the next generation about My power
And the miracles I do for those who follow Me.

My righteousness reaches to the unreachable heights;
I alone can do the wonderful things I do.
No one can compare to Me;
I have allowed you to suffer many tragedies,
But I always restore you to new life,
And lift you from the depths of life.
I always restore you to greater honor,
And again, give you peace and joy.

Praise Me with music and the harp

Because I was faithful to My promise.
Sing praises to Me on the lyre
For I am the Holy One of Israel.
Shout praises with joy in your heart
For I have ransomed you from sin.
Tell about My righteous acts all day long
To those who rejected Me and tried to hurt you.

PSALM 72

I, the LORD, gave My wisdom to King David
And My righteousness to My Son, Jesus.
He will rightly rule My people,
He will make right decisions concerning them.
The mountains will enjoy peace,
The people will enjoy righteousness on the hills.
Jesus will be favorable to the poor,
He will save the children of the needy,
He will destroy the enemy;
They will reverence Jesus from one generation to another.
As long as the sun and moon endure,
He shall bless them as rain on the grass.
As showers that water the earth
The righteous will flourish under Him.
There will be peace as long as the moon endures;
He shall rule from sea to sea.
From the Jordan River to the ends of the earth,
Those who live in the wilderness will worship Jesus.
His enemies will be defeated;
The foreign kings will recognize Jesus.
Kings from Africa will give Him presents;

All kings will bow in worship before Him.
All peoples will serve Him;
Jesus will deliver the needy from trouble
And help the poor out of their calamity.
He will give to the needy
And He will reward the poor.
He will save them from death,
Their life will be precious to Him;
Jesus will receive gold from Africa.
People will pray to Him continually;
Daily they will praise Him.
In the coming day of prosperity
Corn shall grow everywhere.
Fruit will be available everywhere
And the cities will flourish.

His name, Jesus, will endure forever;
He will shine as long as the sun.
And people will bless Him,
All nations will call Him blessed.
Blessed are You, Jesus the Lord God of Israel,
Because You do wonderful things for Your people.
Blessed be the glorious name of Jesus,
Let the whole earth be filled with His glory.
This ends the prayer of David, the son of Jesse.

PSALM 73

I, the LORD, will be truly good to Israel,
To those whose hearts are pure.
Even when you almost gave up your faith

And came close to stumbling,
You wanted what selfish people had,
Especially when you saw their prosperity.

They don't have the pressures you have,
They have strong healthy bodies.
They don't let ethics bother them,
Nor do they have everyday problems.
They show off their selfish pride,
They will not stop at violence to get their way.
They lust for everything,
There is no satisfying their evil desires.
They scoff at everyone else,
They willingly use violence to get their way.
They claim to be bigger than heaven,
They think everything on earth belongs to them.
They have deceived people
To believe everything they say.
They say, "I don't know everything,"
But I the Most High know what they do.
They are arrogant people
Who have a life of ease because of their money.

You were not wrong to stay pure,
Or to deny yourself the pleasures of evil.
You had trouble all day long,
Every morning you faced a different trial.
If you had the attitude of the wicked,
You would have betrayed your children.
When you tried to figure out why the wicked prosper,

You only become more confused.

Then you come into My presence in the sanctuary,

And you understand their future destiny.

Then you will realize they are on a slippery path,

They are heading toward eternal destruction.

They will die and instantly be punished

And will be consumed by terror.

One day I, the LORD, will arise

To punish their selfish desires.

Look at how bitter you have become,

Your whole outlook is poisoned by hatred.

You are reacting like a dumb animal,

You don't know what you are doing.

Nevertheless, you can still follow Me;

I have always held you with My right hand.

I have guided you with My counsel,

And one day I will receive you into glory.

You don't have anyone in heaven but Me;

Therefore, desire nothing on earth but Me.

Your flesh will get weak and your heart will fail,

But I am the strength of your life.

Those who will not follow Me will perish

Because I will destroy those who reject Me.

But it is good for you to be near Me,

Make Me your shelter;

Tell everyone of My works.

PSALM 74

It looks like I, the LORD, have rejected My people,

It looks like I am angry against the sheep of My pasture.

Remember, you are the people I have redeemed;

I chose to give you an inheritance,

I came to dwell in Mount Zion.

When you walk through the destruction of Jerusalem

See how the enemy has destroyed My sanctuary.

My enemies claimed victory in the place I met with you,

They took over the place where I once dwelt.

They cut down My holy place with axes

Like it was a grove of trees.

They smashed the beautiful carved fixtures

With their axes and battle hammers.

They burned My sanctuary with fire

Then defiled the place where My name dwells.

They said inwardly, "Let's completely destroy this place";

They had destroyed every other place I was worshiped in the land.

You ask where are My miracles;

You ask if I have any prophets left.

You don't know what to do.

You ask how long will the enemy mock Me;

You ask will I allow them to embarrass Me forever.

You ask am I holding back My hand of judgment;

Why don't I destroy them?

I have always been king;

I bring salvation to the earth.

I divided the Red Sea by My power;
I smashed the sea creatures' heads.
I crushed the heads of the Leviathan
And let the other animals eat him.
I gave My people water from the rock;
I held back the mighty Jordan River.
The day is Mine, as well as the night;
I created light and gave you the sun.
I established the boundaries of the earth;
I make both summer and winter.

You point out how My enemy mocks Me;
These foolish people blaspheme My name.
I will not let innocent doves be devoured by beasts;
I will not let My persecuted people be eaten alive.
I remember the covenant I made with My people
Because dark times and violence threaten.
I will not let you retreat in shame;
The poor and needy will praise My name.
I will get up to defend My cause
Because these fools are mocking Me.
I won't ignore the threats of My enemies;
Their defiance is getting louder and louder.

PSALM 75

Give thanks to Me your God,
Be thankful that I am near;
Tell about My wonderful works.
I will receive those who come to Me;
I will judge all the people correctly.

When earthquakes destroy all human order,
I will hold everything together, Selah!

I warn the arrogant to stop boasting;
I told the wicked to stop sinning.
I told the proud to be humble
And not stiffen their neck toward Me.

Exaltation doesn't come from the east or west,
Nor does it come from the south;
But I know the hearts of all,
I bring one person down, but exalt another.
In My hand is a cup of judgment,
It is seething with punishment.
I will pour it out on everyone,
But the wicked must drink the last terrible dregs.

So tell everyone what I will do in judgment;
Sing praises to Me, your God.
I will cut off the boasting of the wicked
But the godly will be exalted.

PSALM 76

My name—Jehovah—is known across Judah;
My name is greatly respected throughout Israel.
My tabernacle is pitched in peace;
I live in Mount Zion.

I stopped the attacks against My people;

They no longer needed their defense, Selah!
I am more glorious than light
I am more excellent than the mountains.

The strong warriors have been killed,
They sleep their final sleep;
Not one can lift his hand in war.
At My rebuke, I am the God of Jacob;
I will stop all the dangers of war.

I am the only One to be feared;
No one can stand before My anger.
I announced the verdict from heaven;
The nation heard it quietly in awe.
Because I arose in judgment
To save all those who trusted Me, Selah,
Then I will be praised when men rebel against Me in anger
Because My greater anger against them will be unrestrained.

Fulfill the vows you make to Me, your Lord God;
I will accept the gifts that you bring.
You know I will crush the rebellious rulers;
They will all fear My terrible judgment.

PSALM 77

When you cried to Me for help,
You begged for Me to listen to your prayers.
You sought Me in your day of trouble;
You couldn't sleep at night,
And you couldn't be comforted.

Then you remembered what I could do;
Your spirit was overwhelmed with agony, Selah!
You couldn't sleep at night because of your trouble,
You were too concerned to pray.

You thought back to the way I did things,
How I always helped My people.
You remembered when you sang in the night,
How you meditated on My presence.
You ask why have I cast you away?
Will I ever come back to you again?
Is My mercy completely exhausted?
Will I keep My promise again?
Have I forgotten how to be gracious?
Has My anger shut up My mercy? Selah!

Then you concluded that you were getting what you deserved,
Then you remembered the years My right hand helped you.
So you meditated on all My works
To remember all the miracles, I did in the past.
I still live in My sanctuary;
No man-made god is as great as Me.
I am the God who does miracles,
I have shown My strength among My people.
I have redeemed My people, the sons of Jacob and Joseph, Selah!

The Red Sea trembled before Me;
It was ready to obey My command.
The rain clouds poured on your enemies;

The thunder roared, and the lightning flashed.
My judgment was heard in the whirlwind;
I lit up the night with lightning,
The ground shook with an earthquake.

I led My people through the Red Sea
Although no one saw My footprints.
I led My people like a flock;
I led them by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

PSALM 78

My people should listen to teaching from Me, their Lord,
So they can know what I am saying;
For I speak to them in parables,
I communicate by hidden ways from the past.
What lessons you have heard and known,
These lessons your fathers have told you.

Do not hide them from your children,
Tell them to the generations to come
About the praises due to Me, your Lord,
Because of the glorious deeds I have done.
I established the testimony of Jacob
And I decreed the law for Israel.
Then I commanded our forefathers
To teach it to their children,
So the coming generations would know the law,
Even their children not yet born;
So they in turn would tell their children
With a result that they would trust Me, your God.

That coming generations would not forget My works,
But keep the commandments I have given;
So they would not be like their forefathers
Who were a stubborn and rebellious generation
Who refused to yield their hearts to Me;
Whose spirits did not want to obey Me.

The men of Ephraim had superior armament,
But retreated in the day of battle.
They did not keep their covenant with Me,
And refused to walk in My law.
They forgot what I had done for them
And the miracles by which I delivered them.
I did marvelous things in the presence of their fathers
In the land of Egypt and in the land of Zoan.
I divided the Red Sea for them to escape;
I held the waters back like a wall.
I guided them with a cloud by day
And a pillar of fire at night.
I split the rock in the desert
To give them abundant water.
I brought a stream of water out of the rock,
Causing water to run down like a river.

But your forefathers sinned against Me,
Rebelling in the wilderness against Me, the Most High God.
They obstinately tested Me,
Demanding meat to satisfy their lust.
They asked in unbelief,
“Can I spread a table in the wilderness?”

When Moses struck the rock,
 A stream of water gushed out.
But they in unbelief doubted if I could feed them,
 Doubting if I could supply food.
I was very angry when I heard them;
 A consuming fire broke out against them
For they did not believe I could provide for them,
 Nor did they trust Me to deliver them.
I commanded the skies to open,
 And rain down manna for them to eat;
 It was the corn of heaven.
They ate the food of angels;
 They had all the food they wanted.
I sent a strong East wind,
 Then I directed a mighty wind from the South.
I blew food on them like a sandstorm;
 Flying birds were like sand on a seashore.
The birds flew in low through their tents;
 They landed all around their tents.
Our forefathers ate until they were filled;
 I gave them all they desired.
But even when the food I supplied was in their mouth,
 They were lusting for more.
My wrath was unleashed against them;
 I put to death the strongest and best.

And they still kept on sinning;
 In spite of My miracles, they wouldn't trust Me.
So they died needlessly in the wilderness;
 They lived in constant terror.

Whenever I judged some of them,
Those who were left would eagerly turn to Me.
They remembered that I was their Rock,
That the Most High God was their Redeemer.
They flattered Me with their lips,
But they were lying in their hearts.
Because their hearts were rebellious toward Me,
They did not intend to keep their covenant with Me.
Yet I was merciful toward them,
I held back My anger.
I remembered that they were just human,
They're just a breeze that's quickly gone.

They often provoked Me in the desert;
They grieved Me during the 40 years in the wilderness.
They constantly rebelled against Me,
Continually frustrating Me, the Holy One of Israel.
They forgot what I did for them,
They didn't remember how I delivered them
By the mighty miracles in Egypt,
Or the wonders against Pharaoh in Zoan.
I turned Egypt's streams into blood;
No one could drink from them.
I sent swarms of flies among them
And frogs that frustrated them.
I sent grasshoppers to eat their crops
And locust devoured all they grew.
I sent sleet to destroy their vines
And hail to ruin the sycamore figs.
Also, their cattle died in the hail

And lightning killed their livestock.
I released My anger against them,
 Sending a band of destroying angels among them.
I made a way to express My anger;
 I did not spare them from death.
I killed the firstborn in every family,
 The oldest male child of every Egyptian family died.
Then I led your own people out of Egypt,
 Guiding them safely into the desert.
Your people were safe as I led them,
 But their enemies were drowned in the Red Sea.
I brought them to the border of the Promised Land,
 I gave them the hill country as their own.
I drove out the heathen before them
 And divided the land to them as an inheritance;
 I settled each tribe into its home.

But they refused to obey Me, their Most High God;
 They refused to keep My commandments.
Like their fathers, they were faithless and rebellious;
 They were as unreliable as a faulty weapon.
They made high places to worship other gods;
 They angered Me with their man-made idols.
When I saw this, I was again angry;
 I completely rejected them.
I withdrew from the tabernacle in Shiloh,
 The tent where I had met with My people.
I allowed the enemy to defeat My people
 Because I was angry with My inheritance.
The fire consumed the young men

And the young women did not marry.
The priests were killed by the sword
And the widows did not grieve for them.

Then I awoke, as it were from My sleep,
As a man awakens from a deep sleep.
I routed the enemies and they retreated;
I put them away forever.

I didn't bring the Deliverer from the tent of Joseph,
Nor did I choose the tent of Ephraim.
But I chose the tribe of Judah,
I chose Mount Zion to be My home.

I put My sanctuary there among the high places,
I chose that place among all the places on earth.
I chose David to be My leader;
I brought him from leading sheep
To be the shepherd of My people.

And David will lead Israel with the integrity of his heart,
And guide them by the skillfulness of his hands.

PSALM 79

I know the heathen nations have conquered My inheritance,
They have defiled My holy temple,
They have made Jerusalem a trash heap.

They have left the dead bodies of My followers
For the birds to eat;
The scavenger animals are eating them.

Their blood flowed around Jerusalem
And there was none to bury them.

The neighbors are making fun of My people,

My people are being scorned.

How long will I be angry with My people?

Will My jealousy burn forever?

I poured out My wrath on a nation that rejected Me

And upon the people that refuse to call upon Me.

For the enemy has devoured Israel

And destroyed their homeland.

I will not hold the sins of your fathers against you,

I will come quickly to deliver you

Because you need My help now.

I will help you, and be your God and Savior,

And bring glory to My name.

I will forgive your sins and deliver you

For the sake of My name.

Why should the heathen nations boast

“Where is their God?”

I will pour out My vengeance on them

Because they poured out the blood of My servants.

I heard the groans of prisoners,

I will save them before they die.

I will retaliate against your enemies seven times,

Giving them the misery they have caused you.

You are My people, the sheep of My pasture;

You will thank and praise Me forever.

PSALM 80

I will listen to you, O Israel,
I lead the sons of Joseph like a flock;
I am enthroned between the cherubim
And shine forth.
I stir up My strength before Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh,
And come and save you.
I, the LORD, will turn you around;
And shine My face upon you to save you.
I am God of the angels,
How long will I be angry against your prayers?
You are eating the bread of anguish
And you are drinking tears.
You are trouble to your neighbors,
Your enemies laugh at you.

I will turn you around, O Israel
And shine My face upon you to save you.
You were the cutting of a vine;
I brought you out of Egypt.
I drove the heathen out of the Promised Land,
Then planted you there.
I, the LORD, cleared the ground so you could grow;
You took root and thrived.
The mountains were covered by your cool shade,
Your branches reached out like gigantic trees.
You reached out to the seas
Then you extended your rule to the rivers.
Why did I take away your protective wall
So strangers could pick your fruit?
Pigs are rooting up your vine,

Wild animals are eating up your leaves.

I will come back to you, O Israel,
And look down from heaven on you,
And come protect this vine.

I will come back to the vineyard I planted
And send the Son who is your Deliverer.

I have trimmed the vine and thrown it into the fire,
My people are dying under My punishment.
I will send the One who sits on My right hand,
The Son of Man Who is strong to deliver.
Then you will not turn away from Me,
I will restore you, so you can call upon My name.
I will turn you around, O Israel
And shine My face upon you to save you.

PSALM 81

Sing loudly to Me, the God of strength;
Shout praises to Me the God of Jacob.
Sing a hymn and play the tambourine,
Play praise choruses to Me on the guitar.
Blow the trumpet in celebration
And confess your sin in the solemn assembly.
This is the right way for you to worship,
This is the way you fulfill My law;
I directed Israel to worship this way,

When I brought them out of Egypt,
You heard a language you didn't understand.

I took the burden from your shoulders,
I freed you from their flesh pots.
You called out to Me in your distress
And I answered you from the dark cloud,

Then I tested you at the waters of Meribah,
I called out to warn you,
I wanted you to listen to Me.
I commanded you not to possess foreign idols,
Nor should you worship any strange gods.
I am the LORD your God
Who brought you up out of Egypt.

I promised to fill your lives
If you would just open yourselves up to Me.
But you would not listen to My voice
And you would not yield to My leadership.
So I gave you over to your sinful hearts,
I let you make your own decisions.

If you would have just listened to Me
And obeyed My principles,
I would have defeated your enemies,
And strengthened your hand against your foes.
Those who hate Me would have feared Me
Because I would have punished them.
I would have fed you with the best food
And satisfied you with honey from the Rock.

PSALM 82

I am your God, I stand in heaven's court room;
I will correctly evaluate the evidence.
How long will I withhold judgment
And let the wicked continue living?
I will defend the poor and the fatherless,
Protect the afflicted and needy.
I will deliver them in their time of affliction
And from the clutches of the wicked.
They don't know what's happening;
They walk blindly in darkness
Because the foundation of the earth is out of whack.
I told them, "You all belong to Me;
You are all My children, I am the Most High God."
Because you will not listen, you will die as all others
And be buried as are the powerful rulers.
I will come as God to judge all people
Because all people belong to Me.

PSALM 83

I am the Lord, I will not keep quiet and still;
I will not be silent.
My enemies are causing trouble,
They that hate Me are threatening My people.
They have conspired against Me,
They devise evil against My chosen ones.
They boast that they can destroy you,
That the nation of Israel will not be remembered.
They all plan together against Me,
They join together to destroy My influence.
The people of Edom, Ishmael, Moab and the Hagites,

Join with Gebal, Ammon, Amalek and Philistia.
They have joined together with Tyre and Assyria,
To strengthen the sons of Lot, Selah!
I will defeat them as I did the Midianites,
As I defeated Sisera and Jabin at Kisham.
They will die as My enemies died at Endor,
They became as fertilizer on the ground.
I will make their leaders like Oreb and Zeeb,
As I destroyed Zebah and Zalmunna.
They boasted they would capture
My sanctuary as their possessions.
I will make My enemies like weeds,
As chaff which the wind blows away.
I will consume them like fire burns wood,
Like the forest fires consume the mountains.
So I will punish them with My terror
And beat upon them with a storm.
I will humiliate all their endeavors
So that they will seek My name, the Lord.
I will confuse everything they do
So that they will forever be tormented.
I will make them realize that My name is Jehovah,
That I alone rule as the Most High God over the earth.

When You Want to be Happy

PSALM 84:4

There are two words for blessed in the original language of the Psalms. First, *barak*, which is the usual word used for blessed and comes from “to bow,” as subjects bowing before a king because they want something from the king. They know the king can bless their lives. This word means to be enriched, or to receive value, or to have your life filled or fulfilled. As you pray the Psalms, bow before Me, asking Me to fill your life with the things for which the Psalmist originally prayed.

The second word for bless is *ashrey*, which means happiness. When I bless you with *ashrey* you are positive, upbeat, i.e., you just feel good.

Because all people sin and disobedience is hard, and because life has many troubles, it’s difficult to be happy all the time. But when you begin to trust Me, you begin to learn inner joy, “Happy (*ashrey*) is he who has Me, God of Jacob, for his help, whose hope is in Me, his LORD and God” (Ps. 146:5).

“Blessed (happy) is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful” (Ps. 1:1, KJV).

The very first word in the book of Psalms is Happy, *Ashrey*. This book will make you happy when you pray its words and follow its directions. Therefore to be happy, there are three progressive actions you shouldn’t do, (1) Walk not—(2) Stand not—and (3) Sit not. There are three progressive attachments with ungodly people you should avoid, (1) Listen to their counsel—(2) Linger in their way—and (3) Settle down in their seat. There are three progressively evil types of people to avoid, (1) Ungodly—(2) Sinners—and (3) Scorners.

You will be happy when you properly deal with your sin by confessing and turning from it. “Blessed (Happy, *ashrey*) is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered” (Ps. 32:1).

You will be happy when you study the Scriptures and seek My presence in prayer. “Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed (happy, *ashrey*) is the man who trusts in Him” (Ps. 34:8).

You will be happy when you obey your inner urge to do My will, because I put that inner urge in you. “Blessed (happy, *ashrey*) is the man I choose, and cause to approach Me, that he may dwell in My courts. You shall be satisfied with the goodness of My house, of My holy temple” (Ps. 65:4).

The psalmist describes a sparrow making a nest in the sanctuary near My presence. My Temple was so peaceable, the sparrow made a nest, laying eggs, and going about her normal duties. The psalmist wanted to be as close to Me in My Temple, as was the sparrow. The psalmist described the intimacy he wanted with Me on a continuous basis, “My soul longs, yes, even faints for my courts—even the sparrow has found a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young—even my altars, You, Lord, are King and my God” (Ps. 84:2, 3). The psalmist is crying out to enjoy peace found in My presence.

You will be happy like the psalmist when you stay in My presence to enjoy intimacy with Me. “Blessed are those who dwell in My house; they will still be praising Me” (Ps. 84:4).

The world’s happiness is only a feeling that gets him excited and makes him temporarily forget his problems. But after the world’s happiness is over, the troubles of life return because, “Man who is born of woman is of few days and full of trouble” (Job 14:1). But the happiness that I give is lasting, because I am the giver and I go with you. “Blessed (happy, *ashrey*) is the man whose strength is in Me” (Ps. 84:5).

PSALM 84

I want you to enjoy coming into My presence in the tabernacle;

Express your deep passion for the courts of My house,

May your flesh cry out when you are not there.

The sparrows are so comfortable in My presence

That they make their nest within sight of My altar.

I want you to rest near My presence

Because I am your King and your God.

I will bless those who linger in My house

Because they worship and praise Me, Selah!

I will bless those who realize their strength is in Me

Because My principles direct their hearts.

Worshipers come to Me through a valley of weeping;

They fill pools with their tears.

They continue climbing from strength to strength

In their endeavor to find My peace.

They desire to know Me, their Lord and God,

And to look into My face, Selah!

One day in My courts enjoying My presence

Is better than a thousand days anywhere else.

Worshipers would rather be a doorkeeper in My house

Than live sumptuously in the tents of wickedness.

I will shine warmth on their life like the sun;

I will protect them like a shield.

I will not withhold any good thing from them

When they walk uprightly.

Blessed are those who trust in Me.

PSALM 85

I have shown favor to the land of promise;

I have brought back Jacob from captivity.

I forgave the iniquity of My people

And covered all their sins, Selah!

I am no longer angry at them,

I have turned aside My wrath.
You ask Me to turn to you and save you
And stop punishing My people.
Will I be angry with you forever?
Will I always continue punishing My people?
I will revive your spirits
That you may rejoice in Me.
I will show mercy
And save you from your troubles.

When you listen to what I say,
I will keep My promises of peace for My people;
I don't want you to return to your folly.
So I will surely save those who fear Me,
Then My glory will live in the land.
Then mercy and truth will meet each other,
Righteousness and peace will kiss.
Truth will be found in the earth
And righteousness will look down from heaven.
I will give you what is good,
And you will prosper in this land.
Righteousness will go before Me
To prepare the way that My people must go.

PSALM 86

I, the LORD, will bend down low to hear you
When you are poor and needy.
I will protect your soul when you are separated from My house;
I will save you because you are My servant.
I will have mercy on you

As you pray to Me all the time,
I will give you joy
When you lift your soul to Me.

I am a forgiving and good Lord,
I give mercy to all who call on Me.
I listen to your prayer made to Me, your Lord,
And hear what you are saying to Me.
In your day of trouble call on Me
Because I will answer and do something for you.

There is none like Me among the earthly gods,
They cannot do the works that I do.
I have made all the different ethnic groups of people;
They will come before Me to worship
And bring glory to My name,
For I am great and do awesome works;
I alone am God.

I will teach you the way you should walk
And how to follow My truth.
I will give you a focused heart
So you will fear My name.
Praise Me with your whole heart for I am your Lord and God;
Glorify My name forever.
For My mercy is great to you
And I have delivered you from the lowest hell.

The boastful are coming to attack you,
They are violent men who want to destroy you;

They do not honor Me.
But I, your Lord, am a compassionate God;
I am patient with abundant love and kindness.
I will come to you in mercy and give you strength,
I will save My children
And show signs that I am with you;
I will confuse your enemies, then help and comfort you.

PSALM 87

I established a firm foundation on My holy mountain
So My people will love the gates of Zion
More than all the houses of Judah;
Glorious things are spoken of My city;
Zion is My city, I am the Lord God.
Those from Rahab and Babylon take notice,
Along with those from Philistia, Tyre, and Cush,
Of those born in Jerusalem.
Even in Zion they will be recognized
That they were born in Jerusalem.
Jerusalem is My city, the dwelling place of the Most High God;
I will establish it forever.
Even I, the LORD, register those people
Who belong in Zion, Selah!
The singers and musicians praise Me, their Lord;
All My people dedicate their life to Me.

PSALM 88

You have cried out to Me, your Lord, day and night,
You have prayed for Me to save you.

You want your prayers received in My presence
So that I listen to the request you are making.
Because of all kinds of troubles,
People are continually trying to kill you.
People treat you like you are already dead,
Like you have no strength left.
They abandon you like a corpse,
Like someone who is not here
And gone out of their sight forever.

You asked if I have put you into this hole,
Into this dark night.
You feel My anger punishing you,
Coming one wave of pain after another, Selah!
You asked if I have taken away your friends,
Now they all hate you;
You are in a hole and can't get out.
You are blinded by your tears;
Each day you call out to Me,
Lifting your hands pleading for help.

You want Me to show the miracles I did in the past,
But the dead can't rise again to serve Me.
Shall I extend kindness to those in a hole
Because I am faithful even in punishment?
My wonders will extend to those in dark places
Because I never forget those who are forgotten.
You cried to Me for help,
Every morning you pray again to Me.
You ask why do I not hear you,

And hide My face from you.
You hurt all over and are ready to die,
You can't stand My punishment any longer.
My fierce anger has overwhelmed you,
You are cut to the bone.
All day long your sin haunts your memory,
You are completely overwhelmed with fear.
Your friends and relatives have abandoned you,
And darkness is your only companion.

PSALM 89

Continually sing of My mercies,
Make known My faithfulness forever,
Let all generations hear from your mouth
That My mercy stands forever,
That My faithfulness is as firm as heaven itself.

I made a covenant with My chosen One,
I swore an oath with David, My servant.
I promised to establish his family lineage forever,
I promised to give the throne of Israel to him, Selah!

Let the heavens praise Me,
My faithfulness is revealed where angels gather.
No one in the heavens compare with Me,
None of the mighty angels is likened unto Me.
I am greatly feared among the angelic beings,
I am more awesome than all those about My throne.
I am the Lord God of the Angels, who is likened unto Me?
My faithfulness is seen in all I do.

I rule the raging sea;
 When the storms blow, I still them.
I destroy the great sea monsters,
 I scatter My enemies with a strong arm.
The heavens are Mine, so is the earth;
 I established the universe and everything in it.
I made the north where it is, and the south;
 Mount Tabor and Hermon praise My name.
I have a powerful arm and a mighty hand,
 I lift My right hand in victory.
My rule is characterized by righteousness and justice,
 Mercy and truth come from Me.
I will bless those who sing joyfully to Me,
 Who walk in the light of My countenance.
They rejoice in My name all day long;
 Therefore, I accept them.
I am their glory and strength,
 And I exalt them with My anointing;
For I defend you from the Evil One,
 I am your King, the Holy One of Israel.

I spoke in a vision to My people,
 Telling them My strength was upon a warrior.
I lifted up a young man from among My people;
 I chose David as My servant,
 I anointed him with oil to follow Me.
I promised to strengthen him with My hand,
 I established him with My arm.
No enemy will make him pay tribute,
 No wicked one will defeat him.

I will destroy his enemies before him
And punish those who hate him.
I will faithfully be with him,
And My name will be exalted by him.
I will give him the rule of the sea
And his right hand over the rivers.
David will call out to Me as his God,
Calling Me his Father and the rock of his salvation.
I will appoint him as My firstborn,
Higher than any king on earth.
I will maintain My love to him forever,
I will always keep the covenant I made with him.
I have established his genealogy forever,
His throne will endure as long as heaven exists.

If the children of David forsake My law,
And not obey My commandments,
If they violate My directions,
And do not keep My rules,
Then I will punish their disobedience,
And I will correct their rebellious ways.
But I will never stop loving them,
Nor will I turn My back on them.
I will not deny the promise I made to them,
I will always keep My Word.
I only had to give My Word once,
I will not lie to David.
I will bless his line forever,
He will always rule for Me.
It will be established forever like the sun and moon,

My faithful witnesses in the sky, Selah!
But I had to reject the covenant I made,
Why did I get angry with My people?
I turned My back on My covenant,
I threw the crown of David to the ground.
I had to break down all their defenses,
I have destroyed all their strongholds.
The passing armies have plundered Israel,
Their neighbors laugh at Israel's weaknesses.
I strengthened Israel's enemies against her,
I have let them become triumphant in battle.
I watched as Israel was weakened,
Then I saw My people defeated in battle.
I let Israel's glory fade,
And I let her enemies terminate the rule of David's kingdom.
I cut short the days of his line,
I gave him a robe of shame, Selah!

How long will I let My people suffer?
Will I continue to hide from them?
Will My anger burn forever?
Remember how short is your life,
For I have created you with many limitations.
None of you can live and not die,
None of you can overcome the power of death, Selah!
You ask where is My former patient love
That I pledged to David My servant.
I see the abuse you receive;
You carry the insults of all My enemies.
They mock you because they hate Me,

They reject the rule of David, My anointed;
You can bless Me forever.

PSALM 90

I, the LORD, have been your dwelling place
Throughout all generations.
Before I created the mountains,
Even before I created the earth,
Even from everlasting to everlasting,
I am God.
I determined that all people will die,
I decreed that you would all return to dust.

A thousand years in My sight
Is but yesterday that is gone;
It's just a watch in the night.
I carry away your years like a flood,
Your life is like sleep after you awake.
Your life is like grass that springs up in the morning,
You grow throughout the day;
In the evening you are cut down,
Then you wither and die.

My anger can consume you,
My wrath brings you trouble.
I see all of your disobediences,
I shine My light on your secret sins.
When I am angry with you,
Your life passes away quickly.
Your simple life does not amount to much,

Like a tale that someone tells,
You live approximately three score and ten years,
Some reach the golden age of four score years.
But they have physical difficulties and pain,
Then their life is cut off and they fly away.
No one knows when I am angry at them,
So you must always trust Me in fear.
So I will teach you to make each day count,
So that you can live wisely.

I will return to bless you,
I won't be angry with you any longer.
I will show you mercy when you are young
So you may rejoice all your lives.
May you learn from the years when I afflicted you
And from the years you sinned against Me.
I will help you understand My works,
I will show My glory to your children.
I—the Lord God—will shine My beauty upon you,
I will establish the work of your hands,
Yes, the work of your hands I will establish.

PSALM 91

You can live in the secret place of My presence,
I am the Most High God who owns the universe.
You will abide under My protective shadows,
I am Almighty God who is more than enough.
Testify about all the blessings you receive in My presence,
I am your protection and fortress;
I am your God in whom you trust.

Know that I will save you from all traps
And from deadly diseases.
I will cover you with My wings,
You will find refuge under My protection;
My promises give you peace and security.
Do not be afraid of the unseen terror by night,
Nor of the ever-present dangers of the day.
Nor of the lurking plagues that threaten you,
Nor of the spreading epidemic around you.
A thousand may fall at your side,
And ten thousand may die around you;
But these dangers will not come near you.
Look with your eyes
And you will see the punishment of the wicked.

Make Me, the Most High God,
Your protective refuge.
And when I am your refuge,
Then no harm can destroy you;
And the epidemic plague will not touch you.
Because I will command My angels
To guard you in all ways,
They will protect you with their hands,
To keep you from falling.
You can trample down lions and poisonous snakes,
You will crush evil threats under your feet.
Because you love Me, your Lord,
I will rescue you from danger.
Because you know Me by name,
I will be with you in trouble.

When you call upon Me for help,
I will answer you.
I will be with you.
I will protect you and your honor.
I will give you long life
And satisfy you with My salvation.

PSALM 92

It is good to praise Me, your Lord;
To sing to My name, the Most High God.
I show My loving kindness in the morning
And My faithfulness in the evening.
Praise Me with stringed instruments
By playing music upon the harp.
Rejoice in the things I do for you;
Sing for joy because of what I have done.
How great are My works;
My thoughts are very deep.
The ignorant people refuse to know Me,
The foolish ones will not understand Me.
Even though they grow like weeds
And those that rebel against Me flourish;
They will be forever destroyed,
But I, the LORD, will be exalted forever.

Surely, I know My enemies,
Just as surely My enemies will perish,
Those who are passionate for evil will be scattered.
I have exalted my strength like an ox,
I have anointed you with fresh oil.

Your eyes will see the defeat of My enemies,
Your ears have heard their destruction.

The righteous will flourish like a palm tree,
They will grow like the cedars of Lebanon.
They that are planted in My house
Will flourish in My courts.
They will bear fruit in their old age,
They will stay fruitful and green.
Their life will testify that I am just,
I am their Rock;
I am always good to My people.

PSALM 93

I, the LORD, reign over all the earth,
I am robed in majesty,
I am clothed in power.
I have established the world,
And it cannot be moved;
I establish My throne from eternity.
The seas have roared,
It has lifted up its voice,
Its pounding waves crash on the shore.
But I, the LORD, on high, am mightier,
More powerful than the flood,
More powerful than the waves of the sea.
My laws cannot be broken,
My rule is holy,
I will reign for endless days.

PSALM 94

I, the LORD, will avenge you,
I will come and avenge you now.
I will rise up as Judge of the earth,
And punish the proud as they deserve.

You ask, how long will the wicked get by,
How long will they gloat over you?
I hear them boasting over you;
The evil workers brag about their evil.
They crush My people,
Stomping the life out of My heirs.
They kill widows, foreigners, and orphans,
Saying I do not see and
I, the God of Jacob, do not care.

You pray for Me to make the fools understand,
Make them understand what I will do.
I make the ears, yes, I heard them;
I created eyes, yes, I see them;
I give you knowledge, yes, I know;
I judge the nations, I will punish them.
I know the thoughts of all people,
I know they have no reason for what they do.

Yes, I know those I correct are blessed
Because I teach them My love.
I will give them peace in the day of trouble
Until the wicked dig a pit and fall into it.

I will not reject My people,
Neither will I abandon My heirs.
When judgment falls on My righteous people,
Then the upright in heart will be revealed.

You ask who will testify against the evildoers,
Who will stand with you against the wicked?
Unless I, the LORD, help
You would have no defense in judgment.
When you realized your foot was slipping,
My faithfulness helped you up.
When you were overwhelmed with anxiety,
My comfort gave you peace and joy.

Those ungodly oppressors claim I am on their side,
But their life is based on wickedness.
They attack those who live by My laws,
And kill innocent people who have not hurt them.
But I, the LORD, am your defense,
I am a mighty rock where you can hide.
I will punish them with the death they plan for others,
I will destroy them for their sin;
I, the LORD your God, will destroy them.

PSALM 95

You come singing to Me, your Lord;
You shout joyfully to Me,
The Rock of your salvation.
You come into My presence giving thanks,
You shout the Psalms joyfully to Me.

For I am your great God,
The great King above earthly gods.
I hold the deep places of the earth in My hands,
I own the tops of the hills.
I made the sea and it is Mine,
And I created all dry ground.

You come bowing down to worship Me,
You kneel before Me, your Creator.

For I am your God,
And you are like My sheep;
You are like the people of My pasture.
Today, those who hear My voice
Should not provoke Me by hardening their hearts,
As Israel did when tempted in the wilderness.
The leaders of Israel saw My miracles,
But gave into temptation during their wanderings.

For forty years I was grieved with that generation,
Because they were rebellious in heart;
They did not know My ways.
I determined to judge them,
Not allowing them to enter the Promised Land.

PSALM 96

Sing a new song to Me, your Lord;
The whole earth is singing to Me.
Sing to bless My name
And tell My salvation from day to day.

Declare My glory to the unsaved
And tell them everything that I do.
For I, the LORD, am great in the earth,
I must be praised greatly,
I must be feared more than other gods.

The gods of the unsaved are idols,
But I created the heavens.
Honor and majesty belong to Me,
Strength and beauty are in My sanctuary.
All people must give glory to Me, their Lord;
All must give Me glory and strength.
All must give Me glory that is due to Me
And bring sacrifice when they enter My presence.

Worship Me, the Lord, in the beauty of My holiness;
All the unsaved should fear Me.
Tell the unsaved that I reign,
No one can move the earth that I established;
I will correctly judge each person.
The heavens rejoice, and the earth is glad,
The sea waves roar at My command.
The fields give forth My goodness,
The forest rejoices in My care.

I am coming to judge all things,
I will correctly judge the world,
I will reward people according to truth.

PSALM 97

I, the LORD reign, let the earth rejoice;
Let the distant shores be glad.
I am surrounded by a cloud of thick darkness,
My throne is built on righteousness and justice.
My attributes are a purifying fire
To consume everything that opposes Me.

I reveal Myself like flashes of lightning
So everyone can see My holiness and tremble.
The mountains melt like wax before Me
Because I am the Lord of the earth.
The heavens reveal My righteousness,
Everyone sees My glory.
Those who worship idols will be ashamed;
Those who glory in their idols
Will recognize My majestic glory.

Zion will hear and be glad;
Also, the cities of Judah will rejoice
Because I will judge correctly.
For I, the LORD, am Most High over the earth;
I am exalted over all the false gods.
May those who love Me, hate evil;
I will guard those who are faithful to Me,
I will deliver them from the Evil One.
I will shine My light upon the godly
And My blessings on those who do right.

May My people rejoice in Me
And praise My holy name.

PSALM 98

Sing a new song to Me, your Lord,
For I have done marvelous things.

My right hand and My holy arm
Will save you.

I have made My salvation known,
And shown it to the nations.

I have remembered My mercy
And faithfulness to Israel.

Everyone in all places of the earth
Know about My salvation.

Everyone joyfully shouts My praise;
Break into worship music to praise Me.

Everyone sing unto Me with the harp,
Everyone offer praise unto Me with singing.

Everyone shout for joy to Me,
Sound the trumpets and blow the horns.

Let the sea praise Me with its roar,
Let the earth and everyone join together

With the rivers to applaud Me,
As the hills join with them in praise to Me.

For I am coming to judge the earth,
I will make everything right;
I will judge people fairly.

PSALM 99

Let the nations tremble, I reign in heaven;
I sit between the cherubim,

Let the earth shake.
I, the LORD, am great in Zion;
I am exalted over everyone.
Let everyone praise My great and awesome name
For I am holy.

I am the mighty King, I love justice;
I created fairness.
In Jacob I have established justice and righteousness,
I am God, exalt Me as your Lord;
Worship at My feet for I am holy.

Moses and Aaron were My priests,
Samuel also interceded to Me.
They called on My name,
I answered them.
I spoke to them from the Shekinah Glory cloud;
They followed My principles,
They kept the laws I gave them.

I, the LORD your God, answered them
And I forgave them when they confessed;
But I will punish them when they rebel.
I am the LORD your God, exalt Me
And worship in My holy mountain;
I, the LORD your God, am holy.

PSALM 100

Shout with joy to Me, your Lord, when entering My presence,
Everyone from every nation join in.

Worship as you enter My presence with singing
Because I am the Lord, your God.
I made you and you belong to Me;
You are My people and the sheep of My pasture.
Come into My gates giving thanks,
Enter My courts with praise.
Bless My holy name
By giving thanks for all I have done for you.
I, the LORD, am good, My mercy is everlasting,
And My truth endures forever.

PSALM 101

Sing of My love and justice,
Sing to Me, your Lord.
Plan to live without sinning,
Then you can call on Me for help.

Plan to live blamelessly
With your family and friends.
Plan not to look on evil,
Nor satisfy yourself with it.

Hate the evil deeds of others
That can tempt and addict you.
Have nothing to do
With evil people who lie.

I turn My back on
Those who secretly slander their friends,

On those who are selfish and proud;
Have nothing to do with them.

I, the LORD, see all the faithful
And all who live for Me,
Those who live blamelessly
Will honor Me by their lifestyle.

Those who are deceitful
Will not dwell with Me,
Those who lie and rebel against Me
Will not stand in My presence.

Every morning I search all hearts
To determine those who love wickedness.
Then I separate every evil doer
From the blessing of My presence.

When You Are Lonely

PSALM 102

You're not strange because you feel lonely and lost. Many people have felt "cut off" from other people, even when they live in a city of many people or work in a place with other workers. Loneliness is not about environment or about any one nearby. Loneliness is about your inner self. It's what you feel. The psalmist felt the loneliness you feel, "I'm like a lonely owl, that's lost in the desert. I can't sleep at night, I'm as lonely as a solitary sparrow" (Ps. 102:6, 7).

When you're lonely nothing much matters. You have no happiness, and nothing is worth doing. "My food tastes like dirt, and my tears drip into what I drink" (Ps. 102:9).

When you're lonely, cry out to Me. "I will hear you when you pray, I will listen to your request for help. I will not hide My face from you" (Ps. 102:1, 2).

Realize I am the only One who completely knows you and in return you can know Me, "I your Lord, will live forever" (Ps. 102:12). And you will live forever with Me. Therefore, I know who you are, and I know where you are. I know you are lonely and I have a plan for your life. "Your servants and all their children will live forever" (Ps. 102:28).

I will guide you. "I look down from the height of My sanctuary" (Ps. 102:19).

When you're lonely you hurt all over, sometimes you even hurt in your body. What you need is relationship. I made you a social creature, and everyone needs someone else. If your relationship to Me is healthy, then you can make a healthy relationship with others. Look at the 23rd Psalm; it's about a relationship, i.e., a relationship between the Shepherd and sheep, which is a reflection of your relationship to Me. "I, your Lord, am your shepherd, you shall not want" (Ps. 23:1). Did you see that phrase "shall not want?" Lonely people want a relationship; they want a lot of things. They want fun—meaning—and happy times. Ok, it all starts with your relationship with Me.

Notice how the relationship develops between a sheep and shepherd, between you and Me. "I lead you—I make you lie down—I restore your soul." Then notice what I the Shepherd do for you. I am with you—I prepare a table before you—I anoint your head—What's the best antidote for loneliness? A promise of a future relationship with Me forever. "You shall dwell in My house forever."

PSALM 102

I hear when you pray to Me, the Lord;
I listen to your request for help.
I will not hide My face from you
When you are in trouble.

I won't turn away from you,
But I will quickly answer you.
Your days disappear like smoke,
Your bones hurt all the time.

Your spirit is dying like cut grass
And you've lost your appetite to eat anything.
You groan all the time
And you are just skin and bones.

You are like a lonely owl
That's lost in the desert.
You can't sleep at night,
You are as lonely as a solitary sparrow.

Your enemies continually criticize you,
They curse you and destroy your reputation.
Your food tastes like dirt
And your tears drip into what you drink.

Because of My anger and punishment,
You have been cast aside.
Your days are gone like the night shadows,
You are withering away like grass.

But I, the LORD, will live forever;
I will be known in every generation.
I will arise to have compassion on Jerusalem;
I will show favor on her
When the appointed time comes.

I love every stone in Zion's walls,
I even love the dust of her streets.
The nations will tremble before My name,
All the kings will fear My glory.

For I will rebuild Zion,
I will appear in My glory.
I will finally answer the prayers of the downtrodden,
I will no longer turn My back to their cry.

Let this be written for future generations
So that a nation not yet born will praise Me.
Let them write that I will look down from heaven
To hear the groans of My persecuted people,
To redeem and give them freedom.
Then My name will be declared in Zion,
I will be praised in Jerusalem
Because a multitude of peoples and kingdoms
Will come to worship Me, the Lord.

You have been cut down in mid-life,
Your strength has been weakened
So you cry to Me who lives forever,
“Do not cut me off while I am still young.”

In the beginning, I laid the foundations of the earth;
The heavens are the work of My hands.
They will cease, but I will continue;
They will wear out like old clothes.

Then you will then change to new clothes
And throw them away like rags.
I remain forever the same
And My years will never end.

My servant Israel and all their children
Will live eternally in My presence.
And their children's children
Will be established before Me.

PSALM 103

Bless Me, your Lord, from the bottom of your soul
And with all that is within you,
Bless My holy name.
Bless Me, your Lord, from the bottom of your soul
And don't forget any of My benefits.

I, the LORD, forgive sins;
I heal all diseases.
I, the LORD, redeem your life from death
And crown your life with My love and mercy.
I, the LORD, satisfy you with good things;
Your life is renewed like an eagle.

I, the LORD, give righteousness and justice
To all who are persecuted.
I, the LORD, made known My principles to Moses
And showed My works to the people of Israel.
I, the LORD, am merciful and gracious;
Slow to anger and full of love.
I, the LORD, will not continually accuse you,
Nor will I stay My anger forever.
I, the LORD, will not punish you as you deserve,
Nor reward you according to your sins.

For as the heavens are high above the earth,
So great is My love for you.
As far as the east is from the west,
I have removed your sin from you that far.
As a father takes care of his children,
So I love those who trust Me.
I know what you are made of,
I remember that you are only dust.

Your days on earth are like grass;
You grow like a flower in the field.
The wind blows around you and you are gone,
As though you were never here.
But My love is from everlasting to everlasting,
Upon those who love Me;
And upon their children's children.
It extends to those who keep My covenant,
Who remember to obey My principles.

I, the LORD, made the heavens My throne;
I rule over everything.
All the angels bless Me, the Lord;
My mighty ones listen to My Word.
All the heavenly armies of angels bless Me, the Lord;
Those who serve Me and carry out My will.
All My creation blesses Me, I am LORD;
Everything in My kingdom
Joins in blessing Me, your Lord.

PSALM 104

Bless Me, your Lord, from the bottom of your soul
Because I am your Lord God.
I am clothed with majesty and splendor,
Dressed in the garment of light.
I stretched out the heavens like a curtain,
The roof of My home extends above the rain.
I make the clouds My chariot
And walk on the wings of the wind.
The angels are My messengers,
The flashes of lightning are My servants.

I placed the earth on its foundation,
It can never be moved.
I covered it with deep water like a garment
That covered the tallest mountains.
At My command the waters receded,
I spoke by the thunder and they withdrew.
The mountains rose into sight again
And the valleys appeared,

Returning to the places I intended.
I then set a boundary for the sea;
It will never flood the earth again.
I pour water into the ravines from the springs,
Water gushes down the valleys.
I give drink to the animals of the forest,
The wild donkeys quench their thirst.
The birds make their nest by the streams,
They sing in the branches.
I rain on the mountains from My heavenly home,
Causing fruit to grow on the earth.
I make grass to grow for the cattle
And vegetables to grow for you,
Bringing food out of the earth.

I bring wine that gladdens your heart,
And oil to make your face shine,
And bread to strengthen you.
My trees are well watered,
I cause the cedars of Lebanon to grow.
The birds make their nests in its branches,
The stork makes its home in the pine trees.
The high mountains are for the goats,
The rock badgers hide in the rocky cliffs.

I made the moon to tell you the seasons
And the sun follows a prescribed pattern.
When I bring the night, darkness follows;
Then all the beasts of the forest prowl.
The hungry lion roars after its prey;

It is Me, the Lord, Who controls all.
The wild animals hide when the sun rises,
They retreat to their dens when it is light.
But men go out to work when the day comes,
There he labors until the evening.

I am wisdom, I made them all;
The earth is full of My creatures.
There is the wide and spacious sea,
In it are numerous creatures, small and great.
The ships sail upon its surface
And I created the whales to play in its depths.
All sea creatures at the proper time
Are fed by My gracious hand.
They gather the food I give to them,
They are filled by My open hand.
They are troubled when My provision is gone;
When they have no breath, they die and return to dust.
New life is born when I send My spirit,
This way I continually renew the living of the earth.

My glory will endure forever,
I will rejoice in all I have created.
I look at the earth and it trembles,
The mountains smoke when I touch them.
They will always sing praises to Me, the Lord;
You should sing praises to Me as long as you live.
Be pleased with all your thoughts about Me
Because you rejoice in Me, your Lord.
Sinners will vanish from the face of the earth

And the wicked will completely disappear.
Offer praise to Me your Lord, from the bottom of your soul.

PSALM 105

Give thanks to Me, your Lord;
 Call on My name,
 Tell people what I have done.
Sing to Me, Your Lord;
 Sing praises to Me,
 Tell the world of My wonderful acts.
Glory in My holy name,
 Your heart will rejoice as you seek Me.
Seek strength from Me, your Lord;
 You must constantly seek My face.

Remember My wonderful miracles,
 The marvelous things I have done.
Let the seed of Abraham remember
 My chosen children of Jacob,
That I am the Lord, your God;
 My decisions are seen everywhere in the earth.

Remember the covenant I made,
 My Word will continue for a thousand generations.
I made a covenant with Abraham
 Then I swore it to Isaac.
Next, I confirmed it to Jacob
 That I would keep it with Israel forever.
I promised to give them the land of Israel
 As their portion for an inheritance.

When they were few in numbers
And they were strangers in the land,
They were wandering from one nation to another,
From one kingdom to another.
I allowed no one to oppose them,
I protected them; I rebuked kings.
I told them, "Touch not My anointed
And do no harm to My prophets."

I sent a famine on the land
To destroy all My people's supply of food.
I sent a man to save them,
Even Joseph whom they sold as a servant.
His feet were bruised in shackles,
His neck was put in irons.
Then Joseph foretold what was to come to pass,
And the word he heard from Me was true.
The king sent and released Joseph,
The rulers of the people set him free.
Joseph was made manager of the king's house
And administrator of the food of the land.
He commanded the princes what to do,
He shared his wisdom with the elders.
His father, Jacob, was brought to Egypt
And he stayed there until he died.

I made My people grow in number
And they became too numerous for the Egyptians.
I turned the hearts of the Egyptians against Israel,

They put My people in slavery.
I raised up Moses as their leader
And Aaron was chosen to serve with him.

They did miracles for the Egyptians
And showed My wonders to all the people.
I sent darkness, making the land night
Because they had rebelled against My Word.
I turned their water into blood
And all the fish died.

I sent frogs into every place in Egypt,
They even ended up in the rulers' bedrooms.
Then I spoke, and flies appeared everywhere,
Then gnats covered the land.

I made the hail come down like rain
And the lightning flashed throughout the land.
The hail stripped the vines of their leaves
And destroyed their fruit crop and the trees.

I spoke, and the locusts came,
The grasshoppers couldn't be counted.
They ate all the leaves that were left
And devoured all the crops.

I struck down the firstborn in every family,
The heir in each family.

I brought My people out of Egypt;
They were given silver and gold
And not one of My people was sick.
Egypt was glad to see Israel leave
Because they were afraid of what might happen.

I spread out a cloud to lead them by day
And I gave fire to lead them by night.
I gave them quail when they asked for food
And I fed them with bread from heaven.
I opened the rock for water to gush out,
It flowed like a river in the desert.
I remembered My holy promise
That I had made to My servant, Abraham.
I brought My people out of Egypt
With rejoicing and shouts of joy.
I gave them the land that had been occupied by the heathen
And My people inherited what others built
So that they might keep My laws
And observe My commandments;
For this give praise to Me, your Lord.

PSALM 106

Give praise to Me, your Lord,
Give thanks to Me continuously.
For I am good,
My mercy endureth forever.
No one can fully proclaim My mighty acts,
No one can fully give Me praise.
Bless Me, your Lord, and live justly;
Also, those who do rightly at all times.

I will remember you when I show favor to My people,
I will visit you when I come to save them.
Enjoy the goodness of My chosen ones,

Share in the joy of My people;
Join with My inheritance to praise Me.

You have sinned just as did your fathers,
You have done wrong and committed transgressions.
Your fathers did not understand My miracles in Egypt,
They did not remember My mercy to them,
And they doubted I could open the Red Sea.
But I delivered them for My name's sake
And I made My power known.
I spoke to the Red Sea and it retreated,
I led them across on sandy ground.

I saved them from the attack of Pharaoh
And redeemed them from their enemy.
The waters covered the Egyptians,
Not one of them survived.
Then My people believed My promise
And they sang praises to Me.

But My people soon forgot what I did for them,
They did not obey My orders.
They lusted to fill their fleshly appetites;
In the desert they tempted Me.
I gave them what they asked for,
But sent leanness to their soul.
They complained about Moses' leadership,
And about Aaron who was consecrated by Me.
The earth opened up to swallow Dathan,
It also buried Abiram.

Fire swept through their camp,
 Burning up the rebels with them.

They made a golden calf at Mount Horab
 And worshiped it as an idol.

They quit worshiping My glory
 And began worshiping the image of a bull that eats grass.

They forgot that I was their God
 Who had done miracles for them in Egypt
 And had delivered them through the Red Sea.

So I decided to destroy them;
 But Moses stood in the breach as an intercessor
 So I would not consume them.

Then they despised the land I gave them,
 They doubted My promises to them.

They murmured in their tents
 And would not obey My voice.

So I swore that they would die in the desert
 And be scattered throughout the lands.

They joined themselves to Baal
 And ate sacrifices to the lifeless idol.

They provoked Me to anger by their sin
 And a plague spread throughout their camp.

Then Phinehas acted righteously to intervene
 And the plague was stopped.

I counted this to him for righteousness
 So that future generations might take note.

They angered Me at the waters of Meribah

And Moses paid the consequences for it.
For when the people rebelled against Me,
Moses was judged for speaking ill advisedly.

They did not destroy the inhabitants of the land
As I had commanded them to do.
But they mingled with the heathen
And began living like them.
Then they worshiped the idols of the land
Which became a snare to them.
They sacrificed their sons and daughters to demons,
Shedding the innocent blood of their children;
And the nation was corrupted by their idol-worship.
They defiled themselves by their idolatry
And became whores to evil practices.

No wonder I was angry with them
And was disgusted with My inheritance.
I allowed heathen nations to defeat them
And their enemies ruled over them.
Their rulers oppressed them
And forced My people to serve them.
Many times, I delivered them from their enemies,
But they were determined to rebel
And they were destroyed by their sin.

But I remembered My covenant with them,
When they cried out to Me.
I saw their distress and showed them mercy,
I made their oppressors pity them.

May Israel say, "Save us, O Lord, our God;
Bring us back from the nations
So that we may give thanks to Your name,
And give glory to You in praise."

Offer praise to Me, the God of Israel,
From everlasting to everlasting.

PSALM 107

Give thanks to Me, Your Lord,
For I am good.
Let the redeemed speak for Me,
Those I have saved from the enemy.
I have gathered them from all lands,
From the east and the west, from the north and the south.
They wandered lonely in the deserts,
Not finding a city where they could settle down.
They were hungry and thirsty
And their soul fainted within them.
They cried unto Me in their trouble
And I delivered them out of their distress.

I led them by their right hand
To a city where they could settle down.
Oh that all people would praise Me
For My goodness and wonderful works to them
Because I satisfy the thirsty soul
And I fill the hungry with good things.

Some sat blinded in the shadow of death,
They were bound in affliction and sin
Because they rebelled against My words,
And hated My advice.
So I left them bound in misery,
No one was able to help them out of their bondage.

Then they cried unto Me in their trouble,
And I saved them out of their distress.
I brought them out of the shadow of death
And freed them from their chains.
Now let them give thanks for My goodness
And for the wonderful things I do for people
For I am the LORD God.

For I break the prison doors that enslave them
And cut through the iron bars that bind them up.
They become fools by their transgressions
And suffer because of their iniquities.
They didn't want to eat anything
And almost entered the gates of death.

Then they cried unto Me in their trouble
And I saved them out of their distress.
I sent My Word to heal them,
I rescued them from destruction.
Oh that all people would praise Me
For My goodness and wonderful works to them,
And sacrifice thank offerings to Me
And declare My works with praise songs.

Those that go out on the sea in ships
And do their work in the great waters,
They have seen My wonderful works
And the things I have done in the deep.
For I spoke, and a mighty storm arose,
That lifted up the powerful waves.
They ride them up high to the heavens,
They ride them deep into the heart of the ocean;
They are scared to death because of the storm.
They reel and stagger like a drunken man,
They don't know what to do.

Then My people cried unto Me in their trouble,
And I saved them out of their distress.
I quieted the storm to a gentle breeze
So that the roaring waves were stilled.
Then they were glad when the wind blew lightly
And I led them to their desired port.
Oh that all people would praise Me
For My goodness and wonderful works to them.

Let them give Me thanks in the congregation
And praise Me in the assembly of the elders.
Because of the wickedness of those in the land,
A fruitful place became barren.
I turn rivers into a desert
And flowing springs into dry ground.
I can also turn the wilderness into wetlands
And pour water on dry sandy soil.

I can bring the hungry to live there
So they can build a city to live in.
They can plant their fields and vineyards
That will yield an abundant harvest.
I can bless them and increase their number
And not let their herds diminish.
But they can also decrease and become weak
When they choose affliction, opposition and sorrow.
I can humble the proud rulers,
I can let them wander lost in the wilderness.
But I establish the humble on high
And increase their family like flocks.
The righteous see what I do and rejoice,
But the wicked refuse to acknowledge Me.
Those who are wise observe these things,
They understand the loving way I do things.

PSALM 108

Fix your heart on Me, your God,
Sing to Me with all your heart.
Awake early to praise Me,
Awaken the harp and guitar to do it.
Praise Me among the people,
Sing to Me among the unsaved
For My love is great, higher than the heavens,
And My faithfulness reaches to the clouds.
Exalt Me, your God, above the skies;
Let My glory spread over all the earth.

I will come save you with My right hand
And deliver those I love.
I have spoken in My sanctuary,
I appointed Shechem and the valley of Succoth.
Gilead and Manasseh are Mine,
Ephraim is My crown, Judah My scepter.
I tossed out Moab and wiped My feet on Edom,
I conquered Philistia.

I will bring you into a secure city
And I will lead you in victory over Moab.
Will I not do it for you,
You who rejected Me because of your sin?

I will help you in your struggle with the enemy,
For human help is not enough.
With Me you will do valiantly
For I will stomp upon your enemies.

PSALM 109

I am your God, offer praise to Me;
I will not keep silent when you need Me.
The wicked, deceitful enemy attacks you,
He is lying about you.
He hates everything you do
And he opposes you for no reason at all.
He returned evil when you gave him your friendship,
Now you can do nothing but pray about it.

He has rewarded your good with evil,
He hated the love you showed to him.

This evil person who opposes you,
May satan, the accuser, stand at his right hand
To judge him and declare him guilty,
And may his cry for mercy condemn him.

Let his days be few,
And let someone else take his place.

Let his children be fatherless,
And let his wife be a widow.

May his children be wandering street urchins,
Driven desolate from their homes.

May the creditors seize all his assets
And may looters plunder all he has left.

Let no one show him mercy,
Nor extend help to his children.

His descendants will be destroyed
And his family name will be terminated.

The iniquity of his father will be remembered before Me, the Lord;
The sins of his mother will never be forgiven.

I will always remember his sin,
No one on earth will remember that he ever lived.

Your enemy didn't show mercy to the poor,
But tormented continuously the needy and discouraged.

He loved to curse, so curses on him continuously;
He hated to bless, so don't bless him.

He covered himself with vile language,
He drank it in like water.

His swearing words will choke him like a scarf.

His filthy speech will squeeze him like a tight belt.

All this will be your adversary's reward

Because he cursed you as you lived for Me.

But I, your Lord God, have been good to you;

For My name's sake I have delivered you,

I have shown My goodness and love to you.

You were defenseless and needy,

All hope in your heart had collapsed.

You were fading away like the evening shadows,

You were shaken like a grasshopper in the storm.

You were weak because of fasting for answers

And your body was emaciated and anemic.

Everyone was ridiculing you,

They shook their heads in disbelief when they saw you.

I will help you, I am your Lord and God;

I will save you by My mercy.

They will see My hand working in your life

And understand what I have done for you.

They may curse you, but I will bless you;

I will put them to shame when they attack you,

But you can rejoice in My presence.

I will wrap them in the coat of embarrassment

And cover them with disgrace.

Worship Me with your mouth,

Praise Me among the congregation

For I stand at your right hand when you are needy

To protect you from the condemnation of your enemy.

PSALM 110

I, the LORD, said to Jesus:

Come sit at My right hand

While I put your enemies under Your feet.

I will extend My powerful scepter out from Zion

For You to rule over all My enemies.

Your people will serve Me in the day of battle,

They will be beautifully dressed in holiness

To serve Me from the dawn of the morning,

Until the dew finishes the day.

I have vowed and will not change My mind

That Jesus will be a priest forever;

He serves according to the order of Melchizedek.

Jesus will be at the right hand of Me

To crush the kings that oppose Him.

Jesus will judge all the nations,

Those who rebel will die;

The rulers of great countries will be destroyed.

He will drink from the brook after the task,

His head will be exalted in victory.

PSALM 111

Praise Me, your Lord;

Magnify Me with all your heart.

Praise Me, your Lord,

In the assembly of true worshipers.

Great are My works, I am the Lord;

Meditate on them with other worshipers.
I do things gloriously and majestically,
My righteousness never fails.

Do not forget the wonders I do,
I will be gracious and merciful to you.
I will give food to those who trust Me,
Who always live by the principles I gave them.
I have displayed My great power to you,
Giving you the land of other people.
All I do is just and good;
Live confidently by all My principles.

My truth is forever trustworthy,
I gave it to you in My integrity.
I redeemed My people,
I guaranteed to keep them forever.
Holy and revered is My name;
To understand this is to understand true wisdom.
All who live by My principles
Are rewarded by true wisdom.
Let all the people praise My name forever.

PSALM 112

Praise Me, your Lord,
For blessing you when you fear Me,
For blessing you when you delight in My Word.
I have promised your children will be influential,
I will bless them when they do right.

I have promised to bless them with wealth and riches
When they continually live righteously.

I will help you live uprightly as a light in darkness
And to be gracious and compassionate to all.

I will help you graciously give to the needy
And guide your life with truth.

Then you shall not be shaken
And your righteousness will be remembered forever.

Do not be afraid of bad news;
Be steadfast in trusting Me.
Be established and not afraid,
I will help you triumph over your enemies.

If you give to the poor,
Your testimony will endure forever;
That will honor Me.

Your wicked enemies will see it
And be terrified of coming judgment.
They will gnash their teeth in fear
To realize they will perish.

PSALM 113

Praise Me, your Lord, by My holy name;
Come praise Me with My servants.
Bless My name for I am your Lord;
Bless Me both now and forever.

From the rising of the sun until its going down,
Praise My name for I am your Lord.
I will be exalted above the nations,
My glory will shine above the heavens.

Who can be compared to Me, your Lord and God;
I sit on My throne.
I descend to examine the affairs
On both the heaven and earth.

I lift up the poor from the ground
And raise the needy from despair.
I set them among the honored ones,
Even among the leaders of their people.
I give a home to the woman without children
So she can be a mother;
Praise Me for I am your Lord.

PSALM 114

I live in Israel as My sanctuary
When the nation left Egypt.
I made the house of Jacob My dominion
When My people left those speaking a strange language.
The Red Sea saw Me coming
And parted for Israel to cross.
The Jordan River acknowledged My presence
And the waters rolled back.
The mountain skipped like happy rams
And the hills played like little lambs.

Why did this happen that the Red Sea parted

And that the Jordan backed up?

Why did the mountains skip like rams

And the little hills played like lambs?

Because of My presence, the Lord God of Israel;

Let the earth tremble when I come near.

I brought pools of water from the Rock of Merabah,

Water poured out from a solid rock.

PSALM 115

Not to humans goes the glory;

But glorify Me, your Lord, because of My name.

Not to humans goes glory,

But to Me because of My mercy and truth.

Why are the heathen asking,

“Where is the God of His followers?”

Because I, the LORD God am in the heavens,

I do whatever I want to do.

Their gods are nothing but silver and gold idols,

The workmanship of their hands.

They have mouths, but cannot speak;

Eyes have they but cannot see.

They have ears, but they cannot hear;

Noses have they but cannot smell.

They have hands, but they cannot handle;

Feet have they, but cannot walk;
Nor can they speak intelligently.
Those who create idols make them like themselves,
And those who trust idols are only worshiping themselves.

Israel must trust in Me, your Lord,
For I am their help and protection.
The priest must trust in Me, their Lord,
For I am their help and protection.
All those who acknowledge Me as their Lord
Must trust Me for help and protection.
I will remember and bless you accordingly;
I will bless the house of Israel,
And bless the priests who serve Me.
I will bless all those who acknowledge Me,
Bless them small and great alike.

I will prosper your life with My blessing,
Both you and your children.
You will be blessed by Me, your Lord,
Maker of heaven and earth.
The highest heaven belongs to Me, your Lord,
And I have given the earth to you.
The dead cannot sing praises to Me
For they are silent in the grave.
You, the living must bless Me, your Lord,
From this time into eternity.

PSALM 116

You should love Me, your Lord,

Because I hear and answer your prayer.
Because I listen to you,
Pray to Me as long as you live.
When you were scared to death,
And thought you were going to die,
You were so worried you couldn't think straight.
Then you called on Me, your Lord;
"Please come and save me."
I will be gracious and kind,
I will be merciful to you.
I will protect those with simple faith;
When you were in trouble, I saved you.
Then once again you were peaceful
Because I had been good to you.
I kept you from dying
And you no longer cry.

So now walk in My presence
Among the land of the living.
Because you believe in Me,
You told Me all your troubles.
When you were upset you complained to Me
That all men are liars.
What can you do for Me, your Lord,
For all I have done for you?
All you can do is drink from My cup of salvation
And praise My name for saving you.

Keep your promises to Me, your Lord,
In the presence of My people.

The ones who are faithful to the end
Are precious to Me when they die.
You are My servant, the son of My handmaid;
I have given you freedom in serving Me.

Worship Me with the sacrifice of thanksgiving,
And call upon My name, I am your Lord.
Keep your promises that you made to Me;
I am your Lord in the presence of My people,
In the heart of Jerusalem.
In the courts of My house,
Praise My name forever.

PSALM 117

Praise Me, your Lord, with the different ethnic groups of the earth;
Praise Me with all people of the earth
For I love you with unending love;
My faithfulness endures forever,
Praise Me, your Lord.

PSALM 118

Give thanks to Me, your Lord,
For I am good, and My love endures forever.
Join all My people to proclaim
My love endures forever.
Join the priests of Aaron to proclaim
My love endures forever.
Join all who fear Me to proclaim
My love endures forever.

In your trouble call on Me your Lord;
I will answer you and deliver you.
I will be with you, do not fear;
What can anyone do to you?
I will be with you and will help you;
You will triumph over your enemies.
You know it is better to put your trust in Me
Than to put your confidence in anyone on earth.
You know it is better to put your trust in Me
Than to put your confidence in human leaders.

Though hostile enemies surround you,
You will defeat them in My name.
Even when your enemies have you hemmed in,
You will defeat them in My name.
They may swarm around you like bees,
They may circle around you like fire in dead thorn bushes;
But you will defeat them in My name.

You retreated and were almost defeated,
But I helped you.
I was your strength in battle,
You sing of Me in your victory song.
Shouts of joy and victorious songs of praise
Are sung among those who have been redeemed.
My mighty right arm has done glorious things,
My mighty right arm has been exalted.
You will not be defeated but you will live
And you will tell what I have done for you.

I will punish you severely for your sin
But will not deliver you to death.

They will open the gates of righteousness for you,
And you will enter to give thanks to Me, your Lord.
The gates will open that lead to My presence,
And the godly will come in to Me.
Thank Me for answering your prayers
And for saving you from your troubles.

The stone which the builders rejected
Has now become the cornerstone of the building.
I have accomplished this great thing
And it is a marvelous thing to see.
This is the day that I have made,
Rejoice in it and be glad.

Now, I the Lord, will save you
And give you success.
And bless you who comes in My name;
I will bless you because of the One standing in My presence.
I have accepted you into My light;
Bring the sacrifice to My altar.
I am your God, offer Me thanks;
I am your God, exalt Me in your praise.
Give thanks to Me your Lord,
For I am good, and My love endures forever.

PSALM 119

a
ALEPH

I, the LORD, will bless those who are blameless
Who walk according to My law.
I bless those who keep My statutes
And those who seek Me with all their hearts.
They do not commit iniquity,
But they walk according to My way.
I have commanded you to keep My precepts,
Oh that you are steadfastly doing it.
Then you would not be shamed,
Because you respect all My commandments.
Then you can praise Me with the integrity of your heart,
As you continue learning My laws,
You will obey My statutes,
Then, I will never leave you.

b
BETH

How can a young man keep clean?
By knowing and obeying My Word.
Then he will seek Me with his whole heart,
He will never stray from My commandments.
My Word has he hid in his heart
That he might not sin against Me.
He will praise Me, and I will help him understand My Word;
His lips will repeat the laws I gave to him.
He is happy when he follows My testimonies,
As one that rejoices in riches.
He will meditate on My precepts

And respect the way he is to live.
He will delight in My statutes,
And will not forget My Word.

g
GIMEL

He prays for blessings to live before Me,
And keep the Word I have given.
He prays, "Open my eyes so I can see,"
Wonderful truths in My law.
He is a stranger on earth;
Do not withhold My Word from his heart,
His soul will always long for My laws.
He will rebuke the rebellious who are cursed
Because they wander from My commandments.
He asks for his scorn and contempt to be forgiven
Because he follows My testimonies.
Although rulers agree to condemn him,
He will meditate on My statutes.
And My testimonies are his delight,
They guide him in the way he should live.

d
DALETH

When he is crushed into the dust,
My Word will revive him.
I have heard how he testified about My way,
I will teach him more of My Word to do it again.
I will help him understand what My precepts mean
So he can tell others of My wonderful way.
When his soul is burdened down with worry,

I will lift him up with My Word,
Keeping him from being deceitful,
And helping him keep My law.
He has chosen to tell the truth,
My standards will be his standards.
He will hold on to the expectations of My law,
He will not change his commitment.
He runs to keep My commandments
For I have given him a new heart to do it.

h
HE

I will teach you to follow My statutes,
And you will always obey them.
I will help you understand My law
And you will wholeheartedly observe it.
I will make you follow My commandments
And you will find delight in them.
When you incline your heart toward My testimonies,
You won't be selfishly greedy.
When you incline your eyes from looking at vain attractions,
I will renew your life with My words.
When I fulfill My scriptures to you,
You will worship Me in awe.
I will take away the things you fear
And give you My judgment.
Because you long to know My precepts,
I will revive your desire to be righteous.

w
WAW

I will show you My daily mercies
And save you according to the promises of My Word.
Then you can answer the one criticizing you,
For you trust the answers in My Word.
Do not take My truth out of your life
And put your trust in it.
Always obey My law
And enjoy the freedom it gives you.
Testify of My truth before kings
And be not intimidated by them.
Constantly delight in My commandments
Because you love them.
Lift up My commandments with your hand
And meditate on them constantly.

Z
ZAYIN

Remember the Word I have given to you,
And put your trust in it.
Then you can take comfort in what I have said,
Because My Word gives you hope.
Your enemies mock you for trusting Me,
But you have not turned away from My love.
Remember the laws I originally gave
And continue to trust in them.
You can be angry at the wicked,
Because they have forsaken My law.
You must sing about My words,
Make them your theme song wherever you live.
In the night meditate on My name,

Because it helps you obey My commandments.
Make it your practice through the years
To obey all the precepts of My law.

j
HETH

I am your protection when
You promise to obey My law.
Seek My face with all your strength,
And I will mercifully answer you according to My promises.
When you examined your ways,
You began walking according to My statutes.
Then you acted on My commandments quickly
And did not delay your obedience.
Even when your enemies tied you up and robbed you,
You responded according to My law.
At midnight when you wake up, give Me thanks,
For My laws make your life happy.
Be a friend to all who fear Me
And who follow My precepts.
The earth is filled with My love,
I will teach you how to live by My expectations.

v
TETH

I have done good things for you
Just as I promised in My Word.
I will teach you good judgment and knowledge,
Wisdom is found in My commands.
Before I disciplined you, you strayed from Me,
But now you know to keep My Word.

I am good, and I only do good things,
Let Me teach you My principles to live by.
Your enemies have told lies about you,
But you keep My precepts in your heart.
Their heart is blind and disobedient
To the truth that you keep.
It was good for you to be in trouble
Because you learned My statutes.
The law spoken by Me is better
Than thousands of gold and silver coins.

y
YODH

I made you with My hands,
Now I will give you discernment to learn My commandments.
May all who fear Me rejoice when they see you
Because you have put your trust in Me.
You know that My decisions are fair
And I punished you because you deserved it.
Now I will comfort you with My merciful kindness
As I promised to do in My Word.
I will cover you with My tender mercies so that you may live,
For you find happiness in My law.
May your enemies be embarrassed for telling lies about you,
But you will meditate on My commandments.
You want to be reconciled with those who fear Me
And those who know My testimonies.
May you blamelessly keep My commandments,
Then you will never be embarrassed.

k
KAPH

You thought you weren't going to be saved,
 But your trust in My Word strengthened you.
When you have difficulty seeing My Word,
 I will encourage you.
You were empty like a bottle of smoke,
 So you hung on to My promises.
You do not know how long you will live,
 So you want Me to judge your persecutors.
Your enemies have tried to trip you up,
 They don't live by My laws.
All the promises I gave you will work,
 So I will help you respond properly to your enemies.
They have almost overcome you,
 But you still hang on to My Word.
I will give you a new life through My Word,
 And you will obey My commandments.

m
LAMEDH

My Word is forever settled in heaven;
 I am faithful to all generations,
 I established the abiding earth.
My promises continue to this day
 And are applied to all My followers.
Without the encouragement of My law
 You would have given in to your affliction.
You must never forsake My Word
 For it gives you life and hope.

You are My servant and belong to Me,
 You must always seek and follow My Scripture.
The wicked are waiting to destroy you,
 But you will still look for My precepts.
You have seen every perfect thing cease,
 But My commands will reach everywhere.

1
MEM

You love My law,
 You meditate on it all day long.
My commandments make you wiser than your enemies
 For they are your constant guide.
You get more understanding from My law than from your teachers
 Because you constantly think about My commandments.
You are even wiser than your elders
 Because you obey My precepts.
You have refused to follow evil paths
 Because they disagree with My Word.
You have not neglected My standards
 For they have profited your life.
My words are sweet to your taste
 Sweeter than your favorite dessert.
You gain understanding from My commandments
 Therefore, you hate everything that pulls you away from Me.

n
NUN

My Word is a light for your feet,
 I help you see the path in the dark.
You have taken an oath to obey

The wonderful command I gave you.
Because you have suffered much, My Word will revive you
Because I promised I will do it.
You gave Me an offering of praise
So I will teach you how to do it better.
You bring your soul in your hands to Me
Just as I teach you to do in My law.
Your enemies have tried to trip you up
But you have not departed from My standards.
The stories of My exploits are your heritage,
You get excited when you read about them.
Your heart is committed to keeping My law
To the very end of your life.

S
SAMEKH

You hate those who claim to love Me, but disobey Me;
But as far as you are concerned, you love My Word.
I am your defender and shield,
Therefore, you trust what I tell you.
You don't want evildoers anywhere near you
Because you keep My commandments.
I will hold you steadily by My Word
And you will put your trust in Me.
I reject all who have rejected My statutes
But you cling to My loving ways.
You would be afraid not to obey Me
Because you fear My judgments.

O
AYIN

You have always done the right thing in the right way,
I will not leave you to your enemies.
I will guarantee your spiritual wealth and blessing,
Don't let the oppressor tear you down.
Your eyes strain to see My salvation,
You are looking for My righteous Word.
I will deal with you by My mercy
And teach you the meaning of My statutes.
Seek discernment for you are My servant,
Then you will understand My will.
Now is the time for Me to act
When they are breaking My law.
I know you love My commandments better than gold,
You love them more than pure gold.
And because you know all My precepts are right,
You hate everything that is false.

p
PE

My statutes are wonderful,
Therefore, you should love to obey them.
You get understanding when you read My Word,
Even average people get insight from it.
Open your mouth to receive My Scriptures
Because you long to know what I say.
I will come show you My love and faithfulness,
As I do to those who love My name.
I will guide you by My words
And won't let sin control you.
I will deliver you from your oppressing enemy

So you can obey My commandments.
I will shine the presence of My face on you
And will teach you how to live by My law.
You can't help the tears running down your face
Because people disobey My law.

X
TSDAHE

I will always do the right thing
And My decisions are right.
My directions are the right thing for you,
You can fully trust them with your soul.
You become overcome with anger
Because your enemies won't obey My commands.
My words are absolutely honest,
Therefore, you can love everything about them.
Though you are insignificant and despised,
You have not forgotten My precepts.
My righteousness is as eternal as I am
And My law is absolutely true.
When trouble and anxiety overwhelm you,
My commandments get you through problems.
My testimonies are always right,
I will help you understand them, so you can live.

q
KOPH

I will answer when you call to Me with all your heart
But you must obey My laws.
You again called out for Me to save you,
You must continue obeying My statutes.

Get up early in the morning to cry for help
And continue to put your trust in My Word.
Remain awake through the different hours of the night,
Meditating on the promises of My Word.
I will hear your request because I promised to listen,
I will renew your life by My Word.
Those who plan to attack you are nearby
But they live far from Me.
Yet I am near to you
And you can depend on the truthfulness of My commands.
You learned when you were very young
That My established commands last forever.

r
RESH

I will look on your pain and deliver you,
For you have not forgotten My Word.
I will come help you and defend you,
I will deliver you as I have promised.
The wicked are far from being saved,
They will not seek My Word.
My mercy is great, I am your Lord;
I will revive you according to My laws.
You have many enemies and oppressors
But you have not rejected My promises.
You are grieved when you see them hate Me
Because they reject My Word.
I see how you love My promises,
I will revive you according to My Word.
All My words are true from the beginning

Because My laws are right, they will forever stand.

v
SHIN

Even when rulers persecute you without a cause,

Your heart still respects My Word.

Rejoice in My Scriptures,

Like someone finding a great treasure.

Hate those who lie,

But love My law.

Seven times a day you praise Me

For giving you right laws by which to live.

They who love My Scripture will have great peace,

Nothing shall offend them.

Put your hope in My salvation

And obey My laws.

Obey My commands

And love them with all your heart.

Obey My statutes

And know them because they contain all truth.

t
TAW

I, your LORD, will listen to your prayer;

I will help you understand what is in My Word.

I will listen to your prayer

And deliver you according to My promise.

Let your lips pour out praise to Me

Because I taught you My Word.

Let your tongue sing about My promises

For they help you live right.

I will let My hand help you

Because you have chosen to follow My precepts.

Long for My salvation

And My law will give you happiness.

Live so you can praise Me

And My Scriptures will sustain you.

You have strayed like a lost sheep;

I will come find you

For you have not forgotten My commandments.

The Psalms of Degrees (Also called the Psalms of Ascent)

The word “degrees” means steps. There are fifteen Psalms in the Psalms of Degrees (i.e., Psalms 120-134). These Psalms were sung by the pilgrims going up to the three annual required feasts in Jerusalem (Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles). They would sing these psalms as they climbed the mountains toward Jerusalem. Because of this, they are called “the Psalms of Ascent.”

Some say the title “degrees” began when the exiles returned to Jerusalem from captivity during the reign of Artaxerxes. They sang these psalms as they approached Jerusalem. Others say these psalms got their names from the fifteen steps from the court of the women up to the court of the men in My Temple. The Levitical singers performed. They used these steps as a stage. They were part of a worship procedure as the priests advanced up these steps in preparation for daily sacrifices. The word degrees might mean “step to step” as seen in Psalm 121:4-5; 124:1-4.

Still others say that the fifteen psalms correspond in number with the fifteen years that were added to Hezekiah’s life. When Hezekiah prayed to live longer, I increased his years when the shadow of the sun went backwards ten degrees on the sundial of

Ahaz (2 Kings 20:8-11). The number of fifteen psalms corresponds with the number of years (15) that were added to Hezekiah's life. At the same time the number of ten psalms written by Hezekiah, reflects the number of degrees by which the "shadow of the sun went backwards."

Solomon's psalm (127) is the center psalm. There are two psalms by David on each side of the center (a total of four), and ten psalms written by Hezekiah, i.e., bring the total number of psalms to fifteen. Also look at the symmetry of the Psalms of Degree, My name Jehovah (Lord) occurs twenty-four times in each of the seven psalms on either side of the center psalm, and My name Jehovah occurs only three times in the central psalm.

Authorship of the Psalms of Degrees

Psalm 120: By Hezekiah

Psalm 121: By Hezekiah

Psalm 122: By David

Psalm 123: By Hezekiah

Psalm 124: By David

Psalm 125: By Hezekiah

Psalm 126: By Hezekiah

Psalm 127: (The Central Psalm) By Solomon

Psalm 128: By Hezekiah

Psalm 129: By Hezekiah

Psalm 130: By Hezekiah

Psalm 131: By David

Psalm 132: By Hezekiah

Psalm 133: By David

Psalm 134: By Hezekiah

PSALM 120

Call on Me, your Lord, when you are in trouble;
I will hear when you pray.
I will save you from liars
And from deceitful people.
You asked what I will do to the liars
And how much will I punish them.
I will inflict them with the pain of sharp arrows
And with the torment of burning coals.

When you suffer because you live in Meshech,
And stay in the tents of Kedar,
It is because you have lived too long
Among those who hate peace.
You must be a lover of peace
But they are all men of war.

PSALM 121

Lift up your eyes to the hills,
But does your help come from there?
No! Your help comes from Me, your Lord;
I made the heavens and the earth.
My foot will not stumble;
Indeed, I who watch over Israel
Never get tired, nor will I sleep.
I will watch over you to keep you,
I will stand at your right hand to protect you.
The sun will not harm you during the day,
Nor will the moon at night.
I will deliver you from all evil
And preserve your soul.

I will watch over you as you come and go,
Both now in this present age and forever more.

PSALM 122

You should be glad when they said to you,
“Let us go into the Lord’s house.”
Now you are standing inside My gate,
You are standing in My city of Jerusalem.
Jerusalem is the eternal city,
It is tightly built together.
This is where My people of Israel come,
They come here to praise Me.
As the commandments instruct,
They come to worship My name.

I have put the seat of government here,
The throne of David rules from this city.
Pray for the peace of Jerusalem;
May all prosper who love Me.
May there be peace within these walls
And prosperity within the palaces.
For the sake of your relatives and friends,
Pray for peace within this city.
For the sake of My house, the God of Israel,
Pray for prosperity in Jerusalem.

PSALM 123

You must look up to Me, your God,
As I sit on My throne in heaven.

Lift up your eyes to Me, your God,
As the servant looks to the hand of his master,
As the maid looks to the hand of her mistress.
Look to Me, your Lord, and God,
That I would show you mercy,
And be gracious to you, for I, your Lord, am gracious;
For you have been criticized by the proud,
And you have been rejected by the arrogant,
And you can't stand rejection.

PSALM 124

If I had not been on your side as your Lord,
Tell everyone who will listen.
If I had not been on your side
When your enemies attacked you,
They would have swallowed you alive
Because their anger was hot against you.
The waters would have drowned you,
The torrent would have flooded your soul.
The angry waters from the storm
Would have overwhelmed your life.

Bless Me, your Lord, for I am your protection;
Because I did not let them devour you.
You have escaped like a bird
Out of the trap of the hunter;
You are free because the trap was broken.
I am your defender, I am your Lord;
I am the Creator of the heavens and the earth.

PSALM 125

Because you trust in Me your Lord,
 You are as secure as Mount Zion;
 You will not be shaken but will abide forever.
Just as the mountains surround Jerusalem
 Give it protection,
 So I, your Lord, surround and protect My people.
The wicked will not rule the godly
 Lest they make the godly do evil.
I, your Lord, will do good to those who are good,
 To those whose hearts are upright.
But to those who follow crooked ways,
 I will expel them with the evil ones;
 I will give peace to Israel.

PSALM 126

When I, your Lord, returned the exiles to Jerusalem,
 It was like they were dreaming.
They laughed with joy
 And sang a happy song.
The Gentiles were amazed saying,
 “The Lord has done great things for them.”
Yes, I, the LORD, have done great things for all,
 Overflowing their hearts with joy.
I, the LORD, will restore their lives
 As the streams restore the desert.
Those who plant with tears
 Will sing heartedly during the harvest.
He who goes out weeping to plant,

Carrying his seed to sow,
Will come from the work singing for joy,
Carrying his sheaves with him.

PSALM 127

Except I, your LORD, build the family,
The work of the workers is useless.
Unless I, your Lord, watch over the city,
The watch of the watchman is in vain.
It is useless to toil and work,
Getting up early and staying up late;
Worrying about getting enough food to eat
Because I supply the needs of those I love.
I, your Lord, give children as a gift;
The fruit of the womb is My reward.
Like weapons in the hands of a warrior,
Are children born to a wise family.
Blessed is the man whose quiver is full
Because his children defend him against attacks.

PSALM 128

I prosper those who fear Me;
I bless those who follow My ways.
They enjoy the fruit of their labors,
I give them happiness and prosperity.
Their wives will be like a fruitful vine,
Flourishing within their home.
They will have many children
Sitting around the table,

That is one of the ways I bless
Those that fear Me.

I will bless them from Zion
All the days of their life.
May they see the prosperity of Jerusalem
As long as they live.
May they live to see their children's children;
I, the LORD, give peace upon My people.

PSALM 129

Your enemies have tormented you
Ever since you were young.
They have oppressed you as you were growing up
But they have not been victorious.

Like a plow on your back,
They have made deep furrows.
But I, the LORD, have been good to you;
I will free you from their bondage.

Those who hate My people
Will be defeated and embarrassed.
They will be like grass without roots
That withers because it can't grow.

Reapers will reject them at harvest
Because they are not good for anything.
No one passing by will bless your enemies,

Nor say, “The blessing of the Lord’s name upon them.”

PSALM 130

Out of my depth of trouble
 Call to Me, your Lord;
 I will listen to your cry for help.
If I kept a record of your sin,
 No one could stand before Me.
But there is forgiveness with Me
 So that you will fear Me.
Wait for Me, your Lord,
 And put your trust in My Word.
Wait for Me, your Lord,
 More than a watchman waits for the morning.
You should put your hope in Me, your Lord,
 For there is loving-kindness with Me;
 And there is redemption in Me.
For I will redeem you all
 From all your iniquities.

PSALM 131

Do not be egotistical over who you are,
 Nor be proud of what you do.
Do not be concerned about these self-serving ambitions,
 Nor be concerned about other things.
But come quietly to Me, your Lord,
 Just as a little child comes quietly to its mother;
 Let your soul be like a quiet baby before Me.
May My children put their hope in Me,

Both now and forever.

PSALM 132

I, the LORD, remember the passion of David
Who in spite of all his afflictions
Made a vow to Me, his Lord,
Promising that he would not enter My tent,
Nor would he rest in his bed,
Nor would he close his eyes in sleep,
Until he found a place for Me, his Lord,
And he built a house for Me to dwell in.
I have heard about this vow in Ephratah,
It was repeated in the woods and fields,
That all must come to My tabernacle,
And all must worship at My feet.

I will arise from My rest,
I will let the Ark of My presence shine.
So let the priest's clothes reflect My salvation
And My saints shout for joy.
For David's sake I will not turn away,
I will shine My face on My anointed.
I have made a promise to David
That the fruit of his loins
Would sit on his throne.
That when his children obey My commandments,
That I would teach them,
They also will sit on David's throne.
For I, your Lord, have chosen Zion
To be the place for My habitation.

This is where I will rest in eternity;
This is where I want to live.

I have abundantly blessed this land,
You have given bread to the poor.
I will spread salvation through the priest,
And My people will shout for joy.
I will once again raise up one from David's line;
The Messiah will hold forth the light!
My enemies will be humiliated
But the Messiah will be crowned in prosperity.

PSALM 133

It is good for My people
To live together in unity.
It is like the oil that is anointed
On the head of My servants,
Even oil that trickled down Aaron's beard
And dripped on his skirts.
It is like the dew on Mount Hermon,
And like the dew on all the mountains of Zion.
Because in unity I direct My blessings,
Even life forevermore.

PSALM 134

Praise Me, your Lord, with all My servants
Who stand in My house to praise Me.
They lift up their hands in the sanctuary,
They praise Me their Most Holy Lord.

I, who made heaven and earth,
I will bless them from My home in Zion.

PSALM 135

Praise Me, your Lord,
Join with all My servants to praise My name.
With all those who stand in My house,
Praise Me, your Lord.
With all those who stand in My courts,
Praise Me, your Lord.
Praise Me, your Lord, for I am good;
It is pleasant to sing praises to Me.

I, your Lord, chose Jacob for Myself;
I chose Israel as My peculiar treasure.
Know that I, your Lord, am great;
That I, your Lord, am above all gods.
I created what I wanted in the heavens,
The same in the earth and in the sea.
I created all the fog and the mist,
I created the lightning with the rain;
I brought you wind and the storm.

I sent the death angel to strike the firstborn,
Both among people and animals in Egypt.
I send miracles and signs to Egypt,
Both upon Pharaoh and his servants.
I smote the great nations on earth
And killed their mighty kings.

This included Sihon, king of the Amorites,
Plus Og, king of Bashan, and the other nations.

I gave their land to My people,
To Israel for an everlasting heritage.
My name will continue forever,
People will remember Me throughout generations.
But I will judge My people when they sin
And forgive them when they repent.

The idols of the heathen are made of silver and gold,
They are the creation of man's hands.
Idols have mouths, but they do not speak;
They have eyes, but they do not see.
Idols have ears, but they do not hear;
Neither is there My breath in them.
Those who create the idols are like them;
Those who worship them are also like them.

So join with all Israel to praise Me;
Praise Me, your Lord, with the priests.
Praise Me, your Lord, who comes to Zion;
Praise Me, your Lord, who dwells in Jerusalem.

PSALM 136

Give thanks to Me, your Lord,
For I am good;
For My mercy endures forever.
Give thanks to Me, your God, over false gods,

For My mercy endures forever.
Give thanks to Me, your Lord, over lords,
For My mercy endures forever.
I alone can do great miracles,
For My mercy endures forever.
I have made the heavens,
For My mercy endures forever.
I stretched out the earth and the seas,
For My mercy endures forever.
I created the sun and stars,
For My mercy endures forever.
I made the sun to rule your days,
For My mercy endures forever.
I made the moon and stars to rule your night,
For My mercy endures forever.
I sent the death angel on the firstborn of Egypt,
For My mercy endures forever.
I brought Israel out of Egypt,
For My mercy endures forever.
I stretched out My strong arm against the gods of Egypt,
For My mercy endures forever.
I divided the Red Sea,
For My mercy endures forever.
I brought Israel through on dry land,
For My mercy endures forever.
I drowned Pharaoh and his armies in the Red Sea,
For My mercy endures forever.
I led My people through the wilderness,
For My mercy endures forever.
I defeated great kings who oppose Israel,

For My mercy endures forever.
I executed famous kings,
For My mercy endures forever.
Sihon, King of the Amorites, was eliminated;
For My mercy endures forever.
Also, Og, King of Bashan, was eliminated,
For My mercy endures forever.
I gave their land to My people,
For My mercy endures forever.
Now the land is the heritage of Israel,
For My mercy endures forever.
I remember you in your weakness,
For My mercy endures forever.
I redeemed you from your enemies,
For My mercy endures forever.
I give everyone food to eat,
For My mercy endures forever.
Give thanks to Me, the God of Heaven,
For My mercy endures forever.

PSALM 137

My people sat by the rivers of Babylon
And wept when they remembered Zion.
They refused to sing joyfully,
Hanging their harps on willow trees.
Their captors demanded that they sing;
Those who imprisoned them wanted entertainment,
Asking, "Sing us a song of Zion."

My people couldn't sing

While being held captive in a strange land.
My people said they couldn't forget Jerusalem
Just as their right hand couldn't forget its movement.
My people said their tongue would stick in their mouth
If they did not remember Me, their Lord.

Don't forget what Edom did to My people
When Jerusalem was being attacked.
Edom was yelling for the city to be destroyed
And its foundation be destroyed.
Know that I will destroy Babylon;
Someone will be happy to do it.
They will enjoy destroying the children of Babylon
Just as Babylon destroyed My children.

PSALM 138

I am the Lord, offer praise to Me
With all your heart.
Sing praise to Me
And not to idols.
Worship Me in My Temple,
And praise Me for My love and faithfulness
Because I exalted My name and kept My Word.

When you called to Me in trouble,
I answered by encouraging you with My strength.
All the rulers of the earth shall praise Me
When they hear the words I speak.
They shall sing about My ways
And My glory shall be great.

Even though I am high and lofty,
I look kindly to the lowly
But I know those who are proud in heart.

When you have a lot of trouble,
I will help you through it.
I will stretch out My hand against your enemies,
My right hand shall deliver you.
I will fulfill My plan for your life;
My love endures forever,
I will not quit protecting you.

PSALM 139

I, your Lord, have searched you
And I know you thoroughly.
I know when you sit and when you rise,
I understand your thoughts from afar.
I know your journeys and your rest,
I am familiar with everywhere you go.

Before your tongue speaks a word,
I, your Lord, know what you are going to say.
I know all about you, in front and behind;
I have laid My hand on you.
Being known by Me is a wonderful thing,
I have greater knowledge than anyone.

It is impossible to escape from My Spirit,
You can never get away from My presence.

If you could go to heaven, I am there;
If you make your bed in hell, I am there.
If you could fly away on the wings of a new day,
And fly across the sea,

Even there you would find My hand guiding you,
And My right hand holding you.
If you say that the darkness will surely hide you,
Even the night covers everything about you.
But you cannot hide from Me in the darkness
Because the night shines like the day to Me;
Both darkness and light are the same to Me.

I made the inner parts of your body,
I created you in your mother's womb.
Praise Me for reverently and wonderfully forming you,
Recognize My marvelous creative works.
I saw you being conceived in the protection of the womb
And you came together under My watch care.

All the days of your life were preordained for you,
I wrote them in a book before they happened.
I, your God, have precious thoughts about you;
You can't begin to number the times I think about you.
If you could count all of them,
My thoughts of you are more than the grains of the sand.
When you wake each morning,
I am still right beside you.
You ask if only I would destroy the wicked
And get rid of all who are trying to kill you.

Your enemies blaspheme Me,
They misquote Me and take My name in vain.
I want you to hate those who hate Me;
Have nothing to do with those who oppose Me.
Yes, I, your Lord, hate My enemies as should you
For My enemies are your enemies.

I, your God, will search you to know the intent of your heart;
I will try you to know your thoughts.
I will point out any wicked inclination in you,
And lead you in the way of eternal life.

PSALM 140

I, the LORD, will deliver you from evil people;
I will protect you from those who would hurt you.
They think up evil plans in their heart,
They want to fight you every day.
They sharpen their tongue like a serpent,
Their words against you are poison, Selah!
I will deliver you from the hands of the wicked
And protect you from violent people
Who plan to destroy you.
They arrogantly set a trap for you;
They plan to trip you up
And catch you in their deceit, Selah

I am the LORD, your God;
I will hear your cry to Me for help.
I am the LORD, the strength of your salvation;
I will protect you in the heat of battle.

I will not let the wicked do what they desire,
I will not let them become proud before Me, Selah!
Your enemies will be destroyed
With the destruction they plan for you.
Burning coals will be thrown upon them
And they will be thrown into the pit never to escape.
I won't let liars prosper on this earth;
They will be hunted down and destroyed.

You know I will do the right thing for the poor,
And protect the rights of the needy.
Then the godly will praise My name
And they will live in My presence forever.

PSALM 141

I am your Lord, cry out to Me;
When you immediately need Me,
I will listen when you call.
Your prayers will be the first thing I hear
And your lifted hands will be the first thing that pleases Me.
Guard the words that you say
And keep your mouth from speaking wrongly.
Don't lust for evil,
Nor get involved in wicked acts,
Nor satisfy yourself with transgressors.
I will get godly people to remind you when you stray,
And get them to rebuke you when you are stubborn,
And make you listen to them.

So pray constantly against evil

And those who do it.

When rebellious people are thrown down,

Sinners will understand why My words are true.

They will say that as the plough breaks up hard soil,

Even in death their bones are broken and scattered.

But I, your Lord, give help;

For I am your refuge, I will not let you die.

I won't let you walk into the trap of your enemy,

Nor get caught by those who do evil.

The wicked will fall into their own trap

While you walk safely by.

PSALM 142

Cry loudly to Me, your Lord;

I will listen when you ask for help.

Pour out your troubles to Me

And tell Me all your difficulties.

When your spirit is about to faint,

I alone know what you should do.

Everywhere you go in life

Your enemy lays a trap for you.

Look to My right hand for help

When there is no one else who cares.

Cry out to Me, your Lord;

In this land of the living,

I am the only One who will protect you.

I will listen to your cry
When you are discouraged.

I will deliver you from your persecutions
For they are too strong for you.

I will deliver you from your prison
So you may praise Me.

Then the godly will gather around you
As I will show you My goodness.

PSALM 143

I, the LORD, will listen to your prayer;
I will answer you because I am righteous and faithful.

I will not judge your failures
Because no one is perfect compared to Me.

When your enemy is chasing you,
And has knocked you to the ground,
And you hide in darkness like a dead person,
Your spirit is crushed
And you have no hope in your heart.

Remember the good old days;
Think about all My works
And meditate on what I did for you.

Again, I will stretch out My hands to you,
You need Me as parched ground thirsts for water, Selah!

I, your LORD, will answer you quickly
When you are discouraged.

I will not hide My face from you
Because you might die.

In the morning I will remind you of My faithfulness
Because you are trusting Me.

I will show you how to live a godly life
Because that's your heart's desire.

I, the LORD, will save you from your enemies
Because you hide in Me.

I will teach you to do My will
Because I am your God.

I will lead you into My perfect plan for your life
Because I am good.

I will deliver you from trouble
Because I am righteous.

I will protect you from now on
For My name's sake.

I will cut off all your enemies
And destroy them
For you are My servant.

PSALM 144

Praise Me, your Lord, for being your rock
Because I give you strength,
And I give you skill.

I, your Lord, am good and I am strong;

I can protect you and deliver you.
You can take refuge in My protection
Because I will defeat the enemies who fight you.

You ask Me your Lord, “What is a mortal person
That I should be concerned for him,
Or that I the Son of Man should think of him?”
A person is like a breath
And his days are like a passing shadow.

I will split heaven wide open and come to earth,
Touching the mountains so they smoke.
I will strike the enemy with lightning,
Destroying those who oppose Me.
I will reach down My hand from heaven
To rid you from dangerous floods
And from the hands of your enemy,
Who lies about you,
And constantly deceives you.

Sing a new song to Me, your God;
Praise Me on musical instruments
For I give victory to My leaders;
I delivered My servant David.
I will rescue you from the attack of your enemies
And from the power of your oppressors.
They tell lies on you all the time
And they plot deceitfully to destroy you.

May your sons prosper in their youth

And grow like well-nurtured plants.
May your daughters be like beautiful pillars
That decorate a magnificent palace.
May your barns be filled with every kind of crops
And may your flocks multiply and grow,
And your work animals carry heavy loads.
May your walls be safe against the enemy
And may none of you be carried into captivity.
You will be happy with life like this;
You will be blessed because I am your Lord.

PSALM 145

Magnify Me, your God and King;
Bless My name forever.
Every day lift up My name
And praise My name forever and ever.
Because I am great
Praise My name greatly;
You can never fully understand My greatness.
Each new generation will praise My works,
Telling the next generation of My mighty power.
You must tell them of My glory and majesty
And of My wonderful acts.
Others will also tell of My abundant goodness
And loudly sing of My faithfulness.

I am gracious and compassionate,
Slow to anger and filled with love.
I am good to all people
And show My mercy to all I created.

All My Creation will praise Me, your Lord;
All My saints will bless Me.
They will tell of My glorious rule
And tell of My great power.
As a result, all will know of My mighty acts
And the majestic glory of My rule.
I will rule forever in an everlasting kingdom,
I will rule from generation to generation.

I will help all those who fall
And lift up all those who are down.
All eyes look to Me for help,
I will supply their needs in due season.
I open My hands to you,
I satisfy the desires of all people.
I am righteous in everything I do
And holy in all My acts.
I am near to those who call upon Me,
To those who sincerely seek My presence.
I will satisfy the desires of those who fear Me,
I will hear their cry and save them.
I will care for all who love Me
But the wicked will I destroy.

Magnify Me, your Lord and God;
Let everyone on earth bless My holy name
From generation to generation and forever and ever.

The Hallelujah Psalms

The last five psalms (146-150) are called the Hallelujah Psalms because each begins and ends with the word in Hebrew, Hallelu-JAH. (The JAH is My name Jehovah or LORD). Because the entire book of psalms is a prayer to Me, the last five psalms echo “Hallelujah” for everything that has been included.

The authorities call Psalm 146 the “Genesis Psalm” because it praises Me for creation and the beginning of everything. “I am the Creator of the heavens, earth and the seas, and I created everything in them” (v. 6).

Psalm 147 is called the “Exodus Psalm” because it praises Me for My kindness to Israel in delivering the nation back to the Promised Land. “I am rebuilding Jerusalem and bringing the exiles back to the land” (v. 2).

Psalm 148 is called the “Leviticus Psalm” about My sanctuary. It tells you to shout Hallelujah because the entire universe is My dwelling place. “The heavens praise Me. The heights praise Me” (v. 1). Yet My greatest sanctuary is when I indwell My people. “The children near My heart, all praise Me their Lord” (v. 14).

Psalm 149 is called the “Numbers Psalm” reflecting My judgment on My people at Kadesh Barnea (Num. 13-15) and their subsequent wandering in the wilderness. I keep My promises in both blessing and punishment, therefore, shout hallelujah because, “My saints have felt My judgment, I have kept My Word when they sinned” (v. 9).

Psalm 150 is the “Deuteronomy Psalm” that repeats the praise for everything that has gone before, just as Deuteronomy repeated everything that has happened to Israel.

PSALM 146

I, your Lord, hear your hallelujah;

I hear your praises from the bottom of your soul.

Praise Me with all of your life,

Praise Me as your Lord as long as you live.

Do not put your trust in human leaders,
Nor trust those who cannot help you.
When they die, they are buried
And then they are gone.

I will bless you because you trust in Me, your God;
I am your hope, the Lord, God of Jacob.
I am the Creator of the heavens, earth and the seas
And I created everything in them.

I remain faithful forever
To protect those who are oppressed.
To give food to the hungry,
To set the prisoners free.
To give sight to the blind,
To lift up the oppressed,
And to love those who live righteously.

I, the LORD, preserve those who live alone
And watch over the orphans and widows,
But confuse the way of the wicked.
I, your Lord, will reign forever and ever;
I will always be the God of Israel,
Shout hallelujah.

PSALM 147

Shout hallelujah to Me, your Lord;
Praising Me will fill your life with gladness.
I am rebuilding Jerusalem
And bringing the exiles back to the land
To heal the broken hearted

And bind up the wounds of the hurting.
I know the exact number of stars,
I call each of them by their name.
I am the great Lord, and have great power;
My understanding is infinite
To encourage the humble,
But I throw the wicked to the ground.

Give thanks to Me with singing,
Sing praise to Me with your harp.
I cover heaven with the clouds,
I send rain upon the earth,
I make grass grow upon the mountain.
I provide food for the wilds animals
And for the young raven when they call.
I am not impressed by the strength of horses,
Nor with the power of a man's legs.
I take pleasure in those who fear Me
And in those who put their hope in My mercy.
Join with Jerusalem in praising Me,
Join with Zion in praising Me.
I fortify the protection of the gates,
I bless those within My care.
I send peace to My people,
I provide the finest food for them.
My commandments go out to the earth,
The influence of My words spread quickly.
I send the snow to spread over you,
I scatter the frost on the ground like ashes.
I cover the ground with ice like pebbles,

I hurl down hail as a man throwing stones.
Then they are melted according to My plan,
I send the wind to thaw the ice.

I give My Word to Jacob,
I reveal My laws and principles to Israel.
I have not done this with other nations,
They do not understand My laws;
Shout hallelujah.

PSALM 148

I, the LORD, hear your hallelujah;
The heavens praise Me,
The heights praise Me.
The angels praise Me,
The hosts praise Me.
The sun and moon praise Me,
The stars of light praise Me.
The heavens where I live praise Me,
The waters above the heavens praise Me.
They all praise My name, for I am the Lord,
For I commanded them to be created.
I have set them in their eternal place,
I have determined they will never pass away.
The earth praises Me,
The great sea creatures in the oceans' depths praise Me.

Lightning and hail, snow and clouds,
And stormy winds obey My Word.
Mountains and hills, fruit trees and cedars,

Wild animals and cattle, small animals and birds,
Kings of all people, princes and all people,
And all the judges praise My name.
Young men and young women, old men and children,
All praise My name, for I am their Lord.

My name is exalted,
My glory is exalted above the heaven and earth.
I have raised up a people to praise Me,
All My saints praise Me.
The children of Israel near My heart
All praise Me;
Shout hallelujah.

PSALM 149

I, the LORD, hear your hallelujah;
Sing to Me a new song,
Praise Me in the assembly of saints.
May Israel rejoice in Me their God and their Creator;
May the children of Zion be glad in My rule.
May they praise Me in dance,
May they sing My praise with musical instruments.
Because I take pleasure in My people,
I make the humble beautiful with salvation.
May My saints rejoice in My glory,
Let them sing My praises at night.
May they praise Me with their mouth
And be alert with a sword in their hand
To carry out judgment upon their enemies
And punishment upon My foes,

To put their rulers in prison
And their staff into chains.
All My saints have legal privileges
To execute judgment according to the law;
Shout hallelujah.

PSALM 150

I, the LORD, hear your hallelujah,
Praise Me in My sanctuary,
Praise Me in My vast heavens.
Praise Me, your Lord,
Praise Me for My mighty works,
Praise Me for My infinite greatness.
Praise Me, your Lord,
With the blast of trumpets,
With guitars and bass.
Praise Me, your Lord,
With your whole body,
With the stringed instruments and flutes.
Praise Me, your Lord,
With the playing of cymbals
And the echoes of more cymbals.
Everyone join together in praising Me;
Shout hallelujah.

I AM GOD

The Giver of Wisdom

The Book of Proverbs

A proverb usually expresses familiar truth in a popularly known way and is expressed in simple metaphorical truth so that people may apply or honor its teaching. The thrust of Proverbs is “apply your heart to wisdom, that you may gain understanding.” This is another way of saying learn to think what is right, so you’ll do what is right.

I didn’t include a lot of things in Proverbs. There is no plan of salvation, doctrine, and messianic predictions. You can read about these topics in other books of the Bible. Also, there are no plots or storyline and no individuals identified by name in Proverbs, except Solomon, Bathsheba, Ithiel, and Ucal. Proverbs gets its points across by brief, one or two-line declarations of truth to illustrate proper living. Personalities are described but are not involved in parables or conversations with each other, nor do they refer to actual persons. They are descriptions of actions or attitudes that we should follow or reject to have a good life.

You’re holding in your hands a book that could change your life. If you will honestly pray the Proverbs, you will gain wisdom; it will help you live better. And wisdom is truth applied to daily life.

PROVERBS 1

A Father Teaches – Be Wise

I, the LORD, gave wisdom to Solomon, King of Israel,
The son of David, to write these proverbs.

You must learn and obey My requirements
So you will always know what to do.
They will give you all the wisdom you need
So you will always live right and serve Me.
Then you can help teach those who don't know
All they need to know and do.
So carefully listen and learn,
And become more understanding
So you can always do the right thing.
You will gain much counsel from the wise
So you can become a smart person
And learn to understand things that are difficult.

First, all wisdom is in Me,
I will help you understand My ways;
Do not rebel or despise My direction.

Listen to Me as your father
And obey Me as your mother.
Then others can see My principles guiding your life
And you will glorify My beauty.

You must resist their temptation.
So you do not give in to them.
When sinners want you to make illegal money
And take advantage of innocent people,
You can resist their temptation.
Because when you destroy the lives of other people,
You really are condemning your own life,
Even when sinners promise you exorbitant riches

And a wealthy home and furnishings
And they promise to share their wealth with you.

Remember what I said, “Stay away from them,
Don’t be like them or obligate yourself to them,”
For they really intend to break every law
And suck the life out of innocent people.
Every plan they make is to catch someone
And snare them into their own addiction.
They plan to steal happiness from others,
They destroy any chance of enjoying it
On the altar of their greed.

Look at the eyes of honesty
Weeping over the crimes she sees in life;
Honesty crying for crimes to be punished.
And listen to the voice of honesty
Crying in the empty courts of justice;
“How long will evil run rampant?”
Honesty cries, “How long will skeptics be skeptical?
How long will rebels hate My ways?”

I call you to return to Me,
I promised to pour My Spirit on you;
So I can teach you My ways.
When I call to the rebel,
I also stretch out My hand to him;
But the rebel not only rejects My ways,
He determines to do the exact opposite
And completely rejects all I stand for.

Therefore, I will turn My back when he is punished,
I will say, "You got what you wanted."

Then the rebel will be scared to death
And the consequences of his sin will rip him apart
When he cries out in anguish.

He shall cry out for mercy but not get it;
He shall seek Me, but I will not be found.

There is no second chance in hell,
Because the rebel hated My way of life
And would not listen and learn from Me.

He rejected My plans for his life
And refused to do what I wanted him to do.

Therefore, he shall bear the consequences of his sin;
He shall suffer the misery he gave others,
His vile trespass shall be his own punishment.

Because My children turned to Me
Shall be proof that the wicked could have repented;

My prosperity on the righteous
Should have warned the wicked to change his ways.

But those who listen and learn from My instructions
Shall be safe in My presence
And shall be delivered from evil.

PROVERBS 2

Good Decisions Will Treat You Right

You must receive My Word as
 A child receives instruction from a parent.
Hide My instructions
 Deep within your heart.
And open your ears
 To hear and understand My wisdom.
Passionately seek to know Me
 And tell others that you understand.
You must want My knowledge more than money
 And more than a hidden pot of gold.

I, your Lord, will teach you to reverence My ways
 And how I want you to live.
So I will give you wisdom to know Me
 And you can obey what I tell you to do.

I, your LORD, know there is abundant wisdom
 For those who seek to live the right way;
And I protect those who know Me,
 Who attempt to walk the right way.
I will show them the right paths
 And they will make right decisions.

Honestly seek to do the right thing,
 My Spirit will help you to know what to do,
 And I will guide you in good paths.
When you experience My wisdom,
 You will direct your life correctly
 And enjoy fellowship with Me.

When you experience My wisdom,
 You will not make bad decisions
 And you will not make dumb mistakes.
Then evil people will not take advantage of you
 Nor will they talk you into bad decisions.
Evil people reject My ways of thinking
 And refuse to live by My principles.
Evil people also love to think evil and do evil
 And brag about it to everyone.

I, your Lord, will deliver you from a flirtatious woman
 Who tries to flatter you with her words.
She has rejected the right way about sex
 And turned her back on My rules of purity.
A man is heading towards a disastrous death
 When he has sex with her.
No one that goes to bed with her
 Can be blameless in his own eyes;
 He is headed toward hell.

But when you obey My wisdom,
 You are headed toward eternal life.
You are on the right path
 Because you follow My principles.
You will enter into fellowship with Me
 And stay there as long as you obey Me.
But the rebellious will eventually die
 And not enjoy fellowship with Me.

PROVERBS 3

Learning From Correction

Do not forget My principles; I am your Lord,
So live the way I direct.

Know that My principles
Will give you satisfaction
And help you live a long time.

I will not let My mercy and truth forsake you;
Post My laws where you will constantly see them
And meditate on them continually.

Know that when My principles control your thought processes
I will add value to your life
And others will respect your commitment to truth.

Trust in Me, your Lord,
With all your heart.

Lean not on your own way of doing things
Nor make decisions apart from Me.

In all your actions
Acknowledge Me
And I will direct your paths.

Do not do things your own way
Nor prize your opinions over Mine.

Reverence Me in all you do
And separate yourself from all appearances of evil.

My paths shall make you wise and healthy;
My ways shall make you strong.

Give all that you have to Me, your Lord,
And bring a tithe of everything to Me.
I promise that your checking account will have enough,
I will meet all your needs as they come.

Do not complain when I punish you
Because you know I correct wrong actions.
You know I am your heavenly Father
Who loves and cares for you.
And I correct you when you disobey,
Just as an earthly father corrects his child.

Rejoice when you find My principles
And learn how to direct your life.
My correction is a valuable gift,
Better than a gift of money.
My correction is also better than expensive jewelry;
Nothing can compare to My care of you.
When you do the things I teach you,
You will live longer than those who reject My way.
And you will be more satisfied than a rich person;
You will be more honored than a famous person
And you will have a pleasant life to live in peace.
My principles can give everyone a good life;
Everyone can enjoy My happiness.
I, your Lord, have created natural laws to rule the earth,
My principles guide the universe.
I had a reason for creating the seas
And I directed rain to fall on the earth.
Since I have the power and wisdom to create all things,

Don't neglect My laws for you;
Live by My principles.

I, the Lord, know that My laws will enrich your life;
They will help you do all you should do.

Let My principles guide your daily life;
They will keep you from making terrible mistakes.

When you lie down to go to sleep at night,
Your conscience won't keep you awake.

And you will trust Me when the wicked come,
Bringing sudden terror and destruction.

Because you have yielded to My paths,
I will not let anything happen to you
That is not within My plan.

I, your Lord, will not withhold good from anyone
Who is entitled to it,
When you are able to receive.

Do not tell the needy to go away
And come back tomorrow;
If you can, give them help immediately.

You should not hurt your neighbor
Who lives peaceably with you.

Do not fuss needlessly with anyone
When there is no reason to disagree.

Do not look up to oppressive people
Nor follow their example

Because you know they are an abomination to Me
And I have cursed them.

I, your Lord, have told you inwardly how to live

And I will bless the home of those who live right.
You know I scorn the scorner
And I give grace to the humble.
I give honor to those who honor Me
While I neglect those who neglect Me.

PROVERBS 4

Listening To Parents' Advice

Listen to the instructions of your father
In order to gain understanding,
Because you know it is the path to good life
So don't go against his advice.
Your father was once a child to his father
And your mother loved you tenderly.
Your father wanted you to respect his advice
So you could have a happy and prosperous life.
Your father told you to acquire as much education
As you could master
And not go against the things you had learned.
He told you to guard the way you think
And it would protect your life.

The first thing you want to get is My wisdom
And make sure you apply it to your life.
When you make understanding first in your life,
It will make you first in the life of others.
Your understanding will make you honorable,

When you honor the pursuit of wisdom.

Learn wisdom from your father

So you will live a long life.

Your father endeavored to teach you the right things

So you could live the right way.

Then when you walk, you won't stumble;

And when you run, you will not fall down.

You will learn from your father's discipline

So do not forget how he directed you,

For it is the essence of your life-purpose.

Do not follow wicked people,

Nor do things evil people do.

Avoid what they do

And go the opposite way;

For they can't rest well

Unless they have rebelled against the law

And cause others to do the same thing.

Their whole passion is doing their own thing

And causing others to rebel against My ways.

The path of people who do right

Gets brighter every day

And leads toward the shining light.

But the path of those who do wicked things

Gets darker all the time

And eventually they stumble in their night.

Pay attention to what your father says

And listen to his wise advice.
Do not turn away from his counsel
Nor refuse to listen to his direction
Because his instructions will make things easier
And enrich all you do in life.

Focus your heart on Me
And do everything your father says.
Do not turn your back on him,
Nor refuse to obey him
Because those who listen will prosper outwardly
And get great satisfaction inwardly.

Above everything else you do,
Guard your heart
For it directs all you do in life.
It will always tell the truth
According to what you know in your heart.
Always follow the right paths
According to where your heart directs you.
Do not turn to the left or right
And always turn away from evil.

PROVERBS 5

Beware of the Trollop (A Sexually Suggestive Woman)

Listen carefully to My wise advice
And understand helpful counsel;

That you may learn life-improving principles,
And not forget beneficial truth.

Realize a tempting woman tells lies,
Sweet little tales to get her way.
Slithering words make her happy
But she will make your life bitter.
Her mouth will cut you up and down,
Her feet will lead to your death;
She will guide you straight to hell.

You must go the opposite way and seek the path of life,
The woman's path is slippery;
No one knows where she leads.

You must listen to Me, your Lord
And follow My direction.
You must get away from that woman
And stay away from her house,
Lest you sacrifice your good honor
And destroy your faithful years.
Then, you will grieve in old age
Because your lust consumed your life.

The man who chases skirts hates My advice
And despises My reproof of his sin.
He refuses to listen to those who point out his stupidity
And turns his back on those who warn him.

When evil almost gets you
And you were in My good fellowship,

Realize you must drink from your own well
And not sacrifice your life to the lust of the flesh.

Preserve your own self esteem
And do not give it away.
Then I will bless your decisions
And you will rejoice with your spouse.
She shall give you comfort and strength
And you will be happy with her,
And both will be happy with each other.

Do not be ravished by a whorish woman
Nor find your love with a trollop.
Every one of your actions is always seen by Me
And I know everything you do.
Those who sin against Me
Shall be a prisoner to their iniquity;
Their lust shall become their punishment.
They shall die without knowing anything better;
And the greatest consequence of their sin
Is that it drives them away from Me.

PROVERBS 6

Work Hard and Watch Out for Loose Women

Do not co-sign a loan,
Nor shake hands on a bad deal
Because your agreement will become a trap
And your words will come back to haunt you.

Get out of every bad arrangement
Then you won't lose your friends
When they try to take advantage of you.

Be responsible for your livelihood,
Don't sleep when you should work
Then you won't get caught in a bad deal
When the swindler tries to trap you.

Learn from the industrious ants
Who have learned to work diligently,
Even when no one makes them work.
They work continually in the summer
So they'll have food after the harvest is over.

Do not be a lazy sluggard
But keep awake to do your responsibilities.
The sluggard closes his eyes to his job,
He folds his hands instead of working.
He will be poor because of his procrastination,
As though a thief has stolen everything he possessed.

Do not be a wicked man
Who makes promises he doesn't plan to keep;
Who winks his eye at evil,
Yet sins with his hands and feet.
Do not plan evil to get ahead,
Nor entertain yourself with sin.
Know I will judge the evil man suddenly;
His punishment will break him in two.

I, the Lord, hate six things,

And the seventh is an abomination to Me.
First, is an arrogant attitude
And second, a lying tongue.
Third, I hate hands that shed innocent blood,
And fourth, a heart that thinks evil.
The fifth, feet that lead to trouble,
And sixth, is a false witness who lies.
The seventh is the worst of all,
The gossip who continually stirs up trouble among brethren.

Keep your father's rules,
And do not displease your mother.
Memorize them carefully
And repeat them daily as you try to live right.
They will lead you to success,
And keep you when you sleep
And refresh you when you awake.
My commandments are a light to your feet
And light to your path.
My commandments correct you when you stray
And will renew your life.

Let My commandments keep you from a trollop
Who will flatter to seduce you.
Do not lust after her beauty,
Nor let her fluttering eyelids tempt you.
A man will not be worth two cents
Who falls to the temptation of a whorish woman
Because the adulteress woman will snare his life.
Can you put fire inside your shirt

Without burning your clothes?
Can you walk on flaming hot coals
Without burning your feet?
Neither can you have sex with another woman
Without searing your conscience and reputation.

People do not hate a thief who steals because he is hungry;
But when a thief is caught,
He must repay sevenfold for his crime.

He who has sex outside his marriage
Must pay restitution like the thief;
He may have to sacrifice all his wealth.

He who commits adultery is a fool;
He destroys himself.

He will get nothing but punishment and embarrassment
And he will never forget his escapade.

Because jealousy boils over into rage,
The offended husband will not show mercy
When he takes revenge.

He will not accept your apology,
Nor any other way you try to appease him.

PROVERBS 7

A Description of One Who Despises Wisdom

Obey the directions of your father
And not forget what he expects of you.
Obey the commandments in every area of life
And do not shut your eyes to My directives.

Like a string tied on my finger,
Your heart must never forget them;
And wisdom will talk to you like an older sister,
So you will please your whole family.
My wisdom will keep you from the seductive trollop
Who will tempt you with her flattery.
Someone was looking out the window of his home
And saw a naive youth who lacked common sense.
He was hanging around a dressed-up trollop
And was stupid enough to keep talking to her;
He wasn't wise enough to flee danger.
He accepted her invitation into her place,
It was dark, so he thought no one would see him;
But evening twilight always turns dark
And he was blinded by the blackness of his lust.

The woman was dressed in sexually revealing clothes,
But she was not beautiful;
Rather, she was a "ho," just cheap trailer trash.
She did not value her home or reputation
But prowled the bars to pick up men.
She flirted with the naive youth
And blew him a kiss, then winked at him.
"We're made for each other," she coaxed him;
Then she said, "Where have you been all my life?
"I've been looking for someone like you," she continued,
"Now I'm not going to let you get away!
"You'll love my apartment," as she invited him into her place;
"It's where a man can really feel happy.
"Let's spend the night together," she tempted him,

“We’ll experience more exciting love
Than we’ve had with anyone else.”
She told the gullible youth, “My man is gone
And won’t return until next week.
“He’s got a lot to do in another town,
And no one will even know.”

Because the trollop knows the weaknesses of men,
The naïve youth helplessly gives into her offer.
He follows her like a fatted animal to its slaughter
Or like a convicted felon to execution.
He takes a bullet in his gut,
And like a fish swallowing a lure,
He never realized she leads to death.
Rather seek out My advice
And do exactly as you are told.
Do not reject good counsel,
Nor turn your back on godly advisors.
Know the trollop has wounded many gullible men;
She’s even destroyed strong men.
Her bed is not heaven, but hell;
It leads straight to death.

PROVERBS 8

A Defense of Right Thinking

I, the LORD, was eternally wise
Long before I created the earth.
I made everything by My laws

Long before there were ocean depths
And before there were artesian springs.
I did everything by the laws of My wisdom
Before mountains were put in their place,
Before hills were created.
I followed the right way of doing things
When I established heaven as My sanctuary
And determined the constant direction of the compass.
I was guided by My eternal laws
When I created the clouds;
From them comes the rain upon the earth.
I established the boundary of My creation;
The seas will not cover the dry land,
And the earth will be controlled by the laws I established.

I bless those who now live by My wisdom
And attempt to live in harmony with My laws.
I want everyone to seek My principles
And not refuse the wisdom that comes from Me.
Those who attempt to learn My laws
Are attempting to live by My standards,
For they will get My favor
And will have a better life.
But those who reject My requirements,
Sin against themselves
And eventually will suffer the consequences of broken laws.

Take the wisdom I offer to all;
My wise advice is good for you.
Like a salesman who sells his merchandise,

I have offered you many ways to become wise.
You can become a better manager of your life
When you direct your life by principles,
You can become a better family member.
Anyone can be smarter than they are;
Anyone can have a better life.
The naïve can be successful if he'll get wisdom
And the loser can learn from his mistakes.

I offer you a better life by following good principles,
I offer you the ability to make right decisions
And help you say the right things
And not act foolishly and sound stupid.
Here is My advice to be practical and morally right,
Those who listen to Me will succeed.
Those who are smart will recognize My wisdom;
Those who are moral will value My principles.

The wages of wisdom are better than silver
And those who continually learn the right things
Will receive more than gold.
Wisdom is more valuable than the finest jewels;
Nothing can be compared to a knowing mind.
Wisdom will always lead you to do the appropriate thing
And will help you solve problems and be creative.

Reject pride, don't step on people, nor break the law;
Always put Me first in your life.
Follow right principles in mapping out your life
So you will have a basis to make good choices.

Follow time-proven management principles
Because managers-in-training must follow them.
Wisdom loves those who follow its principles
And you must love wisdom to become smarter;
Wise people will become richer and get more honor.
Because they have something greater than earthly treasure,
They will receive more than tangible goods
And more than wages, stock options, or retirement benefits.
They develop godly inner character;
Their inner peace and happiness will be priceless.

PROVERBS 9

Foolish Thinking Leads to Destruction

Know that everything worthwhile in life
Is built on My wise principles.
Those who live wisely have plenty of meat to eat
And plenty to drink,
And a table full of delicious desserts.
Those who live wisely give good advice to others;
They freely share what they have learned.
Those who are gullible should learn from the wise,
So should those who want to improve themselves.
They should desire to learn as much as they hunger for a meal
And seek wisdom as much as they thirst for water.
Those who are foolish should repent of their stubborn ways
And embrace My wisdom.

Know when you reprove scorners,

They will hate your advice.
When you instruct a wise man,
He will listen to what you tell him
Because the wise man wants to learn from others
So he can improve himself, his family and his business.

It is smart to put Me at the center of your life
And become holy as you follow My principles.
When you live smart, you will live longer
And you will enjoy the days I give you,
For My wisdom will make you a better person
While the negative person makes his life more bitter.

A woman is foolish when she's a busybody;
The more she thinks she learns from gossip,
The dumber she becomes.

She always runs to hear more gossip,
Yet she is both foolish and uneducated;
Only naïve people listen to her.

She delights to hear about those who are having an affair
Because she thinks stolen waters are sweet,
And bread eaten in secret is pleasurable.

She doesn't realize she's enjoying gossiping
About those who rebel against Me
And about those going to hell.

PROVERBS 10

Right Thinking Leads to Success

Wise sons please their fathers,

But a foolish son weighs heavily on his mother.
All the wealth of wickedness can't give inner happiness,
But those who live right have peace the world can't enjoy.

I give a full life to those who live right,
But the rebel will never find happiness.
The lazy man will eventually be poor,
But the diligent will become prosperous.
Smart young men work hard in the growing season,
But foolish young men play during the harvest.

I add value to those who live by right principles,
But those who rebel against My laws
Suffer the consequences of their broken laws.
Remember those who do their duty,
But the memory of the rebel stinks.
Those who are wise will try to do My commands,
But a bragging fool will fail to do right.
Those who live uprightly will have confidence,
But those who undermine the steps of others
Will eventually fail at all he does.
Those who overlook the sin of others and their mistakes
Will eventually suffer for their oversight.
Those who speak the right things will help others;
And those who condone breaking My principles
Will eventually suffer the violence of those broken laws.
Those who love, overlook the faults of others;
But those who hate, stir up strife.

You will find wise thinking in wise men;

But the fool that rejects good advice
Deserves the punishment he receives.

Wise men want to learn more wise things,
But fools don't care about learning anything;
They are destroying any chance of a good life.

A wise man has many kinds of treasures,
They protect him in many ways;
But the fool has only his poverty to help him
Which cannot protect him from destruction.

The life-work of those who do right
Gives them the life they want to live.
The sin of a fool is simply doing nothing
And the laziness of a fool gives him nothing.

Those who follow My unchangeable principles
Are walking in the way of eternal life.
A fool lies to hide his hatred
And slanders those who oppose his way of life.

The wise are able to discipline their words;
The more some people try to explain away their failure,
The more you know they are lying.

The works of people who do right are worth lots of money,
But the heart of an evil man is not worth much.

The speech of people who do right helps many,
But people die who listen to the words of a fool.

My blessings make you rich
And I, the LORD, don't add sorrow to it.

The fool has fun breaking My laws,
But those who give themselves to wisdom know better.

The wicked usually experience the thing he fears,
And those who desire to do right
Usually get what they want in life.

The death of the wicked comes like a blowing wind,
They are gone, and nothing remains.

Those who do right also die,
But they leave a lasting influence in other people.

Those who are lazy sluggards
Are like a vile taste to the tongue,
Like smoke that irritates the eyes.

I, the LORD, lengthen the years of those who do right,
But shorten the life of the wicked.

The dreams of those who do right bring joy,
But the expectations of the wicked pass away.

Doing My will gives you strength,
But the strength of those who rebel against Me will be dissipated.

Those who do right will speak right things,
But the tongue of the wicked is worthless.

Those who do right will know what to say,
But those who do evil never have the right words.

Those who do right will live forever,
But those who do wickedness will not inhabit the earth.

PROVERBS 11

Wrong Thinking Leads to Failure

I, the LORD, hate false advertisements,

But delight when you tell the truth.
When you follow My principles, you will have true self-understanding;
But those driven by ego end up embarrassing themselves.

I, the LORD, want to guide you by integrity,
Because the lies of rebels shall destroy them.

I, your Lord, deliver you when you live right,
But your money will not help when I judge the wicked.

I will reward you when you live right,
But the dreams of rebels will never happen,
And the plans of the law-breakers perish with them.

I, your Lord, will deliver you when you know the truth,
But the lies of a hypocrite destroy his neighbor.

The city rejoices when its inhabitants do right
And they shout when rebels are punished.

The city is blessed when they obey My laws,
But is overthrown when they listen to the evil speech of the rebels.

Do not tell everything you know;
And those who hate their neighbor are not smart
Because they get dirty spreading the dirt of gossip.

Faithful friends don't embarrass others.
Those who seek wisdom get safe advice,
But those who listen to fools will be tripped up.
You know you will end up paying what is owed
If you sign a note for someone you don't know.

A gracious woman is loved,

But hateful people are hated by others.
A strong man is respected
And a merciful man gets mercy.
Those who plant a good seed will get a good harvest,
But a wicked man soweth deceit.

Those who do right have a good life,
But those who run after evil end up with death.

Those who do right are My delight,
But those who lie, are an abomination to Me.
Those who do right plant good seeds
And one wicked person can't keep another from being punished.
A beautiful woman who acts like a fool
Is like a beautiful jewel in a pig's nose.

Those who do right dream of being good,
But the rebel can only expect wrath.
Those who give away goods, eventually get them back
And those who withhold their goods end up in poverty.
I bless the generous soul;
And those who add value to others will have value added to them.
People bless those who provide for them,
But curse those who will not sell them food.
Those who diligently seek good will find it,
And those who seek evil will be found by it;
Because what goes around, comes back around.
Those who think their money will get them ahead
Will always fall behind.
Those who always do the right thing

Will flourish like a fruitful farm.
Those who make trouble for their family
Will inherit a whirlwind.
And the fool will always be a slave
To the wise who does the right thing.
The fruit of those who do the right thing
Grows on the tree of the wise.
Those who do right will be rewarded with right things
And the wicked shall be rewarded with wickedness.

PROVERBS 12

The Contrast Between Right Thinking and Wrong Thinking

You must learn the good principles of life;
Don't be stubborn like those who hate to be corrected.
Do good things to obtain My favor;
Don't believe evil because it leads to judgment.
You shall not be established by doing wicked things,
But will be grounded by living right.

A woman who lives by correct acts
Is a crown to her husband.
A woman who embarrasses her husband
Is like cancer in the bones.

You must believe that doing right will lead to being right;
Those who listen to wicked counsel deceive themselves.

Do right and help other people;

Do right and build your family on a solid rock;

Wicked people hurt other people;

The wicked always fail and their names will be forgotten.

You want to be known as one who lives by My principles

Because those who hate and criticize are despised.

Yet even those who are hated, they work for their food,

Are better than lazy people who puff themselves up

And don't have anything to eat.

Be kind to your animals, to get your work done with them.

It's better than those who speak kind words to them,

Yet treat them cruelly.

When you plow and plant your ground,

You will have bread to eat after the harvest.

But the lazy man won't do anything

And will not have food to eat.

You want the fruit from doing right;

You don't want to follow the schemes of deceivers.

You must walk around the trouble you see,

But an evil speaking man will be tripped up by his words.

Be satisfied with the money you agree to work for;

Live by the things you get from your work.

The fool thinks he always does the right thing,

But they who listen to wise counsel get ahead.

Everyone knows when a fool loses his temper,

But a wise man doesn't show his anger;

He says the right words slowly and quietly.
The words of a fool pierce like a knife,
But the counsel of the wise gives health.

The lies of a fool will eventually be revealed
But no one can correct the words of a wise man.
The fool deceives people because he continually plans evil,
But those who listen to the truth will be happy.
The wicked will continually plan to do wicked things,
But the wise will continually plan to do right.
I hate lips that lie,
And I love those who tell the truth.
The fool always talks about foolish things
And the wise man thinks about what is right.

You must always work diligently,
Because it will make you successful
And the lazy will not be successful.
You must always speak good words
Because it will make life easier and happy,
But discouraging words will make an old person out of you.

When you continually live by the right principles,
You are a testimony to your neighbors.
The lazy man tries to get everyone
To live at his level of incompetence and inactivity.
The lazy man won't take advantage of his opportunities,
But the diligent turns them into money.
Those who do right, follow the path of eternal life;
The path of the procrastinator leads to death.

PROVERBS 13

How to Live Right

You must listen to your father's wise instruction,
But a sarcastic son won't take any advice.

You must speak good words so you will prosper,
But the rebel will eventually get violence.

You must control your speech to properly discipline your life,
But they are destroyed who don't care what they say.

You must work diligently so you will prosper;
But the lazy have nothing, even though they want everything.

You must live right and speak the truth,
But the wicked will eventually be caught in his lies.

Your right thinking keeps you doing the right things,
But the evil desires of the wicked always trip him up.

Some people dream of riches, but have nothing;
But the poor who works diligently
Can improve his bank account.

People who live right enjoy thinking the right way,
But the wicked are tripped up by their wicked thoughts.

You can learn to live right by listening to wise people,
But proud people get everyone irritated at them.

You will increase your bank account by diligent work,
But the arrogant will lose his money when he won't take advice.

Sometimes you get discouraged

 When you don't reach your goals that are too lofty;
But when you accomplish the plans you make,
 Your life feels complete and fulfilled.

Those who despise My Word will be destroyed;

 You shall be rewarded when you live by My principles.
Right living leads you to an abundant life
 And you shall not come into eternal punishment.
Right thinking helps you focus on others,
 But those who break My law will have a hard time.

Get help to understand the way I think

 So you will not be like the fool who opens himself to folly.

I will help you be a faithful witness to your friends

 And not like the wicked who deceive others.
Learn from the admonishment of the wise,
 But those who reject correction
 Will be embarrassed by their failure and poverty.

You will be happy when you reach your goals in life,

 But fools are never happy in their sin.

Make friends with people who think right,

 So they'll influence you to live right.
Those whose friends are fools,
 Will suffer the same consequences as fools.

Those who live right will be rewarded by righteousness,
But evil will chase the lazy and beat him to death.
A good man's inheritance will extend to his grandchildren,
But the inheritance of evil men will go to those who live right.
The right-living poor have enough to eat,
But wrong-thinking people eventually lose everything.

Correct your children so their decision-making won't be corrupted
And demonstrate your love to them by making them do right.
Those who live right have satisfying lives,
But the desires of evil are never satisfied.

PROVERBS 14

Fear Me, This Leads to Right Living

A wise woman strengthens her family,
But foolish women tear it down with foolish actions.

You will live rightly because you fear Me,
But those who live perversely despise Me.

The words you speak will keep you out of trouble,
But the words of a fool become his punishment.

You will keep out of trouble if you don't do anything,
But you will never accomplish anything in life.

Purpose not to lie in life,
Because a liar will lie with every breath he takes.

It is easy to find My wisdom when you search for it,
But scoffers who don't want it, can't find it.

You must stay away from fools and their influence,
Because you won't hear My wisdom from them.
You must look ahead to see where you are going,
But the fool deceives himself about the right paths he takes.

You must come to Me to acknowledge your guilt,
But fools make fun of their sin.

Only you know the loneliness of your heart
And no one else can enter into your feelings.

I will establish the house of the righteous,
But the home of the wicked will perish.

Each person thinks they choose the right path,
But without Me the path leads to death.
People laugh to hide their heavy heart,
But their grief remains when the laughter's over.

You know I will reward right living,
But backsliders get what they deserve.

Be cautious about every step in life,
Because the simple believes everything he hears.

Be wise by avoiding danger,
The fool recklessly walks too close to the edge.

He is quick tempered and makes bad decisions,
He is hated for his sin and stupidity.

I reward cautious people with good thinking,
But the simpleton gets grief and failure.

Eventually evil people will recognize your good thinking,
But you will be within the gates of heaven
And they'll be in hell.

The rich have many outward friends,
While the poor are hated by his neighbors.
Those who despise others, sin against Me,
But I bless those who show compassion.

I give you grace when you plan to do good,
But those who plot evil will go astray.
Those who work hard get ahead,
While those who only talk get nothing.

You will be rewarded for your hard work,
But fools are rewarded with foolishness.

You will help others by telling the truth,
But a liar is a traitor to everyone he speaks.

You will be secure because you fear Me
And my children also enjoy My refuge.
Drink the goodness of life from My fountain
And escape the temptations that lead to death.

A wise leader attracts many followers,
But a lesser following shows his influence is declining.

You are very wise when you control your anger;
Those with quick tempers make foolish mistakes.
Because you keep a tranquil spirit, you will be healthy,
But those with envy and hate will rot away.

You will honor Me by having mercy on the needy;
I am insulted by those who oppress the poor.
You will be confident when you face your death,
But the wicked will be judged by their wrong doings.

Think right to guarantee your success,
But the fool will fail because he will not think right.
Righteousness makes a nation great,
But sin will always be a snare to any people.
The leader likes those who think right and act right,
But is irritated with those who make bad decisions.

PROVERBS 15

A Cheerful Heart Leads to Right Thinking

Remember, a soft answer turns away anger,
But angry words stir up anger.
Use wisely all you have learned
And don't be like the fool who spouts foolishness.
Know that My eyes are everywhere,

Seeing both evil and good actions.
Let your words give life and health to others
And don't deceitfully crush the spirit of people.
May you learn wisdom when you are corrected
And not be like the fool who despises his parents' discipline.
Let your house be filled with the treasures of wisdom
And not like rebels who get trouble from their money.

Give good advice to others,
Remember fools do not have wisdom to share with friends.
I, the LORD, delight in the prayers of righteous people,
But reject good works by wicked people.
I love those who pursue right-living
And despise the wickedness of the wicked.

I discipline those who forsake My straight path
And they will die by refusing My correction.
Because I, the LORD, know what's in death and hell,
How much more I know what's in the human heart.

Because a scorner won't listen to corrections
He won't go to the wise for advice.

Have a happy face because your heart rejoices,
But a scorner breaks the human spirit.
I will give you an inquiring mind so you can become wise;
Don't be like a fool who feeds on foolishness.

Every day I set a new table before you,
But the scorner is daily stressed with affliction.

You should desire a little food and fear Me
Than have plenty to eat and a life of trouble.
Better a bowl of vegetable soup with someone you love
Than a sirloin steak with someone you hate.

You must be a peace-maker,
Because quick-tempered people disrupt things.
Be diligent so your path will be easy,
Because the slothful allows thorns to grow over everything.

Plan to make your parents proud of you,
Because the rebellious son shows he hates his parents.
Live sensibly and stay on the right track,
Even when fools find happiness in being foolish.
Remember good counselors make good plans,
Because plans go astray without wise advice.

Plan to always say the right thing at the right time,
Because people listen to a fitting reply.
Follow the path that leads to life above,
And avoid the rebellious ways that lead to hell.

I destroy the things of arrogant people
Who think they've made it by themselves
And I protect the property of widows.
I hate the thought of taking or giving bribes,
Because wicked money earned by wicked acts troubles the family.

I delight when you speak right words the right way,
I despise the wicked thoughts of the wicked.

Think about your answers before speaking,
Because evil people only spew out evil words.

I hear the prayers of right-acting people,
But I shut up My ears to the wicked.
You'll be happy when you see an optimistic glance in the eyes of
another,
Because good news lifts your spirit.

Be comfortable around wise people,
Because you want to learn from their counsel.
You will grow in understanding when you listen to the wise,
But a man hurts himself when he doesn't listen to others.

Reverencing Me, your Lord, is the first step to successful living
And you must be humble before you receive honor.

PROVERBS 16

My Providential Care

Every man justifies his actions in his mind,
But I, the LORD, know the real motives of his heart.
So carefully discipline your speech
And trust Me to help you give the right answers.

When you commit yourself to think right,
Your actions will be successful.
I have a purpose for you in all I create and do,
I even punish the wicked for a purpose.

If you think you are better than Me, that is an abomination;
That attitude will not escape punishment
Even if rebels join with others who hate Me.
I punish by the standards of truth and consistency
And you must reverence Me to escape punishment.

When your actions please Me
Your enemies cannot accuse you of anything.
You should desire to live right and have little gain
Than draw a huge salary from sinful acts.

Make your plans in the integrity of your heart,
But I direct each step you take.
I direct your life through government authorities;
It's very difficult to go against their decisions.
Be honest in everything you count,
Because I know the correct measure of all things.

It is an abomination when government authorities do wrong,
Because I established their authority so people can live by laws.
Government officials expect everyone to keep the peace
And their job is easier when everyone lives by the law.
But government officials punish when they are mad,
So do not anger them.
You are fortunate when governmental officials smile at you,
Because they can be as beneficial as an autumn rain.
You should desire a good mind rather than great riches
Also, desire to think successfully than get wealth.
Walk the right way and turn your back on evil
To preserve your soul.

Pride will trip you up in many ways
And a rebellious spirit will destroy you.
Desire to spend your life with humble people
Than get rich with a lot of haughty rebellious friends.

You want the good results that come from handling problems wisely,
Because you will be happy doing things My way.
You want to be wise with a reputation for self discipline
And you want your optimism to motivate others to learn.
You want to think right so you can live successfully,
But thinking right to fools is foolishness.

To think right begins with a choice to be wise
And it will show when you speak.
Good words are the source of a happy life
And they give life to the whole body.

Each person thinks they choose the right path,
But without Me the path leads to death.

You work because it reflects who you are,
But it's also a means to provide your livelihood.

Sinners are always thirsting for more sin,
But their lips are burned when they drink it.
A deceitful person makes everyone mad
And a gossip drives a wedge between friends.
A violent man will challenge his friends to a fight
And make them do things they don't want to do.

He shuts his eyes to the truth, and criticizes everything
Using his lips to get his evil way.
You will glorify Me in your old age,
Because you always thought right to live successfully.
When you keep your temper and not blow your stack,
You will be mightier than the mighty.

When you conquer your inner spirit,
You will be like those who conquer a city.

Life is like the rolling of the dice,
But I determine what will happen to all.

PROVERBS 17

A Fool Doesn't Think Right

It is better to eat a simple sandwich in peace
Than have the best banquet where hate is prevalent.
A wise employee who controls a rebellious son
Will be rewarded by those who are faithful.
There are standards to test the purity of gold and silver,
But only I honestly test the hearts of people.
Rebels are influenced by wicked conversation;
Liars pay attention to gross exaggerations.

Those mocking the poor make fun of Me who made all people;
Those who rejoice at the accident of others will suffer accidents.

Grandchildren are our prize for getting older

And the pride of children is their parents and grandparents.
Fools do not speak properly
And lying leaders are even more foolish.

You will get good will when you give a gift
If you give the gift in good faith.
Your love to others is strengthened when you overlook their faults,
Pointing out their problems separates the best of friends.
Learn even from rebels because you want to succeed,
But a fool won't listen if you tell him a 100 times.
Those who break rules are rebellious in their heart;
They will only learn from the cruel consequences of their mistakes.

It's safer to meet a bear robbed of its cubs
Than deal with a fool in his foolishness.

Those who give evil to people who do them good
Will have more evil than they can bear;
They will never get rid of evil.

Those who start a fight are like those who open the flood gates;
It's hard to stop a flood once it gets going
And it's hard to stop quarreling once it gets started.

Those who excuse the rebel and condemn the righteous
Are both an abomination to Me.

A fool won't pay tuition for a college education,
Because he doesn't want to learn anything.

You will have My friendship at all times,
That should be one of your enjoyments in life.

If you guarantee a loan for someone
You are responsible for his debts.

Those who enjoy arguing, also enjoy sinning
And those who brag about their strengths invite attacks.
Those with twisted ideas do not try to live right
And those with twisted tongues end up in trouble.
It is painful to a parent to let their children become fools
And a parent is not proud
When their child won't think right.

Your rejoicing heart is good medicine,
But a broken heart makes you feel bad all over.
The rebel will accept illegal bribes
To cover a lie or pervert justice.

Think right so you can live successfully;
Don't be distracted by worldly traps.
A foolish child who won't listen to right-thinking
Angers a good father
And embitters his mother who gave him birth;
But to punish the innocent is wrong,
Likewise, to punish leaders who do right.

Use your knowledge to discipline your speech
Because wise people control their temper
Even a fool is thought wise if he doesn't speak;

So any who keep their mouth shut
Will appear to be wise to everyone.

Amen

PROVERBS 18

A Contrast Between Perils and Blessings

Don't be a recluse or hermit,

They selfishly think only of themselves

And deny every principle of getting along with people.

A fool never tries to learn from others,

They only want to arrogantly express their advice.

A wicked person brings rebellion into the room,

Then provocation and arguments follow.

Let your words give the water of life,

Flowing out to refresh everyone you encounter.

It is wrong to reward the wicked

And condemn those who do the right things.

A fool gets into fights because of what he says,

But it's his evil heart that gets him beat up.

The mouth of a fool keeps him in constant trouble;

He can't do right because his words continually trip him up.

Gossip is slippery sweet like honey,

It'll slip into the belly and make you sick.

A lazy man never accomplishes anything,

He is as bad as one who destroys what others accomplish.

Wealthy people think their riches are their defense;

They think money is their defense.

But My name is a strong tower;

You must run to Me for safety.

Proud people will eventually be destroyed,

So, be humble so you can be successful.

Listen carefully to matters before you answer,

Because it's foolish to give the wrong answers.

You make it through sickness when you think right,

But you give up when your spirit is deflated.

You must be wise if you want to learn,

You will learn when it is your purpose to think right.

Giving to people is a way to influence them

And brings you before influential people.

The first thing you hear usually seems right

Until someone straightens up the record with the truth.

Drawing straws can settle arguments

Because neither person has to give in;

Yet, one person is the winner.

It's harder to win back the friendship of an offended brother

Than to win a big physical fight,

Because the offense is taken to heart.

Good food in the mouth satisfies the belly

Just like good words make the spirit happy.

You must discipline your speech

Because the tongue can kill or nourish life.

The man who finds a good wife

Discovers the greatest treasure to possess

And he gets My blessing in life.

The poor always beg and need some help,

But the rich seem to speak straightforwardly.
A man must be friendly to have friends
And I am the friend that is closer than a brother.

PROVERBS 19

Build Character by Wise Thinking

It's not wise to act impulsively without knowing what you are doing,
Or to rush ahead without knowing where you are going.
You should rather be poor and live morally upright
Than to be a fool and morally dishonest.
A fool is ruined by his own foolishness,
Then angrily blames Me for his failure.
Wealthy people appear to have many "friends,"
While the poor have only a few.

Lies will always add grief to the liar;
He will not escape his punishment.
Many people want something from their leaders;
They are his friend to get something.
The relatives of a poor man despise him
And his friends ignore him.
When the poor man needs them and calls to them
They don't respond to his requests.

You should have enough self-respect to get wisdom
And you will prosper because of right-thinking.
Those who put up a false front will be embarrassed
And those who tell lies will be punished.

It's wrong for a fool to live in the lap of luxury
And for jail inmates to tell presidents what to do.

Discipline your anger because you want to be wise
And overlook the mistakes of others.

The king's wrath terrifies like the roar of a lion,
But his favor is like dew on the grass.

A foolish son will disappoint his father
And a nagging wife irritates her husband
Like a faucet that keeps dripping.

A house and wealth are inherited from your family,
But I, the LORD, give a wife who thinks sensibly.

A lazy person sleeps instead of working
And as a result, goes hungry.

You live correctly when you obey My commandments;
Those who despise My way of life will die.

You are lending to Me when you help the poor;
I will repay you in many ways.

Discipline your children while they can learn
So their life won't be ruined.

A violent-tempered person will pay for his anger;
A friend may try to stop him from getting mad
But he'll have to do it again and again.

Obey good advice and learn from discipline
So you'll have a good life for the rest of your life.

You can make any plans in your heart,

But My purpose in life will prevail.

You must be loyal if you want to influence people
And you'd rather be poor than get money by lying.

You must reverently trust Me for eternal life
And evil will not be able to touch you.

Some lazy people are so lazy
That they will not lift a hand to feed themselves.

When the rebellious person is punished,
The simpleton can learn from that example.

When the wise are corrected, they learn valuable lessons;
The children who mistreat their father or reject their mother
Are a disgrace and embarrassment to them.

When you stop listening to correction,
You have turned your back on common sense.

A lying witness makes a mockery of justice
And wicked people drink in evil.

The scorner will be judged for his scorn
Just as surely as fools will be judged.

PROVERBS 20

Build a Life of Integrity

Wine makes a mockery of wise people, and liquor leads to fights;
You must not be led astray by using it.

The leader's anger is like a lion's roar;

Those who make him mad risk their life.

You must become wise by avoiding quarrels,
Any fool can fly off the handle in rage.

Those who are too lazy to plow in the spring
Won't have any food in the harvest.

Your intentions lie deep within your heart,
But a wise person can know what you are thinking.
Many people announce they are your good friend,
But only the faithful ones stick with you.

You must think right and walk in integrity
So your children may happily follow your example.

You will want to look at all the evidence
Before you decide if something is good or bad.

You cannot say you are pure from all sin;
No one can cleanse themselves from iniquity.

You must hate double standards and price fixing,;
So padding an expense account and lying about taxes is wrong.

You want to be innocent and transparent like a child
So everyone will know the purity of your heart.

You want to hear what I made the ears to hear
And see what I made the eyes to see.

Do not spend your days sleeping,
But open your eyes to the tasks before you
So your needs will be supplied.

Do not bad-mouth a product to get a better price,
Then go off and brag that you got a bargain.

You don't want just gold and jewels,
You want to be wise in discernment and decision-making.

Make sure you get collateral before making a loan;
You will need security when making a loan to a stranger.

When you steal or lie to get something illegally,
It will turn sour in your stomach.

You must make good plans to have success in life
And you must seek advice when attempting something big.

You know a gossip goes around telling secrets
So she can't repeat anything you don't tell her.

Those who curse their father and mother
Their lamp will be put out and to live in darkness.

When you get a possession too soon, and too easily
You usually don't appreciate it in the long run.

Don't give a bad deed in return for evil;

Rather, wait for Me to punish the evil doer.

I hate a double standard that gives some an advantage
And I despise double entry bookkeeping.

I order the steps of a good man,
So pray for help to know how to walk properly.

It is a sin to pledge money to Me
Then change your mind and not give it.

I will help you be a wise leader to determine who is violating the rules,
Then you can fire them before they do more damage.

My searchlight penetrates your human heart
To expose all the reasons for your actions.

My grace and truth put the king on the throne;
My mercy keeps him there.

The glory of a youth is his strength;
The splendor of the elderly is their experience and wisdom.

Physical punishment will deal with disobedience
But it must deal with the heart, not just the body.

PROVERBS 21

Build a Life Plan

The king's heart is in My hand like a river,
I turn it wherever I please.

Many think they are doing the right thing,
But I know the truth found in each heart.

I am more pleased when you do the right things,
Than when you give Me a gift of sacrifice.

Haughty eyes and an arrogant attitude is just as much sin
As all the actions that break My law.

You will succeed with good planning and hard work,
But, will fail when you goof off and give it your second best.

And wealth gotten by lying will vanish like the early fog;
It is a seductive trap that leads to death.

The violence by the wicked will destroy them
Because they refuse to do the right thing.

The rebel walks a rebellious path,
But those who think right will walk right.

I'd rather live on a small corner of a roof
Than share a large house with a nagging wife.

Evil people love to do evil things,
They have no consideration for their neighbors.

When a scorner is punished, the simpleton learns to think right;
When the wise is instructed, he learns to live right.

I know what happens in the home of the wicked
And eventually I will judge their wickedness.

Those who shut their ears to the requests of the poor
Will be ignored when their time of need comes.

A personal gift gets favor to the giver,
But a bribe under the table will be punished.

Enjoy right-living because you practice right-thinking
And this righteousness terrifies the evil doers.

The one who strays from the path of common sense
Will end up dead like others who violated My law.

The ones given to pleasure shall end up poor
And the ones given to wine will never succeed.

Sometimes I punish the wicked to save the upright,
And I judge the treacherous to pressure the godly.

It is better to live alone in the desert
Than to live with a complaining negative wife.

The wise have a nice home and furnishings,
But a fool spends his money as soon as he gets it.

When you seek to think right and live right

I have promised you life, wisdom and honor.

The wise can conquer strong warriors,
Because he uses wisdom to undermine their fortifications.

When you discipline your thinking and words
You will stay out of trouble.

Those who are guided by overwhelming conceit
Are arrogant rebels of My expectations.

The craving of a lazy man will eat him up
Because he is too lazy to work for the things he wants.
He is greedy but will not pay the price,
But the righteous have something to give.

I hate the good works of rebellious people,
Especially when they do them with ulterior motives.

A lying witness will eventually be punished,
But those who know the truth will be allowed to speak.
A wicked man covers up his real feelings,
But the upright plans to live right.

No human plans that are made against Me
Will eventually succeed in the long run.
The battle armaments are prepared for war,
But I am the One who gives victory.

PROVERBS 22

What to Avoid in Life

You should rather seek a good reputation than lots of money;

Seek respect more than silver or gold.

The rich and the poor have one thing in common,

I made them both.

A wise man sees problems coming and gets out of the way,

But problems run over the naive, then he suffers the consequences.

When you fear Me, you have a proper view of yourself

And you will be properly equipped to make money.

Stubborn people will run into a lot of difficulties,

But those who think-right will be able to avoid them.

If you properly train a child to think and act right,

He will live-right when he grows up.

Those who break the law end up in trouble

And it will do them no good to get angry.

Those who have a generous spirit add value to their life

Because they share with the needy.

Kick the sarcastic person out and people will stop fussing;

Also, they will stop giving one another insults.

Those who are conscientious and give compliments

Will get the attention of the boss.

I protect the right-thinking person who is wise
And I upset the schemes of schemers.

The lazy man makes up hypothetical problems
Complaining there's a lion in the street,
All because he's too lazy to do anything.

The mouth of the adulteress is a deep hole;
Those who are angry with Me fall into it.

It's natural for a foolish child to do stupid things;
He needs to be corrected to live a wise life.

It's not smart to make money off the poor
And you'll lose the money you give to the rich.

Pay attention when the wise instruct you
So you can gain knowledge and wisdom.
Because when you have the principles of wise people in your heart,
You can explain why you live by My rules.
You will put your trust in Me alone
And then you can tell others how to live for Me.

Solomon has given you these worthwhile principles
To instruct you how to live wisely and to keep out of trouble,
So you can live with My assurance
And tell others how I expect them to live.

Do not take advantage of the helpless who cannot help themselves,
And don't sue the poor to get your money,
Because I watch out for the poor
And withhold blessings from those who oppress them.

Do not hang out with angry people
Nor become close friends with hot-heads
Because being around them will make you become like them
And you will suffer the consequences of their mean-disposition.

Don't sign loan papers for those who ask you
To guarantee a loan for them
Because you will eventually have to pay for them;
And if you don't have the money to pay their loan,
Your house and furniture will be repossessed.

Do not move the ancient boundary makers
That were set up by the ancestors,
Because the stability of the past guarantees your future.

You should be the most skilled at what you do
So you will be recognized and promoted.

PROVERBS 23

Don't Lust for the Things That Evil People Get by Doing Evil

When you sit to eat with leaders
Remember who you are with.

Do not gorge your stomach with food
So that you embarrass yourself.

Do not lust after delicacies;
Stuffing your mouth reveals your lack of character
And is not healthy and nourishing.

Do not exhaust your strength pursuing money,
But be smart enough to control yourself.

Do not set your eyes on riches,
For you will lose sight of everything else in life.
Wealth is an elusive goal that has the wings of a bird;
Just when you think you have it, off it flies.

Do not eat the food of a stingy man,
Nor be greedy for the delicacies of his table;
For he keeps count of all you eat;
He says, "Eat and drink" but he doesn't mean it.

For that which you eat, you will have to repay;
Your compliments for his meal will be wasted.

Do not quietly correct a fool
For he will despise the common sense you tell him;

Do not move the ancient boundary stones
To encroach on the property of another;
For I, the LORD, am your Redeemer
And I may take up the fight against you.

Discipline your mind to learn knowledge

And listen to hear words of wisdom;
Do not withhold discipline from a child
For if you correct him he will not die,
But with correction he will learn wisdom and live.

I want My children to learn wisdom
So that I will be glad when they speak wise words;
Your role models should not be those who despise My law.
Follow the example of those who follow Me;
For a solid future is with those who fear Me
And you will not be cut down in the prime of life.

Listen to wise men and become wise;
You will set your mind on the right kind of life.

Do not be addicted to guzzling strong drink,
Nor should you eat like a pig;
For both the drunkard and glutton will become poor
And laziness will only buy rags to wear.

Listen to your father who gave life to you
And honor your mother all of her life long.

Give your money to get as much truth as possible
And with it get discipline, understanding, and wisdom.

The father of a right-living son will rejoice
And a wise son will make him glad;
So, make your father and mother rejoice;
They will be proud of you as their child.

Give your heart's control to Me;
Let your eyes see how I want you to live.

Reject the prostitute who is a deep ditch
And refuse the trollop who is a narrow well;
They lie in wait to catch straying males
And like predators, they eat human flesh.

What idiot has misery? Who has sorrow?
Who gets into quarrels and fights?
Who gets beat up and who has his body bloodied?
Who has bloodshot eyes and a hang over?
Those who can't say "NO!" to liquor or beer;
Those who always search for another mixed drink.

I tell you to never lust for the liquor glass
As it gives off its smell and seducing color.
It may slide smoothly down the throat,
It may seem like a heavenly taste,
But liquor bites like a hidden serpent
Its sip is the venom of a deadly snake
So determine never to take your first drink.

The eyes of a drunken man see peculiar things;
His mind is hopelessly messed up.
He staggers as if he were walking on a rolling ship;
His head heaves as if he's on the top of a mast.
People can beat on him when he's drunk, and he'll not feel it;
After he gets sober he will know he's been beaten up.

The pathetic drunk is addicted because when he gets sober
He asks, "Where can I get another drink?"

PROVERBS 24

Learn the Right Values in Life

Don't make evil people your role models
And do not hang out with them;
Because they think of ways to break My law
And they try to talk others into their transgressions.

You can build your home on right-living wisdom
And you can make it secure by right-thinking understanding.
You can fill the rooms with knowledge
And furnish it with the best of thoughts.
You want to be wise, so you can be strong
And you will increase your strength with knowledge.
For with wise counsel you can conquer your dreams
And many wise counselors will help you achieve your goals.

Wisdom is a wonderful possession; too lofty for a fool;
The wise man doesn't tell people he's wise
But the important people in the city recognize him.

Those who plan to break the law are called schemers
And people hate schemers
Because they are fools given over to sin.

You must vow not to faint in the day of conflict;
Pray for strength that is strong enough to endure.
Then you will rescue those about to be killed
And you'll save those being dragged off to death.

Some will say "We didn't know anything about it!"
But I will know you know because I know your heart.

I expect all to be truthful
And will repay each one who quits the battle.
Solomon tells you to eat honey because it is good for you;
The taste of honey is sweet to the tongue.
Therefore, you should seek wisdom because it is good for you;
Its taste is sweet to the desires of the soul;
Wisdom will give you what you hope for in life.
The thief lurks near the home of a righteous man
Then plans to steal his possessions.
Though a righteous man falls seven times,
He will rise up to bring the thief to judgment;
It's the wicked who falls and never gets up.

Do not rejoice when your enemy falls
And don't be happy when he has stumbled;
Because your evil rejoicing will displease Me,
I might withdraw My protection from you
And begin protecting your enemy.

Do not let evil doers upset you,
Never be envious of the actions of the wicked;
For the person who does evil will not enjoy what he does

And his candle will be put out in death.

Do not get involved with those who fight the government
They do not fear Me, the Lord, nor the rulers;
For judgment will fall quickly on rebels,
No one knows what ruin will ruin their lives.

Learn these My principles
That I prepare for the wise;
Do not show partiality to anyone
When you are making decisions or judgments;
Do not tell guilty people, "You're innocent"
Because the public will curse you and nations will hate you;
But when you condemn those who should be condemned,
The reward of doing right will follow;
When you give an honest answer to those who ask,
It's like giving a kiss to those you respect.

First you'll prepare yourself for honest work
And give an honest day's work to your employer;
Then build or buy a home
And never be a witness against someone if it's not so;
Do not use your words to deceive listeners;
Do not say, "I'll do to my neighbor what he does to me,"
Or, "I'll get even when he does me wrong."
When you walk by a field of a lazy man
It is the garden of a fool.
It is overgrown with vines and briars,
The ground was covered with weeds;
The fence is broken so anyone could wander in or out.

The more you observe the lazy man's field
The deeper becomes your conviction about hard work.
The lazy man enjoys being lazy and resting,
He loves folding his hands and sleeping late.
But poverty follows the lazy man, as sure as night follows day
And he'll want for food, clothing and shelter
For the rest of his life.

PROVERBS 25

Nothing Can Compare to Right Thinking

I gave these proverbs to Solomon;
The scribes of King Hezekiah copied them for all.
I am glorified by concealing things;
It is the privilege of kings to search them out.
Just as the heaven is high and the earth is deep,
So the heart of a ruler is unknowable.

When impurities are removed from silver ore
The silver can make a beautiful vessel.
When the wicked are removed from public life,
The nation can live in righteousness.

Don't elevate yourself over those around you
And don't try to sit in a seat of honor;
Because it is better to be elevated to a higher seat
Than to be sent to the end of the line.

Don't rush to solve a dispute between neighbors,

Especially when you don't know all the facts
Because you'll be embarrassed when one puts you to shame.
Discuss the problem with your neighbors
But don't tell one what the other said to you;
Because if the first hears you publicly tell,
What he said to you privately,
Then you'll be embarrassed, and your reputation will be ruined.

Apples of gold in a setting of silver
Are like an appropriate word spoken at the right time;
Just as a gold earring and necklace are appropriately worn,
So are the words of a counselor to a receptive ear.
Just as a cool breeze is in the heat of harvest,
So is one who always tells the truth,
Refreshing the heart of his employer.
Just as some of clouds and wind bring no rain,
So is the one who promises a gift
But disappoints because he never gives it.

Patience can win a stubborn leader
And a soft answer can melt a hard heart.
Only eat as much honey as you need
Because you'll throw up if you eat too much.
Do not visit your neighbor too much
Because he'll get sick of you and hate to see you come.

Those who give false testimony against a neighbor
Hit them with a club, a sharp sword or a piercing arrow.
When you rely on an untrustworthy person in a time of trouble,
It is like having a toothache, or a crippled leg.

Singing sad songs to people in trouble
Is like taking away their coat in cold weather.

When someone who hates you is hungry, give him food;
For then you'll heap hot coals (of shame) on his head
And I, your Lord, will reward you.

Just as a cold north wind brings rain,
So a backbiting tongue brings an angry stare.
It is better to live in a small corner of the roof
Than to live in a big house with a nagging wife.

Just as cold water quenches your thirst,
So good news from a distant source brings happiness.
Just as a muddy spring pollutes the drinking water,
So is a good person who compromises with the wicked.

It's not good to eat too much honey,
Nor is it wise to seek your own glory;
For both excesses will make you sick.

A great fortified city with breeched walls
Is like a person without self-discipline.

PROVERBS 26

Watch Out For Fools and Scoundrels

Know that snow in the summer and rain at harvest

Are both out of place,
Just as giving honor to a fool.
I know that a bird struggling to fly will come home to roost,
So you will be punished with the curse you give
To someone who did not deserve it;

Remember a whip will make a donkey obey
So correction is the only way to help a fool.
Do not answer a fool according to his foolishness
Because you'll lower yourself to his disgusting level;
But you answer a fool according to truth
So that he'll know he is not wise.
Letting a fool deliver a message for you
Is like asking for trouble and pain.
A wise saying in the mouth of a fool
Is about as good as a limp leg or useless arm.
A wise saying in the mouth of a fool
Does as much damage as grabbing a thorn bush with your hands;
Giving honor to a fool is like
Trying to shoot an arrow without a bow.
A master craftsman can make a work of art,
But employing a fool breaks the laws of common sense.
A fool will always fool around about foolishness,
Just as a dog will return to his vomit.
Yet, there is more hope for a fool
Than for a conceited man who thinks he knows everything.
A lazy person makes excuses not to work
Saying there's a lion in the street;
Just as a door turns on its hinges,
So a lazy person continually turns over in bed;

He refuses to get up and go to work.
A lazy person puts his fork into his food,
But is too lazy to lift it to his mouth.
A lazy person has more excuses for what he does
Than the reasons of seven wise men.

If you get involved in a fight that's not your own
It's like grabbing a dog by its ears;
You'll get bitten.

Those who deceive their neighbors, then say, "Just kidding,"
Are like those shooting deadly arrows or firebrands.

When there's no wood, the fire goes out;
So when gossip stops, so does contention.
Just as coals are to a fire and burning wood makes heat,
So a quarreling person creates strife.

The lies of a slanderer are easily swallowed
But they make everyone sick to their stomach.
Just as silver covers a clay pot
So loving lips cover a hating heart.
Hateful people try to cover with pleasant words,
But they can't overcome their deceitful heart.
So don't trust people who always speak pleasantly
Because they may be covering the abominations of their heart.
They may be trying to cover the hatred of their heart
But what's in the well comes up in the bucket;
So, eventually their hatred will come out.

Those who dig a pit will eventually fall into it
And what goes around will come around;
You will eventually suffer the evil you plan for others.

Those who tell lies eventually hate their victims
And a flattering tongue is a sugar-coated lie;
So tell the truth because I, the Lord, love you, and others.

PROVERBS 27

Right Thinking Leads to Good Relationships

You should not boast what you will do tomorrow
For you don't know what a future day will bring.

Let another talk about your accomplishments
Because no one will believe your boasting.

Let an objective observer do it.
Stones are heavy to pick up, so is sand;
But a fool's anger outweighs them both.

Know that wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous
But the revenge of a jealous person is greater than both.

You should rather have open rebuke to become wise
And know where you stand with a person;
Than have hidden love that you never experience,
And not realize the love that was yours.

You should desire faithful wounds from a friend,
Than deceitful kisses from an enemy.

When you are full you have no taste for honey;

But when you are hungry, anything bitter tastes sweet.

A man who foolishly strays from his home
Is like a bird that abandons his protective nest.

Just as perfume and sweet-smelling things make us happy
So does good advice from the heart of a friend.

Do not abandon a loyal friend
Who is also a life-long friend of your father.
Do not go for help to a relative that is far away
Rather, go to a friend who is near;
Become wise to make your father glad.

You won't need your father to answer your critics;
It is wise to avoid trouble when it comes;
Fools don't think about the future and pay the price.

Do not sign a note for a stranger
Then they won't take the coat off your back.
They'll probably seize another man's clothing,
To pay the debts he incurred because of his sin.
Do not yell a blessing to your neighbor before dawn,
For you'll waken him and he will curse you.

A nagging wife that keeps fussing
Is like dripping water on a rainy day;
It will only irritate and anger.
The one who can restrain the negative wife
Can also restrain the wind;

Of course neither can be done.

Just as iron is used to sharpen a knife,
So you can sharpen the outlook of your friend.
Those who carefully look after the fig tree
Get to enjoy its fruit.
Those who do what their boss wants done,
Will be honored and promoted.
Just as you can see your image reflected in water,
So others can see your heart by looking at your face.

The greed that motivates your heart to want many things,
Is like hell and the grave;
Neither are ever satisfied.
Just as fire tests silver, and the crucible tests gold,
So your character will be tested by its reaction to praise.

You can grind a fool in the mill with a grinder
Just as grain is crushed to powder;
Yet his foolishness will remain.

Take care of the health of your flocks
And pay attention to the number in your herds;
Because a man's riches can be eventually lost,
And a business won't stay in the family forever.
So, when the hay has been mown for winter feeding
And the vegetables have been gathered from the garden,
The wool of lambs provides clothing;
There is enough goats' milk for all to drink.
You can sell your extra goats for a profit,

Then you can buy enough food to get your family through the winter

And have enough to give a bonus to your employees.

PROVERBS 28

Use Common Sense When Being Religious

The wicked have terror in their hearts

Because they have no confidence in life.

The righteous have the self-confidence of a lion

Because they know Me, they feel sure of themselves.

Because you live in a world of sin,

You need many rulers to make people do right.

But there is coming a ruler—a man of understanding,

His Kingdom will rule all—it will endure.

When you see one poor man oppressing another poor man,

It's like a rain storm that washes away all food;

For the poor doesn't realize he needs the other to survive.

Those who abandon their principles end up loving sin,

But those who obey My principles oppose those who love sin.

Evil people don't understand absolute truth and judgment

But they that seek to please Me, understand all things.

It's better for you to tell the truth and end up poor

Than it is to get rich by living a lie.

Be a wise child who obeys My truth

Because those who hang out with fools disappoint their father.

Those who get rich by charging too much
Create wealth for someone else to give to the poor.
Those who refuse to obey My principles
Will not get their prayers answered.
Those who tempt the righteous to break My law
Shall suffer the punishment he plans for them.
But the upright who does not give into temptation
Will get the good things I have for him.

The rich man thinks everything he does is all right,
But the wise poor man can see through his deceit.
When the good man wins, everyone rejoices
But no one wants to see a wicked man win.
Those who hide their sin will not get away with it
But I accept those who confess and repent.
Those who fear and obey Me are happy
But those who harden their hearts will have a hard life.

A hungry roaring lion and prowling bear
Are like a wicked leader who eats up the poor.
A rising leader without wisdom is a cruel oppressor
But leaders who hate greed shall stay in office.

The one who kills another deserves to die;
Don't let anyone get him off the hook.
Those who obey My principles shall be saved;
Those who reject My ways will not live long.

Those who work hard at their job will have food to eat
But those who frolic with lazy people will be poor.

Those trustworthy workers will receive bonuses and raises
But those who cut corners will be demoted or fired.

It's wrong to be partial to any person
Because all people are of one blood and
Were created in My image.

The greedy person will sell his soul for money
Not knowing his insatiable appetite
Will ultimately choke him to death;
And a starving man will steal for bread.

If you correct your brother to help him
You'll get more gratitude
Than if you flatter his sin and disobedience.

Those who steal from their parents saying,
"I deserve it because I'm their child,"
Is a brother to satan.

Those who grasp after attention
Create strife and anger in those around him.
But those who obey My principles
Will prosper and get the right kind of attention.

Those who trust only in themselves are fools,
But the ones living right will prosper.

Those who give to the poor will not lack anything,
But those who turn their backs will be cursed by them.

When the wicked are in power,
Good people hide when they are punished.

But when the wicked are kicked out of office,
Everyone flourishes.

PROVERBS 29

Right Thinking Will Make You a Good Citizen

Those who harden their will after being rebuked
Will be suddenly broken.

When the righteous are your leaders
Everyone rejoices because they do right.

But when the wicked are over you,
Everyone moans because evil flourishes.

When you seek to think the right way,
You make your father glad.

But those who visit a prostitute
Waste their money and their life.

Rulers give us a stable nation when they do right,
But rulers that take bribes destroy a people.

Those who try to get ahead by flattery
Spread a trap for their feet.

The crimes of an evil man will eventually catch him,
But the righteous sing and dance because they have a clean conscience.

The righteous are always concerned about the poor.
But the wicked are selfish people,
They don't care about anyone but themselves.

A negative critic gets everyone mad,
But the words of the wise have a calming effect.
When a wise man argues with a fool,
He only gets scorn, and angry replies.
Those who want to kill, hate those who obey My principles
And will attempt to do away with them.
The fool rattles on about everything he doesn't like,
But a wise person holds his tongue, and thinks through the situation.
Those leaders that listen and believe lies
Have counselors around them who are wicked.

I have given to you a conscience of right and wrong,
Also, to the poor and the oppressor.
When the leader honestly trusts the poor,
He will be in office a long time.

I have given you means to correct your children,
But the child left to himself will disgrace his parents.
So discipline your child and he will make you happy;
Yes, he will do what you expect him to do.

When you don't have divine direction in your life,
You'll shrivel and die spiritually;
But you will be happy when you obey My law.

It's hard to discipline workers with words;
They may understand, but they won't obey.
Those people who have something to say about everything
Have as much hope as a fool.
If you pamper a child from youth,

He will be ungrateful when he grows up.
Angry people stir up strife and bitterness.
People with uncontrollable tempers commit crimes.

You will be brought low if you are proud,
But you will be honored when you humble yourself.
He who partners with a thief, hates himself;
When he hears people curse the thief
He doesn't say anything.

The fear of man brings a snare
But those who put their trust in Me will be safe.
Many seek the leaders' favor
But they get justice from Me, your Lord.

The wicked man opposes the righteous person
And the righteous is detested by the wicked.

PROVERBS 30

The Knowledge I Would Have You Know

Solomon received a message from Me
To give to Ithiel and Ucal.

The one who is more boorish than others
Is too ignorant to seek to understand Me;
He lacks human understanding and wisdom.
He doesn't have enough common sense

To know Me, the Holy One.

I am the only One who has access
To both heaven and earth.
I hold the wind in My cupped hands;
I wrap up the oceans in My cloak.
I created the whole earth
From one end to the other.
Only I know My name
And My Son's name.

Every word that I speak is pure;
I protect those who take refuge in Me.
If you add anything to My words,
I will rebuke you
And you will be made to be a liar.
You have asked two things from Me
To help you all your life.
You don't want to tell a lie or misrepresent the truth,
You want neither poverty nor riches;
You just want the food you need each day.
If you have too much money, you may deny Me
And say, "Who is the Lord?"
If you are too poor, you might steal
And tarnish My name, I am your Lord.

Never criticize a person to his employer
Because he will slander you for your interference.
There are those who curse their fathers
And don't bless their mothers.

These people justify their actions
And think they never do anything wrong;
They are haughty and stupid.

There are critics whose teeth are sharp like razors;
Their tongues are like daggers.
They eat up everyone with their sarcasm
And criticize those who most need help.

The leech sucks the life out of things,
Always crying more! More! MORE!
There are three things—no, there are four
That want more and are never satisfied.
The grave,
A barren womb,
The dusty desert,
A blazing fire.

The eye that mocks his father
And criticizes the request of his mother,
Will be pecked out by the birds
And will be judged for its rebellion.

There are three things that are wonderful,
When you add a fourth, you are amazed:
The way an eagle floats in the sky,
The way a snake slithers on a rock,
The way a ship glides under the wind,
The way of a man with a woman.

It seems an unfaithful wife excuses herself;
She wipes her mouth saying, "I did nothing wrong."

Three things make the earth quake,
Add a fourth thing and everything trembles:
A slave who becomes a king,
A fool who gets rich,
A complaining woman who finally gets a husband,
A servant girl who takes the place of her mistress.

Four things on the earth are very small,
But they are wise:
Ants who are not mighty, but they store food for the winter,
Little badgers who make their home in the holes of the rocks,
Locusts that have no leader, but they march in ranks,
Spiders that are tiny enough to get into the king's palace.

Three things march stately with dignity,
No, add a fourth that also strides:
The lion that turns aside for none,
The swiftest greyhound that can't be caught,
The stubborn goat that won't back down,
The king leading his army.

It is best when all boorish fools
Are smart enough to keep quiet
So people won't see their stupid ways.
Just as churning milk produces butter
And pressure on the nose produces blood,
So the pressure of anger produces strife.

PROVERBS 31

What is a Godly Woman?

This is the message for Solomon
A message that was given him by his mother, Bathsheba.

It is the biggest vow that could be asked

By a mother of her son,

She wanted him to promise to keep this pledge.

Do not give your strength to whorish women,

Or live an adulterous life that would destroy you.

Do not seek pleasure in strong drink, nor ever taste liquor

Because drinking will distort your understanding of My law

And drunkenness will make you forget your duties.

Liquor will not give happiness, but brings misery;

And those who are given to strong drink will be destroyed.

They drink to fill up their emptiness

And forget about all their problems.

You shall speak to those who don't know what to do

And give My Word to those who are perishing.

Always do the right thing

And open your heart to the needs of the poor.

Prayer for Women (31:10-31)

Every young girl should desire to be a virtuous woman

Whose price is worth more than rubies.

Her husband trusts her in his heart

And find happiness in her.

You want to do good things for your husband

And not tempt him to deny his faith.

Determine to dress appropriately at all times

In the best available clothes you have.

Do whatever is necessary

To get the appropriate food for your family.

Get up early to prepare food

So your family will have nourishing meals.

Use the ability I gave you

To buy a field and plant food for your family.

I will give you strength to get everything done

And moral strength to stand for the right.

You know your task in life is good;

I will help you do the best job possible.

I will give you wisdom to do everything for your home

And the self-discipline to get it done.

I will give you a compassionate heart for the needy

And money to give to the poor.

Be prepared for all types of weather

And make sure that all of your family are comfortably clothed.

Your outward clothes

Should reflect the inward beauty that I have given you.

You want your husband to have a good reputation

In the community in which you live.

Use your time wisely

So you can earn extra income for the family.

Think properly what makes your family happy

And make sure everyone in your household lives by My principles.
Teach your children to appreciate your godly influence
And your husband will tell others how I've helped him.

There are many good women in the world,
So be the virtuous woman I have described.

Outward beauty can deceive you
And compliments can sidetrack you.

Seek earnestly for the inward beauty that comes
Because you put your trust in Me.

May the compliments you receive come from the things you have
accomplished

And may your praise be the family you have raised.

I AM GOD

The Purpose of Life

The Book of Ecclesiastes

Solomon wrote the Song of Solomon, with its passionate emphasis on love when he was a young man who walked with Me, the LORD. Solomon's second book, Proverbs, emphasizes practical wisdom he used to build his kingdom on wisdom. Through good leadership principles, he chronicled Proverbs in his middle adult life. The third book, Ecclesiastes, was written by Solomon in his old age after his failures of many marriages, his lack of contentment with luxury, and his boredom with power and authority.

Many people have been perplexed at the negative attitudes of Ecclesiastes. This is Solomon's attempt to show the futility of life lived apart from My principles. The Preacher begins, "Vanity of vanities" (1:2), which is translated in this volume as "frustrating and nothing makes sense." Then the Preacher asks the question, "What profit hath a man of all his labor which he taketh under the sun?" (1:3, KJV). The word "profit" is the Hebrew word *yithron*, a word unique to Ecclesiastes drawn from the business world. It means a financial profit, superiority, or preeminence. What can man gain from a fallen world? Solomon concludes that money, luxury, and sexual exploits are all frustrating and meaningless. Solomon asked the same question the Lord Jesus asked, "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36).

To Realize the Futility of a Life Without Purpose

I, the LORD, say these words through Solomon, the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem: "Everything is frustrating. And nothing makes sense.

1 What does a person gain from all his hard work here on earth?

“People come, and people go, but by contrast, the world remains the same. The sun rises, and the sun sets, and it seems to hurry back to rise again. The wind blows to the south, and it blows to the north. It swirls back and forth, and it seems to go nowhere. Rivers flow into the sea, but the sea is never full. The water goes back to the rivers and flows again into the sea. Everything is so tiring, more than we can describe. No matter how much we see or hear, we are never satisfied. We always want to see and hear more.

“History repeats itself. Nothing on the earth is really new. Can you point to something that is totally new? No. It had already existed years before, even before we were born. We easily forget about people who lived years ago, and people yet to be born won’t be remembered either.”

When Solomon was king of Israel living in Jerusalem, he tried to understand everything that is done here on the earth. But he soon realized that everyone carries heavy burdens. He has seen everything, and it is all so frustrating and without meaning. It’s like chasing after wind, a foolish waste of energy and an impossible task. You can’t straighten what is crooked, and you can’t depend on something if it doesn’t exist.

Solomon said to himself, “I am wiser than any king before me in Jerusalem. I am wiser and know more than any of them.” So he worked hard to see the difference between being wise and being foolish. Then he realized that that too is as pointless as trying to catch the wind. It seemed like the more he knew, the more grief he felt. And his knowledge even caused more distress.”

I, the LORD, gave wisdom to Solomon, king of Israel; he became the wisest man on earth. He applied his wisdom to investigate everything on earth, yet Solomon’s wisdom made him a cynic because he did not make Me the center of all inquiry.

To Realize the Purpose in Work

2 Solomon continues, “I decided to have fun and try to enjoy life to see if that would make sense of the world. But it didn’t. It too was frustrating.

Why laugh and try to have fun all the time? What good does that do? So I tried cheering myself up with wine, while still being wise. I was hoping to find something that makes sense for us humans in our few years here on the earth.”

Solomon continued to say, “I took on some big projects to see if that would make sense of things on the earth. I built houses for myself. I planted lots of vineyards; I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. I made reservoirs to hold water for my groves of trees. I bought male and female slaves, and other slaves were born in my house. I owned more herds and flocks than anyone who lived in Jerusalem before me. Other kings brought me lots of silver and gold. I had many male and female singers, and many beautiful wives and concubines, who gave me great pleasure. So I became greater in wealth and fame than anyone who lived in Jerusalem before me. And I tried to stay wise as I evaluated everything.

“I had everything I wanted, and I did whatever made me happy. I enjoyed hard work, and pleasure from it was the reward for my labors. Yet as I looked at everything I had done and how I had worked so hard to accomplish everything, it all seemed so frustrating, like chasing after wind. Nothing seemed to matter.”

So Solomon compared wisdom with foolishness saying, “Anyone who succeeds me can reach the same conclusions I came to. I concluded that yes, being wise is better than being foolish, just as light is better than darkness. Being wise is like seeing with two good eyes but being foolish is like walking in total darkness—fools can’t see a thing. I realized that both the wise person and the fool end up the same way—dead. I then thought that since the fools and I will both die, what’s the point of being wise? So I said again to myself, ‘This is all so frustrating and without meaning. The wise and the fool both die and both will be forgotten.’”

Also, Solomon hated life because his work on the earth was such a burden. He said everything is frustrating and without meaning, like chasing the wind. “I hated everything I worked for because when I die, I have to leave it all to someone else. And who knows whether he will be wise or foolish? He will own everything I gained by hard work and wisdom. That too is frustrating. So I felt depressed as I thought about all my hard work here on the earth. Though I have worked with wisdom and skill, I have to

leave it all to someone who has done nothing to earn it. That is meaningless and unfair. What does a person get in return for all his hard work and restless activity here on the earth? His days are filled with pain and grief, and at night he can't rest because his mind keeps thinking of things. This too is frustrating and meaningless."

Solomon says, "The best thing a person can do is to enjoy eating, drinking, and working. These pleasures are from God, for who can enjoy anything apart from Him? To the person who pleases Him; God gives wisdom, knowledge, and joy. But God may help a sinner become wealthy and then gives his wealth to someone who pleases Him. Even this is frustrating and is like chasing the wind."

Solomon came to the wrong conclusion to eat, drink, and enjoy what one's work produced. He thought that I, the LORD, gave food and drink as the ultimate enjoyment in life; he didn't realize you should all enjoy Me in all things. Praise Me for any and all enjoyment in this life.

To Realize I Have Given You a Time on Earth

3 Solomon said, "Every activity on earth has its own time and season. There is a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to harvest, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, a time to scatter stones and a time to gather stones, a time to hug and a time not to hug, a time to search and a time to quit searching, a time to keep and a time to throw away, a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak, a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.

"What does a person get for all his hard work? I have seen the burden God has placed on people. Yet He has made everything beautiful or appropriate in its time. And He has given people a sense of eternity in their hearts. And yet no one can fully understand all God has done from beginning to end. So the best thing people can do is to enjoy life and do well in this lifetime. Also, they should appreciate God's gifts of food and

drink and work. What God does will last forever. Nothing can be added to it or taken from it. God's purpose in all He does is to encourage people to reverence Him. Whatever we see now has already happened in the past, and whatever will occur in the future will have already occurred. God does many things over and over.

“Everywhere on earth, I saw evil and wickedness instead of justice and fairness. But I realized that in time God will judge everyone, both the righteous and the wicked. Another thought I had is that God often tests us to show that in a sense we are often like animals. In fact, both people and animals die. And people and animals have the same breath so that in a sense humans are no better off than animals. Humans and animals die; they both go to the same place, the grave. They return to the dust from which they were made. No one can see that the spirits of humans go up and the spirits of animals go down. So the best thing we can do is enjoy our own work because that's why we are here. No one who has died can come back to life to enjoy the future.”

I, the LORD, have given everything for its time and place in My plan; I have made you aware that you're preparing for eternity, but you can never fully understand what I'm doing in your life because you don't know the beginning from the end. What time I give you on earth, dedicate to Me and use it for Me.

To Learn the Value of Others

4 Solomon said, “Again I saw the troubles people were facing. They were in tears, and no one was there to comfort them, and those who mistreated them were very powerful. It seemed to me that the dead are better off than the living. But better off than either the dead or the living are those who have never been born. Why? Because they have not seen all the evil on the earth. I realized that many people succeed in their work because they are jealous of others. This too is frustrating and meaningless, like chasing the wind. Fools refuse to work, and so they starve. Yet it is better to have a little and enjoy a peaceful life than to work hard and have no peace. This too is like chasing after wind.”

Solomon saw another example of frustration. He said, “A man who lived alone had no son or brother. He worked all the time to keep getting more wealth. Yet he was never content with what he had. One day he thought, ‘For whom am I working so hard? Why am I always working and having no joy in life?’ This too is frustrating and depressing. By having a companion to work with, the two can get more done and have better results. If one of them falls, the other can pick him up. But if someone has no one with him, he has no one to help him up. If two people are in bed on a cold night, they can keep each other warm. But a person can’t be warm by himself. A person by himself can more easily be attacked, but two can help defend each other. A rope made of three strands can’t be broken very easily.”

What is stamina prayer? It’s serious prayer, or strenuous prayer, or dogged prayer. There comes a torturous time in life when your problems are so great, and your circumstances are so dire, that all you can do is hang on. Somehow you know deliverance is not coming. So you hunker down to perseverance prayer; you determine to endure to the end (Heb. 6:15).

“It’s better to be a poor but wise young person than an old but foolish king who won’t take advice. A young person may have been in prison and then become king even though he was born into a poor family. Everyone on the earth followed him after the king died. Numerous people were subject to him, but the kings who came later were not pleased with him. This too is meaningless and is like chasing the wind.”

To Learn Tolerance

5 The wisdom from Solomon continues, “Be careful when you enter the house of God and go there to listen and learn. Don’t be like a fool who offers sacrifices without realizing what he’s doing. Don’t be quick to talk or quick to make a rash promise to God. He’s in heaven, and you’re on the earth, so don’t talk a lot. Just as having many problems can give you nightmares, so talking a lot can show you are a fool.

“If you make a promise to God, keep it right away, because God doesn’t care for fools. In fact, it’s better not to make a promise at all than to make a promise and not keep it. Don’t let your words get you into trouble. And don’t tell the temple messenger that you made a mistake when you made a vow. That would make God angry, and He might destroy everything you’ve worked for. Dreaming and talking all the time is meaningless. Therefore, keep your words few and reverence God.

“If you see a powerful person giving a poor person trouble, or if you see someone being treated unfairly, don’t be surprised. An official is doing what a higher official tells him to do, and that one is following orders from someone above him. Everyone, including even the king, tries to get some share of crops he didn’t plant.

“People who love money never have enough. They are never satisfied. This too is frustrating and meaningless. The more you have, the more everyone wants something from you. So what is the point of having a lot of money except to look at it as it vanishes? Work hard, and you can sleep well, whether you have a lot to eat or not. But rich people can’t sleep well because they are always worrying about their money.

“Another serious problem I have seen in the world is people gathering a lot of money and then experiencing harm or losing it through some misfortune. So they have nothing left to pass on to their children. People come into the world naked, and they leave this world the same way. They can take nothing with them when they die. This too is frustrating. People leave the world just as they came into it. And what does a person gain from all his work, which was like working for the wind? Besides this, his existence is like eating in darkness, feeling frustrated, grief-stricken, and angry.

“I came to realize that one good thing for a person is to eat and drink and enjoy work, tiring as it may be, while he is on the earth in the few years God has given him. That is his lot in life. Also, if God gives someone wealth and he enjoys it and is happy in his work, that is a gift from God. When God helps a person be happy, he doesn’t have time to think of how short life is.”

Solomon said it was good for a man to eat, drink, enjoy life, and work hard, for this is My plan for him under the sun. If a man will

accept his work as a gift from Me, at least he has something to keep him happy, nor will he complain that his life is meaningless.

To Enjoy What You Have

6 “I, Solomon, say there’s another serious problem on the earth, and many people are troubled by it. Some people have lots of money and are highly honored so that they have everything they want. But then God doesn’t let them enjoy it. Someone else enjoys it instead. This too is frustrating, a serious problem.

“A man may have 100 children and live to be very old. But if he gets no satisfaction in life and doesn’t even have a proper burial, he would have been better off having been born dead. Such a child has no meaning, ends in darkness, and is forgotten. He never saw the light of day or knew what life is like, yet he has more rest than a rich but unhappy person. If he lives 2,000 years, but can’t enjoy life and then dies as does everyone else, what is the use?

“Everyone spends a lot of time and effort to have enough to eat, but they never have enough. What’s the point then of being wise? And what do poor people, if they are wise, gain by knowing how to conduct themselves before others? It’s better to enjoy what we have than always to be wanting something more. That too is frustrating and like chasing the wind.

“Whatever happens was determined long ago, including what everyone is like. So there’s no point in arguing with God because He is stronger than anyone. The more we talk, the less sense we make, so why talk at all? Life is short and frustrating, and it passes quickly like a shadow. So who knows what is best in this life? And who knows what will happen after we are gone?”

You were named before you knew it, and I, the LORD, gave you a personality before you reflected it. And you know you’re only human. Therefore, you are not strong enough to defeat death, because it is mightier than all of you together. You’ll be what I want you to be.

To Have a Good Reputation

7 “Having a good reputation is better than having expensive perfume,” Solomon continues. “And the day a person dies with a good reputation is better than the day he is born with an uncertain future. It is better to attend a funeral than a feast. Everyone will die, and so it is good to think about death. Feeling sorry is better than laughing all the time because sadness can help us think of life seriously. A wise person thinks about death, but a fool thinks only about having fun.

“Being corrected by a wise person is better than listening to a fool sing. A fool’s laughter is soon gone, like nettles cracking under kettles. This too is frustrating. Hardships can make a wise person a fool, and even a bribe can ruin him. Finishing a project is better than starting it, and patience is better than pride. Don’t get angry easily, because that’s what fools do. Don’t long for the “good old days,” because you don’t really know if they were better than today. Wisdom with an inheritance is a good thing; it benefits those who are on the earth. Both wisdom and money can give protection from trouble, but only wisdom can help a person live longer. Think of what God has done. No one can change what He has done. So when times are good, enjoy life. And when times are bad, think about the fact that God has purposes in hard times. God has made both good and bad times so that we can’t predict the future.

“In my frustrating life, I have seen good people die young and wicked people live long. Don’t think that being righteous or wise will guarantee God’s blessings. You could end up being confused. On the other hand, don’t think that being very wicked will mean you will live a long life. Get hold of both points, and if you reverence God, He will bless you. Being wise can make you stronger than city leaders. Yet no one on the earth is always good and never sins. If you listen to everything everyone says, you might hear your own servant cursing you. You know that you have often cursed others. I tried to be wise and understand everything, but true wisdom was beyond me. Wisdom is beyond our grasp and very deep. Who can really discover it?

“So I searched everywhere to try to find wisdom and how life works, and I wanted to understand how wickedness and foolishness can be so stupid. I discovered that being involved with a prostitute is worse than death. She is like a trap to catch you, and her hands are like chains. You can escape from her if you please God, but sinners will be caught in her trap.

This is what I have concluded after trying to see things from every angle: One out of a thousand men could be said to be good, but not one woman. I also found that God made people to be upright, but they, both men and women, have followed their own schemes.”

Solomon searched everywhere for truth. He looked everywhere to find an answer to life. He concluded that I, the LORD, originally made people to believe right but most people think up foolish schemes and excuses that will ultimately destroy their lives. Almost no one lives by My principles. Almost no one wants Me to rule their lives.

To Learn to Do What is Right

8 Solomon asked, “Who can know and explain everything? Wisdom brightens a person’s face and makes him smile. If you promised God you would obey the king, then you should keep that promise, and not be in a hurry to leave his presence. Since the king can do whatever he pleases, don’t take sides with people who do evil. And since he has the final word, don’t question what he’s doing.

“Obey the king’s command, and you will avoid trouble. Be wise, and you’ll know when and what to do. There is a time and a place for everything, even though life can be miserable. No one knows what lies ahead, so no one knows when things will happen. Just as no one can control the wind, so no one can control when he will die. And just as soldiers aren’t sent home when a war is still on, so wickedness doesn’t release its hold on those who practice it.

“I saw all this and tried hard to figure out everything that goes on here on the earth. I don’t understand why one person may rule over other people and bring them harm. Also, I saw wicked people go to the temple, and when they are buried, they are commended in the very city where they committed their crimes. This too is frustrating. If a crime isn’t punished right away, criminals think they can get away with more crimes. True, a wicked person may commit 100 crimes and live a long time. But still, I know the person who reverences God will be better off. And I know that it will not go well

for the wicked. Since they don't reverence God, their days will be short like a moving shadow.

“Here's another frustrating thing. Good people are often treated as if they are wicked, and wicked people are thought of as good. This, as I say, is very frustrating. So we should enjoy life. Nothing on this earth beats eating, drinking, and being glad. Joy can brighten up a person's work each day God has given him here on the earth. I stayed awake day and night trying hard to be wise and to see everything people are doing. Then as I considered what God does, I realized that we couldn't understand everything here on the earth. We can try hard to figure things out, but we can't really understand God's ways even if we tried.”

Obey the laws of your nation, because this is what I want you to do. You must not rebel against the goodness I want you to live. Don't persist in breaking laws.

To Know the Difference between Good and Bad

9 Solomon reflected on all these things, “I concluded that both the righteous and the wicked are subject to God's will, and that no one really knows if he will be loved or hated. Yet everyone faces the same destiny, death—whether he is righteous or wicked, good or bad, ceremonially clean or unclean, worshiping God with sacrifices or not; a sinner or not, one who keeps his promises or doesn't keep them. Sin is everywhere on the earth, and the same destiny, death, is for everyone. People are such sinners, and they are filled with madness, and then they all die. As long as we are alive, there is hope, just as a live dog, a scavenger animal, is better off than a dead lion, king of the animals.

“People who are alive know they will die, but a dead person doesn't know anything. They have no benefit from work, and people forget they even existed. They have no emotions; no love, no hate, and no jealousy. These are all gone. They will never again have any part in what happens on the earth. Death is final.

“Therefore, while you are alive, enjoy your food and drink, for this is what God wants you to do. And wear nice clothes and put on some cologne. And enjoy your wife, the one you love, even though life here on earth is frustrating at times, God’s plan for you is to work hard. So whatever you do, do it well. In the grave, where you will end up, you won’t work or plan or know anything.

“Here’s yet another troubling thing I’ve observed on the earth: Fast runners don’t always win the race. And strong soldiers don’t always win battles. And being wise, sharp-minded, and educated doesn’t always mean you will have food to eat or will be rich or have a good reputation. That’s because many things seem to happen by chance. Also, no one knows when he will die. Just as fish are caught in a net and birds in a trap, so it is that people are often trapped by sudden tragedies.

“An example of wisdom that impressed me greatly was this: A powerful king attacked a small town, and in that town was a poor man who was wise, and he saved the town by his wisdom. Yet people soon forgot him. Obviously then wisdom is better than strength. Yet people who are wise, but poor will be despised, and their advice won’t be followed. Yet wise words spoken softly are more helpful than shouts of a foolish king. Wisdom is more powerful than weapons, but one foolish sinner can undo much that is good.”

Solomon carefully observed the life and death of the righteous and wise. Then he observed the same in the unrighteous and fools. He concluded that all are ultimately in My hands.

To Learn Not to Make Mistakes

10More words of wisdom came from Solomon, “Just as flies can ruin a bottle of perfume, so a little foolishness can damage wisdom and honor. Wisdom protects from danger, but foolishness doesn’t. The way a fool lives shows he has no sense, and everyone can see how stupid he is. Don’t quit your job just because your boss gets angry with you. Be calm, and he may overlook your sins.

“Here’s another terrible thing I’ve seen on the earth, a mistake a ruler may make while not intending to. He may put fools in positions of authority and place rich people in low positions, and slaves may ride like princes on horseback, and princes walk on foot like slaves.

“If a person digs a pit, he might fall in it, and if he breaks down a wall, a snake might bite him. If a person cuts stones, they might fall on him and injure him, and if he splits logs, he might get hurt by the ax or a log may fall on him. If an ax is dull, it’s harder to use. But when a wise person sharpens his ax, it does better. A snake charmer is in trouble if his snake bites before it’s even charmed. In a similar way, wisdom may be of no value if it’s not applied at the right time.

“A wise person’s words win him favor with others, but a fool’s words destroy him. A fool’s words are ridiculous, to begin with, and they end in madness. Yet he keeps on talking. Since no one knows what the future holds, no fool can tell another person what will happen next.

“Fools easily get tired of work. And they don’t even know how to get to town. That’s bad news if your king is inexperienced, and if all your princes do is eat and get drunk every morning. But you can be glad if your king is mature, and his princes eat and drink for nourishment and not to get drunk.

“Some leaders are so lazy they don’t fix sagging rafters and leaking roofs. They think eating and drinking are the ways to be happy, and that money can fix everything. However, if you have a bad king, don’t criticize him even in your bedroom. Why not? Because some unknown person, like a bird, may have heard you, and will tell the king what you said.”

I, the LORD, say those who dig a pit usually fall into it, and those who dig in a snake’s nest usually get bitten. Those who carry stones too big for them get hurt, and those who chop wood with a dull ax will get hurt. I will give you the wisdom of common sense, and the strength to make smart decisions.

To Learn the Inevitable Consequences of Life

“Just as trading foodstuffs by sea can give you some monetary return, so you should invest wisely by dividing the money among seven or eight **11** investors because you don’t know if some disaster lies ahead,” says Solomon, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. “Some things you can be sure of. Rain clouds will always bring rain, and in whatever direction a tree falls, there it stays. But if you keep watching which way the wind blows, you won’t plant. And if you keep looking at the clouds to see if it will rain or not, you won’t harvest a crop. Just as you don’t know the way the wind will blow or how a baby grows in its mother’s womb, so you can’t understand what God, the Maker of everything, does. Plant seeds in the morning, and keep working all day, because you don’t know which crops will succeed, whether one or both.

“It’s a delight to see the morning sun. No matter how long you live, enjoy each day, because many dark days will come. In fact, everything to come is frustrating. Be happy while you are young and be joyful in your youth. Do whatever your heart leads you to do and enjoy things you see, but realize that God will judge you for everything you do. So don’t be anxious and try to avoid physical pain, because even the energetic days of youth can be frustrating.”

Solomon now realizes no one can be young forever. Yet, what he did when young will stay with him forever. So now pray for your remaining days. Invest them wisely, and use your resources to please Me.

Fear Me and Keep My Commands

12This is a message from Solomon saying judgment will come one day, “While you are young, keep your Creator in mind. Days of trouble will come, and you will say, ‘I don’t enjoy life.’ In old age, the sun, moon, and stars will not seem bright, for clouds will block out their light. In old age, your arms will be weak, and your legs will be feeble. Your grinders, that is, your teeth, will be few, and your eyesight will grow dim. You will lose some of your teeth (like doors to a street), and you won’t hear the noisy grinding of the grain. You will get up early because you can’t sleep, and

you'll have difficulty hearing birds sing. You will be afraid of heights and of walking down the street. Your hair will be white like almond blossoms, and you will drag along slowly like an old grasshopper. We will each go to our own eternal home, and the streets will be filled with mourners.

“So remember your Creator before death comes. It will be like the silver cord snapping, the golden bowl breaking, the water pitcher being shattered, and the wheel at the well broken. The dust from which the human body is made will return to the ground, and man's breath will return to God who gave it. Much of human wisdom and effort is frustrating.

“Epilogue: The wise Teacher imparted knowledge, and he collected and thought about many proverbs. He tried to explain them in the best way possible and to write words of truth correctly. Words of wise people can be like the stick a farmer uses to make his animals move—they encourage godly living. And they come from God, our Shepherd, whose sayings are like nails, giving security to life. Avoid any teachings that conflict with these. Many books are written and studying all of them can tire you out.

“After everything has been said, here's the final word: Reverence God and obey His commands. That is man's total responsibility. God will judge everything we do, including things we've done in secret, whether good or bad.”

I, the LORD, say learn all you can before the final days make your memory hard; before your eyes become dim, before your mind gets cloudy, and your muscles begin to tremble; before your back bends with the burden of years, and you are no longer able to work around the house; before you begin to lose your teeth, and then lose your eyesight; before you shut your mind to what's happening in the world, and your ears can't hear; before you have difficulty walking upstairs, and you are dizzy with heights; and when your hair is white like the dogwood tree in bloom, Yes, learn all you can today, you have no guarantee for tomorrow.

I AM GOD

The Bridegroom

The Song of Solomon

The sons of David worked in the fields to learn character, just as David learned many lessons as a boy shepherd. In the fields, Solomon met a young dark-skinned Shulamite girl and fell in love with her. It was pure love! Suddenly Solomon was taken away to become king. She was left alone with his promise that he would return. She had dreams and desires, and as the old adage says, “Separation makes the heart grow fonder.” It seemed she loved Solomon more in separation than in presence.

The day came when Solomon returned triumphantly to claim his bride. His chariot came dashing down the country road. “Who is this that cometh out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke?”

This book is called “Solomon’s Song of Song.” But what does that mean? It means that this song is foundational to all other songs because it’s about a relationship of pure love between a man and his wife; which is a picture of the believer’s love for Christ. Christ loves us deeper than a bridegroom loves his new bride, and we ought to respond in kind. This is the best song that has ever been written, perhaps a “Song of Songs” about your love to Christ.

Giving Yourself to the One You Love

1 This is Solomon’s best song. The woman: “Kiss me over and over because your love is sweeter than wine. Your cologne is so nice, pleasing like your name. No wonder all the young women like you. Hurry, my love. Take me with you to your home.”

Friends: “We are glad for you, O woman, and we praise God because he loves you even more than wine.”

The woman: “How right they are to adore me. My skin is dark, but it is lovely like a dark tent in the desert or like Solomon’s tent curtains. Don’t stare at me just because the sun has tanned my skin. My brothers got angry with me and made me work in the vineyards. That’s why I haven’t given much attention to my skin.

“Tell me, my lover, where you are leading your flock today and where they will rest at noon. I don’t want to wander around veiled like a prostitute after other shepherds.”

The man: “My sweetheart, if you don’t know, just follow the path of the sheep. You can then feed your young goats beside the tents of other shepherds. You are as gracious as the pony that leads one of Pharaoh’s chariots. Your cheeks are so lovely, and earrings add to your beauty, just as does your necklace with many precious stones.”

Friends: “We will make you some gold jewelry with beads with silver.”

The woman: “The king is on his couch, enjoying the fragrance of my perfume. He is like a sachet of myrrh between my breasts. And he is like a bouquet of flowers from the vineyards of En Gedi.”

The man: “How beautiful you are, my darling. How beautiful. Your eyes are soft like those of a dove.”

The woman: “How handsome you are, my love. How handsome. And our bed will be green under the cedar beams and fir rafters in our bedroom.”

This ultimate song of love is a picture of My love for you. I will show you My unbounded love. When I, the LORD, said, “I will abide in you,” I also reminded you, “You shall abide in Me” (John 14:20). That’s the oneness You want with Me.

Love Grows in Separation

Solomon's song continues, "I am only a rose from the land of Sharon, a lily in the valley."

2

The man: "True. You are like a lily among thorns, beautiful compared to other women."

The woman: "And you, my lover, are like an apple tree in the trees of the forest. Being with you is like being in the shade on a sunny day, and your fruit is delicious. You brought me to the banquet hall, and your love for me was like a banner over my hand. Refresh me with raisin cakes and apples, because I am lovesick. Put your left hand under my head and embrace me with your right hand. Young women of Jerusalem, promise me by the swift gazelles and the deer that you won't awaken our love until the time is right.

"I hear the voice of the one I love. He is leaping over the mountains and hills like a gazelle or deer. He stands at our wall, looking through the windows and gazing into the room. He said to me, 'Get up, my beautiful darling, and let's go away. Winter is past, the rains have stopped. And flowers are blooming, people are singing, and doves are cooing. Fig trees are bearing early fruit, and vineyards with their grapes smell wonderful. Get up, my darling, my beautiful one, and come away with me. You are like a dove hiding in a cliff. Let me see your face and hear your sweet voice. Your face is so lovely. Our vineyards are in blossom with tender grapes, and so we must catch any foxes that would spoil the vines.'"

The woman: "My lover is mine, and I am his. He feeds his sheep among the lilies. Before daylight comes and shadows flee away, come to me, my lover, and be quick like a gazelle or young deer on the mountains."

I, the LORD, am your rose of Sharon; your fragrance and beauty enhance My life. I am your lily of the valley; I give color and tenderness to all you do. Before the breezes of life make you old, before life's shadows lengthen into darkness, once more return to My presence, enjoy My Word.

The Fulfillment of Love

3 The woman: “One night as I lay in bed, I longed for my lover. I looked for him but didn’t see him. So I said to myself, ‘I will get up and search for my lover in the city streets and squares.’ But I couldn’t find him anywhere. I asked the city guards, ‘Have you seen the one I love?’ Soon after that, I found him. I hugged him and wouldn’t let go of him until I took him to my mother’s home. Young women of Jerusalem, promise me by the swift gazelles and the wild deer that you won’t awaken love before it is time.

“Who is this coming from the desert like a cloud of smoke? He smells so nice with myrrh, frankincense, and other spices and sweet-smelling powders. It is Solomon being carried on a throne, surrounded by 60 of Israel’s best soldiers. Each of them wears a sword; they are skilled warriors, ready to defend the king even at night in the dark. King Solomon made the carriage himself from cedar wood from Lebanon. Its posts are made of silver, and its base is gold, and the seat is covered with purple cloth. The young women of Jerusalem lovingly covered the inside. You daughters of Jerusalem, come see the crown Solomon’s mother gave him on his happy wedding day.”

I, the LORD, came mightily into your desert wilderness where you were thirsty and dying, where you were lost and afraid. I came in My beauty and fragrance; I came to enlighten your Spirit. I came with the many fruits of the Holy Spirit so you could eat and refresh your character. I came to give you heaven’s finest. I sent angels to protect you. I faced your dangers before you knew them. When you couldn’t protect yourself, I brought a wall of protection for you.

How Beautiful, How Wonderful

4 The man: “How beautiful you are, my sweetheart. How beautiful. Your eyes behind your veil are as soft as doves. Your dark hair falls gracefully like goats skipping down the slopes of Mount Gilead. Your teeth are whiter than sheep with their wool just cut off, and their skin washed. Your teeth are

perfectly matched, and not one is missing. Your lips are perfectly shaped like pieces of red thread, your mouth is lovely, and your cheeks behind your veil are lovely and sweet like halves of a pomegranate. Your neck is as grand, and you are as majestic as the tower of David on which are displayed the shields of a thousand warriors. Your two breasts are soft like twin fawns of a gazelle content as they feed among lilies.

“During the night, before dawn and the shadows are gone, I will enjoy your breasts like hills sprinkled with the sweet aroma of myrrh and incense. My darling, you are beautiful, perfect in every way. Come with me from Lebanon, my bride, from the peaks of mountains where lions have their dens and leopards prowl. You have stolen my heart, my bride, with one glance of your eyes, and the glow of a single bead of your necklace. How wonderful is your love, my bride. Your love is so much sweeter than wine. And the aroma of your perfume is more pleasant than any spice. Your lips, my bride, are as sweet as honey. Like milk and honey in Canaan, so your love is a source of joy. Even your clothes have the sweet scent of cedar trees from Lebanon.

“My bride, you are a private garden, and a fountain sealed off to everyone else and available only to me. You are like an orchard of pomegranates with delicious fruits and all kinds of spices—henna, spikenard, saffron, calamus, cinnamon, frankincense, myrrh, and aloes—all the very best spices. You are a garden fountain, pure like a well of fresh water, and as refreshing as streams from Mount Lebanon.”

The woman: “Come, north and south winds. Please blow on me, his garden, so that he, my lover, may enter me, and enjoy its choicest fruits.”

The Father says to bow at My feet that brought Me to earth; praise Me for bringing salvation into your heart. How wonderful My eyes to see all that is, that was, and that is to be. My heart knows your intentions; I love you deeply in spite of your shallow love for Me. Read My words written to all, and how meaningful are My words that apply only to you. My message is a scarlet thread that reaches from My throne to you. I know you because you've talked to Me and I've talked with you.

Love Restored

5 The man: “My bride, I have come to you, my garden, and I have enjoyed its spices. Our love is like eating honey and drinking wine and milk. As God has said, He wants us to enjoy our love like eating and drinking at a banquet.”

The woman: “One night I had a dream in which my lover was knocking and saying, ‘My sweetheart, my dove, my perfect one, please open the door. My head is wet with dew, and my hair is damp.’ But I said, ‘I have already taken off my robe. Should I get dressed again? And I have washed my feet. Should I get them dirty again?’ My lover started to open the latch to the door, and I felt sorry. So I jumped up to open the door for him as my hands and fingers were dripping with perfume as I opened the door. But when I opened it, my darling wasn’t there. So I searched and shouted for him, but I couldn’t find him. The guards patrolling the city hit me and wounded me and tore off my veil. If you, young women of Jerusalem, find my lover, please tell him that I am lovesick and I long to see him.”

Friends: “Most beautiful of women, what is so special about your lover? How is he better than anyone else so that you want us to tell him how you feel?”

The woman: “My lover is tanned and handsome, the most outstanding among ten thousand. His head is as valuable as gold, and his hair is wavy and black as a raven. His eyes are gentle like doves beside water brooks, and they are set like jewels. His cheeks are as desirable as perfumed spices and herbs, and his lips are soft like perfumed lilies. His arms are as attractive and valuable as gold covered with jewels, and his body is handsome like ivory and sapphires. His lips are strong like marble and gold. He is tall like the cedar trees of Lebanon. His kisses are sweet. He is so handsome. Young women of Jerusalem, this wonderful man is my lover and my friend.”

“I am magnificently divine and wonderfully human,” say I, the LORD. I stand unique from anyone else. My purity of love never

changes; it is only matched by My changeless holiness. You are the one who changes because you are so human. When you enter My love, you feel My acceptance. But when you get sidetracked, you stray, or you disobey, then you experience the rejection of My holiness; I don't change when you move into a different relationship. When you change, I wait isolated in solitude; it's then I say nothing to you. I say in the pages of Scripture all you need to know about Me. I wait lovingly, patiently, and expectedly for you to come back to Me, for I do not change My love to you.

Unbroken Communion

6 Friends: “Most beautiful of women, where has your lover gone? We will help you find him.”

The woman: “My Darling has gone to his garden to pasture his flock of sheep and to gather lilies. I am his, and he is mine. He pastures his flock pleasantly surrounded by lilies.”

The man: “My sweetheart, you are as beautiful as the lovely cities of Tirzah and Jerusalem. You are as impressive as an army parading with many banners. Look the other way because your eyes melt me. Your dark hair falls gracefully like goats skipping down the slopes of Mount Gilead. Your teeth are whiter than sheep with their wool just cut off, and their skin washed. Your teeth are perfectly matched, and not one is missing. Your cheeks behind your veil are lovely and sweet like the halves of a pomegranate. If I had 60 queens and 80 concubines and many virgins, I would still choose you, my dove, my perfect one, your mother's favorite child. The young women of Jerusalem bless you and the queens and concubines all praise you. You are as majestic as the rising sun, as glorious as the moon, as bright as the stars, and as impressive as an army parading with many banners.”

The woman: “I went to the orchard of nut trees and to the green valley to see the new growth on the grapevines and buds on the pomegranate trees.

Before I realized it, I imagined I was riding in a chariot going back to be with my lover.”

Friends: “Return to me, O beautiful woman from Shulam. Come back so we can see your beauty again.”

The woman: “Why are you interested in me?”

Come to the garden to show your love to Me. Come to refresh yourself in My presence, to worship Me with the fruit of your tongue. Before you knew it, you found yourself caught up in the excitement of worship; you are in Me, and I am in you (John 14:20).

Come Back

7The man: “O Princess, your feet are pretty in your sandals. Your curved legs are like jewels, like the work of a craftsman. Your navel is as attractive as a glass of wine. Your waist is as slender as a heap of wheat bound with lilies. Your breasts are soft like twin fawns of a gazelle. Your neck is beautiful like ivory, and your eyes sparkle like the Heshbon pools by the gate of Bath-Rabbim. Your nose is as lovely as the tower of Lebanon overlooking Damascus. Your head is majestic like Mount Carmel, and your hair is so pretty that its beauty captivates me. You are so beautiful, my love, and a complete delight. You are tall and slender like a palm tree, and your breasts are like clusters of dates. I said to myself, ‘I will enjoy her body like climbing a palm tree.’ Her breasts are delicious like clusters of grapes, and your kisses are sweeter than the best of wine, flowing gently over your lips and teeth.”

The woman: “I am my lover’s, and he wants only me. ‘My lover, let’s go to the countryside and spend the night in a village. Let’s get up early and see if the vineyards are blossoming with grapes and if the pomegranates are in bloom. And when we are there, we can make love together. There the mandrake flowers with their sexual power will give off a fragrant aroma, and I have stored up at our door rare fruits for you, my lover.’”

Out of the Wilderness

8 “If you were my brother, I could kiss you whenever I want, and no one would question it. I could take you to the home of my mother; the one who taught me all I know, where I would give you delicious wine and pomegranate juice. Put your left hand under my head and embrace me with your right hand. Young women of Jerusalem, promise me you won’t awaken our love until the time is right.”

Friends: “Who is this coming up from the desert, leaning on her lover?”

The woman: “Under the apple tree where you were born I aroused your interest in me. Place me like a seal over your heart, and with this arm bracelet remember me. Love is as irresistible as death, as possessive as the grave, as passionate as fire. Floodwaters can’t drown out love, nor can love be bought with lots of money.”

Friends: “We have a little sister whose breasts have not yet grown. What should we do if someone asks to marry her? If she is a wall, that is, if she has resisted temptation, then we will encourage her, like putting silver defense towers on a wall. But if she is a door, that is, if she has been loose morally, we will enclose her with boards of cedar, that is, keep her from having contact with men.”

The woman: “I am a wall, keeping myself pure for my husband, and my breasts are fully developed like towers. Just looking at me pleases him. He had a vineyard at Baal-Hamon, and he rented it out to some farmers for 1,000 pieces of silver from each worker. But as for my vineyard, Solomon, you can have my 1,000 pieces of silver, and I will give 200 pieces of silver to those who take care of the vines.”

The man: “My lover, as you are in the gardens with friends, let me hear your voice.”

The woman: “Hurry, my darling. Be quick like a gazelle or a young deer to come to my perfumed breasts, which are like mountains.”

I AM GOD

The Holy One

The Book of Isaiah

Isaiah began his career during a time of relative peace and prosperity under two of Judah's kings—Uzziah and Jotham. However, conditions deteriorated, especially on the international scene. During Ahaz's reign in the north, Assyria became a superpower and deported away Judah's sister kingdom (Israel) in 722 BC. During Hezekiah's reign, Assyria ravaged the Judean countryside, and the city of Jerusalem itself almost fell. But Isaiah preached a message of hope and Hezekiah's prayer turned away Assyria.

To view Isaiah merely as a preacher about events during his lifetime is to have only half the picture, because he is perhaps best known for his prophecies about both the intermediate and distant future. Isaiah 1-39 deal primarily with events during the prophet's lifetime, but the latter part of the book is almost totally concerned with the future (from their vantage point in history). Isaiah 40 begins a major section that looks ahead to Judah's intermediate return from Babylonian exile in the sixth century BC, and her return at the end of the age when My people will triumphantly occupy the Holy Land.

Isaiah has many prophecies about the coming Messiah; the most striking relate to Jesus' miraculous birth (7:14), His deity (9:6-7) and His suffering and death (53).

Isaiah Declares Israel's Guilty People

1 These visions about Judah and Jerusalem came to Isaiah, son of Amoz, when Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, were kings of Judah.

I, the Lord, said, "You listen, heavens and earth. The children I raised have turned against Me. Even oxen and donkeys know their owners and care for them, but My people Israel don't know Me. Israel is a sinful nation, filled with

guilt. They are evil and corrupt and have turned away from Me, the LORD, the Holy One of Israel.

“Why do My people want to be punished? Why do they keep on rebelling against Me? Your head is injured, and your heart is sick. You are covered from head to toe with bruises, cuts, and infected sores without any soothing oil or bandages. Your country is in ruins, and your cities are in ashes. I, the LORD, destroyed your land as the people looked on and strangers tore down everything. Jerusalem is empty like a watchman’s hut in a vineyard or in a field of cucumbers. It is as helpless as a city under siege. If I, the LORD of the heavens, had not spared a few people, you would have been wiped out like Sodom and Gomorrah.

“Listen to Me and My law, you rulers and people of Jerusalem. You are just like Sodom and Gomorrah. You offer Me a lot of sacrifices, but they mean nothing to Me. I don’t want any more burnt offerings of rams and the fat from other animals. I’ve had enough! And I don’t want any more blood from your bulls and goats. Why do you bring all this to Me when you come to the temple? Stop bringing Me worthless sacrifices. Your incense is offensive to Me. In fact, I hate your monthly new moon festivals and annual festivals; I’m sick and tired of them.

“When you lift up your hands and pray, I won’t listen. Even though you pray many prayers, I won’t hear them because you are violent, and your hands are covered with blood. So wash yourselves clean. I don’t want to see your sinful ways. Stop sinning, do what is good, see that justice is carried out, encourage people who are oppressed, and help orphans and widows.”

Isaiah predicted terrible times were coming because of Israel’s sin (v. 4). I had raised Israel just as a parent raises children, but My people denied My care and spurned My love. They refused to love Me with all their hearts. They gave Me outward worship, while they thought inwardly of sin or planned their next escapade. Isaiah says, “Stop doing wrong—learn to do good” (vv. 16, 17, CEV).

“I, the LORD, suggest we talk this over. Your sins are like a scarlet red stain, but I can make you as clean and pure as snow or wool.”

I am a rational God and I do reasonable things, and I expect you to reason things out. I invite you, "Let us reason together" (v. 18, KJV).

“If you obey Me, you will have plenty of good crops to eat. But if you don’t obey and you continue to rebel, your enemies will destroy you.” I, the LORD, have spoken.

“Jerusalem, once faithful to Me, has become like a prostitute. It used to be a city known for justice and upright living, but now it’s a city full of murderers. You used to be like pure silver, but not now, and your wine is watered down. Your city leaders have turned against Me, and are friends of robbers. They take bribes and gifts, and never help orphans or widows.

“Therefore I, the LORD of the heavens, the Mighty One of Israel, will punish you as an enemy, and then I will get rid of all your impurities and give you good judges and advisers like you used to have. Then you will be called The City of Justice and Faithfulness. I, the LORD, who is just and righteous, will save those who turn to Me. But rebels and sinners who turn from Me, will be destroyed all together.”

I always offer an open door for you to return to Me after you sin. "I will save My people (Israel) that come back to Me (v. 27).

“You will be ashamed of the times you worshiped idols among your oak trees. You will be embarrassed when you think of the idols you worshiped in gardens. You will wither away like the fading leaves of an oak tree or like a garden without water. The strongest among you will burn like timber set on fire by their sinful ways, with no one to put out the flames.”

A Vision of the Glory of the Last Days

2 This is another message that Isaiah, son of Amoz, had about Judah and Jerusalem. I, the LORD, said, “In the future the mountain where your temple is located will be the most important spot on the earth, and people will go there from many places to worship Me. Many people will say, ‘Let’s go to the mountain of the LORD, the temple of the God of Jacob, to worship there.’ I, the LORD, will teach you My ways so you can follow Me. My law and My

word will be taught everywhere, starting in Jerusalem. I will settle arguments among nations. All nations will beat their swords into implements for plowing and their spears into hooks for pruning plants. No longer will nations attack each other, and training for military service will end.”

There is coming a time of peace on the earth when all wars and war machines are done away with. Swords will be beaten into plows. People will stream to worship Me in Jerusalem. I, the LORD, will settle all arguments from My holy hill among the nations.

“Come, Israel, live by MY light and obey Me.”

I, the LORD, have deserted My people, because they follow the sinful ways of nations to the east, they practice fortune-telling like the Philistines, and they are friends with pagans. They have lots of silver and gold, countless horses, and many idols, bowing down to idols they have made. They will be ashamed and punished; therefore, I do not forgive them.

Go hide in caves, and in holes in the ground because I, the LORD, am angry. People will be humbled and brought low, and I, the LORD, will be honored. I, the LORD of the heavens, have chosen a day when I will put down proud and haughty people. I will destroy the cedars of Lebanon, the oak trees of Bashan, all high mountains and hills, every high tower and fortified wall, and every trading ship and great sea vessel. Everyone who is arrogant or proud will be brought down. Only I, the LORD, will be exalted, and every idol will be demolished.

As I said earlier, people will run to hide in caves and holes in the ground, because I, the LORD, am angry. In that future day people will toss their silver and gold idols to rats and bats. People will run to hide in caves, and under rocks at the tops of cliffs, because of My anger and majesty when I come to shake the earth.

People need to stop trusting others to save them; they’re not able to help.

Before that time of peace, I will judge the peoples of the earth for their rebellion and sin. Every nation will be judged. All idols will be smashed, and all human pride and selfishness will be punished. People will hide in holes from My anger. There is terrible tribulation coming to the people of the earth, and the Day of Armageddon will follow.

Israel's Humiliation

3I, the LORD of the heavens and the earth, will soon take away from Jerusalem and Judah everything it needs—food, water, heroes and soldiers, judges, prophets, fortune-tellers and elders, army officers, counselors, craftsmen, and enchanters. Boys will become leaders, and young children will govern them. People will take advantage of each other, neighbors opposing neighbors. Young people will oppose their elders, and people in how positions will have no respect for honorable people.

A man will say to his relative, “Since you have a cloak, you be our leader and rule this pile of ruins.” But he will say, “I can’t do that. I don’t have any food or clothing in my house. Don’t make me your leader.”

Jerusalem stumbles and Judah falls because they have spoken against Me, the LORD, and have offended My glorious presence. The shameful look on their faces shows they are sinning openly like Sodom, and they are not ashamed. How terrible it will be for them because they have brought trouble on themselves. But it will be well for those who are godly. They will receive a nice reward. But it will be terrible for the wicked. They too will get what they deserve. Young people and women abuse and rule My people. They are leading My people down the wrong path.

I, the LORD, will take My place as Judge to punish elders and leaders who have ruined My vineyard and taken belongings from the poor and put those things in their own houses. They have crushed My people and rubbed the faces of the poor in the dirt.

I, the LORD, say the women of Jerusalem are proud, walking in pride, flirting with their eyes, walking daintily, and with ornaments jingling on their ankles. So I will cover their heads with sores and make them lose their hair. In that future day I, the LORD, will take away all the jewelry on their ankles, heads, necks, ears, arms, fingers, and noses, and their veils, perfume bottles, charms, rings, fine robes, and all their dresses, purses, mirrors, capes, and shawls. There will be a terrible smell instead of fragrance, a rope instead of a belt, baldness instead of fancy hairdos, burlap clothing instead of nice clothes, and scars instead of beauty. Men will be killed in war, and helpless women will sit on the ground and mourn.

The Future Kingdom

4I, the LORD, say in that future day so few men will be left that seven women will grab one man and say, “Let’s all marry you. We will provide our own food and clothing. Let’s be called by your name so we won’t be made fun of as old single women.” In that future day, My Branch, that is My future offspring, will make the land fruitful and lush again. People who will survive will be proud of the land’s excellent fruit. Those who are left alive in Jerusalem will be a holy people.

I, the LORD, will wash away the moral filth of the women of Jerusalem and cleanse Jerusalem of its bloodstains by My Spirit of judgment and fire, then I will cover all of Zion and everyone there with a thick cloud in the daytime and a thick fire at night that will be like a protective covering over My people.

In the future the Shekinah cloud will return to cover My people, just as the Shekinah went before Israel to guide them out of Egypt, I will guide My people with My presence in the future. Just as the Shekinah went behind Israel to protect them from an attacking army, so I will cover My people in the future. Their covering will be Me who meets every need of My people.

In this way My glory will provide shade in the daytime heat and a place of shelter from storms and rain.

I promise a safe place “to hide from the storms and rain.” That doesn’t mean I will keep the storms from beating on you, nor does it mean there will be no storms in your life. It means that in Me there is safety.

The Sevenfold Woe

5I, the Lord, give you this song for My loved one about his vineyard. “He had a vineyard on the side of a fertile hill. He plowed the land, removed all the stones, and planted the best vines. He built a water tower nearby and made

a winepress. Naturally he expected to get good grapes, but they were all wild and sour.

“Now you people of Jerusalem and Judah, you be the judge of My vineyard. What more could I have done? Why did I get bitter grapes instead of sweet grapes? Here’s what I’ll do: I’ll tear down the walls around the vineyard and let the vines be trampled on. I won’t prune the grapes or hoe the ground. I’ll just let thorns grow over it, and I’ll tell the clouds not to send rain on it.”

The story of the vineyard is about ingratitude. I did everything for Israel, just as the owner of the vineyard did everything to grow grapes. He chose rich soil, dug away stones, hauled away trash, and built a tower to provide water and a winepress to produce wine. But only wild grapes grew in the vineyard. It produced nothing. This was a picture of Israel. I came looking for the enjoyment of worship from My people. I want praise, thanksgiving, and gratitude from My people. But there’s silence.

The point of this story is this: I am the LORD of the heavens and the vineyard is My people. But when I looked for honesty, all I found was bloodshed, and when I looked for mercy, all I found was people weeping in distress. How terrible it will be for people who buy up houses and fields so that no one except you has any place to live.

I, the LORD of the heavens, say that these houses will be empty, and these beautiful mansions will have no one living in them. A ten-acre vineyard will yield only about six gallons of wine, and six bushels of seed will yield only about a half bushel of grain.

How terrible it will be for those who get up early to start drinking and who continue until late in the evening. In their wine-drinking parties they play music on harps, lyres, tambourines, and flutes. But they never think about what I have done for them. Therefore, I will send My people away to foreign countries because they don’t know Me. Their leaders will starve, and everyone will die from thirst.

The grave has opened its mouth wide, ready to swallow up Jerusalem’s leaders and its drunken crowds. I, the LORD, will bring down proud people.

Expressions of gratitude are the acid test of character. If you are ungrateful for all you possess—like Israel—I will take away what you have.

But I, the LORD of the heavens, will be exalted because I am just, holy, and righteous. Then lambs will feed among the ruins, and strangers will eat among the ruins of the rich.

How terrible it will be for those who drag their sins behind them as if they were dragging a cart full of sins. They say, “Let God hurry up and do something. We want to see what He can do.” How terrible it will be for those who call evil good and good evil, who say dark is light and light is dark, who say bitter is sweet and sweet is bitter. How terrible it will be for those who are wise in their own eyes and think themselves clever. How terrible it will be for those who are so great at drinking wine and mixing drinks. They take bribes to let the guilty go free, and they put innocent people in jail.

Therefore, just as fire lights up straw and dry grass, so their roots will rot and their blossoms will blow away. That’s because they have rejected My law and hate My Word. That explains why My anger is against these people. I have struck them down, the mountains shake, and their corpses cover the streets like garbage. Even then, I, the LORD, am still angry and ready to strike again.

I will signal foreign nations to come and attack you, and I will whistle to other nations to come quickly. The enemy doesn’t easily tire or get sleepy, nor do they loosen their belts to relax, nor will their sandal straps be broken. Their arrows are sharp, their bows are bent ready for battle, and their horses’ hoofs are hard like flint, and their chariot wheels spin quickly like a whirlwind. They roar like lions and growl as they pounce on their prey and carry them off where no one can rescue them. They growl over their victims like the roaring of the ocean. In the land there is only darkness and trouble, and the sky is blackened by thick clouds.

Isaiah’s Vision of Me

6In the year King Uzziah died Isaiah saw Me, the LORD, sitting on a high throne, and My robe filled My Temple. Above Me were winged creatures. Each had six wings. With two he covered his face, with two he covered his

feet, and with two he flew. They shouted to each other, “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of the heavens. The whole earth is full of His glory.” Their singing shook the doorposts, and My Temple was filled with smoke, a sign of My presence.

Then Isaiah said, “How terrible it is for me. I’m doomed because I am a sinful man just like everyone around me, for I have seen You the King, the LORD of the heavens.” One of the winged creatures flew to him with a burning coal that he had taken from the altar with some metal tongs. He touched Isaiah’s lips with the coal, and said, “This has touched your lips, and so you are now no longer guilty. Your sins are forgiven.”

Then, I the LORD, asked, “Whom shall I send as a messenger for Me to My people. Who will go?” Isaiah said, “LORD, I’ll go. Send me.” And I said, “Yes, go. But tell My people they will keep on hearing what I say, but they won’t understand. They will keep on seeing what I do but they won’t perceive their meaning.” I will make their heart stubborn, their ears closed, and their eyes dim. That way they can’t see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn to Me and be healed.

I, the LORD, called Isaiah to a ministry of failure. I told him to preach, but the listeners would not see My truth; they would hear and not understand My message, and they would reject his preaching. Almost all My servants are called to witness to family and friends, but many of them do not understand and many will not respond. So like Isaiah, you are called to minister in the face of predetermined resistance.

Then Isaiah asked, “How long, LORD, will this last?” I answered, “Until your cities are ruined and their houses are empty, the land is a wasteland, and I have sent people away as captives and their land is in ruins. If a tenth of the land remains, it will be like a stump, but it will be burned like a tree. But just as a stump remains when a tree is cut down, so the holy seed will be like a stump that will grow again.”

Isaiah asked, “How long should I do this?” That was a natural question. I, the LORD, didn’t give Isaiah the answer he expected. Isaiah probably expected an answer from the calendar, that is—weeks

—months—or years. But I wanted Isaiah to be faithful to the end, whether or not he was successful.

Isaiah to Encourage King Ahaz

7 When Ahaz, son of Jotham, and grandson of Uzziah, was king of Judah, Rezin, king of Syria, and Pekah, king of Israel, attacked Jerusalem, but they couldn't take the city. When Ahaz heard that Syria and Israel had joined forces against Judah, he and everyone in Jerusalem were so afraid that they were shaking like tree leaves in a windstorm.

Ahaz and all the people of Judah were afraid. The people of Syria had always hated My people. The king of Syria was angry and ready to attack My people. But their fear was compounded; Israel—the northern half of My people—had turned traitors against the Southern Kingdom. Like brothers who sometime fight brothers, Israel and Syria joined forces again the Southern Kingdom.

Then I, the LORD, said to Isaiah, “Take your son, Shear-Jashub, and go meet Ahaz at the end of the canal from the upper pool, on the road to the field where people wash clothes. Tell Ahaz, ‘Stop worrying and don't be afraid of the anger of Rezin and Pekah. They are nothing but pieces of wood on fire that's dying out.

“‘True, they are coming against you and are planning to invade Judah and defeat it and make the son of Tabeel Judah's king. But that won't happen, because the capital of Syria is only Damascus and only Rezin is in Damascus. In less than 65 years Israel will be defeated. And the capital of Ephraim is only Samaria, and Pekah is the head of only Samaria. If you, Ahaz, don't stand firm in your faith in Me, the LORD, you will fall.’”

Again I, the LORD, said to Ahaz, “Ask Me for proof that I will defeat your enemies as I promised. You may ask for something as difficult as you like, something in the depths below or in the heights above.” But Ahaz said, “I won't test You, LORD.” Then Isaiah said, “God says, ‘Listen, all of you in David's royal family. You have tried My patience. Will you now try My patience again by not asking for proof of what I said I will do? I will give you

proof. A virgin will become pregnant and as a virgin she will give birth to a son and will name him Immanuel, which means God is with us.”

I promised a sign that a virgin will be pregnant. She will deliver My Son—“Immanuel” (v. 14). This a prediction of My coming Son, the Messiah—Jesus Christ. He is Immanuel, God with us.

“He will eat yogurt and honey, and he will soon know the difference between right and wrong. And before that, the land of the two kings you are afraid of will be desolate. I will bring more trouble on Judah and your family than anything you have experienced since Israel separated from Judah. I’ll bring the mighty king of Assyria. In that future day I, the LORD, will whistle and armies will come from Egypt like flies and from Assyria like bees. They will settle everywhere in the land, in ravines, between rocks, by thornbushes, and at all the watering holes. In that future day the Assyrians from the Euphrates will be like a razor and will shave your head, legs, and beards. A farmer will be glad to have even a cow and two goats. And with the milk they give, he will have yogurt and milk. In that future day the lush vineyards, now worth a thousand pieces of silver, will become overrun with thorns. The entire land will be one big patch of thorn bushes, where people will hunt with bows and arrows. People used to dig the hillsides with hoes, but no longer because thorns will be there. Cattle will be loose there, and sheep will roam there.”

Assyria Will Overcome Israel

8 I, the LORD, said, “Isaiah, write on a large scroll in big letters the name Maher–Shalal–Hash–Baz (meaning ‘Swift to the Plunder and Quick to the Loot’).” I will have Uriah, the priest, and Zechariah, son of Jeberekiah, both honest men, serve as witnesses. Isaiah slept with his wife and she became pregnant and had a son. I told him to name the child Maher–Shalal–Hash–Baz, which suggests that before the boy can say “Mommy” or “Daddy,” the king of Assyria will attack both Damascus and Samaria and carry off their riches.

Again I, the LORD, spoke to Isaiah. “These people have refused the gentle water of Shiloah in Jerusalem and they have been glad because of what will happen to Rezin and Pekah. Therefore, I will send against Judah the armies of

the king of Assyria like the flood waters of the Euphrates overflowing the banks. It will flood Judah and cover it like water reaching up to your neck, and like a giant bird it will spread its wings over all your land.

“Go ahead, you nations, and go into battle. But you will be shattered. Get ready for battle, prepare your plan of attack, but they will fail, because I am with you.”

The LORD spoke sternly to Isaiah and warned him not to be like these people of Judah. “Don’t call something a scheme just because they do. And don’t be afraid just because they are. I, the LORD of the heavens, am the one you should regard as holy and reverence and fear.”

Notice I said, “Don’t be afraid of the things they fear.” Not only do you have your own personal fears, but you also let the fears of others scare you with the things that scare them. Then you are doubly weak. Why? Because when people talk about their fears, they exaggerate. The answer? “Remember Me, the LORD of the heavens—I am the One you should fear.”

“Isaiah, I, the LORD, will be for you, a sanctuary, a place of safety. For Israel and Judah, I will be like a rock that will make them stumble and fall, and I will be like a trap for the people of Jerusalem. Many of them will stumble and fall and will be taken captives.”

I, the LORD, said, “Seal up these words and give them to your followers. Wait for Me even though I am turning away from Israel. Continue to place your trust in Me. The names of your children and your name are signs from Me, the LORD of the heavens, who lives on Mount Zion. So why should they go to mediums who try to contact the dead, and psychics, who whisper and mutter? Shouldn’t they contact Me? These fortune-tellers should follow My law, and since they don’t, the light of the truth is not in them.

“Your people will be led away as captives, tired and hungry. And when they are starving, they will shake their fists toward heaven and will curse Me, their king and their God. Everywhere they look on the earth they will see trouble and darkness and despair, and they will be driven into total darkness.”

A Child to Reign as Prince of Peace

9 But that time of gloom won't last forever. In the past I judged the land of Zebulun and Naphtali, but the land of the Gentiles west of the Sea of Galilee and near the Mediterranean Sea will be honored. People who are walking in darkness will see a great light, and those who are living under the shadow of death will see the light.

Galilee, which had been so ravaged for centuries by foreign invaders, was the area where Jesus the Messiah was raised. When Jesus was a small boy in Galilee, the sophisticated Jews of Jerusalem looked down on the Galileans. But those who were the most depraved knew they needed a Savior, so they gladly received the message of Jesus.

I have increased the nation in size and have made them happy like the way people are joyful at harvest time or the way soldiers are happy when they are picking up loot after a battle. I will break the yoke on their neck and the bar on their shoulders, and free them from their aggressors just as I destroyed the Midianites with Gideon's small army. No longer will soldiers need boats or other military equipment. Their blood-stained clothing will be burned, all because peace is coming.

"A child will be born to you. I will give you a son and He will be the nation's ruler. His royal title will be Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace. His peaceful government will never end. He will rule forever from the throne of his ancestor David with justice and fairness." I, the LORD of the heavens, will see that this is done.

The names of the Messiah were described. First, Jesus is Wonderful Counselor: "Wonderful" is a word used for miracles. Counselor stands for One who shares wisdom. He has miraculous wisdom. Second, as the Mighty Powerful God: Jesus has all the power that I, the Father, possess. Third, He is called Father of Eternity, which means just as a father will beget a child, so Jesus is the originator of the beginning of all things. Fourth, Jesus is the Prince of Peace. He gives My peace which is salvation, and He becomes your inward peace over stress and turmoil.

I have spoken against Israel, and everyone in Israel and especially Samaria will hear it. In their pride they have said, “The bricks have fallen down, but we will rebuild the bricks with cut stone, and we will replace the sycamore fig trees that the enemy cut down with cedar trees.” I caused the enemies of Rezin, king of Syria, to attack Israel. These enemies will include Syrians from the east and Philistines from the west. But even then I will still be angry and I will continue punishing Israel. Still My people have not turned back to Me nor have they sought Me, the LORD of the heavens. In one day I will destroy both head and tail; the head are the leaders, and the tail are the prophets, who tell lies. They led the people down the wrong path, and the people were led astray. I did not have any pity on young men, or orphans, or widows because they were all ungodly and speak foul language. Their sin will be like a fire that burns briars and thorns and even entire forests, sending up columns of smoke.

Did you see that evil is described as a “small fire”? Usually evil begins in a small way in your heart. You see, or hear, or touch something that is prohibitive. You think you must have it; at least you want just a little touch. But evil, just like fire, burns everything it touches. Evil burns the belongings in your life. Then evil burns your soul. Then, “Everything goes up in a column of smoke.”

In My wrath, I, the LORD of the heavens, have scorched the land and have destroyed the people as if they are fuel for a fire, and no one tries to help anyone else. Like animals, they will eat but are still hungry and never filled. In fact, they even eat their own children. West Manasseh and Ephraim will attack each other and will then turn against Judah. Even then I, LORD, will still be angry, and ready to punish Judah even more.

My People Are Punished

10How terrible it is for people who make unfair or troublesome laws, depriving the poor of their rights and desolate of justice, and robbing widows and orphans. What will they do when I punish them by bringing people against them from a different country? Where will they go for help? And where will they hide their valuable belongings. They will stumble along

as prisoners or fall among the dead. Even then I, the LORD, will still be angry and ready to punish Judah even more.

How terrible it will be for the Assyrians. I will use them like a club against My people, a godless nation that makes Me angry. So I will send them to grab lots of loot and to stomp down on the people like trampling on mud in the streets. But the king of Assyria won't know that I sent him. He will plan to destroy Judah and also many other nations. He will say, "I will make each of my commanders a king. They have already conquered the Syrian cities of Calno, Carchemish, Hamath, Arpad, and Damascus, and Israel's capital city Samaria. The gods of these kingdoms were greater than those of Jerusalem and Samaria. So I will destroy Jerusalem and her idols, just as I did Samaria and her idols."

I, the LORD, have used Assyria to punish Jerusalem, then to punish the proud, haughty king of Assyria. He says, "I have conquered these places by my power and my wisdom. I took over much of their land, looted their treasures, and killed their kings. I took their wealth as easily as taking eggs from a chicken's nest. I gathered up nations like gathered eggs from a nest with no hen. And no one flapped a wing or peeped in protest."

But king of Assyria, you are only an ax, and so you aren't greater than the one who swings it. And you are only a saw, so you aren't greater than the one who uses it. A pole can't lift the one who holds it, nor can a club swing at the one who has it in his hand. Therefore, I, the Lord, LORD of the heavens, will send a terrible disease on their soldiers, and they will burn with fever. I, the Light of Israel, and the Holy One, will be a flaming fire that will consume the Assyrians like burning up thorns and thistles. I will completely destroy their great forests and fertile lands, like a sick person dying away. There will be so few trees in the Assyrian forests that even a child could count them.

In that future day survivors of Israel and Judah will no longer rely on the Assyrians, but only on Me, the LORD, the Holy One of Israel. A few will survive and return to Me, the Mighty God. My people are as numerous as the grains of sand on the seashore, but only a few will return. That's because I in My righteous way have decided that many of them will be destroyed. I, the LORD of the heavens, will destroy them as I promised.

This too is what I, the Lord, the LORD of the heavens, say: "You people in Jerusalem, don't be afraid of the Assyrians. True, they will punish you with rods and clubs as the Egyptians did. But soon I won't be angry with you, and then I will turn My anger against the Assyrians to destroy them. I, the LORD

of the heavens, will punish them much as I used Gideon to defeat Midian and used Moses to defeat the Egyptian army at the Red Sea. In that future day I will lift the Assyrian burden from you like lifting a yoke from your neck.”

The Assyrians reached Aiath, went through Migron, stored some of their supplies at Micmash, and camped overnight at Geba. This frightened the people of Ramah, and everyone in Gibeah, Saul’s hometown, ran away. People in Gallim, Laishah, and Anathoth are screaming in fear. People of Madmenah and Gebim have left. The enemy will stop at Nob and shake their fist at Mount Zion in Jerusalem, only a few miles away. I the Lord, the LORD of the heavens, will destroy Assyria like cutting off tree branches and chopping down tall trees. I the Mighty One will destroy the Assyrian soldiers like cutting down forest trees in Lebanon with an ax.

The Coming Kingdom

11 Like a branch that sprouts from a tree stump, someone from David’s family will be like a fruit-bearing branch.

The Messiah-Jesus is predicted as a coming Branch. Don’t think of just a tree limb. This prediction pictures a tree that was cut down and only a stump was left. That tree was David’s kingdom. Isaiah’s prediction came true in 587 BC when the kingdom of Judah ceased and David’s line of successive sons on the throne ended. There has never been another king of the Jews since 587 BC The coming Branch is Jesus from the line of David, through both Mary and Joseph. They mocked Jesus on the cross calling Him “the King of the Jews,” but in divine providence, they were right. There is coming a day when Jesus will rule from David’s throne in Jerusalem. Sin will be no more. Then there will be world-wide peace.

I, the Spirit of the LORD, will be with Him and will give Him wisdom, insight, counsel, power, and knowledge. And He will honor Me, the LORD, and He will delight in obeying Me. He won’t judge people simply by what He sees or hears. He will judge the needy with fairness and justice, and He will make decisions to benefit the poor. He will put criminals to death merely by

what He says. Fairness and faithfulness will be as much a part of Him that they will be like His wearing a belt or a sash.

Isaiah predicted that I, the Spirit of God, would rest on Jesus, so you shouldn't be surprised when you read of when it happens. I gave Jesus "wisdom, understanding, guidance, and power," and because Christ dwells in your hearts, He brings to you that same Holy Spirit of "wisdom, understanding, guidance, and power."

Wolves will no longer kill and eat lambs; they will live together. And leopards will no longer attack goats to eat them; they will lie down together. Calves and year-old horses will be safe with lions, and a little child will lead them all. Cows and bears will eat together, and calves and cubs will lie down together. Lions will eat straw with oxen. Babies can play near snake holes, and young children can put their hands in the dens of poisonous snakes and not be hurt. Nothing will be harmful or destructive in all My holy mountain, Zion. As water covers the ocean, so the land will be filled with people who know Me, the LORD.

In that future day one of David's descendants from the "Root" of Jesse, will be like a signal for people of all nations to come to Him, for His land will be glorious. In that future day, I the LORD, will bring back home My people from Assyria, Egypt, Ethiopia, Elam, Babylonia, Hamath, and the coastlands. I will signal the nations and will bring home the refugees of Israel, gathering the scattered people of Judah from all around the world. Israel will no longer be jealous of Judah, and Judah will no longer be an enemy of Israel. Together Israel and Judah will swoop down on Philistia on the west and take loot from the people to the east, and defeat Edom, Moab, and Ammon. I will dry up the sea of Egypt, and I will send a scorching hot wind over the Euphrates River, breaking it into seven streams so that people can walk across it. For the people who survive I will make a highway from Assyria just as I made a road for your ancestors to come from Egypt.

A Thanksgiving Song

12 On that day you will say, "Praise the LORD, because He is no longer angry with us, and He is a comfort to us. Lord, You have come to save

us, and so I trust You and I won't be afraid. You, LORD, make me strong and give me reason to sing. You have saved me."

This chapter predicts "at that time" Israel will be restored from her captivity to the Promised Land. Then, I, the LORD, will "make her sing." That's a picture of Israel rejoicing. But it's also a picture of what I do for individuals when I save them.

"With joy I drink from the wells of salvation."

In that future day you will say, "Thank the LORD. Praise His name. Tell the nations the wonderful things He has done, and how great He is. Sing to the LORD because of the wonderful things He has done. Tell everyone how wonderful He is. People in Jerusalem, shout your praise of Him with joy. Great is the Holy One of Israel who lives among you."

The reason I have saved you and called you to Myself is for worship; Isaiah exhorts, "Praise the LORD and worship Him." And how do you worship Me? "Tell how great I am." Worship is not about your method of approach, it's about My majesty. Worship is not about how high you jump, or how deep you bow; it's about My exaltation. Worship is not about lifting hands or folding hands, it's about recognizing My holiness—My justice—My truth. Worship is about Me, your Lord.

Babylon to Become Utterly Desolate

13 This is My message I gave Isaiah about Babylon. "Flags are waving on a hilltop. Cheer them on in their march against Babylon." I have ordered My armies to carry out this task and to rejoice when they are victorious. Isaiah heard the noise of many soldiers on the mountains. They sounded like numerous nations shouting together. I, the LORD of the heavens, have brought them together to fight in a war. They are coming from distant counties, and I, the LORD, will use them as weapons of anger to destroy the whole earth.

"People in Babylon cry because the time when I, the Almighty One, will destroy is now come. Everyone's hands are weak, and everyone's courage is

gone. You will be afraid, and everyone will be in pain like a woman in childbirth. When you look at each other, your faces will be red with embarrassment. My day of the LORD is coming, a cruel day of wrath and anger. I will destroy your land and every sinner in it.”

Why would I use an evil nation like Babylon to punish My people? I hate all sin, equally; whether it's the sin of My people or the sin of an evil nation. But it's worse when someone sins against light. So I took a powerful nation that ravished every people it conquered and used them to punish My people living in the Promised Land. My people sinned against My commands; they sinned in the presence of the Levitical priest when the sacred chest sat in My Temple. What will I do to you when you know better but sin anyway?

Stars won't shine, and neither the sun nor the moon will give light.

I, the LORD, will punish the world for its evil and the wicked for their sins. I will stop the proud from being so haughty, and I will bring down the pride of dictators. People will be as scarce as pure gold, more rare than the gold of Ophir. I will shake the heavens and make the earth move. I, the LORD of the heavens, will do this in My wrath and anger.

The people will run home to their countries like a hunted deer or like wandering sheep without a shepherd. Everyone who is captured will be killed by a sword. Their little children will be beaten against rocks while they look on, and their houses will be robbed, and their wives raped. I will send the Medes to attack the Babylonians, and the Medes won't be bought off with any amount of silver or gold. The Medes will shoot young men with arrows, and they will have no mercy on babies and children.

I will defeat Babylon, the jewel of kingdoms, and the pride of the Babylonians, just as I destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.

I don't ignore the transgressions of the transgressors. I used Babylon as a stick to punish Israel. But I didn't overlook the sins of those who punished Israel. The Medes and Persians defeated Babylon in 538 BC and later Xerxes completely destroyed the city of Babylon.

No one will live in Babylon. Nomads will not camp there, and even shepherds won't rest their flocks there. But wild carnivores of the desert will live there, and jackals will move into the empty houses. Owls will dwell there, and wild goats will leap around in the city's ruins. Hyenas and wolves will howl from the city's strongholds and palaces. Babylon's time is just about up.

Babylon Punished

14I, the LORD, will have mercy on Israel. They will again be My special people, and I will bring them back to their land, and foreigners will join them as part of Israel. People from other nations will help My people return home, and those who come to live with them will serve them. Israel will take as captives those who had taken them as captives, and Israel will rule over its enemies.

I, the LORD, gave My people relief from suffering, sorrow, and slavery, they will mock the king of Babylon and say, "You, camel leaders, your end has come, and your fury is over. The LORD has crushed your evil power and has broken your sinful reign. In anger you persecuted people and never stopped abusing them. But now the land is at rest and is peaceful, and people are singing. Cypress trees and cedar trees of Lebanon are now saying, 'King of Babylon, now that you are cut down, no one will now come to cut us down.'

"The people who are dead are excited about your joining them. The spirits of the dead, including many world rulers, will welcome you. They will all say together, 'Now you are as weak as we are. You are just like us.' Your pride and the music of your harps have ended here in the grave. You are covered with worms like a blanket, and maggots are like a sheet under you.

"You Lucifer, the bright morning star, have fallen from the sky. You destroyed nations, but now you are destroyed. You said to yourself, 'I will climb to heaven and put my throne above the highest stars. I'll be seated there with the clouds far away in the north. I will climb to the highest place in the clouds and be like the Most High God.'

"But not so. You will be brought down to the lowest parts of hell. People who see you there will ask, 'Is this the one who made the earth shake and made kingdoms tremble? Is he the one who made the world a desert, conquered its cities, and who would not let prisoners go free?'"

Isaiah writes under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to describe the coming fall of a future king of Babylon, but actually pictures the fall of Lucifer. This chapter tells how one of the created angels fell into sin because of pride. Notice the five ways satan sinned, “I will ascend into heaven” (14:13). There are three heavens; (1) the atmosphere, (2) the stellar heaven, and (3) My abode with the angels. Satan attempted to move into the 3rd heaven, that is, into My place. The second thing, satan wanted was to “raise his throne above My stars” (14:13). The stars represented angels and satan wanted first place in the universe to rule all angels. Third, satan tried to govern heaven when he desired “to sit on the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north” (14:15). Satan wanted My role. Fourth, satan wanted My glory when he desired to “ascend about the heights of the clouds” (14:14). Clouds represent My glory. Fifth, satan wanted “to be like Me, the Most High” (14:14). Satan knew he couldn’t be Me, but the closest was to be like Me. Satan could become El Elyon, the ruler of the world which is rendered by the English term, Most High. And today satan is the god of this world.

“Kings are buried in attractive tombs, but not you. You are left unburied, like a branch no one wants. You will be covered with dead bodies of people killed by the sword, kings who go at death to the lowest parts of the world of the dead. Your unburied corpses will be trampled by horses’ hooves. You won’t have a burial because you destroyed your nation and killed your people. No one will remember your offspring. Your sons will be slaughtered for the sins of their ancestors. They won’t conquer the land or rebuild cities.”

I, the LORD of the heavens, have said, “I will rise against you and destroy your children and grandchildren, so they will never sit on your throne. I will make Babylon a land fit for only porcupines, a land full of swamps. I will sweep the land to destroy it like using a broom.”

I, the LORD of the heavens, have made this promise: “Everything I have planned will take place just as planned. I will defeat the Assyrians in My land, and I will trample on them on My mountains. My people will no longer be slaves to the Assyrians. This is My plan in the whole world; My hand of control will stretch over all nations. I, the LORD of the heavens, have spoken, and no one can stop Me.”

This is the message I gave in the year King Ahaz died. “You Philistines, don’t be happy that the king who attacked you is dead. Like a broken rod, he’s gone. But his son will be far worse than he ever was. From the snake will come a poisonous viper, a fiery serpent. I will feed your very poor people and your needy will rest in peace. But I will starve you with a shortage of food and others will be killed.

“You Philistine cities, cry because you are doomed. A well-trained army is coming from the north like a snake. Every soldier is in rank, ready to fight. What should you tell messengers who come from a faraway country? Tell them that I, the LORD, have built Zion, and the poorest of My people will be safe there.”

The Doom of Moab

15 This is My message about Moab. “In one night your cities of Ar and Kir will be destroyed and ruined completely. People in Dibon will go up to their temples and shrines to mourn over Nebo and Medeba. In sorrow they will shave their heads and cut off their beards. They will wear burlap clothing in the streets, and at home they will weep. Crying in Heshbon and Elealeh will be heard in Jahaz. Moab’s burnt warriors will cry out in fear.

“I pity Moab. The people run to Zoar and to Eglath-Shelishiyah, and they cry on the way to Luhith and all along the road to Horonaim. The streams in Nimrim are dried up, the grass is withered, and all the vegetation is gone. The people of Moab carry what things they can as they run across Willow Creek. Everywhere in Moab people are weeping, from one end to another, from Eglaim to Beer-Elim. The streams near Dimon are red with blood, but I am still not finished with Dimon. Those who try to escape will be attacked by lions.”

Isaiah, the prophet, weeps as he sees the coming destruction by Assyria of Moab, Bajith, Dibon, Nebo, Medeba, Heshbon, Elealeh, and Jahaz. These Moabite cities will be quickly—in a night—destroyed. These were constant enemies of Judah, but Isaiah was not quick to rejoice that an enemy was eradicated. But he weeps, as should all My servants when their enemies are punished.

Moab Shall Be Utterly Desolate

16“Moab’s refugees at Sela will send lambs to Jerusalem to ask for help. The women of Moab will be at the crossings of the Arnon River like homeless birds. They cry, ‘Help us and protect us like a daytime shadow. Hide us and don’t betray us. Let us fugitives stay with you, and shelter us.’

“Oppression will end, and the enemy will disappear. Then a faithful descendant of David will sit on his throne, and he will rule in fairness and do what is right.

“We have heard of Moab’s pride, conceit, and empty boasts. The people weep and long for the raisin cakes of Kir-Hareseth. They weep because the farmlands of Heshbon and the vineyards of Sibmah are dried up. The rulers of nations have trampled down Moab’s grapes from vineyards that used to reach all the way to Jazer and across the desert and beyond the Dead Sea. But now mourn for Jazer and Sibmah, and weep for Heshbon and Elealeh because there is no joy over the harvest fruits. There is no joy in the orchards, no singing in the vineyards, and no joyful shouts when grapes are pressed in the winepresses. Weep for Moab as if playing a mournful tune on a harp. My sorrow for Kir-Hareseth is great. When Moab’s people go to their hilltop shrines to pray to their idols, it does them no good. I, the LORD, have said all this about Moab in the past. Now I say that within three years Moab’s greatness will be gone, her people will be hated, and only a few people will survive.”

The Doom of Idolatrous Israel

17This is My message to Isaiah about Damascus. “Damascus will no longer be a city. It will be nothing but ruins. The villages of Aroer will be deserted, with only sheep lying down there and no one to chase them away. Just as Israel will lose its fortress, so Damascus’ great power will end. The few survivors in Syria will suffer the same fate as Israel. I, the LORD of the heavens, have promised this.

“In that future day when Assyria will invade Israel and Syria. Israel’s glory will decrease, and people will lose weight because of the lack of food.”

Isaiah predicts the downfall of the alliance between Syria and Israel, the northern nation. Tiglath-Pileser, king of Assyria, destroyed Damascus in 732 BC. Note that Isaiah predicts the downfall of Israel in this chapter, "Israel's wealth will be gone." The King James reads, "Israel shall be made thin" (v. 4).

"Israel will be deserted like wheat fields in Rephaim Valley after harvest. Only a very few people will be left. It will be like only a few olives left on an olive tree in its top branches. I, the LORD, the God of Israel, have promised this.

"In that future day people at last will think of Me, their Creator, and will look to Me, the Holy One of Israel. They will no longer look to their altars and the idols they have made. They will never again worship Asherah poles or burn incense on altars they've made. Cities Israel conquered will be as deserted as places overgrown with weeds. Israel, you have forgotten Me, the God who can save you, I am a rock where you can be protected. You plant nice flowers and vines. They may bud the very morning after you plant them, but you'll have no harvest. Instead you will suffer endless pain.

"The nations are noisy like a raging ocean, roaring like a terrible flood. They may roar like rushing water, but I will give the word and they will turn back. They will be like dust or like a tumbleweed blown by the wind in a storm. An enemy attacks you at night, but by morning they are gone. This is what happens to those who rob you."

The Doom of Ethiopia

18 Isaiah says, "How terrible it will be for Ethiopia, a land where locusts' wings are often heard buzzing. It sends messengers down the Nile in fast boats made of papyrus reeds to a people who are tall and have smooth skin. Many nations are afraid of them. They are aggressive, they speak a strange language, and their land is divided by branches of the Nile River.

"I will raise My battle flag for everyone to take notice. And they should all listen when the trumpet sounds."

I, the LORD, said, "I will look on quietly from My temple, like the heat on a summer day or like dew forming quietly on a morning in the harvest season.

“Assyria, before you begin your attack, I will cut you off like cutting off ripened grapes. I will cut you off as with pruning shears and will cut off the spreading branches. Your soldiers will be left to be eaten by wild birds all summer and wild animals all winter. People will bring gifts to Me, the LORD of the heavens, in Jerusalem, gifts from the land divided by the branches of the Nile and from people who are tall, smooth-skinned, and are feared by people everywhere.”

Isaiah describes Ethiopia as “filled with the sound of wings,” which is a picture of the swarming insects that cover Africa with frequent plagues to cause continuous famine. Nothing much has changed in Africa; there are still plagues and famine.

Egypt Judged

19This is My message to Isaiah about Egypt. “I am riding on a cloud against Egypt. The idols of Egypt shake in fear, and the people are afraid. I will cause the Egyptians to fight against each other, including brothers, neighbors, cities, and provinces. The Egyptians will be completely discouraged because I will confuse their plans. They will ask their idols for help, and they will try to get advice from the spirits of the dead, and from fortune-tellers and psychics. I will hand the Egyptians over to a cruel master, a fierce king,” says I, the LORD, the LORD of the heavens.

“The Nile will dry up and its riverbed will be parched. The canals and streams of the Nile will become dry, and the papyrus reeds and plants will dry up. Every field will dry up and its crops will blow away. Fishermen who use hooks and nets will die away. Weavers will have no flax or linens and so they will all be discouraged.

“The officials at Zoan are fools and they give Pharaoh stupid advice. They say they come from a long line of wise ancestors. But Pharaoh, where are those counselors now? If they are so smart, they should be able to tell you what I, the LORD of the heavens, had planned for Egypt. But these officials of Zoan and Memphis are fools and are deceived, leading her people astray. I have sent a spirit of foolishness on them so that they stagger and vomit. No one in Egypt, leaders or common people, can help them in any way.

“In that future day the Egyptians will be weak like women, shuddering with fear because I, the LORD of the heavens, will oppose them. The Egyptians will be terrified by just the mention of Judah.”

Isaiah makes an unusual prophecy about Egypt that included both My judgment and My blessing. This prediction comes when Judah was depending on an alliance with Egypt because throughout history, Egypt had been the dominant power of the world. I am telling My people not to depend on a world power for protection, but upon My sovereign power.

“Five of Egypt’s cities will follow Me, the LORD, and will even speak Hebrew and pledge their allegiance to Me, the LORD of the heavens. One of these will be Heliopolis, the City of the Sun. An altar will be built to Me in the very heart of Egypt, and a monument will be set up to Me in Egypt. This will be a sign to remind them that they will witness to Me, the LORD of the heavens, in Egypt. When the Egyptians ask me for help against their enemies, I will send someone to rescue them.

“In that future day I will make Myself known to the Egyptians, and they will worship Me with sacrifices and offerings and make promises to Me and keep them. I will punish Egypt, but then I will restore them. They will turn to Me and I will respond and heal them. In that future day a highway will extend from Egypt to Assyria, and the Egyptians will go to Assyria and the Assyrians to Egypt, and they will worship Me together. Israel will join them and be a blessing to them. I, the LORD of the heavens, will bless Egypt, and Assyria, whom I made and Israel, My special people.”

Philistia’s Chief City to Be Sacked

20King Sargon of Assyria went to Ashdod and captured it. At that time, I spoke to Isaiah and said, “Don’t wear your outer garment of burlap or your sandals.” And he did as I told him. Then I said, “My servant, Isaiah, has not been wearing his outer garment for three years. This is a sign to warn Egypt and Ethiopia not to trust in Assyria because Assyria will lead Egyptians and Ethiopians into captivity with hardly any clothes on. The Philistines who trusted in Egypt and Ethiopia to help them will be afraid and embarrassed.

And the Philistines will say, ‘We turned to these two countries to help us against Assyria. But look what happened to them. So is there any hope there for us?’”

I told Isaiah to take off his burlap outer garment (that was a sign of repentance) and “walk naked and barefooted” (20:2). Some scholars teach Isaiah was not nude or naked without clothes (because of a strong ethic by the Jews against nakedness). So these scholars describe Isaiah walking in his underwear, itself a shock. Other scholars teach that the nature of the prediction—that Assyria would capture both Egypt and the Ethiopians—was descriptive of what Assyria did to its captives. Prisoners were stripped naked, chained together, and deported to a foreign land. So Isaiah’s nakedness was a prediction of what Assyria would do.

An Approaching Storm

21 This is a message about the Babylonians, by the Persian Gulf, the “Desert by the Sea”: “A nation will invade you like a whirlwind from the desert. Isaiah, saw a vision of one nation destroying another and of loot being taken. Elamites and Medes will attack you. You, Babylon, will fall. I, the LORD, will end the groaning of the many nations cursed by Babylon. Isaiah was in pain like a woman in childbirth and disturbed by what I am planning to do. His heart skipped a beat, trembling with fear. The evening, usually a pleasant time, is now a time of fear. You Babylonians continue to feast as if nothing will happen. But officers, get up, grab your shields, and get ready for battle.”

I, the Lord said, “Have a watchman on the city wall ready to report what he sees. When he sees chariots and horses and soldiers riding donkeys and camels, tell him to sound an alarm.” Then the watchman said, “I have watched for several days and nights. Now at least I see a man with a team of horses and he is shouting, ‘Babylon has fallen! All its idols lie broken on the ground.’ My people, Judah, you are crushed like wheat on a threshing floor. But I am only telling you what I, the LORD of the heavens, have said.”

This is a message about Dumah: “From the country of Edom someone keeps shouting, ‘Watchman, when will morning come?’ And he said,

‘Morning is coming. But then night will fall again. If you want to ask again, then come back and ask.’”

This is a message about Arabia: “Caravans from Dedan, camping in the desert of Arabia, bring water to the thirsty. And you people in Tema, take food to the refugees. They are tired from running from the enemy’s swords and arrows.” I, the LORD, say that within a year all the glory of Kedar will end, just as a worker’s contract ends after a year. Only a few archers will survive. I, the LORD, the God of Israel, have spoken these words.

Isaiah describes Babylon as located “in the desert by the sea,” a reference to the alluvial plains surrounding Babylon, that is, surrounded by a sea of sand. This is an amazing prophecy because Babylon has not yet grown into a world power. When Isaiah wrote, both Egypt and Assyria were the most fearsome powers in the world. But I, the eternal God, who lives in the past, present, and future, knew what was coming. So I knew Babylon would grow in power to destroy both Assyria and Egypt. Then almost a century later, a new world power Medo-Persia would destroy Babylon. So in chapter 21 I am accurately predicting the future, “I call those things which are not as though they are” (Rom. 4:17). Because I know the future, trust your future to Me.

Jerusalem Judged

22 This is a message about Jerusalem, the Valley of Vision: “Why are you celebrating on your flat rooftops when the city is in an uproar? Bodies of dead people weren’t killed in battle by the sword. Instead your leaders ran but were captured without a fight. And others tried to get away, but they were captured too.” So Isaiah said, “Let me weep. Don’t try to comfort me as I see my people being destroyed.”

The valley of vision may refer to a valley where Isaiah got this vision of the fall of Jerusalem. Others think the valley refers to the Tyropoeon Valley which runs between Mount Zion (where most of the people lived) and Mount Moriah (My Temple mount). Therefore, this is a vision of Jerusalem itself. In either case, Isaiah describes with

accuracy the fall of Jerusalem. Those who heard Isaiah rejected his message because they thought Jerusalem was the eternal city set on a mountain; no one could conquer her. But I did allowed Babylon to conquer them because of Israel's sin.

“I, the Lord of the heavens, have caused confusion and fear in the valley. Jerusalem’s walls have been broken down and crying can be heard in the nearby mountains. The Elamites are the archers riding in chariots, and the soldiers of Kir hold up their shields in defense. The enemies’ chariots are everywhere in your valleys, and cavalymen are at the city gates. Judah is left defenseless. When you ran to the armory in the Forest Palace, you saw the holes in the walls of Jerusalem. You stored up water in the Lower Pool, and you tore down some of the houses to get stones to repair the city wall. Between the city walls you built a reservoir for water from the old pool. But this won’t help you because you didn’t ask Me for help.

“When all this happened, I, the Lord, the LORD of the heavens, told you to weep and mourn, to shave your heads, and to wear burlap clothing. But instead you eat beef and lamb and drink wine, saying, ‘Let’s eat and be happy because tomorrow we may die.’ I, the LORD of the heavens, said I won’t forgive your sin, as long as you live.”

I, the LORD of the heavens, gave Isaiah this message for Shebna, the palace administrator: “Why are you building a tomb for yourself from this rock? I will send your army into captivity. I will roll you into a ball and toss you away into a distant land. You will die there, and your great chariots will be useless. You are a disgrace to your master, so I will take away your job. Then I will replace you with Eliakim, son of Hilkiyah. He will wear your royal robes and will have your authority. He will be concerned for the people of Jerusalem like a father is concerned for his children. I will give him the key to the house of David. He will open and close doors and no one can close or open them. He will keep firm on his position as a tent peg. He will bring honor to his family. But that day the peg will come loose and fall, and everything hanging on it will come loose.” I, the LORD, have spoken these words.

Tyre and Zidon Judged

This is My message about Tyre: “Weep, O ships of Tarshish. Your harbor at
23 Tyre is gone: And houses in Tyre are destroyed too. What you heard in
Cyprus is true. Your people of the coast and you merchants of Sidon,
mourn in silence. Your sailors crossed the sea, and brought grain from Shihor,
a Nile River branch in Egypt, and harvests along the Nile. You became the
leading center for many nations.

“Sidon, you are a fortress built on the coast. The sea has said, ‘I didn’t go
through labor to have children. I produced wealth without going through
pain.’ When Egypt hears the news about Tyre, she will be in agony over her
financial losses. Flee to distant Tarshish, and be sad, you people who live
along the coast. It’s hard to believe that this has happened to Tyre, a city full
of joy, who sent people off to live in distant lands. Who planned all this
against Tyre, that great city, whose merchants are famous like princes and
whose traders are known everywhere? I, the LORD of the heavens, planned
this in order to destroy your pride and to humble all famous people.

“Tarshish will not be a safe refuge. It will be devastated like the Nile. I,
the LORD, hold out My hand over the seas and I disturb the nations. I have
given orders to destroy fortresses in Canaan. I said, to the people of Sidon,
‘Stop celebrating, because you are now crushed. Even if you go to Cypress,
you won’t find any rest there.’”

*Isaiah’s message of judgment against Tyre extends to the entire nation,
not just this one city. Historically, this was the nation of Phoenicia,
today called Lebanon. Phoenicia was a nation built on a commercial
shipping enterprise. They traded with Egypt, plus all the nations of the
Mediterranean world. Isaiah begins with a statement of My judgment
on this nation yet ends with a message of hope.*

“Look at the Babylonians, who are now nothing. The Assyrians attacked
the Babylonians and made it so desolate that only desert animals live there.
The Assyrians built siege ramps against Babylonian’s walls, tore down its
palaces, and made it nothing but a pile of rubble.

“Weep, O ships of Tarshish, because your part of Tyre is destroyed. Tyre
will be forgotten for 70 years, the length of a king’s life. Then after those 70
years, Tyre will sing like a prostitute. Play the harp, walk through the city, and
sing several songs so you will be remembered. Yes, after 70 years Tyre will be

like a prostitute. But none of what is earned will be hoarded. Instead her earnings will be for Me, the LORD, and will provide food and clothing for My priests.”

Judgment on the Nations

24I, the LORD, will destroy and devastate the earth. You will make it a wasteland and scatter the people everywhere. This will happen to everyone, priests and ordinary people, masters and servants, mistresses and maids, sellers and buyers, borrowers and lenders, and debtors and creditors. The earth will be completely emptied, and much loot taken. I, the LORD, have spoken.

The earth will dry up and waste away, and its great leaders will weaken. The earth is contaminated by the people’s sins. They have disobeyed My laws, not kept My commands, and have broken the everlasting promise.

This section of Isaiah has been called the “Little Apocalypse” because it looks at the judgment of the Gentile nations, looking far into the future to the final judgment during the Tribulation period. These past tense verbs of what I have done are technically “prophetic perfects.” Thus, Isaiah sees the events of the future as though they have already happened.

Therefore, a curse is on the earth, and the people are guilty. They will be destroyed by fire and there will be few survivors. Grapevines will dry up and there will be no more wine. People who used to make music will groan. Tambourines and harps will not be played, and shouts of joy will not be heard. People will not sing as they drink wine because strong drink will be better.

The city is in ruins, and doors of houses are locked to keep looters out. People gather in the streets wanting wine, but all joy is gone. The city is in ruins, and its gates are damaged. The same will be true throughout the world. Just a few people will be left alive, like a few olives left on an olive tree or a few grapes left on the vine.

But those who are left will shout for joy. Those in the west will praise Me, the LORD, for My majesty, those in the east will give Me glory, and those on the coast will exalt Me, the God of Israel. You can hear people everywhere

singing, “Glory to the Righteous One.” But Isaiah said, “I feel terrible. So many people are evil and are betraying each other.” Everywhere people face terror and are trapped by their sins. If you are terrified and run, you may fall into a pit. And if you get out of the pit, you may step into a trap.

Destruction will fall on you from the sky, and the earth will tremble beneath you. An earthquake will shake everything and will cause great crevices to open up. The earth will stagger unsteadily like a drunkard and sway like a watchman’s hut in a windstorm. Burdened down with so much sin, the earth will fall and not rise again.

In that future day I, the LORD, will punish spiritual forces that oppose Me and proud rulers on the earth. They will be gathered together and shut up in prison and then punished. The brightness of the moon and the sun won’t be needed because of the glorious reign of Me, the LORD of the heavens, on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem before all the leaders of the people.

This chapter describes divine judgment when people are partying and getting drunk. I intervene in their self-inflicted addictions to bring punishment. Then I, the LORD, invite My people to break into song, “These songs praise Me, the Righteous One.” Many never thought of praising Me because I judge sin; but when You judge sin, it’s the only thing I can do. It’s the right thing to do because I, a holy God, cannot allow sin to go unpunished.

The Song of the Redeemed

25“I, the LORD, am your God. So you will praise Me. I do such wonderful things and I am faithful in carrying out everything I planned.”

This chapter begins with a testimony of praise, “O Lord, You are my God” (25:1). The survivors of the Tribulation will exalt Me for My great intervention on their behalf. They fall on their faces to worship Me, The strong nations have been defeated, and My people magnify Me. “I have been a refuge from the storms” (25:4).

“I turn cities into piles of rubble, and fortified cities into ruins. They will never be rebuilt. Therefore, strong and cruel nations will honor and reverence Me.

“I protect the poor from the storms of life and protect the needy in their times of distress. I am a shelter from the storms and a shade from the oppressive heat. Even the breath of heartless people is like a storm beating against a wall or like the awful heat of the desert. But I can silence the boastful singing of heartless people just as a cloud can reduce heat.”

When Isaiah says, “I will swallow up death forever” and “I, the LORD God, will wipe away all tears” (25:8), refers to the Jewish millennial kingdom of the future.

“In Jerusalem I, the LORD of the heavens, will make a wonderful feast for everyone in the world. It will be a feast of good food and the best meats and wines. I will remove death that covers everyone like a cloud. I will swallow up death forever. I, the Sovereign LORD, will wipe away everyone’s tears and remove the shame of My people.” I, the LORD, have spoken.

In that future day people everywhere will say, “This is our God. He saved us. He is the LORD, and we trusted in Him. So let’s rejoice in the salvation He gives.” I, the LORD, will place My hand of blessing on Jerusalem. Moab, typical of all Israel’s enemies, will be punished like trampling down straw. Like a swimmer spreading out his hands to swim, Moab will try to save itself. But I will bring down their pride despite their cleverness. I will destroy Moab’s high fortified walls, bringing them to the dust.

Song of Joy

26In that future day this song will be sung in Judah: “Our city Jerusalem is strong because You, the LORD, defend its walls and defenses. Open the city gates so that Israel, God’s righteous nation, can enter. You, God, give perfect peace to those whose thoughts are on You and who trust in You. We trust in You, LORD, because You are dependable and strong, like a mighty rock.”

This chapter opens with the redeemed ones entering the eternal city in the millennial kingdom. They sing a great song of praise in the land of Judah (lit., praise). Their salvation is not just physical, but I will completely care for My people in all ways.

“You bring down those who are proud. You bring down to the dust the city that is haughty. The oppressed and poor will trample it under foot.

“The path of the righteous is easy, and I am the upright One, I make their path smooth. You wait for Me to punish the wicked, and you want My reputation to be known everywhere. Your soul longs for Me both in the night and in the morning. People will learn what righteousness truly is like when they are judged. Yet even My grace doesn’t always influence them to be righteous. They keep on sinning and have no interest in My majesty. Even when I raise My hand to act, they ignore it. They need to see how eager I am to defend My people. Perhaps then they will be ashamed. But since they don’t, let fire consume them.

“I the LORD, will give peace. Know that everything you have done is because of Me. I, the LORD, your God, have ruled over you. These rulers are dead and will never live again. I punished them and brought them to ruin, and no one remembers them. Your nation has grown because of Me. And you have more land than before.

“When I punished you, you came to Me, but you could barely whisper a prayer. When you came to Me, you were like a woman in the pain of childbirth. But in your pain, instead of having a child you produced only wind. You have not brought salvation to others. Yet those who belong to Me will live. Their bodies will rise again. Those who are dead will wake up and shout for joy. By being raised they will be refreshed as dew refreshes the grass each morning.”

I promised, “I will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Me” (26:3, KJV). The promise of “peace” literally reads, “peace, peace,” it’s the Hebrew way of indicating My peace goes beyond human understanding.

“Israel, go home and lock your doors and hide until I, the Lord, am no longer angry. I am coming to punish people for their sins. Everyone will see those who shed the blood of others.”

A Song of the Vineyard

27 “In that future day, I, the LORD, will pierce with a great sword the serpent Leviathan, the dragon of the sea, (a picture of My enemies). In that future day you will sing about Israel, a fruitful vineyard. I will care for it, watering it and guarding it. I am no longer angry at Israel. If I find sin in Israel, like thorns, I will deal with it. If Israel comes to Me for safety, it will then be at peace with Me.

“In that future day Jacob will take root like a vine, and it will blossom and provide fruit for all the earth. I haven’t punished Israel the way I punished their enemies. I dealt with Israel by war and captivity, and I forced Israel out of her land like being blown out by a scorching heat or an east wind. This was My way of purging Israel of its sins. Then Israel will show that they have been forgiven by crushing to pieces the pagan altars, Asherah poles, and incense altars.

“Israel’s fortified cities will be empty like the desert. Cattle will graze and lie down there, and strip the trees of their branches. When tree twigs are dry and fall to the ground, women will pick them up and use them for fire. Because My people are stupid, I, their Maker, will show no mercy.

“In that future day I will gather My people one by one like grain, from the Euphrates River to the river of Egypt. In that future day a great trumpet will be played. And My people who were dying in Assyria and were captives in Egypt will worship Me on My holy mountain in Jerusalem.”

Isaiah says, “a great trumpet” (27:13) will be blown to regather My people into the Promised Land from around the world. Listen for the trumpet sounding Jesus’ return.

Israel Learns

“How terrible it will be for Samaria, the pride of Israel’s drunkards. It is located in a rich valley, but its beauty will fade like that of a flower. I, the **28**LORD, am powerful and strong. I will throw Samaria to the ground with the force of a hailstorm, a terrible wind, a driving rain, or a downpour of rain. Samaria, the pride of Israel’s drunkards, will be trampled beneath its enemies’ (Assyrians’) feet. That fading flower and beautiful city in a rich valley will suddenly lose its glory. It will be snatched up as an early fig is picked and eaten.

“In that future day I, the LORD of the heavens, will be like a crown and a beautiful wreath for My people. I will make My judges want to exercise justice, and I will give My soldiers courage as they defend their city at the gate.

“Now, Israel’s priests and prophets stagger because they are drunk. They are confused, and they make stupid decisions. Their tables are covered with vomit and filth. They say, Isaiah, ‘Who do you think you are? Do you think of us as little children, just weaned? You repeat yourself in silly baby talk, saying, “Do and do, do and do, rule on rule, rule on rule, a little here, a little there.”’”

“Since they didn’t listen to Isaiah, then I, the LORD, will speak to them in a foreign language. I had offered them rest in their own land, but they refused to listen. So again, I will say to them, ‘Do and do, do and do, rule on rule, rule on rule, a little here, a little there.’ Therefore, your scoffing rulers in Jerusalem, will listen to what I say, ‘You boast that you have made a bargain with death and an agreement with the grave so that you will avoid both. Thus, when the Assyrians attack, they won’t be able to touch you. Your lies and deceptions will keep you safe.’”

I, the sovereign LORD, also say this: “I am laying a cornerstone in Zion. It is tested and firm and safe to build on. Whoever trusts Me need never be agitated and confused. With the measuring line of justice and the plumb line of upright living, I will measure the foundation wall you built. It looks fine, but since it is built on a lie, a hail storm will knock it down, and a flood of water could sweep it away. Your bargain with death and your agreement with the grave will be canceled. When the enemy comes in like a flood, you will be trampled. Again, and again that flood will come, morning after morning, day and night, until you are carried off.

“This message will be terrifying. To seek protection from false gods will be as inadequate as a short bed or a narrow blanket. I, the LORD, will come

against the enemy just as I did against the Philistines at Mount Perazim and against the Ammonites in the Gibeon Valley. I will do a strange thing, that is, I will destroy My own people. So you people stop mocking or your punishment will be even worse. I, the LORD of the heavens, told Isaiah of the destruction I have in mind for My people.

“Listen carefully to what I say. Does a farmer plow continually and never sow? Does he break up the soil and never plant seeds? Doesn’t he finally plant seeds for dill, cumin, wheat, barley, and spelt? He knows what to do because I have taught him. Dill and cumin aren’t threshed with a heavy threshing sledge. Instead they are beaten softly. Wheat and barley are easily crushed, so he doesn’t keep on threshing it. They are run over with a threshing sledge but not to grind it to dust. Farmers know all this from Me, LORD of the heavens, who gives them wisdom.”

Isaiah predicts the fall of the Northern Kingdom, calling them Samaria, the capital city. He says the glory of Samaria is a fading flower (28:1, 4) and there is a storm coming that will destroy them. Isaiah accuses them of being overcome with wine (28:1) and being a drunkard (28:3) and given over to intoxicating drink (28:7). They have given themselves to physical pleasures rather than to Me. They stumble and vomit in their debauchery. Do not drink alcohol, knowing it will mock you and kill you.

The Destruction of Jerusalem’s Enemies

29“How terrible it will be for Ariel, another name for Jerusalem, the City of David. Year after year you hold your festivals. But I, the LORD, will besiege Ariel, and the people will weep, and the city will be like the meaning of its name Ariel—a hearth. I will be your enemy; I will surround Jerusalem with soldiers and attack you. When you die, you will call for help from deep in the ground, with only a faint whisper like that of a ghost.

“However, your many enemies will be driven away like chaff in the wind. Suddenly I, the LORD of the heavens, will come against your enemies with thunder, an earthquake, noise, a windstorm, and flame. All the many nations that attack and lay siege to Ariel will vanish like a dream or a vision. A hungry person dreams he is eating, but when he is awake, he is still hungry.

And the same for someone who is thirsty. In the same way your many enemies will dream of defeating Jerusalem, but they will be unsuccessful.

“Go ahead and be stunned and blind to the truth. And be drunk and stagger but not from wine. That’s because I, the LORD, have made you sleepy and closed the eyes of your prophets and seers. This message is like a sealed book to you. Some may say, ‘I can’t read this because it’s sealed.’ Or they may say, ‘I can’t read it because I don’t know how to read.’ So I, the LORD, say, ‘These people honor Me with their words, but their hearts are far from Me. In worshiping Me they just repeat man-made rules. So I will shock them by destroying the wisdom and intelligence of those who claim to know.’

“How terrible it will be for those who try to hide their plans from Me, the LORD. They work in the darkness and think I don’t see them. You people have it wrong. The clay can’t say to the potter, ‘You didn’t make me,’ or ‘You don’t know anything.’

“Soon Lebanon will be a fertile field with crops thick as a forest. The deaf will hear what is read to them, and blind people will no longer live in darkness. Again, the humble and needy will rejoice in Me, the LORD, the Holy One of Israel. Cruel people and mockers will be gone, and evil people will be killed. Also, those who make an innocent person guilty and who tell lies against the innocent will be gone.”

I, the LORD, who redeemed Abraham, say this to Israel: “My people will no longer be ashamed and embarrassed. When they see their many children and the many material blessings I have given them, they will see My holiness, the Holy One of Jacob, and they will stand in awe of Me. Those who are in error will gain understanding, and those who have complained will be willing to be taught.”

Israel Asks Help From Egypt

30 “How terrible it will be for rebellious “children,” people who carry out their own plans and make treaties without asking Me first. They pile up one sin after another when they ask Egypt for help and look to Pharaoh for protection and to Egypt for shade. But you will be disappointed and shamed by trusting in Pharaoh.”

Isaiah warns Judah against seeking protection from Egypt, and not from Me. Judah made plans, but never asked Me, the LORD, for help. Isaiah concludes, "They will be put to shame" (30:3).

“My power reaches all the way from Zoan in northern Egypt to Hanes in the south. But you will get no help from Egypt. You will have only shame and dishonor.”

This is a message about the animals of the Southern Desert: “Messengers from Judah are moving through a terrible desert where there are lions and snakes. Your donkeys and camels are loaded with treasures in Egypt, a weak nation. But they can’t help you, and that’s why I call Egypt ‘Rahab the Do-Nothing.’”

“Write down those words about Egypt, which will be a witness forever of Israel’s unbelief. The people of Israel are rebellious and deceitful, and they refuse to listen to My instructions. They tell the prophets, ‘Don’t tell us what God has shown you. Tell me pleasant things and lies. Stop telling me what God has said. We don’t want to hear about the Holy One of Israel.’”

Therefore I, the Holy One of Israel, say this: “Because you reject what I tell you and rely on violence and lies, this sin will be like a cracked wall that suddenly collapses. It will be smashed like a piece of pottery so that not a piece will be big enough to carry coals or to scoop water out of a well.” And I, the Holy One of Israel, also say this: “Do you want rest, salvation, quietness, and strength? Then turn to Me. But you refused.”

Isaiah promises Judah My rest and peace, "I say in returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength" (30:15, KJV).

“You said, ‘We’ll escape on fast horses.’ True! You may be on fast horses, but those who chase you will be faster. Five of them or even one will chase a thousand of you. And your few survivors will be as lonely as a mountain flagpole. I want to be gracious to you and show you My love. I am the God who does right, and I bless those who wait for Me to help them.”

Isaiah promises My grace to them, but there is a condition to receive it, “Blessed are all they that wait for Me” (30:18).

“You people in Jerusalem don’t need to weep anymore because I will be gracious when you pray for help. I will answer you right away. I have given you trouble, but you will now listen to your teachers, the prophets. If you get off the right path, you will hear a voice saying, ‘This is the way; walk here.’ Then you will destroy your silver idols and gold images and toss them away like a filthy rope.

“I, the LORD, will send rain to water your planted seeds and you will have great harvests, and your cattle will graze in plenty of pasturelands. Oxen and donkeys will eat good grain. When your enemies are slaughtered, you will be blessed with plenty of water. The moon will shine as bright as the sun, and the sun will be seven times brighter than usual. This will be when I, the LORD, bandage My people’s injuries and heals their wounds.

“I, the LORD, am coming from far away, burning with anger and surrounded by a thick cloud of smoke. My words are like a consuming fire. My anger pours out like a flood. I sifted out the nations, and I put a bridle in their mouths and led them away. You will sing as you do when you celebrate a religious festival. You will be glad as when you go to Jerusalem, My mountain, the Rock of Israel, singing while festivals are playing. I, the LORD, will come in My anger, with cloudbursts, thunder, and hail. My voice will destroy Assyria. As I attack them in battle, you will rejoice with the music of tambourines and harps. Topheth, the place of burning, is ready for the Assyrian king. It has lots of wood, and My breath, like burning sulfur, will set it on fire.”

Egypt Will Fail

31 “How terrible it will be for those who go to Egypt for help, or depend on horses, chariots, and cavalrymen but refuse to look to Me for help, the Holy One of Israel. I can bring disaster, and I can do exactly as I say I will do. I will oppose wicked people and those who help them. Remember, the Egyptians are humans; they aren’t God, and their horses are mere flesh, not spirits. When I, the LORD, oppose the Egyptians, I will destroy them and any who try to help them.”

Isaiah has two messages for the people of Jerusalem and Judah. First, they will not get any help from Egypt. I remind them, “The Egyptians are men, and not God” (v. 3). He predicts “Egypt will be destroyed” (v. 3, ELT). In a second prediction Isaiah says, “Assyria will be destroyed” (v. 8, ELT). By looking through My predictive eyes, you can see nations rise and fall. Only I remain.

I, the LORD said, “When a lion kills a sheep, it pays no attention to shepherds shouting at him. Similarly, I, the LORD of the Heavens, will fight on Mount Zion and not be scared off. I, the LORD of the Heavens, will protect Jerusalem like a mother bird flying over her nest I will defend it and rescue it from danger.

“Israel, though you have turned from Me, turn back. The day is coming when you will get rid of the silver and gold idols your sinful hands made.”

I predict the coming golden age of Israel when they will live in peace in the Promised Land. “The time is coming when each of you will stop worshiping the idols of gold and silver that you made” (v. 7).

“Assyria will be destroyed, but not by human swords. Young men will try to escape, but they will be caught and made slaves. Their fortress will fall, and their commanders will panic. This is what I, the LORD, say, whose fire of wrath continues to burn.”

The Righteous

32“A king and his rulers will rule with justice and fairness. They will keep others safe from trouble like a storm and provide refreshment like water in the desert and protection like a big rock that gives shade from the sun.”

I predict the coming of a righteous king, that is, the LORD Jesus Christ who will rule over Israel in the coming millennium. This king will be “like a stream of water in a dry land.” That should remind you

of Jesus who said, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink” (John 7:37).

Then everyone with eyes and ears will see and hear spiritual truths, and they will know My Word and speak it clearly. Fools and scoundrels will no longer be respected. Fools are always busy making plans to do sinful things, lying about Me and not helping the hungry and thirsty. Scoundrels are evil, making sinful plans to destroy the poor and the needy. But good people have good plans, and they will live on.

You women who are so smug and feel so secure, listen to Me. In little more than a year the grape harvest will fail, and you will tremble. Shudder, you smug, secure women. Wear burlap clothing instead of your regular clothes. Beat your breasts because your fields and vines are covered with thorn bushes. Mourn because happy homes and the city of joy are gone. The palace and the city will be deserted. Fortresses and towers will be places for donkeys and pastures for sheep. When My Spirit is poured down from heaven, the desert will become as fertile as a forest. Justice and fairness will be everywhere, and justice will produce peace, quietness, and confidence. I, the LORD, say that people will live in peace, security, and rest. Hail may destroy forests and cities may be destroyed, but people will be blessed as they plant crops by streams as oxen and donkeys roam free.”

The Righteous Protected

33 “How terrible it will be for you, Assyria, who defeated others. Now you will be defeated. You betrayed others; now you will be betrayed. When you stop destroying and betraying others, that’s when you will be destroyed and betrayed.

“I, the LORD, will be kind to you. You have waited for Me to help you. I will give you strength each day and save you when you are in trouble.”

Isaiah tells how My people will call on Me for help, “O Lord, God give us strength every morning. Save us when we are in trouble” (v. 2, ELT). That should be your prayer every morning, “Help me make it through this day; You are already saved from sin, but I will save you in the hour of your temptation, and save you from evil sent by satan.”

“The enemy runs when he hears My voice, and when I stand up, the nations scatter. You will take loot from the nations much like a swarm of locusts eating every bit of crops.

“I, the LORD, am great and I live in heaven. I provide justice and fairness for Jerusalem. Depend on Me your sure foundation, who gives you salvation, wisdom, and knowledge as you reverence Me.”

“Your ambassadors weep because Assyria has refused to grant them peace. So the highways are empty. The Assyrians have broken their treaty and have no respect for anyone. Your land of Israel is barren, Lebanon withers, the plain of Sharon will come to nothing, and the trees of Bashan and Carmel will lose their leaves. “But now I’ll be exalted,” I, the LORD says. “But you’ll be like conceiving chaff and giving birth not to a baby but to straw. Your own breath will consume you like a fire. You will be burned up like thornbushes set on fire. You who are at a distance and you who are nearby, listen to what I have done and see My power.

“Sinners in Jerusalem are afraid as they ask, ‘Who can live here in this raging fire?’ Those who live right, say what is right, reject making money by fraud, don’t accept bribes, don’t listen to plans to murder, and don’t look on evil. They are the ones who will live in a high, safe place and in a secure, mountain fortress. People will bring them food and water.

“You will see Me, the glorious King and the extent of My kingdom. You will think of that time of terror and ask yourself, ‘Where now are those officials who made us pay heavy taxes?’ Soon those proud people will be gone, those people who spoke a strange, foreign language.

“Instead you will see Jerusalem, where festivals are held. You will see a peaceful city, as secure as an unmovable tent. I, the LORD, will be your Mighty One, like a wide river protecting you from your enemies and on which no ships can sail. I, the LORD, am your judge, lawgiver, and king, and I keep you safe. The enemies’ sails hang loose on broken masts. Their wealth will be divided by My people, and even lame people will carry off lots of loot. I will forgive your sins and everyone in Jerusalem will be healthy.”

Destruction by the My Righteous Anger

“Come near, all you nations, and listen to what I will say. Everyone, please pay attention. I, the LORD, am angry with all nations, and My fury is **34** against their armies. I will completely destroy them by slaughter. Their dead bodies will be left to stink, and the mountains will be covered with their blood. The sky will disappear like a rolled-up scroll. And the stars will fall from the sky like dried-up leaves on a vine or shriveled-up figs on a fig tree.

This chapter shows Me punishing Edom, the people who descended from Esau. They have continually persecuted My people, the Jews. Because I love the Jews, you shouldn't be surprised when I punish those who punish My people. Esau's descendants had a historic knowledge of Me and My salvation. When Edom rejected Me, they rejected My salvation; so do not be surprised when I punish those who reject Me.

“When My sword has done its works in the skies, it will come down on Edom, a nation I will completely destroy.”

“Swords are covered with animal blood and fat. Many people will be slaughtered in Bozrah, a city in Edom. Edom's leaders are like wild oxen, calves, and bulls. The country will be soaked in blood and the ground will be covered with fat. I have chosen a day and year when I will pay Edom back for what it did to Israel. Edom's streams will become tar, and her nation will be on fire, which will never go out. For generations, Edom will be desolate, and no one will travel through it. Owls and ravens will nest there. I will bring chaos and destruction to Edom. Her rulers will have no kingdom, and her princes will all be gone. Her fortresses will be covered with thornbushes. Jackals and owls will live there. Wild desert animals, hyenas, wild goats, and creatures of the night will reside there. Owls will raise their young there, as will falcons.

“As you search My book, you will read, ‘The LORD has given His order, and the Holy Spirit will bring these animals to Edom, with none missing. I have decided where each one will live, and they will be there for generations to come.’”

Fruitfulness

35 “In those days the desert will be glad, and barren lands will rejoice and blossom.”

Isaiah predicts the coming millennium of peace in the Holy Land. The land will be transformed and become beautiful and alive. “The desert shall . . . blossom as the rose” (v. 1, KJV). It hasn’t happened yet, but it looks like a beginning. Israel is back in the Promised Land, and the desert is growing roses and oranges to be shipped to Europe and around the world.

“Flowers will bloom everywhere in the desert. There will be happy sounds and shouts for joy. The desert will be fertile like Lebanon and as lovely as Mount Carmel and the plain of Sharon. There will be My glory,” says the LORD, your God.

“If you have tired hands or weak knees, be strong and encouraged. Don’t be afraid, because I’m coming to punish your enemies and rescue you. Then the blind will see, and the deaf will hear. The lame will leap like a deer, and those who couldn’t speak will shout with joy.”

Living with Me in the future will be healthy. I promise, “The eyes of the blind shall see” (v. 5), and “the deaf shall hear” (v. 5). “Crippled people shall jump like deer, and those who cannot talk will shout with joy” (v. 7). My healing will come to earth while now only some are healed. When you get to heaven, all will be healed.

“Water will rush through the desert. Hot desert sand will become a pool, and springs will water the thirsty land. Grass and papyrus reeds will grow where desert dogs used to live.

“A good highway will be there, and it will be called ‘The Highway of Holiness.’ Only those who love Me, the LORD, can travel on it. The spiritually unclean and sinful fools will not be allowed to travel on it. No lions or other fierce animals will be on it. Only those I have saved will be allowed on the highway, and they will go home on that highway, singing with joy.

Happiness will be like a crown on their heads. They will be filled with gladness and joy because all sorrow and mourning will be gone.”

Jerusalem Besieged

36“When Hezekiah had been king of Judah for 14 years, Sennacherib king of Assyria attacked and captured all the walled cities of Judah. Then Sennacherib sent his personal representative with a huge army from Lachish to Hezekiah in Jerusalem. The representative stood on the road beside the canal from the Upper Pool near where people wash their clothes. Three officials in Judah went out to meet him. They were Eliakim, son of Hilkiyah, who was the palace administrator, Shebna, the court secretary, and Joah, son of Asaph, the royal record keeper. Sennacherib’s representative gave this message to Hezekiah: ‘The great king of Assyria says, “Why is King Hezekiah so confident? His talk of military strategy and strength is nothing but empty words. On whom is he depending for help? Depending on Egypt and Pharaoh is like leaning on a broken stick that pierces your hand. Or if you are depending on the LORD, didn’t Hezekiah tear down all except one of His places of worship? The king of Assyria will give you 2,000 horses if you have enough men to ride them. How could you defeat the least of my army master’s officials, even with the help of Egypt’s chariots and cavalry? Also, remember that the LORD sent me here to destroy your nation.”’”

The enemy of Israel lied to My people to coax them to surrender. After he belittled Egypt’s power, he promised them 2,000 horses. Then with an outright lie, he said I told Assyria to come destroy Israel. Remember, satan is the father of lies, and the first temptation of Eve was a lie, “You will not surely die” (Gen. 3:4), and “You will be like God” (Gen. 3:5).

“Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah told the representative, ‘Don’t speak to us in Hebrew because the people who are listening will know what you are saying. Instead, speak in Aramaic; we understand it.’ But the representative said, ‘No, Sennacherib wants everyone to hear these words, not just you three. And your people will soon have to eat their own body waste and drink their own urine, and so will you three.’ Then the representative shouted in Hebrew, ‘The great

king of Assyria says, “Don’t let Hezekiah deceive you. He can’t save you. Don’t trust him when he says the LORD will save you, and Jerusalem will not be given to the Assyrians.” The king of Assyria says that if you make peace with him, then each of you can continue for a while to have your own vineyard, fig tree, and water cistern. Then you will come to Assyria, where you’ll have plenty of grain and new wine.”

The enemy promised Israel freedom, “Everyone will be free to eat the fruit of his own grapevine . . . everyone will be free to drink water from his own well” (v. 16). But Assyria always took prisoners and put them in harsh servitude in another country. In the same way, the spiritual enemy lies to you. He may promise you freedom from a “legalistic church” if you will enjoy alcohol . . . drugs . . . sex . . . but the Devil doesn’t give you freedom. You’ll end up in addition, with broken health, or you’ll die early from a disease related to your sin. You’ll be blinded to the truth, and it may be impossible for you to return to Me; apart from My mercy and grace.

Hezekiah says, “The LORD will rescue you from us. However, has the god of any nation been able to rescue them from us? What about the gods of Hamath, Arpad, Sepharvaim, and Samaria? Have they been able to rescue their people from us? What makes you think your God can rescue Jerusalem from Assyria?”

The people said nothing because Hezekiah had told them not to respond. Then Eliakim, Shebna, and Joah tore their clothes in grief and told Hezekiah what Sennacherib’s representatives had said.

Hezekiah’s Prayer

37 When Hezekiah heard their report, he tore his clothes in grief and put on burlap clothing and went into My Temple to pray.

There is a time to pray desperately. Peter asked Jesus to come to him, walking on water. When Jesus said, “Come,” Peter actually walked on water until he took his eyes off Jesus and looked at the threatening

waves. When Peter began to sink, he cried out desperately. “Lord, save me” (Matt. 14:30). When Hezekiah got the message from the Assyrian general, he put on burlap (a sign of repentance). It’s then Hezekiah prayed desperately.

Then Hezekiah sent Eliakim and Shebna and the head priests dressed in burlap clothing, to Isaiah. They told him what Hezekiah said, “This is a day of distress and shame. It’s like a mother at childbirth having no strength to deliver her child. Pray that the LORD will hear these words of ridicule by Sennacherib’s representatives and then rebuke him. Pray for all us who are left.”

Isaiah then said to them, “Tell your master Hezekiah that the LORD says, ‘Don’t be afraid of these words of insult against Me. I will make sure Sennacherib, on hearing a report of some problem in Assyria, will return to his homeland, where he will be killed.’”

The representative heard that Sennacherib had left Lachish and went to attack Libnah. So that’s where he went. Then Sennacherib got a report that Tirhakah, king of Ethiopia, was on his way to fight against him. Then Sennacherib sent this message to Hezekiah: “Don’t let your God deceive you when he says Jerusalem won’t be handed over to me. Remember what I have done to other countries, destroying them completely. Would it be any different for you? My forefathers destroyed the towns of Gozan, Haran, Rezep, and the people of Eden who lived in Tel Assar. Also, the kings of Hamath, Arpad, Sepharaim, Hena, and Ivvah are all gone.”

When Hezekiah received this letter, he went to My Temple and spread it before Me, the LORD, to see.

Hezekiah went into My Temple to pray. That’s a good place to go to pray when you’ve been out of fellowship with Me. Technically, I will hear you from any place when you pray, because I am everywhere present at the same time.

Then he prayed to Me, “O LORD of the Heavens, the God of Israel, you are enthroned above the winged creatures. You alone are God, and You made the heavens and the earth. Listen and see how Sennacherib has insulted You, the living God. True, the Assyrian kings have destroyed these many nations,

and have tossed their idols into the fire. But these gods were made of only wood and stone by human hands. Now, O LORD our God, rescue us from Sennacherib so that all nations will know that You alone, O LORD, are the true God.”

Then Isaiah sent this message to Hezekiah: “The LORD, the God of Israel, says this to Sennacherib: ‘Jerusalem hates you and laughs at you. Sennacherib, you have insulted, and made fun of, and raised your voice against the Holy One of Israel. Your messengers have insulted Me, and you said you have conquered the highest peaks of Lebanon and have cut down its cedar and pine trees deep in its forests. You also said you dug wells and dried up streams of Egypt. Sennacherib, haven’t you heard that I planned all this long ago? I am the one who decided to let you demolish walled cities into piles of stone. Their people became weak and ashamed. They were like wildflowers, blades of grass on housetops that are scorched in the sun.

“I know all about you, your comings and goings, and your fierce anger against Me. Because of your anger against Me and your disrespect for Me, I will put a hook in your nose, and a bit in your mouth, and I will send you back by the road on which you came.”

Isaiah said to Hezekiah, “Here is proof that the LORD will protect Jerusalem from Assyria. This year you will eat crops that grow on their own, and the next year you will eat whatever springs up where those crops were. Then in the third year, you will plant crops and harvest them. You who are in Judah will be like a vine with deep roots that bear fruit. A remnant will go from Jerusalem to repopulate the land, and the LORD of the Heavens in His passion will see that this happens.”

I, the LORD, say this about the king of Assyria: “He won’t get into Jerusalem, or shoot arrows into the city, or march around it with their shields, or build a siege ramp against it. He will return by the way he came, and he will not enter the city. I’ll defend the city for My reputation and the reputation of David My servant.”

Then at night I, the LORD, sent an angel into the Assyrian camp and killed 185,000 Assyrians. When the surviving Assyrians woke up the next morning, they found the dead bodies everywhere. So Sennacherib left and went back to Nineveh. One day while he was worshiping in the temple of his god, Nisroch, his sons, Adrammelech and Sharezer, killed him with the sword, and they escaped to the land of Ararat. Sennacherib’s son, Esarhaddon, became the next king of Assyria.

Hezekiah's Deliverance

38 About that time Hezekiah was sick and nearly died. So Isaiah went to see him and told him, "The LORD says you need to take care of things because you will soon die." Hezekiah turned toward the wall and prayed, "Remember, O LORD, that I have been faithful to You and have done what pleases You."

I had a purpose in allowing this sickness and announcement of Hezekiah premature death. What was it? I wanted to scare Hezekiah so that he would repent so deeply that it would influence his prayer life. Early in life, Hezekiah was not known for spirituality. The announcement of his death so shook Hezekiah that he prayed so deeply that I answered and gave him fifteen extra years. But Hezekiah was permanently influenced. He later could pray Israel out of danger when Rabshakeh and Assyria defeated every Judean town and almost conquered Jerusalem.

Then I gave Isaiah this message: "Go tell Hezekiah that I, the LORD, have heard his prayer and seen his tears. So I have decided to give him another 15 years to live. And I will rescue him and Jerusalem from the king of Assyria. As proof that what I've said is true, I will make the afternoon shadow go back up ten steps on the stairway of Ahaz." So the shadow on the sundial went back ten steps.

After Hezekiah got well, he wrote these words: "I thought I would die in my best years and enter the gates of death. I thought I would never see the LORD or my friends again. I thought my life was ending like a tent is taken down by a shepherd and was being cut short like a weaver cuts cloth from a loom. I thought my life would end any day or night. During the night I thought You, LORD, like a lion would break my bones. I thought my life would soon end. I chattered like a bird and mourned like a dove. My eyes grew tired from looking up for help. LORD, I am in trouble. Please help me."

Obviously, Hezekiah was moved to deep prayer when told he would die of his sickness; then he prayed immediately from the depth of his

heart. I use experiences like this to motivate you to a deeper walk with Me.

“But there is nothing I can say since You have caused me to be sick. So in my bitterness, I will be humble before You. People live because of what You do and say. And I am encouraged by those things too. You have restored my health and let me live. It was good for me to suffer. And I’m grateful that Your love kept me from dying and that You have forgiven my sins. Dead people can’t praise You or sing to You. They can’t see Your faithfulness in action. But only the living, including myself, can praise You, and each generation can tell the next how faithful You are. You, LORD, will save me, and every day I live I will sing in the temple to the music of stringed instruments.”

Isaiah then told Hezekiah to put some mashed figs on his boil, and he would recover. Then Hezekiah asked for proof that he would worship again in My Temple.

Apparently, Isaiah didn’t get out of the king’s house before I changed My mind and told Isaiah to go back with a second message, “Thus saith the LORD . . . I have heard thy prayers” (38:5). As a result, Hezekiah was the only one in history that knew the year of his death. What would you do if you knew the exact time of your death?

Hezekiah’s Indiscretion

39Merodach-Baladan, son of Baladan, was now king of Babylonia. When he heard that Hezekiah had been sick and now was well, he sent him letters and a gift. Hezekiah welcomed the messengers and showed them his storerooms full of silver, gold, spices, and oils. He even showed them the rooms with all his weapons. He showed them everything in his palace and his entire kingdom.

This chapter introduces the rest of the book of Isaiah, focusing on the coming captivity of Israel by Babylon. After Hezekiah got well of his disease, the king of Babylon sent an envoy and letters to congratulate Hezekiah. This incident led to Hezekiah’s foolish mistake, done in

vanity and pride. He showed the Babylonians “all that was found in his treasures” (39:2).

Isaiah went to Hezekiah and asked, “Where are these men from, and what did they want?” Hezekiah said, “They come from the distant land of Babylonia.” Isaiah then asked, “What did you show them?” Hezekiah answered, “I showed them everything in my palace and in my kingdom.”

Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, “The LORD of the Heavens says that Babylon will carry off everything you and your ancestors have stored up in your palace. And some of your own sons will be taken to Babylon and made to serve in the palace of the Babylonian king.” Then Hezekiah thought, “At least there will be peace in my lifetime. So in a sense, this is a good word from the LORD.”

Isaiah predicts two things. “All that is in thy house . . . shall be carried to Babylon,” and “thy sons that shall issue from thee . . . shall be eunuchs in Babylon.” With this judgment was a word of hope. Remember, Hezekiah did not have any sons. If he had died in the previous chapter, there would have been no heir to the throne. Also, presumably, the line of the Messiah would have been cut off. So when Hezekiah is told he will have sons— Manasseh was not yet born—it was a sweet promise in his ears. What was Hezekiah’s response? “Good is the word of the LORD.”

Isaiah’s Vision of Redemption

40I, the LORD, say, “Comfort My people. Tell Jerusalem that she can be encouraged because her slavery is past and her sins are forgiven, even though she has been punished fully for her sins.”

When turning the page into the second half of Israel, it’s like walking out of darkness into light. (Chapters 1-34 tell of My punishment on Israel and the surrounding nations for their sin. Chapters 40-66 tell of My salvation after I pardon their sins). The cry of COMFORT follows

true repentance, so this is a view of Israel's future, "Her warfare is ended" (40:2).

Someone is shouting in the desert, "Prepare for the LORD's coming. Make a straight road for Him."

Isaiah predicts the coming ministry of John the Baptist who was "the voice of one crying in the wilderness" (40:3). He predicts the spiritual preparation necessary for the coming of the Messiah, that is, the LORD Jesus Christ. The reference to the "valley . . . mountain . . . rough ground" describes My work in the hearts, not just the physical transformation of the planet at the end of this age.

"Fill the valleys and level every mountain and hill, and smooth out the rough spots in the road. Then everyone will see His glory, just as He has said."

This promise is for more than all Israel—the Jews—it is for "all flesh." I take away the sins of the world" (John 1:29). I "reconcile the world to Myself" (2 Cor. 5:19). I am "the propitiation . . . for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2). But not everyone receives My salvation, but I made it possible "for all flesh shall see it" (40:5).

Someone told Isaiah to shout. He said, "What shall I shout?" The answer came, "Shout that everyone is like grass and flowers that die away. They died off because God blows on them. Flowers and grass fade, but God's Word lasts forever.

Messenger of good news, go to Jerusalem, go on a high mountain, and don't be afraid to shout to Judah, "Your God is coming. He is coming with power to rule with great strength, and He will reward people when he comes. He will care for His people as a shepherd takes care of his sheep and carries lambs in his arms, holding them close to his heart, while leading the other sheep."

Has anyone ever measured the ocean? Or has anyone ever measured the sky with a ruler? Who has ever held all the dust in a basket or weighed all the mountains on balance scales? Obviously, no one. In a similar way, no one can

fully understand but Me, the Spirit of the LORD. No one has given Me advice as if he were My counselor. I never asked anyone to teach Me or to give Me knowledge and understanding.

“Compared to Me all nations are small and insignificant as a drop of water in a bucket or like dust on balance scales. All the islands are like mere dust. All Lebanon’s forests would not provide enough wood to burn animal sacrifices to Me, and all Lebanon’s animals would not be enough for offerings for Me. All the nations are nothing compared to Me. In fact, they are less than nothing, totally worthless.

“Can anyone be compared to Me, the LORD? Certainly, no idol is like Me. Idols are made of gold and decorated with silver. A person too poor to present an offering to Me may ask a worker to make him an idol from wood that won’t rot and to set it up so it won’t fall over.

“Don’t you people know? Haven’t you heard that I, your God, rule from heaven above the earth, and that compared to Me, people are as small as grasshoppers? I spread out the sky like a curtain or like a tent. I judge rulers and bring them to nothing. Like plants that start to grow and wither, rulers get established, but then I blow on them, they wither, and the wind carries them off like chaff.”

I, the Holy One, ask, “Can anyone be compared with Me? Is anyone equal to Me?” Look at the sky and ask, “Who created all this?” I, the LORD, am the one who created each of them and I gave a name to each one. I am so powerful that no star is ever missing.

My power will save great numbers in a great way. Isaiah says, “don’t doubt it” but “lift up your eyes to see My greatness” (40:26). I created the stars, and I lead them like a mighty army. There are trillions upon trillions of stars according to recent research, yet I “call them all by names.” If I can keep up with the stars and call them by name, you can’t get lost in My plan of care.

“Israel, how can you say I don’t see you or don’t care for you? Have you forgotten that I, the LORD, am the eternal God, the Creator of the earth? I never get tired, and no one can measure My wisdom.”

“I, the LORD, strengthen tired people and help those who are weak. Even young people get tired and worn out and stumble and fall. But those who trust

in Me will gain new strength. They will be strong like eagles soaring high. They will walk and run without getting worn out and tired.”

Isaiah compares the strong young man who runs mightily, to those who “wait upon Me, the LORD.” The strong faints and fails, but those who enjoy My presence renew their strength . . . walk . . . run . . . mount up like eagles. You are not strong in yourself but abide in Me for strength. Pray for energy to walk. Let the Holy Spirit fill you to run. When I take over your life, you will mount up with wings of eagles.

Protection by Me, the LORD

41 I, the LORD, say, “Be silent and listen, you lands beyond the sea. You and all the nations, come and speak. Let’s settle the matter. Who stirred up this king from the east, who has victory in every battle? Obviously only I, the LORD. I have helped him defeat nations and kings, turning them to dust and chaff with his sword and arrows. I chased them and am unhurt in the process. Who controls things from one generation to another? I, the LORD, do it. I am the first and the last. I am God.

“The lands beyond the sea have seen what I do, and they tremble. Yet they encourage each other by saying , ‘Woodcarvers, goldsmiths, and other workers making idols say, “I’ve done a good job.” Then they nail down the idols, so they won’t fall over.’

“But I have chosen you, Israel, My servant, the descendants of my friend Abraham. I called you here from the remote parts of the earth and made you My chosen servant. I won’t desert you. Don’t be afraid, because I am with you. Don’t be upset, because I am your God. I will make you strong and help you as I hold you with My hand.

“Anyone who hates Me will be shamed, and if he opposes Me he will vanish. You’ll search for your enemies but won’t find them. If they fight against you, they’ll become nothing. I, the LORD your God, hold your hand. And I tell you not to be afraid because I will be here to help you. As I said, don’t be afraid, Israel; even though you may feel small and feel like a worm. I, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel, will help you. I will make you a threshing sledge with many new teeth to crush all your enemies, turning mountains into chaff. Like a wind blowing away the chaff, I will blow away

your enemies. Then you will be glad, and you will delight in Me, the Holy One of Israel.

“The poor and needy search for water and can’t find any. I, the God of Israel, will help them and not neglect them. I will make rivers appear on mountaintops and give them springs in the valleys. Pools of water will be in the desert, and springs will appear on parched land. In the desert, I will plant cedar trees, acacia trees, myrtle trees, olive trees, pine trees, fir trees, and cypress trees. Then people will see this and will know that I, the Holy One of Israel, did this.

“Present your arguments. Can your idols tell what happened long ago, or what will happen in the future, to prove that they are gods? Do something great, so we will be shocked and afraid. But your idols are nothing, and people who follow you are disgusting.

“I, the LORD, will cause a ruler (Cyrus) to come from the north and the east. He will honor My name, and he will defeat rulers like a worker trampling on mortar or a potter treading clay. Did any of your idols predict this? No, of course not. I, the LORD, was the first to tell Jerusalem he was coming. Not one of your idols could answer when I asked them. All your idols are false, who can do nothing. They are as empty as the wind.”

I, the LORD, rebuke Israel for worshiping idols by asking, can they “show us what will happen” (41:23)? No, idols “are nothing” (41:24). Then I again say only I can predict the future.

Jehovah’s Anointed

42I, the LORD say, “Here is My servant! I chose Him and delight in Him. I will put My Spirit in Him, and He will be the Judge of the nations. He won’t shout or yell or be noisy in the streets. If someone, like a bruised reed, is hurting, He won’t make him feel worse. And if someone, like a dying flame, is discouraged, He won’t discourage him further. He’ll see that justice is done. In fact, He’ll keep at it till He brings justice to all the world. No wonder people in distant lands will trust in Him.”

Who is the Servant (42:1) that Isaiah introduces? None other than the Messiah, Jesus Christ. In the end times, He will judge all people and nations. The reference to “the isles” (v. 4, KJV) and “a light to the Gentiles” (v. 6, KJV) points to the worldwide ministry of Jesus Christ. As great as Jesus Christ is, He is called a “Servant.”

“I am the LORD who created the sky and stretched it out like a tent. And I created the earth and everything in it. I give breath and life to everyone. I have called You to do My will. And I will take Your hand and keep You and help You fulfill My promises. You will be a light to guide nations to Me, and You will open blind eyes, free captives from prison, and free those who are sitting in a dark dungeon. I am the LORD, and I will not share My majesty with idols. Everything has happened as I said it would, and now I’ll tell you what will happen next.

“Sing a new song to Me, the LORD; praise Me in song throughout the earth. You sailors and you people who live in distant lands, sing to Me, the LORD. People living in desert towns like Kedar in Arabia and Sela in Edom should sing to Me the LORD, shouting from mountaintops. And they should glorify Me, the LORD, and praise Me everywhere.”

Because of what Messiah will do, you are to “sing to the LORD a new song” (42:10). Sing happily of your redemption. Sing happily of your new assurance. Sing happily because I guide you daily.

“I, the LORD, will march out like a strong soldier, shouting in victory over My enemies.

“I, the LORD, have kept quiet for a long time. But now I will cry out like a woman in childbirth. I will level mountains and hills and dry up green growth on them. I will dry up rivers and pools. I will lead the blind, guiding them along unfamiliar paths. I will turn darkness into light and level out rough places. I will do these things; you can depend on it. But people who trust in idols as their gods will be ashamed.

“You who are deaf, listen, and you who are blind, look. You, My servant Israel, are blind and deaf. You have seen and heard many things, but you don’t really see or listen. I, the LORD, was pleased to make My law great. But you

have been robbed and trapped in pits and imprisoned. You have been made captives. You, yourselves, are loot and no one is interested in sending you back. Will you not pay attention to what I am doing? I am the one who let you be taken as captives, and that is because you did not obey Me or keep My laws. So I poured out My anger on you in violent warfare. Yet even with the flames you didn't understand or do anything about your sin."

My Care for Israel

43 "Descendants of Jacob, I created you, and formed you into a nation. Don't be afraid; I have rescued you. I have chosen you for a special relationship to Me. You belong to Me. When you cross the deep waters of trouble, I will be right there with you and you won't drown. When you walk through the fires of difficulties, they won't harm you. I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, who saves you. I gave up Egypt, Ethiopia, and Seba in exchange for your freedom."

I, the LORD, promise them deliverance through . . . waters . . . rivers . . . fire (43:2). These were both physical and spiritual deliverance.

"I traded their lives for yours because you are precious to Me and I love you.

"You have no need to be afraid because I am with you. I will gather you and your children from the east and the west, and the north and the south. I will bring My sons and daughters from faraway lands, including everyone I have chosen and created to honor Me."

I, the LORD, promised to bring Israel back to the land, long before Babylon destroyed My Temple and burned Jerusalem. I will bring these back from "the east . . . the west . . . the north . . . the south . . . and the ends of the earth" (43:5-6).

"Bring My people together, even though they are spiritually blind and deaf. None of their idols predicted this. They may bring in witnesses to say they predicted what I will do. Gather the nations together. Can their idols

predict anything? Where are the people who can say they told the truth? But You, My servant Israel, whom I have chosen, are My witnesses. You know and understand that I am He. No other God besides Me exists, and there never will be another God. Only I, the LORD, am Your Savior. I said I would save you, and I, not some foreign god, did. And you are witnesses that I am your God. I am God from eternity to eternity. And no one can set people free from Me or reverse what I do.

“Israel, I am your Redeemer, your Holy One, and this is My message: For your sake, I will send an army against Babylon and take away their people as captives in their very own ships. I am the LORD, your Holy One, and Creator and King. In the Exodus, I opened a way for you through the waters. An Egyptian army with chariots and horses lie dead, snuffed out like the fire on a candlestick. But forget the past, because I’m going to do something new. In fact, I have already begun. I’m making a road and streams in the desert. Wild animals, jackals, and owls will be glad I’ll give them water in the desert. In fact, I’ll also provide water for you, My chosen people, so that you can praise Me.

“But, My people, you haven’t asked for My help. You are tired but not from worshiping Me. And you haven’t brought Me animals for burnt offerings. And I haven’t asked for offerings and incense. And you haven’t brought Me any sweet-smelling oil or the fat of sacrificed animals. Instead, you have burdened Me down with your sins. But for My reputation, I’ll remove your sins, and I’ll never remember them again.

“State your case as to why I should forgive you. Adam sinned, and your prophets and priests rebelled against Me. So I’ll shame your temple priests, and I’ll destroy them, and I’ll despise your nations.”

Idols Are Useless

44“Israel, My servant, I have chosen you. I created you, and I formed you like forming a baby in the womb. I will help you, so you don’t need to be afraid. As I said, you are My servant whom I have chosen. I will water your land, and I will pour out My Spirit and My blessings on your descendants.”

How can you not stop reading and start praying when you read what I promise, “I will pour water on him who is thirsty, and floods upon the

dry ground” (44:3)? Who doesn’t want to be refreshed by Me, the LORD?

“They will prosper like grass and like willow trees by streams. They’ll say, ‘I am the LORD’s,’ or ‘I am a descendant of Jacob.’ Still, others will write my name on the back of their hands to show they belong to Me.

“I am Israel’s king, Redeemer, the LORD of the Heavens, and I have existed forever (I am the First) and will continue forever (I am the Last). I am the only God. No one is like Me. Can anyone say what has happened since I made you My people? Or can anyone say what will happen? So you don’t need to tremble in fear. I’ll tell you what My plans are for you. Is there any other God? No. Is there anyone who is as reliable as Me like a rock? No.

“People who make worthless idols are themselves worthless. Those people are blind, stupid, and shameful. Those idols they make can’t help them at all. People who make idols are mere humans. They will stand before Me in terror and disgrace.”

Isaiah emphasizes My high and lofty nature. The idols that Israel was worshiping in Isaiah’s time were nothing compared to Me. I “am the first” and I am “the last,” and “beside Me, there is no God” (44:6).

“Think of how stupid it is to make an idol. A blacksmith hammers out a piece of metal in the shape of an idol. Then he gets hungry and thirsty. Then a woodcarver draws an outline of an idol on a piece of wood. He chisels it, and the wood now looks like a person. He uses wood from either cedar, cypress, or oak trees, or even a pine tree he planted that was watered by rain. Then he uses some of the wood to make a fire for heating or cooking. From the other part of the wood, he makes an idol and worships it. He burns part of the tree to roast his meat and to keep warm. Then he makes an idol from the rest of the wood and bows down to it and asks it to rescue him.

“How stupid are such people. They are so ignorant, their eyes are closed, and their minds can’t think. Idol makers don’t stop to think, ‘I used half of this wood for fuel for a fire and to cook my bread and meat. How can the rest of the wood be an idol? Why should I bow down to a block of wood?’ Actually, this wood will become ashes. It can give him no help at all. He doesn’t realize that the idol in his hand is a lie.

“Israel, you are My servant, and so you need to remember these things. Since I made you, I won’t forget you. Come back to Me because I have removed your sins as if they are floating clouds. Come back to Me because I have paid the price to set you free. Heavens and earth, sing and shout. And mountains, forests, and every tree should sing because I have rescued My people and showed My majesty.

“I am your Redeemer, and I formed you like forming a baby in the womb. I, the LORD, made everything, including the heavens and the earth. I show that false prophets are liars and that fortune-tellers are fools. I turn human wisdom into nonsense. By contrast, I carry out what My prophets say and predict. If they say Jerusalem will be lived in again and Judah’s towers will be rebuilt, it will be done. If I tell the rivers to dry up, they will be dry. And when I say Cyrus will be My shepherd He’ll obey Me. He will rebuild Jerusalem and help restore My temple.”

Prediction of Cyrus

45I said to Cyrus, My chosen one, “I have taken hold of your right hand to enable you to conquer nations to defeat kings. City gates will be open for you and won’t be closed. I will level the mountains and knock down bronze gates and iron bars. I will give you treasures hidden in dark, secret places. Then you will know that I am the LORD, the God of Israel, who has chosen you for a special relationship to Me.”

I predict Cyrus will set Israel free, and “he will rebuild My city” (45:13). I called one pagan world ruler by name over 150 years before he was born. Why? Because Cyrus moved the forces of history to allow the Jews to return from captivity and rebuild Jerusalem (read Ezra and Nehemiah).

“Israel, you are My servant, and in My relationship to you, I will honor you even though you don’t admit that I am the only true God. I am the only God; there is no other. I will make you strong against your enemies, even though you don’t know Me. From east to west everyone will know that I am the LORD and that there are no other gods. I create light and darkness, good and bad times.”

Isaiah writes two unusual statements about Me, "I form the light and create darkness" (45:7). That's easy to explain before creation there was only Me; nothing else existed. There was no light and no darkness. So on the second day, I created light and two days later created light holders, that is, the sun and stars. And what is darkness but the absence of light? Then I say, "I make peace and create evil" (45:7). That's tough for you to interpret because it seems that I am the author of evil. The Hebrew word here is "trouble" not "evil," which means I can send problems or difficult circumstances ("good and bad times"). I didn't create evil, but I created the situation where evil was formed. I gave Adam and Eve free choice, that is, the liberty to do right or wrong. When they chose to disobey Me, sin or evil was introduced into the world. Thank Me for your freedom. At times your freedom has gotten you in trouble, but when you chose Christ as your Savior, you became a follower of Jesus Christ.

"Let the skies pour out justice like rain. Salvation and justice will spring up like flowers." I, the LORD, will do all this.

"How terrible it will be for anyone who disagrees with Me. He is like a clay pot asking the potter, 'Why did you make me this way?' And he doesn't say, 'You are so clumsy as if you had no hands.' How terrible it will be for anyone who says to his parents, 'Why did you bring me into the world?' As I said, I am the Holy One of Israel and Your Creator. How can you dare ask Me questions about what I will do? I created the earth, and I put people on it. And I made the heavens and filled it with many stars. I will raise up Cyrus, and I will guide him on smooth roads. He will rebuild My city Jerusalem and set My captives free without paying for it at all." Remember, I, the LORD of the Heavens, say all this.

"The riches of Egypt and Ethiopia will be yours, Cyrus, and the people of Seba will be your captives. They will say, 'We know God is with you and that there is no other.' I, your God, work behind the scenes, but yet I am your Savior. People who make idols will be ashamed and dishonored. But I will save Israel and they will never be ashamed and dishonored throughout endless ages.

"I God created the heavens, and made the earth, not for it to be empty, but for people to live in it. I could do this because I am the LORD and there is no other. I haven't spoken in secrets, and I didn't tell you to search for me in

vain. I always spoke the truth. To every freed captive I say, ‘Realize how stupid it is to worship wooden idols or to pray to gods that can’t help.’ Argue your case with proof that idol worship is good. I told you long ago what would happen. I am the only God, a just God with power to save.

“Invite everyone to look to Me for salvation. I am God, and there is no other. What I have said will come true. Everyone will bow down and worship Me. They will admit that I am just. And anyone who is angry with Me will come to Me and be ashamed. I will give victory to all of Israel.”

Israel’s Folly in Trusting Idols

46“The idols of Babylon, Bel, and Nebo are being hauled off on ox carts. But the oxen are stumbling, and the idols are falling off the carts. The idols and the people go off as captives together. You survivors in Israel, listen to Me. I created you and cared for you from the day you were born. And I’ll care for you even when you are old and gray. I created you, I will take care of you, and I will rescue you from trouble.

“Can you compare Me with anyone? Some people hire a goldsmith to make an idol from their silver and gold. Then they bow down and worship it. In fact, they carry the idol around on their shoulders, and when they set it down it can’t move. And when they ask it for help from their troubles, it has no answer and no power to help him.

“Don’t forget this, you sinners. Remember what I’ve done in the past, and that I am God and that no one is like Me. Only I can tell you in advance what will happen, and I do whatever I wish. I will call that bird of prey, Cyrus, from the East, and he will do what I want him to do. You stubborn people, listen to Me. You are far from doing what is right. But I will come to rescue you because I am not far away. I will restore Jerusalem, and I will give my honor to Israel.”

Babylon Destroyed

47“City of Babylon, you were unconquered. But you sit in the dust without a throne. You will no longer be lovely like a tender plant. Grind corn. Remove your veil and your fancy clothes as you cross the streams. You will

be naked and ashamed. I will take revenge against you. I am your Redeemer, the LORD of the Heavens, the Holy One of Israel.

“Babylon, sit in the dark. No one will ever again think of you as their queen. I was angry with My people, so I let you conquer them, and you even made older people carry heavy loads. You thought you would be a queen forever. But you didn’t think about what could happen to you. Listen, you wealthy, pleasure-seeking nation, you think you are secure as you brag that you are the greatest. You say you’ll never be a widow or lose any of your children. But you are wrong. In a moment you will become a widow and lose your children, in spite of your relying on demonic power and magic.

“You’ve thought no one sees you in all your sin. You thought you were wise in saying that you are the greatest. But suddenly disaster will come, and you won’t be able to buy your way out. This catastrophe will come so quickly you won’t know what happened.

“You have been involved in demonic power and magic ever since your nation was founded. Keep using these powers and see if they will help you. You are worn out trying to know the future by studying the stars and making predictions every month. Let these astrologers help you. But they are as worthless as straw burning in a fire. They can’t even save themselves, and their fire can’t make you warm. People you’ve known and with whom you’ve done business since you were a child can’t help you.”

I knew that Babylon would fall in one day to the Medo-Persians (Dan. 5), so I wrote, “In a moment in one day” (47:9). I know the big things that will happen in the future, but I also know the small isolated things that will happen in each and every day. It’s secure to trust Me, a God like that.

I, The Lord God, Will Redeem Israel

48“Listen, Israel and you who are from the tribe of Judah, You make promises to Me, but you are lying.”

What Isaiah said about the ancient people of Israel is true about many modern believers. They “make mention of the God of Israel, but not in

truth, nor in righteousness. (48:1, KJV).

“You say you are citizens of Jerusalem and that you depend on Me, the LORD of the Heavens. I told what will happen in the future. Then suddenly I made it happen.

“You are so stubborn. Your neck was stiff like iron, and your forehead was as hard as bronze. I told you what I was going to do so you couldn’t say your idols of wood or metal did them. You’ve seen what I predicted, but you won’t admit I did it all. Now I will tell you new things I haven’t mentioned before. These are new and recent, so you can’t say you already knew it. You were never willing to hear these things before, because you are so rebellious even from the day you were born. But I will delay sending My wrath against you so that you will praise Me.”

I should have punished Israel long before Isaiah’s day, but I said, “For my name’s sake will I defer mine anger” (48:9).

“I tested you in your troubles, but not in the way silver is refined in a furnace. I will rescue you because of who I am. I will not let other nations claim their gods helped them.

“Listen, Israel, My chosen people. I alone have existed forever (I am the First) and I will continue forever (I am the Last). With My own hand, I made the earth and the sky. I spoke, and they came into being. Come and listen to Me. Has any of your idols told you that Cyrus, my ally, will destroy the Babylonians? Yes, I chose him. I will bring him against you, and he will succeed. And listen to this too: I have never spoken secretly. I have always spoken plainly so that you would understand.”

Isaiah received this message from Me, the Sovereign LORD: “I am the one who rescues you; I am the Holy One of Israel. I am the LORD your God who teaches you what is best, and I lead you on the right path.

“If you had obeyed My commands, you would have had peace like a gentle, flowing river and your upright way would have been as continuous as the waves of the sea. And you would have had as many descendants as grains of sand on the seashore. And you would not be destroyed.

“Now, Israel, leave Babylon! Be happy for your release and shout for everyone to hear, ‘The LORD has rescued His servant, Israel. When He led us through the desert centuries earlier, we were not thirsty because the LORD gave us water from a rock.’ But I say that the wicked will have no peace.”

My Servant

49“Listen, you people in distant lands. Before I, the Messiah, was born, the LORD chose Me. He has made My words pierce like a sharp sword or arrow. He said to Me, ‘You are My servant. And because of You, I will display My greatness. My work seems useless and for nothing. Yet I did it all for the LORD, and He will reward Me.’”

Now I, the LORD, say, “I formed You in the womb to be My servant, and to lead the people of Israel back to Me. He has honored Me and strengthened Me.” He also said, “But You will be more than My servant in restoring My people back to Me. You will also be a light for the nations and You will bring salvation to everyone on the earth.” And I, the LORD, said, “I will rescue My people, though many people despise and reject You and treat You like a servant of rulers. But kings and rulers will honor You. I will be faithful for I am the Holy One of Israel who has chosen You.”

I, the LORD say this: “At just the right time I will rescue You, My servant. You will fulfill My promise to Israel to rebuild her land.”

This chapter describes how I will bring My people the Jews back to the Promised Land in the coming millennium. This period is also called the kingdom. Israel describes the land as “desolate” (49:8, KJV) but I will “raise up the tribes of Jacob” (49:6, KJV).

“I will set captives free to return to their land. My people will find plenty to eat even on hillsides. They won’t be hungry or thirsty, and the sun and desert heat won’t hurt them. I will guide them with My tender love beside streams of water. I will make My mountains level for them, and I will raise my highways. My people will return from lands in the north and the west and from Aswan in Egypt.

“Heavens, earth, and mountains, rejoice in Me, because I will give comfort and tender love. You may say I have forgotten you. But could a

mother forget her nursing baby? Could she not love a child to whom she gave birth? Even if she could reject her child, I won't forget you. I have written your name on the palm of My hand. I always think about you."

Jerusalem is called the Eternal City, and it has a special place in My heart. I say, "I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands; your walls are continually before Me" (49:15-16, NKJV).

"Your descendants will return, and those who destroyed your city will leave. Look up and you will see all your sons coming back. Your people will be like a bride's jewelry. True, Jerusalem is in ruins now, and your land is deserted. But it will be rebuilt and repopulated, and your enemies will be gone.

"People born when you were in captivity will say, 'This is too crowded. We need more space.' But you will ask, 'How could I be their mother when I was all alone as a captive. Who bore these children and raised them?'"

I, the LORD, also say this: "I will order godless nations to bring back your children to you."

This chapter is about more than Jews. It shows My plan for the Gentiles. Isaiah asks for the distant lands" to listen to Me. "Take heed, you people from afar" (49:1, NKJV). Then I, the LORD, say, "Behold, I will lift up Mine hand to the Gentiles" (49:22). A Gentile is anyone who is not a physical Jew. I have a plan for them. I love the world.

"Kings and queens will bow down before you. This way you will know that I am the LORD, and by trusting in Me you won't be disappointed. Can loot be taken from soldiers? Who can rescue your children from tyrants? Captives of warriors will be released, and your loot will be retrieved. I'll fight for you, and I'll rescue your children. I will make your enemies eat their own flesh and drink their own blood. Then everyone will know that I, the LORD, am your Savior and that I, the Mighty One of Israel, will rescue you."

Jehovah's Servant is Humble

50 I, the LORD say, “Has your mother gone away because I divorced her? Did I send you away to pay for debts? No, I divorced her and sold you because of your sins. When I come home, the house is silent and empty. Why? Is it because I don’t have the power to rescue? No. Just with a word, I can turn the sea and rivers into a desert, and then fish die and stink.”

Isaiah is pleading the case why I will save Israel in the future. Isaiah quotes Me, “Is My hand shortened at all, that it cannot redeem” (50:2, KJV)? This question applies to you today. I say My “hand is not shortened that it cannot save” (59:1, KJV). Then I add a condition, “but your iniquities have separated between you and Me, and your sins have hid My face from you” (59:2). Come to Me through Jesus Christ your High Priest (Heb. 7:25), and come through His blood (1 John 1:7).

“I can make the sky dark like burlap clothing.

“I, the Sovereign LORD, give the right words to say to comfort the weary. Every morning you wake Me up eager to learn from Me. When you pray, I don’t refuse to listen. I let them beat my back and pull out my beard. I didn’t resist when they made fun of me and spit in my face.”

This passage has the only reference that Jesus Christ had a beard. It shares the physical suffering He endured for you. He went through shame and rejection for you.

“But I, the Sovereign LORD, helped you, and was not ashamed. Do not give up; determine to do My will and know I will support you. Your defender is near. So who can accuse you now? Let your accuser confront Me, your Sovereign LORD, who is your helper. In fact, they will all be destroyed like old cloths eaten by moths.

“Not one of you reverence Me, the LORD, or obeys My servant. You walk in the darkness of confusion and sin. But you should trust in Me your LORD. Go ahead and walk in the light of your own fires.”

Those who “fear Me” may even find themselves walking in “the dark and have no light” (50:10), because the whole world is darkened by sin. What should that believer do? Isaiah says, “Let him trust in the name of the LORD” (50:10, KJV). So that person should “kindle a fire” (50:11, NKJV), then “walk in the light of his fire” (50:11, NKJV). Jesus, You are the light of the world. When He came into your heart, He brought light. So read the Scriptures daily to “light your own fires” and walk daily by the light you get from My Word.

“But I, the LORD, will punish you, and you will lie down in torment.”

An Appeal to Israel

51 “You who follow Me, the LORD, and do what is right, look to the rock from which you were cut. Abraham and Sarah, your ancestors, were that rock. From that one man came many descendants and a great nation. Zion is in ruin, but I, the LORD, will comfort her and look on her with tender love. Her deserts will be lovely like the Garden of Eden. She will be joyful and glad, and she will be thankful and will sing.”

The LORD says, “Listen, My people. Listen, O Israel. My law will be known, and justice will be a light to the nations. Righteousness, deliverance, and justice will come to the nations. People who live in far-off countries will wait for Me to rescue them by My power. Look up at the sky and the earth. The stars will disappear like smoke, and the earth will wear out like cloths. Everyone will die like flies. But My deliverance will last forever, and My upright rule will never fail. Listen, you people who know right from wrong and who obey My law, don’t be afraid of people’s criticisms or insults. They will be eaten away like a garment eaten by moths and like wool eaten by worms. But My deliverance will last forever, and My upright rule will never fail.

“I, the LORD, will wake up strong. I defeated the sea monster Rahab, a name for Egypt. I dried up the Red Sea and made a road in the middle of the sea, so My people could go across safely. Those I have rescued will return to Jerusalem, singing along the way. They will be glad and joyful, and sorrow and mourning will disappear.”

I also promise a great entrance into My millennial kingdom. “The redeemed of the LORD should return and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head” (51:11, KJV).

“I, the LORD, comfort you. So why do you fear mere humans? They will dry up like grass. Why have you forgotten Me, the LORD, who made you and the heavens and the earth. Every day you lived in fear of those who in their anger wanted to destroy you. But where are they now? Prisoners will soon be set free. They won’t die in dungeons, and they will no longer be hungry. I am the LORD your God. I, the LORD of the Heavens, cause ocean waves to roar. I have told you what to say, and you are safe in My hand. I set all the stars in place and I created the earth, and I say to Israel ‘You are mine.’

“Wake up, Jerusalem. You have drunk from My cup of anger, swallowing every drop. And you can’t even walk straight. Not one of your many children can guide you or help you. You have experienced death by famine and by the sword, and how can I comfort you? On every street corner, your children have fainted and lie in the streets, helpless as a deer caught in a net. I, the LORD, am angry with you.

“You people are in a stupor from troubles, but not from drinking. Hear what I say, the Sovereign LORD, your Defender. “I am taking from you the cup of My wrath. You will never be forced to drink from it again. I will give the cup of My wrath to your tormentors who wanted you to lie down, so they could walk over you and trample on your backs.”

The Watchmen’s Response

52“Wake up, O Zion, and be strong. Dress in your best clothes for Jerusalem, the holy city. Foreigners who ruined your city will never enter your city again. Rise from the dust, Jerusalem, and free yourself from the chains of slavery around your neck.” I, the LORD, say this: “You were sold, but not for money, and you will be freed without any payment. Many years ago, you went to Egypt where you lived. Then Assyria oppressed the Egyptians. Now, why are My people slaves again? And those who rule over them mock them, and they curse My name. My people, you will know who I am because I am the one who said this would happen.

“How wonderful are messengers who bring the good news to all the world that you are saved and that I, your God, reign.”

This chapter predicts My messengers will go into all the world to carry out the Great Commission given by Jesus. Paul quotes Isaiah 52:7 and applies it to missionary evangelism, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things” (Rom. 10:15, KJV). You have beautiful feet when you tell someone about Jesus.

“You watchmen, sing and shout because they see Me returning with people to Zion. May the ruins of Jerusalem sing, because I, the LORD, comfort My people and rescue them. I will show the nations My great strength, and everyone will see My saving power.

“Leave Babylon and don’t touch any unclean thing there. Purify yourselves when you carry home My sacred vessels.”

Isaiah exhorts My servants, “Be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the LORD” (52:11, KJV). I want you to be holy because you have a message that is holy. I, the LORD, cleanse from sin (1 John 1:9).

“You won’t need to hurry, because I, the LORD, will lead you and protect you from behind.

“My servant will succeed. He will be highly honored. Yet many were amazed when they saw Him so disfigured that He didn’t even look human. He will provide cleansing from sin for many people. Even kings will be silent before Him because they will see and hear things they’ve never seen or heard before.”

My Anointed Suffers

53 “Has anyone believed your message about My great power? My servant was like a young plant or a root growing out of dry ground. He was not handsome that would make you interested in Him. In fact, He was hated and

rejected. He experienced sorrow and suffering. People didn't even want to look at Him. They detested Him and didn't appreciate Him at all.

“Yet he carried the illness of your souls, and He was burdened down with your grief. People thought He was being punished for His own sins. But He was wounded because of your rebellion and crushed because of your sins. He took the punishment you deserve, but it brought you peace, and amazingly, His wounds healed you. You are all like sheep getting off the path and going where you want to go. But I, the LORD, punished Him for your sins, not His. Though He was abused and treated cruelly, He didn't say a thing. Like a lamb being quiet when it is slaughtered or a sheep being silent when it is having its wool cut off, so He did not say a word. After being abused and sentenced to die, He was taken away to His death. Few people realized He was dying for their sins. He was killed because of their rebellion. He was buried like a criminal but in a rich man's grave. Yet He never did anything wrong and never deceived anyone.

“My plan was to crush Him and cause him to suffer as a sacrifice for sins. He will live to see many offspring who will believe in Him, and He will live forever. He will be blessed because He followed My plan. After His extensive suffering, My wrath was satisfied. Because He was punished for your sins, He will declare many righteous who will believe. Because He willingly sacrificed His life, I, the LORD, will honor Him like a general receiving loot after a battle. People thought He was a sinner, but He was suffering for their sins, not His. And He is now praying for them.”

The passage on Christ suffering extends from 52:13 to 53:12. Christ is called “My Servant” who sprinkles—purifies—many Gentile people (52:13, KJV). Christ was pure so that He could purify many.

Christ's suffering was so extreme that His face was marred (disfigured) so that He was unrecognizable.

Christ “grew up” from the line of David; He was a “root out of a dry ground” (53:2, KJV).

Christ did not have beauty and “no form nor comeliness” (53:2, KJV). This doesn't mean He was ugly or homely, but that He was a common man, not regal like a king. Christ became common for you.

Christ was “despised” and “rejected” and suffered “grief” (53:3, KJV). The idea of substitution is introduced because Christ has “borne

our grief” (53:4, KJV). Christ took your place.

Christ was wounded (pierced through) for your transgressions (53:5), a picture of His substitution and death. Christ took your punishment.

You like sheep have gone astray into sin, but I put your “iniquity” on Christ (53:6, KJV). Christ took your sin on Himself.

Christ became like you. He became a substitutionary sheep, taking your punishment for your sin, and “He opened not His mouth” (53:7, KJV). Christ willingly died for you.

Christ was “cut off” and “taken from prison” (53:8, KJV) where He was tried, and no guilt was found in Him. The records show the same thing. Christ, the innocent, suffered for you, the guilty.

Christ was taken from “the land of the living,” He died. Then “He made His grave with the wicked” (53:8-9, KJV).

How could I, the LORD, be pleased “to bruise Him?” This is not My pleasure, but Christ satisfied My wrath against all your sin (53:10, KJV; 1 John 2:1-2).

The chapter ends in the glorification and exaltation of Christ. I, the Father, “divided to Him a portion with the great” (53:12). I raised and exalted Christ to My right hand. You too have been raised in Christ and are seated at the right hand of Me, the Father (Eph. 2:5-7).

Zion’s Song of Joy

54“Sing and shout, barren woman. Even though you have never had children, you will now have more children than anyone else. Enlarge your tent by stretching the curtain wider, and fasten the tent pegs firmly. You and your descendants will take over the land of other nations and settle in towns that are in ruins.

“Don’t be afraid. You will no longer be ashamed, dishonored, or humiliated. I won’t remember the sins of your youth or the shame of being a widow. I am your husband; I, the LORD of the Heavens, am your creator, the Holy One of Israel, who will rescue you. I am the God of the whole world.”

Isaiah appeals to use your faith to believe Me for big things, and to work hard to do more for Me than you've ever done before. "Enlarge the place of your tent and let them stretch out the curtains of your dwellings; do not spare; lengthen your cords, and strengthen your stakes" (54:2, KJV).

"I, the LORD, will take you back, you who were a young wife divorced by her husband. True, I rejected you, but now I'm bringing you back with tender love. In anger, I turned from you for a short while, but now I have mercy and tender love for you forever," say I, the LORD, who rescues you.

"In anger, I turned from you, but now I, the LORD, who rescues you, will have loyal and tender love for you forever. I promised Noah I would never again destroy the earth with a flood. So now I promise that I will never again get angry and scold you. Mountains and hills may be shaken, but My tender love for you won't be shaken. As I promised, I will give you peace. I, the LORD, have tender love for you.

"Jerusalem, your troubles are like your being tossed in a storm, and no one comforts you. But I will rebuild your city on foundations of precious stones. Your defense towers will be built of rubies, your city gates with jewels, and your walls with precious stones. I will teach your children, and they will enjoy peace. Your city will be known for right living, and you will have nothing to fear. I'll never again send any nation to attack you, and you'll defeat whoever attacks you.

"I created blacksmiths who make weapons over burning coals, and I am the One who caused other nations to cause destruction. But in the future, no blacksmith's weapons will defeat you. And no one's false accusations against you will be a problem. These are the benefits of those who are My servants. Their righteous position is from Me," says the LORD.

There is a promise of protection to Israel in the future, that you can apply in the present; "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper" (54:17, KJV). Just as I will protect Israel in My future kingdom, so I will protect My children today. While not in the same dimension, it is truly with the same intention.

Invitation to Zion and All Nations

55 “If you are thirsty, come drink water. If you don’t have any money, come anyway and eat. You can enjoy wine and milk without paying anything.”

Look at the universal invitation to “come” to Me. “Ho, everyone that thirsteth, come ye to the waters . . . come ye, buy, and eat” (55:1, KJV). I am looking for those who are not satisfied with this world, I’m looking for those who deeply yearn for spiritual meaning.

“Why buy food that does you no good? Why work for something that doesn’t satisfy? Listen to Me, and I’ll help your soul enjoy genuine spiritual food. Listen carefully because this affects your spiritual life. I will make with you an eternal agreement of loyal love that I promised to David. He was a leader and commander of several nations, and he was a witness to them of My plans. You, Israel, will invite nations you haven’t known, and they will hurry to you because of Me, the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, who has blessed you with greatness.

“Turn to Me, the LORD, while I can be found, and pray to Me because I am near.”

Every life has open doors and closed doors. God promises and warns in the same breath, “Seek Me, the LORD, while I may be found, call upon Me while I am near” (55:6, KJV). Every person has a door of opportunity to come to Me, but if he refuses Me and chooses sin in a selfish way, there may not be more times when I speak to him.

“Wicked people, give up your wicked ways and evil thoughts. If you return to Me, the LORD, I will be merciful and will forgive your sins. My thoughts and My ways are higher than yours, just as the heavens are higher than the earth.”

Why do so many people not hear My voice? For the same reason, a thief doesn’t look for a policeman. They do not want to know My ways.

I say, "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways, My ways" (55:8, KJV). I think differently about sin than you do.

“Rain and snow fall from the sky and water the earth, causing seeds to grow and giving grain to eat. In a similar way, My words do what I want them to do. In the future, you will have joy and peace. It will seem as if mountains and hills will sing, and trees will clap. Pine and myrtle trees will grow where thornbushes grew. This will bring honor to Me, the LORD, and will be an eternal sign of My greatness.”

The Sabbath

56I, the LORD, say, “Be just and fair. I will soon deliver you and everyone will see My saving power. I will bless those who do this consistently and who do not work on the Sabbath and who refuse to sin. Resident foreigners should not think that I have excluded them, and men unable to become fathers should not call themselves dried-up trees. To them, I say, ‘Don’t work on the Sabbath, and do what pleases Me, and keep your agreement.’ If they do, I will set up a memorial for them in My Temple with their names written on it which will be better than having children.

“Foreign residents who serve, love, and worship Me, and who don’t work on the Sabbath, and keep our agreement will come to Jerusalem, My holy mountain, and will have joy in My house of prayer. I will accept their offerings, and My house, the temple, will be called a house of prayer for all nations. I, the Sovereign LORD, will bring back My people with others who have returned.

“Wild animals from the forest come and devour you as victims. Israel’s watchmen are blind, and like dogs that don’t bark, they are asleep and don’t warn My people of coming danger. Yet in another way they are like dogs with greedy appetites, never getting enough. They are like stupid shepherds who are concerned only for themselves and not their sheep. They say, ‘Let’s get drunk, and tomorrow we’ll do the same.’”

The Righteous Are Rebuked

“Sometimes good people die before their time and no one thinks anything
57 about it. No one understands that I am doing this to keep them from
evil.”

I, the LORD, talk about your death in this chapter, saying the world doesn't regard the death of My children. This world is not your home, and everything about it is not as important as what you will receive in the next world. Do not clutch this world to hang on to any wealth, or houses, or belongings. You've got so much more on the other side of death's river. Don't be anxious to die but know there's a better life for you on the other side of the valley of the shadow of death.

“Godly people who die rest in peace.”

You will find on many tombstones the phrase, “Rest in peace.” However, only My children find rest in death.

“You offspring of people who practice witchcraft, you sons and daughters of adulterers and prostitutes, who are you making fun of and who are you scoffing and at whom are you sticking out your tongues? You are a bunch of rebels, offspring of liars. You are filled with rust as you worship your idols under every green tree. And you sacrifice your children in valleys and under overhanging rocks. Your gods are nothing but smooth stones in the valleys. You pour drink offerings to them and give them grain offerings. Does all this make Me happy?

“You committed adultery on high mountains where you sacrificed to your idols. You have placed pagan symbols behind your doors and on your doorposts. You have forsaken Me and then got in your bed and committed adultery. You worshiped the Ammonite god Molech with lots of olive oil and perfumes. Some of your people died who went too far away to worship Molech. You got tired, but you didn't give up. You gained strength and didn't quit.

“Have you been unfaithful to Me because you are afraid of someone? Has My long silence kept you from reverencing Me? I will show you that your so-called good deeds will do you no good. When you have problems, ask your idols to help you. The wind or someone's breath can blow them away. But the

person who trusts in Me will inherit the land and My holy mountain, Jerusalem.”

I, the LORD, say, “Clean the road and remove any obstacles so My people, can return from captivity. I, the exalted and Holy One, live forever in heaven, but also with those who are sorrowful and humble. I will refresh the humble and revive the sorrowful.”

I am looking for humility in your life. I, the LORD, say . . . “I dwell with him . . . who has a contrite and humble spirit” (57:15, NKJV).

“I won’t keep on accusing you, My people, and I won’t always be angry with you because that would discourage you whom I have created.

“I was angry because of your greed, and even though I punished you and didn’t show My anger, you kept on sinning. I know what you are like, but I will heal you anyway. I will guide you, and comfort you and help you who are mourning to start singing praise to Me. I will heal them and give them peace. But the wicked are like the sea with waves that never stop and that toss up mud. I say there is no peace for the wicked.”

Fasting

58 “Shout aloud like a trumpet blast. Tell My people, Israel; they have sinned by rebelling against Me. Every day you seem interested in seeking Me and knowing My ways and doing what is right by obeying My commands. And you seem eager for justice and for Me to be near you. Yet when you go without food and belittle yourselves, you wonder why I haven’t noticed. Here’s why: While you are fasting, you do as you please and you take advantage of your workers. And often while fasting you quarrel and fight with each other. So how can you expect Me to answer your prayers? Do you think I want you to give up eating just so you look like a bush that’s bent over? And does your fasting involve nothing more than putting on burlap clothing and lying in ashes? Do you think that is all I want from you?”

Isaiah tells nine different results of fasting and names are given to each result and how to fast to get those results. They are used by My

servants throughout Scripture:

First, the Disciple's Fast to break addiction or bondage, "Is not this the fast . . . to loose the bands of wickedness" (58:6, KJV)? Discipline your appetite to find freedom over anything that has you captive to sin.

Second, the Ezra Fast to solve problems, "Is not this the fast . . . to undo the heavy burdens" (58:6, KJV)? You will find wisdom to solve problems as you fast and pray.

Third, the Samuel Fast for revival and evangelism. "Is not this the fast . . . to let the oppressed go free" (58:6, KJV)? Abstain from food and pray for revival in your life and ministry, and for people to get saved.

Fourth, the Elijah Fast to break bad habits and thought patterns, "Is not this the fast . . . that ye break every yoke" (58:6, KJV)? Take control of your spirit in prayer by taking control of your body and appetite.

Fifth, the Widow's Fast, to give money for the homeless, hungry, and needy. "Is not this the fast . . . to deal thy bread to the hungry . . . bring the poor . . . to thy house . . . the naked, that thou cover them" (58:6-7, KJV)? Sacrifice and fast for the poor, the hungry, the homeless, and the destitute.

Sixth, the St. Paul Fast, to gain "spiritual light" to make correct decisions. "Is not this the fast . . . thy light shall break forth" (58:6, 8, KJV)? Fast to find My truth so you can make better decisions.

Seventh, the Daniel Fast for health and healing, "Is not this the fast . . . (so) your health shall spring forth speedily" (58:6, 8, KJV)? Fast from food and drink that would harm your health, and pray when you need healing.

Eighth, the John the Baptist Fast, for a good testimony to others. "Is not this the fast . . . and thy righteousness shall go before thee" (58:6, 8, KJV)? You have no righteousness in your life and works. You only have the righteousness of Jesus Christ who justified you. Fast so Christ in you will be a testimony to the world.

Ninth, the Esther Fast of Spiritual Warfare, for protection from satan. "Is not this the fast . . . (that) My glory shall be thy rear guard" (58:6, 8)? Fast and pray for spiritual protection from the enemy.

“Here’s what I prefer as you go without food: Set free the people who have been put in prison unfairly, free those who have been abused, and set those free who have been mistreated. Also, share food with those who are hungry, share your home with poor homeless people, provide clothing for those in need, and help your relatives when they are in need. When you do these things, I will shed My light and My protection on you, and I will heal you. And I, your righteous One, will lead you, and My glory will protect you from behind. When you ask Me for help, I will answer you, and I will say, ‘Here I am.’

“If you avoid mistreating others and falsely accusing them, and if you give food to the hungry and help mistreated people, then your light will shine brightly (I will bless you). I will always guide you and give you strength in the desert. You will be like a well-watered garden and a spring that never seems dry. You will rebuild homes that are in ruins, and you will be known as the Repairman of Broken Walls and the Repairman of City Streets.

“Don’t work or eat on the Sabbath, and don’t do whatever you please on the Sabbath. Call the Sabbath a delight and honor My day. Stop doing or saying whatever you please on the Sabbath. If you do these things, then I will be your delight and joy, and you will have spiritual blessings by riding on the highest mountains and you will enjoy the blessings I promised to Jacob by feasting on your inheritance.”

A Deliverer Promised

59“I, the LORD, am not too weak to save you, and I can still hear your prayers. But your sins have come between you and Me and have caused Me to turn from you. Your hands are covered with blood and you have been telling lies and mentioning wicked things. Not one of you is interested in being fair and honest. You tell lies, and you think up trouble and carry it out. Your actions are like snakes hatching poisonous eggs or like a spider spinning a web to catch insects. But you can’t make clothes from those cobwebs. Your actions are all sinful and violent.

“You are quick to sin and to murder innocent people. All you think about is sin, and you run to destroy others. You don’t know what peace is or what it means to be fair. Everything you do is sinful, like going down a crooked road, and people who follow you on that road have no peace.

“You are so unfair and unrighteous that it is like you are walking in darkness, not light. You feel your way like a blind person, and you stumble at noon as if it were nighttime. You are as blind as a dead person. You growl like bears and mourn like doves, hoping for justice and victory, but there isn’t any.

“You know your sins are many and they condemn you. You admit you have sinned. You have rebelled against Me, the LORD, and have turned away from Me. You have treated people harshly and revolted against Me, telling lies. Fairness and justice are far off. Truth stumbles in the streets, and honesty is nowhere around. Truth can’t be found, and anyone who rejects evil is attacked. When I, the LORD, saw there was no justice, I was disappointed. And I was amazed that no one was doing anything about it. So I decided I had to do something about it to bring victory and justice.”

I ask why “there was no intercessor” (59:16, KJV). Will you step forward to intercede for lost men and women? Will you pray for their salvation?

“I put on justice as My body armor and the helmet of salvation on My head. I put on the cloths of vengeance and godly anger.

“I, in My anger, will do to My enemies near and far what they have done to My people. Then people in both the east and the west will reverence Me and glorify Me. I will come against My enemies like a flood driven by My Spirit. I will rescue Zion and Jacob’s descendants who turn from their sins. I promise to give you My Spirit, and you and your children and grandchildren will obey My words forever, I, the LORD, have spoken these words.”

My Future Blessing

60“Jerusalem, stand up and shine. Blessings are coming to you, and My glory will shine on you. Darkness covers the earth and everyone on it, but My glory is over you. Nations and kings will come to your light.”

Because My glory has come into your life, you have a new inner transformation from Me. Isaiah tells us, “Arise, shine; for your light is come, and the glory of the LORD is risen upon you” (60:1, KJV).

“Open your eyes and look around. Everyone is returning home. Your sons and daughters are coming from distant lands. When you see them, your faces will shine with joy and your heart will pound with excitement. Merchants from around the world will bring riches to you from many nations. Camel caravans will come to you from many places as far away as Arabia; some as far away as Midian and Ephah and they’ll bring you gold and incense from Sheba to praise Me, the LORD. Flocks of sheep from Kedar and rams from Nebaioth will be brought to you. They will be given as offerings to Me, and with them, I will honor My temple.

“Who is sailing along like clouds and is flying to their nests like doves? They are the ships of Tarshish that are bringing the people of Israel home with silver and gold, which will honor Me, the Holy One of Israel, and you, My people.

“Foreigners will come and rebuild your city walls, and even kings of other nations will help. In My anger I punished you, but I will now show you tender love. You will be so safe that you will never need to shut your gates. And kings of nations will lead their people to you with their many treasures. But any nation that refuses to serve you will be punished. Lumber from Lebanon’s pine trees, fir trees, and cypress trees will be brought to you to adorn My temple, the place of My throne. Descendants of people who mistreated you and hated you will bow at your feet, and they will say that you, Jerusalem, are My city, Zion, the Holy One of Israel.

“People hated and rejected you, and they did not travel to your city. But people of all future generations will be proud of you and glad for you. Just as a nursing child gets nourishment from its mother, so you will be nourished by the wealth of foreign nations. This will help you see that I, the LORD, am the one who saves and rescues you, that I am the Mighty One of Israel. I will see that they bring you gold and silver, not iron, bronze, wood, stones, or iron. Your “leaders” will be peace and justice. Violence, ruin, and destruction will be gone, and instead, you will name your walls ‘Victory’ and your gates ‘Praise.’

“You won’t need the light of the sun or the moon because I, the LORD your God, will be your light and will honor you. The sun will never set again, and the moon will never go down again because I will light your way forever and your days of sorrow will end. Then your people will live right, and you will always own your land. You are like plants I have planted so you can

honor Me. The smallest group of you will be a great nation. I am the LORD, and when the time comes, I will do all this quickly.”

It seems that My followers are always in the minority. Yet I, the LORD, have promised you, “A little one shall become a thousand” (60:22, KJV). Look forward to the day when there shall be an abundance of My followers everywhere.

My Son, the Redeemer, Blesses

61 “I, the Spirit of the Sovereign LORD, am on the Messiah because I appointed Him to bring good news to those who are suffering, to comfort the brokenhearted, and to announce that prisoners will be freed. I also sent Him to tell those who mourn and grieve that the year is coming when I will be kind to them and will punish their enemies.”

When Jesus Christ returned to the synagogue at Nazareth (His boyhood home) to preach, He read the scroll from Isaiah 61:1-2. Notice Jesus didn't include the very last statement of the prediction: “And the day of My vengeance” (61:2). That's because what He read related to His first coming and what He left out related to His second coming.

“To those who mourn in Zion I will give beauty in place of ashes, joy in place of mourning, and praise in place of despair. They will be like trees I, the LORD, planted for My honor.”

I promise “beauty for ashes” (61:3). Your rebellious sin is nothing more than ashes. Every selfish ambition is burned to ashes. But when you turn your life over to Jesus, He transforms everything you give to Him. Only Jesus can take ashes and turn them into something beautiful.

“My people will rebuild cities that have been in ruins and desolate for generations. Foreigners will tend sheep and care for crops and vineyards. But you will be My priests and servants, and you will enjoy the riches of nations.

“In place of your shame and disgrace you, like a firstborn son, will receive double honor and inheritance, and you will be joyful forever. I, the LORD, love justice, and I hate robbery and injustice. I will reward you with an eternal promise. Your descendants will be known everywhere, and everyone who sees you will realize I have blessed you.

“Isaiah, greatly loves Me, the LORD, and I’m happy because of that. I have given him victory. Justice is like wearing nice clothes, or like a groom wearing a headgear or a bride wearing her jewels. Just as seeds grow in a garden, so I, the Sovereign LORD, will cause nations to exercise justice and give praise to Me.”

Watchmen Called to Be Awake

62 “I, the LORD, will speak for you, Jerusalem so that your justice will shine, and your victory will be bright like a flame. Then the nation will see how upright I am and kings will see My greatness. You, Jerusalem, will be a great, royal crown in My hand.”

I, the LORD, say that Jerusalem will bring glory to Me. “Thou shalt also be a crown of glory in the hand of the LORD” (62:3, KJV). I love Jerusalem, and it brings glory to Me. I also want you to glorify Me in your life.

“Israel will be called Hephzibah (meaning “My Delight Is in Her”) and your land will be called Beulah (meaning “Married”). This is because I, the LORD, will be married to you and will delight in you. These names will replace your present names of Deserted and Desolate. Your children will care for you, just as a young man cares for his bride. I’ll rejoice over you as a groom rejoices over his bride.

“I, the LORD, have posted watchmen on Jerusalem walls. They will speak out day and night for Me to fulfill My promises. And to give you no rest till I make you strong and make people everywhere praise Me. I, the LORD, have given My Word and have promised never again to let your enemies eat your

grain and crops and to drink your new wine. Instead, those of you who harvest your crops will eat them and praise Me, and those who drink My wine will be glad in My Temple courtyard.

“Jerusalem, open your gates so people can enter. Remove stones from the highway and raise your flag for nations to see. I, the LORD, have announced to everyone, ‘I, your Deliverer, Jerusalem, am coming to reward those who love Me and punish those who don’t.’ My people will be called ‘the Holy People, the People He has Rescued, the City People Desire and the City No Longer Deserted.’”

My Mercy to Believers

63 Who is this coming from Bozrah in Edom with his clothes stained red? Who is this in his royal robes marching in His strength? “It is I, the LORD. I am upright, and I will rescue you.” Why are your clothes red? They look as if you’ve been treading on grapes. “I stomped on the grapes alone, and no nation helped Me. In My anger, I stomped on the nations and my clothing got stained with their blood. I was taking revenge on My enemies and it was time to rescue My people. No one helped Me, and I was amazed that no one gave Me any support. But I gained victory by Myself even though I was angry. I trampled on nations in My anger and made them drunk, and their blood spilled on the ground.”

This chapter begins by asking a question, “Who is this that cometh from Edom?” (63:1, KJV). Remember Edomites were descendants of Esau; they hated Jacob and rebelled against Me. Edom is representative of all those tribe-nations that hate Israel, and thus they hated Me, the God of Israel. So the one coming from Edom—and Bozrah its capital city—is the Jewish Messiah, Jesus Christ. He is “red in His apparel” (63:2, KJV), meaning this is the picture of Jesus’ second coming in judgment. “He was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood; and His name is called the Word of God” (Rev. 19:13, KJV). This is Jesus in judgment.

“Tell of My acts of loyal love. I am to be praised for all the good things I have done for Israel in accord with My tender and loyal love. I rescued My

people because they are Mine, and they will not be unfaithful to Me again. I was concerned because they were distressed, but I rescued them in My mercy and love, and sustained them all through many years. But then they turned against Me and saddened My Holy Spirit. So I as their enemy fought against them.

“Then My people remembered what happened in Moses’ day, when he brought our ancestors through the Red Sea and shepherded them like sheep. I gave them My Holy Spirit, and My power strengthened Moses. He became famous when I led My people through the sea like horses that don’t stumble and like cows grazing peacefully. The Holy Spirit gave them rest. By guiding them in this way I became well known.

“I looked from My great and holy throne in heaven. I showed My concern and power and My tender love. I am your Father, even though Abraham and Jacob didn’t know you. As your Father, I have rescued you in times past.”

*Isaiah calls Me his Father, “Doubtless You are our father” (63:16).
Then he returns to say, “You, O LORD, are our Father” (63:16).
Come to Me with your need, just as a child comes to an earthly father
with his need.*

“Why then did I let you turn from Me and let your hearts become stubborn against Me? You beg for Me to return and help you because you are My servants who belong to Me. For a while My temple was yours, but then your enemies destroyed it. You have been Mine for centuries, but you sometimes act like I never ruled over you or I never called you My people.”

Israel Laments

64“Isaiah prays for Me, the LORD, to come down from the heavens and shake the mountains. Just as fire burns wood and boils water, so My enemies will know who I am and will tremble because of Me. I did some amazing things, things you didn’t even expect, and even mountains tremble when I reveal Myself. No one has ever heard or seen any god like Me who works for those who trust Him.

“I help those who do what is right and who remember and follow Me. But when you sinned, I became angry. How then can you be rescued? You are all

unclean with sin, and even your good deeds are like filthy rags. You wither and fall like autumn leaves, and your sins are like wind that blows you away”

Isaiah confesses his unworthiness, “But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags” (64:6, KJV).

“Not one of you worships Me or prays to Me. I ignore you, and I let your sins ruin you.

“I, the LORD, am your Father. You are only clay, and I am the Potter who shapes you as I wish.”

You must confess with Israel, “We all are the work of My hand” (64:8). Let Me work My beauty in you that you may be beautiful for Me.

Israel prayed, “Don’t be angry with us and don’t keep remembering our sins. Please think of us as we pray, because we are Your people. Our cities, especially Jerusalem, are desolate like the desert. Our holy, wonderful temple where our ancestors worshiped You, has been destroyed by fire, and our beautiful buildings have been ruined. After all this, LORD, do not refuse to help us, even as You punish us.”

Israel to Be Restored

65I, the LORD say, “People who never before asked about Me are now seeking for Me. My people were not looking for Me, but I told them I am here. I held out My hands all day to My stubborn and sinful people who were following their own ideas.”

I make a profound statement about the Gentiles, “I was sought by those who did not ask for Me; I was found by those who did not seek Me. I said, ‘Here I am, here I am,’ to a nation that was not called by My name.” (65:1, KJV). The Gentiles were not from the root of Abraham, yet they sought salvation. The Jews were called “a

rebellious people” (65:2), and “a people who provoke Me” (65:3). So I rejected My people. Then the Gentiles turned to Me, the LORD, the God of the Jews, and were incorporated into “the body of Christ.”

“They insult Me to My face by offering sacrifices to idols in their sacred gardens and burning incense on brick altars. At night they go in the cemeteries and to secret places to worship idols. They eat pork, cooked in sauces made of forbidden foods. They say to others, ‘Keep away from us for we are holier than you.’ These people are like smoke that irritates My nostrils, a fire that burns all the time.

“All this is written down. I won’t keep quiet. I will make them pay for their sins and the sins of their ancestors. Because they burned incense on the hills and insulted Me with their idol worship, I will make them pay back for what they have done. If a cluster of grapes has some juice left in it, people don’t throw away the grapes. So it is with My people; I won’t destroy them all. I will keep some of My people to possess the land. They will inherit the land and be My servants. Sheep will graze in Sharon on the Mediterranean coast, and many herds of cattle will graze in the Achor Valley in the east near Jericho.

“But if you reject Me and My mountain, and worship the gods of Fate and Destiny, then you will be killed by swords. You didn’t answer when I called you, and you sinned and did what you know I hate. Those who serve Me will eat, but not you; you will be hungry. They will drink, but not you; you will be thirsty. They will be glad, but not you; you will be ashamed. They will sing for joy, but you will cry because of sorrow and pain. Your name will be a curse word among My servants. I will destroy you and give My servants another name. If you bless someone or make a promise, you must do it in My name, because I am the God of truth. I will forget your past troubles and sins.

“I will create new heavens and a new earth, and things of the past will be forgotten. Be glad, because I will make Jerusalem a place of joy for My people. I will rejoice for Jerusalem and be glad for My people. There will be no more crying or sorrow in the city. Infants will not die after living only a few days, and adults will not die young. People who live to be 100 will not be thought of as old. If someone dies younger than that, he’ll be considered under a curse.

“People will live in peace in the houses they build, and they will eat grapes from their own vineyards. In the past, enemies destroyed people’s

houses and took their vineyards. But My people will live to be as old as trees and will enjoy their work. Their work won't be wasted, and their children won't experience setbacks. That's because I will bless them and their descendants too. When they pray, I will answer before they finish praying. Wolves and lambs will eat together, and lions and oxen will eat straw together. But snakes will eat dirt. And snakes won't bite or hurt anyone on My holy mountain."

The New Jerusalem

66I, the LORD, say "Heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool. You could never build Me a temple as good as heaven or a place where I could rest."

I tell that while you may build a structure to honor Me (tabernacle, Solomon's Temple, millennial temple), you may in no way build a house that can contain Me. I am immense, "Heaven is My throne" (66:1), so nothing is big enough to contain Me. I ask, "Where is the place of My rest?" (66:1). Let Me come dwell in your heart.

"I made everything and that's how everything came into existence. The people I favor are those who are humble and repentant and tremble when I speak."

Who do I accept? "But on this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word" (66:2). I reject the sinful, and rebellious, and filthy, but I accept those who come to Me humbly and meekly.

"When you sacrifice a bull, that to Me is like murdering someone. And when you sacrifice lambs, that's like breaking a dog's neck. Or when you offer grain to Me, that's like putting pig's blood on the altar. When you burn incense, you are actually worshiping an idol, not Me. These are your choices to delight in these disgusting things. So I will send trouble on you, things you

have dreaded. You did not answer when I called you. And you didn't listen when I spoke. Instead, you sinned before Me and did what you know I hate.

“Some of your own relatives hate Me because you are loyal to Me. They mock you and say, ‘Let the LORD be honored and let Him make you happy.’ But they will be ashamed. Listen to that noise in the city and the shouts at the temple. That is I, the LORD, shouting as I punished My enemies.

“Have you ever heard of a woman giving birth to a child before she has labor pains? Who has ever heard of such a thing? Has a nation ever come into existence in a single day? But Jerusalem has! She is like a mother who had her baby as soon as her labor started. I would not bring Israel to the point of birth and not let her be born. So, if you love Jerusalem, then be glad for her. She will nurse you, caring for you just as a mother nurses her infant.

“Jerusalem will enjoy peace like a smooth flowing river and nations will bring their wealth to her. She will nurse her citizens, caring for them as a mother carries her child in her arms and plays with them on her knees. Just as a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you. When you see these things happening, you will rejoice, and you will be strengthened like new sprouting grass. Then you, My servants, will know that I have done this, and you will see My anger against My enemies. I will come with fire, and My chariots will be swift and destructive like a whirlwind. I will be furious in anger and I will punish My enemies with fire. I will punish sinners with fire and the sword, and I will kill many people.

“Some people got themselves ready and went to a garden to worship idols and to eat pork, rats, and other forbidden foods. But I will see that they come to an awful end. Because of their sins, I will gather all nations together, and they will see My glory. I will send survivors as messengers to the nations—to Tarshish, Libya, Lydia, whose people are famous as archers, Tubal, Greece, and distant lands. The survivors will tell them of My glory. They will bring My people from every nation to Jerusalem as an offering to Me, and they will come on horses, mules, camels, and in chariots. They will be like people who bring grain offerings to My Temple. I will make some of those who return priests and Levites.

“You will always have descendants just as the new heavens and new earth will last forever. On the first day of every month and on each Sabbath, everyone will worship Me. They will see the dead bodies of those who turned against Me. The worms that feed on them will never die, and the fire that is

burning their bodies will never go out. And everyone who sees these bodies will be horrified.”

I AM GOD

The Covenant Keeper

The Book of Jeremiah

Jeremiah came from a priestly family living in Anathoth near Jerusalem. He wrote the longest book in the Bible, and his career spanned more than 40 years—during the reigns of Judah’s last five kings. Jeremiah was called by Me as a young man, and throughout his long, turbulent life, he confronted a people who had rejected My commands and deliberately chose false gods. I warned them of their eventual destruction. Nevertheless, My people refused to repent, so Jerusalem and My Temple were destroyed in 586 BC, and they were deported to Babylon.

In Jeremiah’s famous “Temple Sermon,” he told the people that My Temple would be destroyed and for that he nearly lost his life. Thereafter Jeremiah was considered as a traitor and was arrested and jailed.

When the city of Jerusalem fell, Jeremiah was given the privilege of remaining in Judah. He wanted to stay in the Holy Land, but renegade Jews forced him to go to Egypt, where tradition has it that he died.

Jeremiah was known as the weeping prophet, because his burden was so heavy. The Jews would not listen to him, and they opposed him and tried to kill him leading him to periods of deep sadness. His was an example of total faithfulness to Me, regardless of failure or circumstances. *The Word of the LORD Came (Jeremiah 1:4)*.

I, The Lord, Call Jeremiah

1 I, the LORD, first gave messages to Jeremiah, son of Hilkiah, a priest from Anathoth in the tribe of Benjamin in the 13th year of King Josiah’s reign in Judah (627 BC), and other messages in the reign of Josiah’s son, Jehoiakim,

and in the reign of Josiah's other son, Zedekiah, when the people of Jerusalem were taken away as captives in August of 586 BC

I, the LORD, said, "Jeremiah, before you were born, I chose you to speak for Me to the nations."

Too often you think your life began when you were born, but I had a plan for your life even before you were conceived in your mother's womb. I am not limited by time. I stand above time and prepare you for My purpose within your limited time.

He said, "But, Sovereign LORD, I can't do that. I'm too young." Then I, the LORD, said, "No, you aren't too young. You must go wherever I send you and say whatever I tell you. You don't need to be afraid, because I'll be with you and keep you safe."

I, the LORD, touched his mouth and said, "I'll give you the words to say. I'm sending you to speak to the nations to tell them they will be destroyed and then rebuilt."

Most feel overwhelmed when I call them to serve Me. You cry out with Jeremiah, "I am only a child." But that's the starting point of success, it's "not you, but Me." You can't do what I call you to do unless I give you wisdom you don't have, strength when you're weak and help you make right decisions, and give you courage.

I said, "What do you see, Jeremiah?" He said, "I see an almond tree branch." I, the LORD, said, "Correct, like the almond, which means 'watchful,' I am watching over My words to do what I say." Again I, the LORD, asked what he saw. He said, "I see a boiling pot in the north." Then I said, "Calamity will come from the north on everyone. I'll lead all nations north of you to approach the gates and walls of Jerusalem and all the cities of Judah. I'll punish them for their sin of forsaking Me and offering sacrifices to idols. So be alert, Jeremiah, and speak what I tell you to say, and don't be discouraged. I've made you like a strong city with an iron column and bronze walls. You will oppose everyone in Judah, including their leaders and priests. These leaders will oppose you, but they won't succeed because I'll keep you safe."

Do I have an extremely difficult job for you? If you do My task you will win, no matter the outcome.

Israel Abandons Me

2I, the LORD, told Jeremiah to go to Jerusalem and tell everyone these words: “Remember how as a young bride you loved Me and followed Me even in the desert?”

Jeremiah kept saying, “The LORD spoke His Word to me.” He heard My audible voice, but you have My written Word available to you.

“You were Mine completely, like the first fruits of a harvest, and I punished anyone who mistreated you.” I, the LORD, have spoken.

Jeremiah told Israel to listen to what I, the LORD, say. “What fault did your ancestors find in Me that led them to leave Me and become foolish by worshiping foolish idols? You didn’t ask Me for help though I had rescued you from Egypt and led you through the desert, a dry, dark land where no one travels or lives.

“I brought you here to this fertile land with its abundant food, but you ruined My land by your sins. The priests didn’t ask about Me, and your prophets and leaders turned from Me. Your prophets gave messages from Baal, and they worshiped foolish idols. So I am bringing a court case against you and your grandchildren. Go to Cyprus and the Arabian Desert and see if any nation has ever exchanged its gods for other gods, even though its gods are nothing. But you, My people, have exchanged Me, your glorious God, for worthless idols. The heavens are shocked and horrified that you did this.

“You, My people, have sinned in two ways. You have rejected Me, the source of living water, and you have dug cisterns that can’t hold water.”

I am a cool refreshing artesian spring of pure water because I, the LORD, renew thirst; I am enjoyable (v. 13). But the people drink from cisterns, holes in the ground that store dirty water, contaminated water, or stale water. Who wants to drink from a hole in the ground when they

can drink fresh cool water? Come to Me to drink when you are tired, thirsty, and bored.

“You weren’t born slaves, but you have been captured. Enemies roared against you like lions and now your land is destroyed, and your towns are burned and empty. Soldiers from the Egyptian towns of Memphis and Tahpanhes removed your glory, like shaving your head. This all happened because you rejected Me. So why did you go to Egypt and Assyria for water to drink? You will be punished because of your sins. Think of how evil and bitter it is for you to reject Me and to have no respect for Me.

“Some time ago I released you from slavery, and yet you refused to serve Me. Instead you bowed down to idols on hilltops and under green trees like a prostitute. When I chose you, you were like the best grapevine. So how did you become a useless, wild vine? You may use a lot of soap, but that won’t get rid of the stain of your guilt.

“You say, ‘We haven’t worshiped the idols of Baal.’ But how can you say that? You are like a restless female camel, and a wild desert donkey sniffing the air and wanting to mate with anyone. Male donkeys can easily find her. So don’t keep running until you wear yourself out. You have fallen in love with gods of other nations and you insist on going after them.

“You are like a thief who feels ashamed when he’s caught. This includes your kings, officials, priests, and prophets. You call a wooden idol your father, and you call an idol made of stone your mother. You have rejected Me, but when you are in trouble you want Me to rescue you. Where are the idols you made? Let them rescue you when you are in trouble. You have plenty of idols, as many as your towns. You can’t accuse Me of not rescuing you, because you have rebelled against Me. I punished you, but it didn’t do any good. You killed your prophets like a lion killing its prey.”

I, the LORD, said, “You people, listen to Me. Have I left you in the desert and in darkness? You are My people, yet you say you will do what you want. Does a young woman forget her jewelry, or does a bride forget to wear her wedding ornaments? Yet for many years you have forgotten Me. You are good at finding lovers; in fact, the most experienced prostitute could learn from you. Your clothes are stained with the blood of innocent poor people; you killed them even though they didn’t break into your houses. Yet you still claim to be innocent and that I am not angry with you. Do you think I’m not angry with you? Wrong. I will punish you because you claim you haven’t sinned. You

keep changing your ways. You went to Assyria for help, and then you went to Egypt. You will be led away from Egypt, because I have rejected the nations you trusted. Those nations will not be of any help.”

The Unfaithfulness of Israel

3 “If a divorced woman remarries, her first husband can’t marry her again because that would be like making the land unclean. You, Judah, have had many lovers in your worship of idols. But I still plead for you to come back to Me. Look around you and you won’t find any place where you haven’t worshiped idols. You sit like a prostitute beside the road waiting for a client, and like a nomad in the desert. Your sins have made the land unclean.”

I use the picture of an unfaithful wife to show My anger to Israel who has been unfaithful to Me by her idol worship (v. 8). The New Testament pictures the church as the bride of Christ who enjoys intimacy with Him. “I will abide in you as You abide in Me” (1 John 1:3).

“That’s why it hasn’t rained. Like a prostitute, you are unashamed. You call Me your Father and your friend, thinking I won’t be angry with you. But yet you keep right on sinning in the worst possible ways.”

When Josiah was king of Judah, I, the LORD, said to Jeremiah, “Notice what Israel does. She has committed adultery against Me by worshiping idols on every hilltop and under every green tree. I had hoped that she would come back to Me, but she didn’t. So I divorced her. Her sister Judah saw this, but she too became unfaithful and became a prostitute. She wasn’t concerned about Israel’s sin. And so Judah made the land unclean by worshiping idols of wood and stone. Worse than that, Judah has only pretended to return to Me.”

Then I, the LORD, said, “True, Israel is unfaithful, but Judah is worse. So give this message to Israel: ‘Come back to Me, Israel, and I won’t be angry anymore, because I am merciful. Admit that you turned from Me, the LORD your God, and that you worshiped foreign idols under every green tree and you disobeyed Me. Come back to Me because I’m your husband. I will bring you back to your own land—one from this town, two from this clan. I will give you leaders who know Me, and they will lead you wisely. Then in those

days when you have increased in numbers, you won't miss the sacred chest, which the Babylonians took away. Then Jerusalem will be My throne, and all nations will come here to worship Me, and they will no longer be stubborn in their sins. You people of Judah and Israel will again be united, coming back from Babylon in the north to the land I promised your ancestors.'

“I wanted to treat you as My own children and give you this beautiful land. I wanted you to call me “Father” and not turn from Me.”

The second picture of Israel is of unfaithful children who have not obeyed Me, the Lord (v. 25).

“But you have been unfaithful to Me like a wife who is unfaithful to her husband. I, the LORD, have spoken these words. On the hilltops you can hear the Israelites weeping and pleading for Me to help them. But they have wandered from the right path and have forgotten Me, the LORD their God. If you faithless people will come back to Me, I will cure you of your straying from Me.

“Yes, we will come back to You because You are the LORD our God. We realize now that our worship of idols and our loud noises were false, and that only You can save us. Since the days of our ancestors these shameful idols have taken our crops and livestock and our children. We now lie down ashamed. We admit that we have sinned against You, the LORD our God, and that like our ancestors we have not obeyed You.”

My People Return to Me

4 I, the LORD said, “Alright, return to Me. And if you really mean to, then get rid of your terrible idols. Make promises in My name then you will bless the nations and they will praise you.”

I, the LORD, say to Judah and Jerusalem, “Plow up the hard ground of your hearts, and don't let your hearts be like land with thorn bushes. Dedicate yourselves to Me. If you don't, My anger will burn like fire that no one can put out because of all your sins. Shout to Judah and Jerusalem and sound the trumpet. Tell them to hurry and run for their lives to Zion or any walled town. Why? Because I am bringing terrible destruction from the north. An army will come like a lion. As a destroyer of nations, it will leave your towns in ruins

with no one in them. So put on burlap clothing and mourn because I am still angry with you. In that day the king and his officials will be discouraged, and priests and prophets will be shocked and frightened.”

Then Jeremiah, said, “Sovereign LORD, why have You fooled everyone by promising peace when the sword is at our throats?” I, the LORD, answered, “I am sending a windstorm from the desert. But it won’t be like a breeze that winnows grain.”

Jeremiah describes My judgment as a scorching wind, that is, the Babylonians are a coming windstorm bringing death (vv. 11-13). Remember I am both a windstorm to judge and I am the breath of God to renew. I am the Holy Spirit, I will breathe on you to give you new life. Let Me breathe on you in love. Repent of all known sin. Let Me breathe on you, I am the breath of God.

“It will be a strong gust from Me. Now I will announce your destruction. Look! The enemy sweeps down like heavy rain, and his chariots are swooping down like a whirlwind. Their horses are swifter than eagles. Then you will say, ‘How terrible it will be for us. We are doomed.’ Jerusalem, cleanse your hearts of your sin and be saved. Don’t keep thinking evil thoughts. Your destruction is being announced as far north as Dan and in the Ephraim hills.

“Tell the nations and Jerusalem that an army is coming from a distant country against Judah. Because you have rebelled against Me, this army will surround you like laborers guarding a field.” I, the LORD, have spoken these words.

“Your own actions have brought this bitter punishment on you, which will pierce your heart. You will say, ‘I feel terrible. I’m in great pain. My heart pounds and I can’t keep quiet. I hear the trumpet sound and battle cry.’

“One wave of destruction follows another till the whole land is in ruins. Tents and shelters are destroyed instantly. How long will I see the enemy flags and hear the trumpet calls to battle? My people are fools; they don’t know Me. They are like foolish children who don’t understand anything. They are good at sinning, but they have no idea how to do good.”

Jeremiah saw that the earth was formless and empty, and that the sun, moon, and stars did not shine. He saw the mountains and hills shaking. All the

people were gone, and birds had flown away. The fertile land was a desert, and towns were in ruins, because of My anger.

I, the LORD, said: “Your land will be in ruins but not destroyed completely. The earth will mourn as the sky turns black with smoke. I will not go back on what I said. Hearing many cavalymen and archers, your people will hide in bushes and behind rocks. Every town is empty. Jerusalem, you lie in ruins. So why are you acting like a prostitute, wearing red clothes, putting on lots of gold jewelry, and using eye shadow? All this is of no use because your lovers hate you and plan to kill you.

“Jeremiah, do you hear screaming and groaning like a woman in labor? This is Jerusalem gasping for breath, pleading for help, and saying, ‘I’m dying. The enemy has murdered me.’”

The Rebellion of Jerusalem

5 I, the LORD, said, “Search in the streets and squares of Jerusalem for even one person who is honest and wants to know the truth. If you find one, I will forgive the city.”

I challenged Jeremiah to search Jerusalem to see if there are any who search for truth and live honestly, who love Me, their Lord, with all their heart.

“Many people may make promises, saying, ‘As surely as the LORD lives,’ and yet they are lying.” I, Jeremiah, said, “LORD, I know You look for truth. You punished Your people because they were untruthful, but in spite of their pain, they became more stubborn, refusing to change their ways.”

I, the LORD, accused the people of being “more stubborn than a rock” (v. 3). I want tender hearts from you.

I, the LORD, thought, “These are the poor, foolish people who don’t know My ways or what I require of them. So I will speak to their leaders because they know what I require. But they too decided not to follow Me, as if that would get them out of slavery. So your enemies will attack you like a lion

from the forest or a wolf from the desert. Like a leopard they will pounce on and tear to pieces anyone who goes outside.

“People of Judah, why should I forgive you? Even your children turned against Me by worshiping gods that are not really gods. I gave you everything you needed, and yet you still committed adultery and went to prostitutes. You are like strong stallions, always wanting someone else’s wife. Obviously, I should punish you for this.

“Go through your vineyards and damage the grapevines. But don’t destroy them. Cut off the branches because you people, like these branches, don’t belong to Me. Judah and Israel have been so unfaithful to Me. I, the LORD, have spoken these words. The prophets have lied, saying I won’t harm them, and you won’t experience war or famine. But these prophets are full of wind and are not speaking My words. So they themselves will experience war and famine.”

Therefore, this is what I, the LORD, the God of the Heavens, say: “Because the people are talking like this, I will give you words to say that will be like a fire burning up these people like wood being burned. Israel, I will bring against you a distant and ancient nation, who speaks a language you won’t understand. The arrows of these warriors bring death. They will eat your crops, kill your children, eat your livestock, and eat your grapes and figs. You may feel safe in your walled cities, but they will destroy those cities.

“Yet I won’t let the enemy destroy you completely. When your people ask why I, the LORD, have done all this, tell them, ‘Since you left Me to serve idols of foreign countries, you will now serve foreigners in their land.’”

I, the LORD, said, “You foolish people. You have eyes, but you don’t see, and you have ears, but you don’t listen. Why don’t you reverence Me and tremble in My presence? After all, I’m the one who made the sandy shore to hold back the oceans. The waves may crash against the beach, but they can’t cross it. Yet you stubborn people have turned from Me. You don’t say, ‘Let’s reverence the LORD our God. He’s the one who sends rain and gives a good harvest for several weeks each year.’ But because of your sin I hold off the rain and your harvesting. Your sin has robbed you of these good things.

“Some of you people trap humans like hunters trapping birds. Just as cages are full of birds, so your houses are full of deceit. By cheating you have become rich and powerful and well fed. Your sinful ways are unlimited. You refuse justice to orphans and the poor. Obviously, you deserve to be punished, so I will take revenge. Think of the shocking things going on in your country.

Prophets are telling lies, and priests assume authority that isn't theirs, and you, My people, seem to love it that way. But when disaster comes, what will you do then?"

Enemies Surround Jerusalem

6 "You people of Benjamin, run for your lives. Leave Jerusalem. Sound an alarm by trumpet in Tekoa and send a signal over Beth-Hakkerem. Disaster, even terrible destruction, is coming from the north. I, the LORD, will destroy Zion, My beautiful daughter. Enemy shepherds will set up their tents around you and divide your pastures for their flocks. The enemy is prepared for battle to attack at noon. But now that the day is fading, and evening shadows are extending, the army will attack at night."

I, the LORD of the heavens, say this to the enemy: "Cut down trees and build ramps up against Jerusalem's walls. This city is to be punished because of her wickedness. She spouts evil like water from a spring. Sounds of violence and destruction are heard in her. And I see her sickness and wounds. Heed my warning, Jerusalem: If you don't, I will make you empty and no one will live there."

*I told Israel, "If you don't listen, I will turn my back on you" (v. 8).
Have you ever come to that place where I do not hear your prayers?
Maybe I will turn a deaf ear toward you because you stopped listening
to Me. Why should I listen to you if you don't listen to Me?*

I, the LORD of the heavens, said, "You, enemy of Israel, may destroy the few remaining people in Israel much as a farmer goes over each vine again to gather the grapes he missed the first time." Jeremiah, says, "Who will listen to my warning? The people refuse to listen, and they reject the Lord's Word. I am full of the Lord's wrath, and I can hardly hold it in any longer." I, the Lord answered, "I will pour out My wrath on children playing in the streets, on young men, and on husbands, wives, and older adults. I will turn over to others their houses, fields, and wives when I punish these people.

"Everyone is greedy and deceitful, including even prophets and priests. They treat My people's wounds as if they aren't serious, and they speak of peace when there is nothing but war. They are not ashamed of their disgusting

conduct. In fact, they don't even blush. So when I punish them, they will fall down with those already killed.

"I told you to walk in the old, godly path your ancestors took, and you would find rest. But you said, 'We won't walk on that road.' I also set watchmen over you to tell you to listen to the warning of the trumpet blast. But you said you wouldn't pay attention to it. Therefore, you nations, listen. My people ignored Me and rejected My laws, so now the evil they planned to do will happen to them. I don't want your incense from Sheba or perfume from some distant country. I don't want your burnt offerings, and I'm not pleased with your sacrifices."

Therefore I, the LORD, say this: "I will put obstacles in My people's path, and fathers and sons will trip over them, and neighbors and friends will die."

I, the LORD, also say this: "A great army is marching from the north, part of a great distant nation. Its soldiers, armed with arrows and spears, are cruel and show no mercy. Their horses sound like the roaring of ocean waves as they attack you, Jerusalem." The people said, "Hearing about this enemy makes us feel weak. Fear and pain make us feel like a woman in labor."

I, the LORD said, "Don't work in your fields or walk by the roads because the enemy is everywhere and is well armed. Put on burlap clothing and sit in ashes. Mourn, My people, as if your only son had died, because the enemy will come against you suddenly.

"Jeremiah, test and observe My people as if you are testing metals. You'll see that as rebels, full of slander, they are as hardened in their ways as bronze and iron. Fire in a furnace purifies metals, but My people can't be purified of their sin. I have rejected them, so they are like rejected silver."

I, The LORD, Speak to Jeremiah

7I, the LORD told Jeremiah to stand by My Temple gate and tell the people there,

Some people think they are getting closer to Me because they walk into My building. But there's nothing magical about a dwelling. The people of Jeremiah's day were trusting My Temple to save them from their enemies. But the answer is not to get into My house, but to get Me, the LORD, of the house into your lives.

“Hear this message from Me, the LORD of the heavens: If you change your ways, I’ll let you live in your country. But don’t think that just because the temple is here I will protect you. I’ll let you live here if you treat people fairly, and stop taking advantage of foreign residents, orphans, and widows; and if you stop killing innocent people and stop worshiping idols. Then I will let you live here in the land I gave your ancestors. But you are trusting in worthless lies.

“Do you think you can steal, murder, commit adultery, lie in court, and worship Baal and other gods, and then come to My temple and say you are safe and then keep on sinning? You have made the temple a place for robbers. I have seen all you’ve done. Go to the place where I had My tabernacle for a while. Because of your sins, I destroyed Shiloh. And while I was doing all this, I spoke to you over and over, but you wouldn’t listen. And I will do the same thing to My temple. I will destroy it, and I’ll send you away as captives, just as I sent away the people of Ephraim.

“Jeremiah, don’t pray for these people. Don’t beg Me to help them because I won’t listen. Look what they are doing in the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem. Children gather firewood, fathers build fires, and mothers mix dough to make bread to offer the queen of heaven (also known as Astarte). And they pour out drink offerings to other idol gods. They are insulting Me, but more than that they are insulting themselves by these shameful things. And now, I, the Sovereign LORD, pour out My fierce anger on people, animals, trees, and crops, and everything will be burned, and nothing left.”

I, the LORD of the heavens, the God of Israel, also say this: “I won’t accept sacrifices from you but go ahead and offer them and eat the meat yourselves. When I rescued your ancestors out of Egypt, I wanted more than burnt offerings from them. I told them, ‘If you obey Me, I will be your God, and you will be My people, and all will go well for you.’”

“But your ancestors refused to listen. They were stubborn in their sinning, and when I wanted them to go one way, they went another. From the day they left Egypt until now, I have sent My servants the prophets to speak for Me. But you didn’t listen. You have been stubborn, sinning even more than your ancestors.

“Jeremiah, when you tell them all this, they won’t listen. Therefore, say to them, ‘You have not obeyed Me, your God and you haven’t changed your

ways. You are not truthful. So shave your heads in mourning, and weep on the mountains. I have rejected this generation that has made Me angry.

““You people have sinned before My very eyes. You have set up your terrible idols right in My temple which has made the temple disgusting. You have built altars as Topheth in Hinnom Valley, where you sacrifice your children in fire to other gods. Obviously, I never thought of telling you to do such an awful thing. The time is coming when that place will be called Slaughter Valley because you will bury your dead there till there’ll be no more room for graves. Corpses on the ground will be eaten by birds and wild animals, and no one will be there to scare them off. The sounds of joy at weddings will no longer be heard in Judah’s towns or Jerusalem’s streets.” ’

My Word is Rejected

8 “In that day the enemy will dig up the bones of dead kings and officials of Judah along with the bones of the priests, prophets, and everyone in Jerusalem. They will be spread out on the ground exposed to the sun, moon, and stars, which they loved, served, and worshiped. These bones will be left lying on the ground like trash. People of Judah who survive will want to die rather than live as captives in some foreign country.” I, the LORD of the heavens, have spoken these words.

“Jeremiah, also give the people of Jerusalem these words: ‘When someone falls, he gets up again. And when he realizes he took a wrong road, he turns and goes back. Why then do you refuse to turn back to Me and continue on your false ways? I listen carefully to your talk, but no one admits he has done wrong. Everyone rushes down his own path of sin like a horse rushing to a battle. Storks, doves, swifts, and swallows know when to migrate. But you, My people, are ignorant of My laws.

““How can you say, ‘We are wise because we have the Lord’s laws, when your teachers have turned them into lies?’” They think they are wise, but they will be shamed and trapped because they rejected what I say. Obviously, they aren’t so wise after all. I’ll give your wives and fields to strangers. Everyone, great or small, prophet or priest, is greedy and dishonest.” ’

My people are guilty of being “greedy for money.” That’s probably the number one sin in modern society, people worship the dollar. They give

their strength, their lives to get more money. They even pray for Me to give them money.

“You treat My people’s wounds as if they aren’t serious, and you speak of peace when there is only war. You aren’t ashamed of your disgusting sins, and you don’t even blush. But you will lie dead with other corpses. I will wipe out your harvests of figs, grapes, and fruit trees. Every good thing I prepared for you will be gone.” I, the LORD, have spoken these words.

Then the people will say, “Why are we sitting here? What are we waiting for? Let’s go to our walled cities and die there. Because we have sinned against the Lord our God, He has determined to destroy us by our drinking poisoned water. We had hoped for peace, but none came. We hoped for healing, but all we got was terror. We can hear the snorting of enemy horses all the way from Dan, and we tremble with fear. The enemy is coming to destroy Jerusalem and our nations.” I, the LORD, say, “I’ll send against you this army like poisonous snakes. You won’t be able to charm them, and they’ll bite you.”

Jeremiah says, “My grief is terrible, and my heart is broken. All across the land people are asking, ‘Has the Lord left Zion? Is the king no longer there?’” I, the LORD, answered, “You made Me angry by worshiping carved images and foreign idols.”

The people knew enough to cry to Me when they got into trouble asking, “Isn’t the Lord still in Zion?” Yes, I am still at the place where you walked away from Me.

“You people say, ‘Harvest time and summer are gone, and yet the Lord has not rescued us.’

“You people are crushed because of My anger. And I, Jeremiah, also feel downhearted. I mourn, and I’m horrified. Surely there are doctors and balm in Gilead. Why then are God’s people not healed?”

Jeremiah Laments the Sins of the People

Jeremiah cries, “If my eyes were a fountain of tears, I would weep day and night for my people who were killed.”

9

Do you see Jeremiah’s heart? He said, “I wish my heart were like a spring of water—then I could cry day and night” (v. 1).

“I wish I could go find a traveler’s shack in the desert and get away from you people who are so unfruitful to the Lord.”

I, the LORD, said, “My people tell lies like they are shooting arrows from a bow. Jeremiah, your friends and relatives are telling this about you, so don’t trust them. People tell lies about their friends, wearing themselves out with their sins. They deceive each other, and refuse to come to Me.”

I, the LORD of the heavens also said, “I’ll punish My people’s hearts like metal is purified in a furnace. Because of their sin I have no other choice.

“Their tongues ‘shout’ lies like poisoned arrows. They speak kindly to their neighbors while planning to kill them. I will punish them for this, getting even with them for their sins against Me. Jeremiah, weep for the mountains and pastures because they are now deserted, and no one travels there anymore. Cattle are not lowing, and birds and wild animals have all disappeared. I, the LORD, will make Jerusalem and Judah’s towns piles of ruins where only wild dogs live.”

Jeremiah answered, “Lord, who can understand why the land has been so ruined: Have you told anyone, so he can explain it to others?”

I, the LORD, replied, “This is because My people disobeyed Me and rejected My laws. They stubbornly followed their own desires and worshiped images of Baal, as their ancestors did. So I, the LORD of the heavens, the God of Israel, will feed them bitter food and make them drink poisoned water. I will scatter them around the world as strangers in distant lands. And their enemies will kill every one of them with swords.”

I, the LORD of the heavens also said this: “Send for the women who are paid to weep at funerals. Tell them to begin weeping quickly and to let tears flow from their eyes. The people of Jerusalem will weep, saying, ‘We are ruined. Our homes have been destroyed so we must leave our land and our homes.’”

“Listen, you women, to what I, the Lord, say. Teach your daughters and your neighbors to wail at funerals. Death has crept in through our windows

and has killed our young people. So children, now dead, no longer play in the streets, and young men are not in the city squares.” I, the LORD say, “Dead bodies will be scattered on the fields like dung or stalks of lengthened grain.” And I, the LORD say, “Don’t brag about your wisdom or strength or riches. Instead, boast in the fact that you know and understand Me, the just God, and that My love is steadfast. A time is coming when I will punish pagans whose hearts are not right with Me, including Egypt, Edom, Ammon, and Moab. And even Israel is like these pagans.”

Listen to Me, Not to Idols

10 Israel, listen to what I, the LORD, say. Here’s My message: “Don’t be like other nations who are frightened when they see signs in the sky.”

I want you—My people—to be different. I say, “Don’t live like the people from other nations” (v. 2). Today I want My people to live differently from unsaved people.

“Their ways are futile. For example, they cut down a tree and carve an idol, and decorate it with silver and gold, and then nail it down so it won’t fall over. Like scarecrows their idols can’t talk, and they have to be carried because they can’t walk. Don’t be afraid of idols because they can’t hurt you or help you.”

I, the LORD, am great and powerful. No one is like Me. Everyone should worship Me because I am King of the nations. No one anywhere is wise like Me. Idols made of wood are worthless, and so are those who worship them. Skilled workers make idols by hammering out silver from Tarshish and gold from Uphaz. Then they dress the idols in blue and purple. But I am the LORD, the only true and living God, the eternal King. When I am angry, the earth trembles, and nations perish under My wrath. So-called gods, who did not create the heavens and the earth, will be destroyed.

But I your God, made the earth by My power and wisdom and I spread out the stars in space. When I speak, clouds in the heavens roar, and I send clouds, lightning, rain, and wind. Everyone who worships idols is foolish and stupid, and even goldsmiths are shamed by their idols because the idols are a hoax and are not alive. Idols are worthless, and people make fun of them. The time

will come when they will all be destroyed. But I, the LORD, the God of Jacob, am not like them. I created everything, and I chose Israel to be My very own. I am the LORD of the heavens.

I, the LORD say, “Gather your things and get ready to leave. The enemy is coming. I will toss you from this land and bring trouble on you and you will be captured.”

Then Jeremiah said, “How terrible, it will be because our wounds can’t be cured, but we must endure the pain. Our homes are destroyed, and our children are dead, and no one is left to help us rebuild our homes. Even our leaders are stupid and don’t follow Me, the Lord. Therefore, they fail and their flocks are scattered. Listen! Hear the noise of the armies from the north. Judah’s towns will be in ruins and wild dogs will live there.”

Jeremiah prayed, “Lord, we humans can’t plan and control our lives. Correct me, Lord, but don’t be angry with us, or we will die.”

Jeremiah knows people are weak. He says, “No one can control his own life.” So Jeremiah prays, “O Lord, correct me, but be fair.” Is that your prayer?

Jeremiah says, “Pour out Your wrath on nations that don’t believe in You and don’t worship You. They have wiped out Israel and made the land a desolate wilderness.”

A Covenant with My People

11 I, the LORD, spoke to Jeremiah again and said, “Remind the people of Judah and Jerusalem of the agreement I made with their ancestors and tell them that I, the God of Israel, will put a curse on anyone who doesn’t keep the agreement. When I brought them out of Egypt, which was like a furnace for melting iron, I told them that if they obeyed Me, they would be My people and I would be their God. Then I brought them into the land where you are now.” Jeremiah answered, “Yes, Lord, that’s true.”

Then I, the LORD, told him to tell everyone in the town of Judah and on the streets of Jerusalem, “Be sure to follow the terms of My agreement. I warned your ancestors over and over to obey Me, but they didn’t listen. They

were stubborn in their sins, so I brought on them all the calamities stated in the agreement.”

Then I, the LORD, added, “Jeremiah, the people of Judah and Jerusalem are plotting against Me. They have sinned as their ancestors did, refusing to listen to Me. By worshiping and serving other gods, Israel and Judah have broken our agreement. Therefore, I will bring trouble on them, and they won’t have any way out. They will plead for Me to relieve them, but I won’t listen. Then they will beg their idols to help them, but the idols won’t be able to save them from disaster. You have as many gods as towns in Judah and as many incense altars to Baal as there are streets in Jerusalem, but they can’t help you.

“Jeremiah, don’t pray or beg for these people, in their time of distress, because I won’t listen.”

Because of their continued sin and hardened hearts, I will not listen when they call to Me for deliverance. But I will listen to any sinner who cries out for salvation. Jesus said, “Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37).

I, the LORD, then said to the people, “What right do you, My beloved people, have to enter My temple while you are carrying out your evil plans? Your sacrifices won’t protect you from My punishing you and they won’t give you joy when you are sinning. You were like a beautiful olive tree full of fruit, but in My eyes, I will send a noisy enemy to burn it and break off its branches. I, the LORD of the heavens, will destroy this tree, because you sinned and burned incense to Baal.”

Then I, the LORD, told Jeremiah that his people were plotting to kill him. But he didn’t know it.

The people tried to kill Jeremiah for his prophecies. They said, “Let’s destroy the tree and kill its fruit” (v. 19), but I protected him. Charles Spurgeon, the 19th century preacher from London, England, said, “God’s man is indestructible until God is finished with him.”

Jeremiah was like a gentle lamb being led away to be slaughtered. They said, “Let’s chop him down like a tree, and kill him so no one will remember

him.” But, I, the LORD of the heavens, will always do what is right and I know what everyone is thinking. So I will repay them for what they have done. Look to Me for help.

The men of the town of Anathoth said they will kill Jeremiah if he keeps on prophesying. But I, the LORD of the heavens, say that I will punish them by dying in battle or by famine. Not one of them will survive when I punish them.

Jeremiah Complains to Me

12 Jeremiah complains to Me, “You are fair and just. But here’s a concern I have: Why do wicked people prosper? Why do they have an easy life?”

“I plant them like trees, they grow and bear fruit, and they praise Me but they don’t mean it. But I know Jeremiah, and I know what he thinks. So I will drag your enemies away like sheep to be slaughtered. How long will the land be dry and parched? Even birds and animals have died, and the people are saying, ‘You won’t see them sinning.’”

“Jeremiah, if you get tired running in a race, how can you run against horses? If you fall in an open field, what will you do in the forest by the Jordan River? That is, if you find your present situation difficult, your future will be worse. Even your own family members are against you. They may sound friendly, but don’t trust them.

“I have forsaken My people, My special possessions. I love them, but their enemies will defeat them. They are like a lion roaring at Me; that’s why I hate them. My people are like a vulture, surrounded by other vultures ready to attack. Wild animals can come and eat the corpses. Shepherds will ruin My vineyard and make My land desolate. The whole land will be desolate, and no one will care. Armies march along desert roads, destroying the land. They are like My sword, killing people everywhere. No one will be safe. You planted wheat but reaped only thorns. You work hard but gain nothing. You will harvest only shame because of My fierce anger.”

I, the LORD also said, “Enemies have attacked Israel, My special possessions, but I will uproot them from their lands just as Judah will be uprooted from them. Later I will have compassion on My nation and bring them back to their lands.

“If these nations learn to worship Me and reject Baal, then they will also become My people. But if any nation doesn’t obey Me, I will uproot and destroy them.”

The Linen Belt

13I, the LORD, said to Jeremiah, “Buy and wear a linen belt, but don’t wash it.” So he did. Then I, the LORD, said, “Take the belt and go to Perath, a village a few miles northeast of Jerusalem, and hide the belt in the rocks.” So Jeremiah did as I, told him.

Sometime later I, the LORD, said, “Now go get the belt.” So Jeremiah dug it up, but it was ruined and useless. Then I, the LORD, said, “In a similar way I will destroy the pride of Judah and Jerusalem. These wicked people who refuse to listen to Me and who stubbornly serve, and worship other gods will be completely useless like this belt. Just as a belt clings to a man’s waist so I have held you, Israel and Judah, close to Me. I wanted you to bring Me praise and honor, but you refused to listen.

“Tell the people of Judah, ‘I, the LORD, the God of Israel, tell you to fill every wineskin with wine.’ If they say, ‘We know to do that,’ then say, ‘I, the LORD, say that I will make everyone in Jerusalem drunk, including kings, priests, and prophets. Then I will smash them against each other, even parents against their children, and I will have no mercy or compassion on them.’

“I, the LORD, have spoken, so don’t be so proud to pay attention. Honor Me before darkness comes and you stumble. You will want light, but you will have only deep darkness. If you are too proud to listen to Me, the LORD, Jeremiah will weep alone. Tears will fill his eyes because you, My sheep, will be taken as captives. Say to the king and his mother, ‘Come off your throne and take off your crowns. No one will be able to go in or out of the cities in the Southern Desert. Everyone in Judah will be taken away as prisoners. Look to the north and you’ll see the enemy coming toward you. The flock you hoped would help you will not be around. The nations that were your allies will now be your enemies, and you will be in pain like a woman in childbirth.’

“If you ask, ‘Why has this happened to us?’ It’s because of your sins. That’s why you were raped. It’s as impossible for you to do good as it is for an Ethiopian to change his skin color or a leopard to remove its spots.”

I recognize a man cannot change his nature. But I can transform a person from the inside out, “If a man be in Christ, he is a new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17).

I, the LORD, say, “I will scatter you to foreign nations like a desert wind that blows away grain husks. This is what I have planned for you because you rejected Me and trusted in false gods. I will expose you to shame because of your adultery and lust and prostitution to idols. I am aware of your disgusting idol worship on hilltops and in the fields. How terrible it will be for you, Jerusalem. How long will you continue in your sins?”

Drought, Sword, and Famine

14 This message came to Jeremiah from Me, the Lord, about the lack of rain: “Judah and Jerusalem mourn as the land dries up. Nobles go to cisterns for water, but the wells are dry. So they return with empty pitchers, and in their depression they lower their heads. The ground is cracked, and farmers also cover their heads. A deer gives birth to fawn but then leaves it because there is no grass, and wild donkeys pant like thirsty wild dogs, and they go blind from lack of grass.”

“We realize how sinful we’ve been and how terrible is our backsliding.” The people prayed for Me to please do something to defend My reputation. I am their hope, and Savior in times of trouble. But why do they treat Me like a stranger, stopping only overnight? Why are they surprised? They think I am among them and they are My people, but I have abandoned them.”

I, the LORD, say this about these people: “You love to wander off. So I don’t accept you. I’ll remember your sins and punish you for them.”

I, the Lord say, “They really love to wander from Me” (v. 10). I understand the rebellion of the natural heart. I want your worship (John 4:23), but you tend to worship everything but Me. You need a hatred against sin.

Then I, the LORD, said to Jeremiah, “Don’t pray for these people. They go without food and they offer burnt offerings and grain offerings, but I won’t

accept them. Instead I will destroy them with the sword, starvation, and disease. Prophets keep telling them they won't die in battle or from lack of food, and they say I will give them peace." Then I, the LORD, said, "These prophets are telling lies, based on false visions, fortune-telling, idol worship, and their own imaginations. But I did not send them. Yet they insist on saying that battles and shortage of food will not happen. However, those same prophets will in fact die in battle and from lack of food. And the bodies of the people who will listen to them will be thrown into the streets of Jerusalem, dying because of the sword and lack of food. No one will be left to bury them. Husbands, wives, sons, and daughters will all be dead.

"Jeremiah, tell the people: 'Your eyes are filled with tears day and night, because My daughter, My people, are suffering from a terrible wound. In the country I see people killed by the sword, and in the city, I see people dying from starvation. Prophets and priests have been taken captives to Babylon.

"Have I, the LORD, rejected Judah? Do I hate Zion? Why have I wounded you so severely? You hoped for peace and healing but found only fear and trembling. Admit your own sin and the sins of your ancestors. I don't despise you because of your reputation. You don't keep the agreement I made with you."

The people prayed to Me, "For Your sake, don't hate us" (v. 21). The people are wrong, I don't hate them; I love them (John 3:16). I hate their sin. Do you see the vicious triangle? I love people, the people love sin, and in turn I hate their sin that keeps them from loving Me.

"No idols can bring rain, and showers don't fall by themselves. I, the LORD your God, am the one who sends rain. That's why you should trust in Me."

I, The LORD, Am Angry With My People

15I, the LORD, said to Jeremiah, "Even if Moses and Samuel were praying for these people, I wouldn't change My mind. So send them away. If they ask you where to go, tell them I said that some of them will die, others will be killed in battle, some will starve to death, and others will be taken captives. I will destroy them in four kinds of ways: by the sword, dogs, birds, and wild

animals. They will be repulsive to all the nations because of the terrible things Manasseh, king of Judah, did. People of Jerusalem, no one will feel sorry for you or mourn because of you or ask how you are.”

I, the LORD say, “You turned from Me and kept on sliding away so I will destroy you, because I’m tired of showing you mercy. I will scatter you like grain at the city gates. Since you haven’t changed your ways, I will bring sorrow and death on you. Your widows will be greater in number than the grains of sand on a beach. At noon I will bring an enemy against the mothers of young men, and the mothers will suddenly feel agony and fright. A mother of seven will grow faint and gasp for breath. She will be shamed and humiliated. And if any survivors are left, they will be killed.” I the LORD have spoken these words.

Jeremiah said to his mother, “I wish I had never been born. Everyone is against me. I never lend or borrow money, yet everyone speaks against me.” Then I, the LORD, said, “I’ll protect you, and even your enemies will beg you for help. Just as you can’t break iron or bronze, so you can’t defeat your enemy. They will take your wealth and valuables because of all your sins. I will make you slaves in a foreign country because My anger is like a fire.

“I know how you are suffering. So I will take revenge on those who persecute you. My words give you strength and joy. You belong to Me, the LORD, God of the Heavens. Don’t join with party-goers. Keep to yourself because I’m angry at their sins. You’re in constant pain with a wound that won’t heal. I will not disappoint you like a stream that is dry in the summer.”

I, the LORD said, “Return to Me and speak My words, and I will make you My prophet. Encourage the people to turn to Me, but don’t you follow their ways.

“I will make you strong like a bronze wall. They will fight against you, but they won’t defeat you because I will rescue you. I will rescue you from wicked people and set you free from cruel people.”

I emphasize the fact, “They will die” (v. 2), predicting disaster will come. I say, “My anger is like a hot fire. And it will burn” (v. 14). Even though the world thinks it can get away with sin, and even though the world thinks there is no punishment after death, I who created all things and I who sent Jesus Christ to die for them, will become the Judge who will punish them for their sin. I will always hear the sinner who cries for forgiveness and salvation.

My Judgment

16 Then I, the LORD, said, “Jeremiah, do not get married and have children.”

Jeremiah is filled with symbolic actions. These are events in Jeremiah's life where his actions carry a message to the people of Israel. Jeremiah was told not to get married, not to go to a funeral, and not to go to a feast. He was not to do the things people normally do, warning Israel there was coming a time of crisis when they couldn't perform normal activities.

“Why? Because children born in this land will be left on the ground like trash. They will die in battles or by starvation, and birds and wild animals will eat them.” I, the LORD say, “Don't go to their funerals and express sympathy because I no longer love or pity these people. Rich and poor will die, and they won't be buried, and no one will show sorrow by cutting himself or shaving his head. No one will give food or wine to comfort those who mourn the death of their parents.

“Don't go to their festivals to eat and drink. I, the LORD of the heavens, the God of Israel, will end their parties and songs and wedding celebrations. When you tell people this and they ask why I have planned such disasters and what they have done wrong, then say, ‘This is because your ancestors left Me, and served and worshiped other gods and disobeyed My laws. But you have done worse than that. You have stubbornly sinned instead of obeying Me. That's why I will send you away into a foreign land, and there you will worship other gods day and night, and you will get no sympathy from Me.

“However, a time is coming when you will no longer refer to Me as the God who rescued you from Egypt, but you will refer to Me as the God who rescued you from the north and other nations. I will bring you back to this land. But now your enemies will be like fishermen catching you and hunting you down in the hills and caves. I see everything they are doing; their sins are not hidden. I will pay you double for your sins because you have defiled the land with lifeless idols.’

“I, your LORD, give strength, and will protect you like a fortress in times of trouble. People will come to Me from distant nations and will say, ‘Our ancestors worshiped false gods but they were of no help. They made their own gods, but they aren’t actually gods at all.’”

So I, the LORD, said, “I will teach them My power and strength, and then they will know that I am their LORD.”

My Judgment (continued)

17I, the LORD, say, “Judah’s sin is as permanent on their hearts as if it were chiseled in iron with a diamond point on the corners of their altars. Even their children worship at altars to Baal and Asherah poles beside large trees and on high hills. I will give all your wealth and everything you own, including your hilltop shrines, to your enemies because of your sin. You will lose the land I gave you, and you will become slaves in a foreign country because you have caused My anger to burn forever.”

I, the LORD, also say, “You are cursed if you trust in people and turn away from Me. You will be dry like a desert bush, with no hope for the future. You will live in the dry, salty desert. But I will bless those who trust in Me. They will be like a tree beside a stream, with roots that reach to the water. Heat and drought do not bother it, and it always bears fruit.

“Human hearts are so deceitful they can’t change.”

Why do people sin when they should know better? Why are people blinded to truth? The answer is the deceitful heart. “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it” (v. 9, NKJV). This verse suggests you can’t even know your own heart.

“I search people’s hearts and I know what they think, and I will see that they get what they deserve. If you get wealthy by cheating, you are like a bird that hatches eggs it didn’t lay. When a man loses his wealth, everyone will see that he was a fool.

“My temple is a glorious throne and I am Israel’s only hope, so anyone who turns from Me, the spring of living water, will be ashamed and will be swept away like words written in dust. I, the LORD, alone can heal and save

you. I am the one you praise. People keep asking me, ‘Why don’t My predictions come true?’

“I, the LORD, know you, Jeremiah, have been faithful as a spiritual shepherd to My people. You have announced upcoming disaster but not because you wanted to. Don’t be frightened because I am your only hope in times of trouble. I will bring shame and fear on people who persecute you and send destruction on them.”

I, the LORD, said, “Jeremiah, stand at each city gate in Jerusalem including the one that the kings use. Say to the people, ‘Hear God’s Word, kings and people of Judah. The Lord says not to do any work on the Sabbath: Don’t carry anything through the gates or out of your houses. But keep the Sabbath holy. I gave this command to your ancestors, but they were stubborn and refused to obey and would not respond to discipline. But if you obey Me, then a descendant of David will always be on his throne. The king and his officials will ride through the city gates in chariots and on horses, and the people of Judah and Jerusalem will join them, and people will always be living in Jerusalem. People will come here from nearby villages, from Benjamin, the western foothills, the hill country, and the Southern Desert. They will bring burnt offerings, grain offerings, incense, and thank offerings to the temple. But if you don’t obey Me and don’t keep the Sabbath holy and you keep on carrying things through the city gates on the Sabbath, then I will set the gates of Jerusalem on fire and it will also burn the fortresses.’”

Jeremiah tells them, “A person who quits following the Lord will be like a name written in the dust” (v. 13). That means it will be blown away with the wind. I will write your name in My book. “So a book of remembrance was written before Me for those who fear Me and who meditate on My name” (Mal. 3:16, NKJV).

The Potter and the Clay

18I, the LORD, told Jeremiah to go to where clay jars are made, and I would give him a message there. So he did, and saw the potter working at his wheel. But the jar he was making didn’t turn out the way he wanted, so he shaped it into a different jar.

The Bible says you are like pots or vessels. “If anyone cleanses himself—he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the master” (2 Tim. 2:21, NKJV). Jeremiah saw a potter using his hands to shape the pot the way he wanted it to be. I, the Lord, want you to be a vessel that I can use. Let Me use My hands to make you what I want you to be. Yield to the pressure of My fingers. Give Me your eyes to see the lost. Give Me your hands to help people. Give Me your ears to hear the cries of the anguished. Give Me your voice to speak My Word. Give Me your heart.

Then I, the LORD, said, “Israel, I’m like this potter and you are like this clay. If I tell a nation I will destroy it, and it turns from its sin, then I won’t destroy it as I had planned. Or if I plan to build up a nation but its people sin and don’t obey Me, then I won’t bless that nation.”

The clay didn’t yield in the potter’s hand, so he crushed the pot and began again. I use some people, then comes a time when they refuse to let Me the divine Potter mold their life. Do I give up on some people?

Therefore, Jeremiah, told the people of Judah and Jerusalem, “I, the Lord, say I will bring disaster on you unless you turn from your sins and change your ways. But you people will continue on in your stubborn evil ways. So I, the Lord, say, ‘Ask the nations and see if they have ever heard of a horrible sin like yours. The snow on Lebanon’s mountains never melt, and the streams from those mountains never run dry. Yet you, by contrast, My people, are unreliable. You have deserted Me and burned incense to worthless idols. In fact, these idols have caused you to stumble from the right path. Your land will be ruined, and people will despise you. Everyone who passes by will shake their heads in amazement. I’ll scatter you before your enemies like dust blown by an eastern wind. I’ll turn My back on you when you are in distress.’”

Some of the people said, “Let’s get rid of Jeremiah. We will always have our priests, wise people, and prophets. Let’s accuse him or ignore what he says.”

Jeremiah responded to Me, “Hear what my accusers are saying, Lord. I tried to help them, but they are digging a pit to put me in it. I pleaded for You not to be angry with them. So now I’m asking You to let their children starve

or be killed in war. And let their wives become widows and their young men be killed. They have dug a pit to put me in it and have set traps for me. Let them scream in fear when enemy troops attack their homes. Lord, You know they plan to kill me, so don't forgive their sins. Defeat them and deal with them in Your anger."

The Broken Jar

19I, the LORD said, "Jeremiah, go buy a clay jar from a potter. Then take with you some of the elders and priests and go to the Hinnom Valley, near the Potsherd Gate. Then I, the LORD of the heavens, the God of Israel, will bring so much trouble on this valley that everyone will be shocked. They have rejected Me, and worshiped foreign gods here, and burned sacrifices to those gods, and they have shed innocent blood. They have built hilltop shrines and burned their children as sacrifices to Baal. This is something I never commanded nor even thought of. People will change the name of this place from Topheth or the Hinnom Valley to Slaughter Valley.

"I'll ruin your plans, Judah and Jerusalem, by letting your people be slaughtered. And your dead bodies will be eaten by birds and wild animals. People who see this city in ruins will be shocked. When the enemy is attacking, people will eat your children and friends.

"Jeremiah, after you say these words, break the jar I told you to buy as the people are watching. Then say, 'I, the LORD of the heavens, will smash this nation as I smashed this jar. You will bury bodies in Topheth till there is no more burial room. I will make Jerusalem unclean like Topheth by filling it with dead bodies.'"

There is a terrible conclusion to the smashed jar. "It cannot be put back together again." Those who refuse to listen to Me and not do My will, will be smashed as Jeremiah broke the jar.

"This is because you people burned incense on your rooftops to the stars and poured drink offerings to foreign gods."

So Jeremiah went to Topheth and in My Temple court said to the people, "The LORD of the heavens, the God of Israel, says He will bring disaster on

Jerusalem and surrounding towns. Why? Because you were stubborn and refused to listen to Him.”

Pashhur the Priest is Judged

20Pashhur, son of Immer, was priest and chief officer in My Temple. When he heard the words of Jeremiah, he beat him and put him in chains by the Upper Gate of Benjamin near My Temple. The next day after Passhur released him, Jeremiah said to him, “Passhur will no longer be your name. Instead I’ll call you Magor-Missabib (meaning ‘Terror on Every Side’). You will see your own friends killed by the sword. I will let the king of Babylon take everyone in Judah as captives. He will kill some and take others as prisoners. And he will take to Babylon all the wealth and valuables of the city. You, Passhur, and your relatives will be prisoners in Babylon. And there you’ll die and be buried because you told lies.”

Jeremiah thought people would welcome his message. But not so. They ridiculed him all day long. When he told them destruction is coming, they insulted and criticized him.

When Jeremiah thought of not giving My messages to them, My word burned intensely like a fire in his bones.

When Jeremiah decided not to speak any more for Me, it was then, “The Lord’s message becomes like a burning fire inside me” (v. 9). Have you ever felt My message was burning you up?

He heard people whispering about reporting him. Even his friends were watching for him to make a mistake, so they can get even with him.

But, I, the LORD, was like a strong soldier at his side. His enemies will stumble and fall and be terribly ashamed and dishonored. I, the LORD of the heavens, know people who do right; I know what everyone is thinking. I will get even with them for what they have done to you. Sing praises to Me, your LORD for rescuing needy people like you.

Jeremiah wished he had never been born. He wished his father had never heard the words, “You have a son.” May the man who gave his father that news be like towns I defeated. May he hear wailing and battle cries. Jeremiah

wished he had been killed in his mother's womb. He wished he had not been born because all he sees is trouble and sorrow.

The Way of Life and the Way of Death

21 King Zedekiah of Judah sent Pashhur, son of Malkijah, and the priest Zephaniah, son of Maaseiah, to Jeremiah to ask him to ask Me, the Lord, to work a miracle for them to get Nebuchadnezzar to back off from attacking Jerusalem. But Jeremiah said, "Tell Zedekiah that the Lord, the God of Israel, says that your weapons will be useless against the Babylonians. They are outside the city walls, but they will break into the city. He'll fight against you in His anger and wrath, and men and animals will die of a plague. Some will survive war, hunger, and disease, but Nebuchadnezzar will capture them and Zedekiah and his officials. He will kill you and have no mercy or compassion.

"Also tell the people that God will let you choose life or death."

I give everyone the choice of life or death. Everyone knows in his heart I am the Creator (Rom. 1:18-21) and they are responsible to Me. They are "without excuse" because they don't worship Me the Creator as they should (Rom. 1:20-21). Because everyone sees the sins of others, and accuses them of sinning, they themselves "are without excuse," because they don't follow what they know is right (Rom. 2:1-6). Everyone has a conscience but disobeys their conscience (Rom. 2:14-15), therefore they are without excuse. As for you, choose to follow Me.

I, the LORD, say, "If you stay in the city, you will die by war, hunger, or disease. But you'll live if you surrender to the Babylonians. I will not rescue Jerusalem. Instead the king of Babylon will burn it to the ground.

"Tell the royal family that I, the LORD, say, "Be sure justice is done and rescue those who are being robbed. If you don't, My anger will be like a fire that can't be put out. You people of Jerusalem think you are safe because you are above the valley, but I will punish you with fire that will burn up everything around you."

A Message to the Kings of Judah

22I, the LORD, sent Jeremiah to the king's palace to speak to him, and his officials and his people and to say, "The Lord says to do what is just and right. Help people who have been robbed, don't mistreat foreign residents, orphans, or widows, and don't murder innocent people. If you obey Him, a descendant of David will continue to rule Judah. They will ride on horses and in chariots, but if you don't obey the Lord, He promises that this palace will be in ruins."

I, the LORD also say this: "The king's palace is as pleasant as Gilead with its green hills and as majestic as Mount Lebanon. But it will be like a desert of a ghost town. I'll send troops against it, and they'll put all its cedar beams in the fire. People from various nations will see Jerusalem in ruins, and they will wonder why I did this to this great city. Others will answer, 'It's because they broke the agreement the Lord their God made with them and they worshiped and served other gods.' Don't cry for the dead King Josiah or his son, King Jehoahaz, who was taken captive and will never see his country again."

Then I, the LORD, said this about Shallum (also known as Jehoahaz): "You will not return to Jerusalem."

This chapter reveals My terrible anger against the kings of Judah, and My people who rebel against Me. It shows My destructive judgment against the empty religion in Jerusalem and My Temple. Not only was empty religion worthless, it was damaging My testimony. So I used a ruthless people to destroy My people. The world will not confess its sin to Me, so I confess their sin.

The Lord continues, "You'll die in the place where they'll lead you as a captive. How terrible it will be for you, because you were unfair to your workers. You made them work for no pay, in building your big palace with large upstairs rooms, big windows, cedar paneling, and red paint. But lots of cedar doesn't make you a great king. Your father, Josiah, always had plenty to eat and drink, and he did what was right, so I blessed him."

Jeremiah asks, "Does having a lot of cedar in your house make you a great king?" (22:15). The answer is no. Also, beautiful clothes don't make you a beautiful person and expensive cars don't make you

important. Inward character makes you beautiful, doing right makes you important, and following Me makes you great.

“Help people who are poor and needy, and that’s what it means to know Me. But all you think about is cheating, murdering innocent people, and taking advantage of others.”

I, the LORD, say this about Jehoiakim, Josiah’s son: “Your family will not mourn for you when you die. You will be buried like a dead donkey dragged outside the city gates. All your allies are gone. You can ask Lebanon in the north, Bashan in the northeast, and Abarim in Moab in the southeast, but they can’t help you because they are crushed. When you felt safe, I warned you but you refused to listen. Ever since you were young, you were like that. Your leaders will disappear like being blown away by wind, and your allies will be taken as captives. You may live in a palace paneled with cedar from Lebanon, but you’ll groan in pain like a woman in child labor.

“King Jehoiachin, son of Jehoiakim, if you were like a ring as a sign of your power, I will pull it off. I will hand you over to the enemy you fear, Nebuchadnezzar and his army who want to kill you. I will throw you and your mother to a foreign country where you will both die.

“You will never return to your homeland.

“Jehoiachin, you are as unwanted as a broken clay jar. You and your children will be taken captives to a foreign land. Land of Judah, hear what I say. ‘You, Jehoiachin, will be as if you are childless, because none of your descendants will sit on the throne of David to rule in Judah.’”

The Righteous Remnant Will Return

23I, the LORD, say, “How terrible it will be for leaders who like shepherds are scattering My sheep.” Therefore I, the LORD, the God of Israel, say, “Because you have chased away My flock and haven’t cared for them as you should, I’ll punish you. I’ll bring back to their land the rest of My people from the countries where I’ve scattered them. And they will grow in number. I will choose leaders who will care for them, and no one will be afraid or missing.

“In a future day I will appoint as My king, an honest branch (descendant) of David to sit on My throne. He will be wise and just. When he is king, Judah and Israel will be safe. His name will be ‘The LORD is Just.’”

“A time is coming when people will no longer refer to Me as the one who rescued Israel out of Egypt, but as the one who rescued you from the north and other countries where you were taken captives. Again, you’ll live in your own land.”

The Lord continues, “My heart is broken when I think of false prophets. I tremble, and I stagger like a drunk person when I think of their lies in contrast to My holy words. They are unfaithful to Me like prostitutes, and so their pasturelands have become like dry deserts. The prophets do evil and abuse their powers.” I, the Lord, say, “The priests are godless, just like the prophets. They even sin right in My Temple. They will slip and fall in the darkness when I punish them.

“The prophets in Samaria were so disgusting. They told false predictions as if they were from Baal, and this led the people away from Me, the LORD. And the false prophets in Jerusalem commit adultery, tell lies, and encourage others to sin so that no one turns from his sin. They are like Sodom and Gomorrah.” Therefore, I, the LORD, say this about them: “Because they have led people everywhere to sin, I will make them eat bitter food and drink poisoned water.”

I, the LORD of the heavens say, “Don’t listen to the lies of these false prophets, because they give you false hope. They make up their messages; they are not from Me. They keep saying that I say they will have peace, and to those who are stubborn in their sins they say everything will be alright. But they have never been in heaven to listen to My Word. Look, My anger will come on them suddenly like a storm or a whirlwind on their heads. I’ll continue in anger until I’ve finished what I plan to do. I haven’t sent these prophets, yet they claim to speak for Me. If they had been in a meeting in heaven with Me and My angels, they would have spoken My words to My people, and they would have turned from their evil ways.”

I say the false prophets were wrong. “If they stood in a meeting of My counsel” (v. 22), then they would have spoken the right message. You can speak with assurance because you have been close to My “counsel” in My Word. You cannot get any closer to truth than in My Scriptures.

“I’m everywhere, both near and far. No one can hide where I can’t see him. I’m everywhere in heaven and earth.”

You see My omnipresence in this chapter. I am far from you, and I am transcendent which means I am great, and boundless. But I am also immanent, meaning I am near or close. As a matter of fact Paul said, "He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:27-28, NKJV).

"I've heard the lies of these false prophets. They claim to have dreams I gave them. They continue on with their lies and deceptions. They think their dreams will get My people to reject Me, just as their ancestors did by worshiping Baal. Compared with My words, their dreams are as different as straw and wheat. Anyone who has My Word must tell it faithfully. My Word penetrates like a fire and is strong like a hammer breaking a rock in pieces.

"Therefore, I am against these prophets who get their messages from each other and not from Me. They say I gave them these prophecies, but I am against them. I oppose anyone who prophesies by false dreams which lead My people away from Me. I didn't send them, and no one benefits at all from them.

"Jeremiah, if a prophet or a priest or someone else asks if you have a message from Me, the Lord, just say, 'You people are a bother. I will forsake you.' Or if a prophet or priest or anyone else says, 'Here is a message from the Lord,' you may ask him, 'What answer has the Lord given?' or 'What has the Lord said?' But don't use the words 'prophecy from the Lord because this twists My words into a lie. You may say to a prophet, 'What answer has the Lord given you?' or 'What has the Lord said?' If someone says, 'Here is a message from the Lord,' I'll forget him and cast him away from Me, and I'll desert Jerusalem, which I gave to you and your ancestors. You'll be ridiculed, and your shame will never be forgotten."

Good Figs and Bad Figs

24 Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, took King Jehoiachin, his officials, and skilled workers as captives to Babylon. Then I, the LORD, gave Jeremiah a vision of two baskets of figs. One was filled with ripe figs, and the other was filled with rotten figs that couldn't be eaten. When I, the LORD, asked him what he saw, he said, "I see some very good figs and some that are very bad." Then I, the LORD, told Jeremiah to tell this to the people of Judah:

“The good figs stand for those of you who were taken captives to Babylon. I will watch over them and bring them back here. I’ll build them up, not tear them down, and I’ll plant them, not uproot them. They’ll want to know Me, and they’ll be My people and I’ll be their God. They’ll finally turn back to Me with all their heart.

“But the bad figs stand for King Zedekiah, his officials, and those who were left in Jerusalem or went to Egypt. Nations will be horrified at them. They will be ridiculed and cursed, wherever I send them. War and hunger and disease will be against them until they are completely destroyed from their land.”

The good figs represent the “saved” Jewish people of that day. I promised I would look after them in captivity, and in the future will bring them back into the land. “They will know that I am the LORD. They will be My people, and I will be their God” (v. 7). This is a picture of the future resurrection when Israel will be brought back to the land in righteousness.

Seventy Years of Destruction

25I sent this message to Jeremiah in Jehoiakim’s fourth year as king of Judah and Nebuchadnezzar’s first year as king of Babylonia (605 BC). Jeremiah told the people of Judah, “For 23 years now, ever since Josiah’s 13th year as king of Judah to today, I’ve told you what the Lord said for me to say to you. But you refused to listen. The Lord sent you other prophets, but you didn’t listen to them either. These prophets told you that if you turn away from your sinful practices, you may stay in the land. And if you refuse to serve and worship other gods and don’t make Him angry, then He won’t harm you. But you didn’t listen to Him and so your hand-made idols made Him angry. So you brought on yourselves all the problems you now face.”

Therefore I, the LORD of the heavens, say, “Because you didn’t listen to Me, I will order armies from the north and Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylonia, to attack you. I will destroy you and nearby nations, and others will be horrified when they see you in ruins. The happy voices of brides and bridegrooms will not be heard. No one will grind grain, and your homes will be dark.

“This country will be a dry desert, and all of you will be slaves of the king of Babylon for 70 years.

“Then after the 70 years I will punish Babylonia and her king. And that country will be a barren desert. I will bring against them all the problems I’ve mentioned in this book. They made slaves of other people, and now they will be slaves of other nations and kings. This will be repayment for what they have done to others.”

I, the LORD, predicted Israel would be in captivity for 70 years. Nebuchadnezzar took a few captivities in 607 BC (including Daniel) and 70 years later when Cyrus defeated the Babylonians, he allowed the first return to the land in 531 BC under Zerubbabel (a total of 70 years). Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem in 587 BC and 70 years later Ezra returned with more captives and reinstated sacrifice and worship in 517 BC (a total of 70 years). I who live in the future, tell Jeremiah the Jews “will be slaves to the king of Babylon for 70 years.”

The LORD, the God of Israel, then said to Jeremiah, “Take this cup filled with the wine of My anger and make the nations to whom I send you drink it. When they drink it, they will stagger and go crazy because of the war I’ll send against them.” So he took the cup and made various nations drink it. In this way they experienced My wrath. These nations included Jerusalem and Judah and her kings and officials, which became an object of horror and cursing. Also included were Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and his officials and people and foreigners living there; the kings of Uz, the Philistines (those of Ashkelon, Gaza, Ekron, and Ashdod), Edom, Moab, Ammon, kings of Tyre and Sidon, and the coast lands; Dedan, Tema, and Buz, in tribes in the Arabian Desert, and others in distant places, kings of Arabia and of foreigners in the desert; kings of Zimri, Elam, and Media; and kings of the north, near and far, all the kingdoms of the world. And then the king of Sheshach (that is, Babylon) drank it too.”

Then I, the LORD, said, “Get drunk and vomit and when I send war against you, you’ll be completely defeated.”

I describe My judgment on sin as, “The cup of My anger” (v. 27). When Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, “Let this cup pass

from me” (Matt. 26:39, NKJV), He was anticipating the physical and spiritual agony He had to suffer when He suffered the sin of the world. But Jesus, knowing the torment, nevertheless prayed, “Your will be done” (Matt. 26:42, NKJV).

“If they refuse to drink it, tell them they must. I’ll bring disaster on Jerusalem, where My name is honored, so I can’t let these other nations not be punished.”

Prophecy this message to them: “I, the Lord, will roar loudly from heaven like thunder against My land. I will shout against everyone, like those who tread grapes or a winepress. My voice will be heard everywhere as I bring charges against all nations, and I bring charges against everyone, and kill the wicked.”

I, the LORD of the heavens, say, “Disaster is spreading from nation to nation like a terrible storm. I will kill many people everywhere. No one will mourn for them or bury them. Their bodies will cover the ground like trash. Weep and moan, you leaders. In your grief roll in the dust. Your time to be slaughtered like sheep has arrived, and you will be shattered like clay pottery. You’ll have no place to hide, and no way to escape. Listen to the cries of the shepherds as I am destroying your pasturelands. Your peaceful meadows will be like deserts. I’ve left you like a lion leaves its den. The land will be made desolate by the enemy’s swords and because of My fierce anger.”

Jeremiah is Threatened with Death

26Early in the reign of Jehoiakim, son of Josiah, king of Judah, I, the LORD, gave this message to Jeremiah. “Stand in front of My Temple and speak My words to everyone who came there to worship. Hopefully they will listen this time and turn from their sins. If they do, then I won’t punish them as I’ve planned. Tell them this is what I say: ‘If you don’t listen to Me and obey Me, and if you don’t listen to My prophets whom I’ve sent to you over and over, then I will destroy this temple just as I destroyed the town of Shiloh, and people everywhere will curse Jerusalem.’

“The priests, prophets, and all the people heard what I said. And as soon as I finished, the priests, prophets, and people grabbed me and said, ‘You ought

to die for saying this about Jerusalem. How dare you say the temple will be like Shiloh and Jerusalem will be empty?” And they crowded in on me.

Because Jeremiah was faithful to preach My message that My Temple would be destroyed, he was grabbed, and they said, “You must die” (v. 8). Jeremiah was faithful to preach My message and was willing to die. Jeremiah embodied what Jesus later challenged, “Be faithful until death” (Rev. 2:10, NKJV).

When the officials of Judah heard about this, they went to My Temple by the New Gate. Then the priests and prophets told the officials that Jeremiah should die because he had prophesied against Jerusalem. Then he said, “This isn’t my message. This is from the Lord. So if you change your ways and obey the Lord, your God, He’ll not bring the disaster He announced. As for me, do what you think is right. But if you put me to death, you and everyone in Jerusalem will be killing an innocent person because what I preached is from the Lord.”

The officials and others told the priests and prophets that Jeremiah should not be put to death because his messages are from the Lord. Some elders said to the people, “Years ago when Hezekiah was our king, Micah of Moresheth said, ‘Zion will be plowed like a field and will become a pile of junk, and the temple mount will be covered with thorns.’ No one put Micah to death for saying that. Instead Hezekiah prayed, and the Lord did not bring the disaster He had announced. So if we kill Jeremiah, we’ll bring a terrible disaster on ourselves.”

Uriah, son of Shemaiah, from Kiriath-Jearim prophesied the same things Jeremiah did. When King Jehoiakim and his officials heard Uriah, the king tried to arrest and kill him. But Uriah escaped to Egypt. So Jehoiakim sent Elnathan, son of Acbor, and some other men to Egypt, and they brought him back to Jehoiakim, who had Uriah killed and his body buried in an unmarked grave. Ahikam, son of Shaphan, supported Jeremiah, and so he was not killed.

There was a previously unknown prophet, Uriah, the son of Shemaiah, who also preached against Jerusalem (v. 20). He was one of the many unsung martyrs who was a faithful witness, who suffered and died by the sword under King Jehoiakim.

Do Not Listen to False Prophets

27 Soon after Zedekiah, son of Josiah, became king of Judah, I, the LORD, gave Jeremiah this message: “Make a wooden yoke with leather straps, and put it on your neck. Then send a message to the kings of Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, and Sidon through their ambassadors who are meeting with Zedekiah. Give them this word for their masters: ‘I, the LORD of the heavens, the God of Israel, say for you to tell your masters that in My great power I created the earth and its people and animals, and I give these things to anyone I please. I will give your countries over to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. He will even rule over wild animals. All the nations will serve him, his son, and his grandson. Then many nations and their kings will conquer Babylon.

“‘This yoke stands for Nebuchadnezzar, and any nation that doesn’t serve him will be punished with war, starvation, and disease.’”

It is senseless to rebel against Me, since I have ordained what shall come to pass. It was useless for Israel to revolt against Nebuchadnezzar since I had decreed Israel’s judgment.

“Don’t listen to false prophets, fortune-tellers, dream interpreters, psychics, or anyone who seeks to talk with the dead, and who say, ‘Don’t worry. You won’t be taken captive to Babylon.’ If you listen to these lies, I’ll remove you from your lands and you will die. But if you submit to the yoke of the king of Babylon, I’ll let you stay in your country and farm your land.” I, the LORD, have spoken these words.

Jeremiah gave this same message to Zedekiah. He said to him, “If you want to live, then be under the yoke of the king of Babylon. But if you don’t, you’ll die by war, starvation, or disease. Those prophets who say you won’t be slaves in Babylon are lying. The Lord didn’t send them. So if you follow them, you and they will be thrown out of your country and will die.”

Then Jeremiah told the priests and the people not to listen to the prophets who are saying that the Babylonians will soon return back to their temple the gold utensils they stole. “They are lying. Don’t listen to them. Instead serve the king of Babylon and you will live. If you don’t, the city will be a trash heap.” If they really are My prophets, they should pray that I let not anything else be taken from My Temple and the king’s palace. The bronze columns, the bronze water tank, the bronze water carts, and other articles in My Temple and

the city were not taken by Nebuchadnezzar when he took Jehoiachin, son of Jehoaikim, and other leaders to Babylon. I, the LORD of the heavens, the God of Israel, say that the items left in My Temple and the palace will later be taken to Babylon. They will remain there till I decide to bring them back.

Nebuchadnezzar took the smaller vessels from My Temple the first-time captives were taken to Babylon. Jeremiah predicts the large vessels would be taken the second time (v. 19-21). But Jeremiah's predictions didn't stop there. I, the LORD, said, "I will bring them back and return them to this place" (v. 22).

Jeremiah and the False Prophet Hananiah

28 Later in the summer of that same year, Zedekiah's fourth year as king of Judah, Hananiah, son of Azzur, from Gibeon, a prophet, said to Jeremiah while the priests and people were listening, "The LORD of the heavens, the God of Israel, will break the yoke that Nebuchadnezzar put on you. In two years he will bring back all the temple treasures that he took. And Jehoiachin, son of Jehoiakim, and all the captives taken to Babylon will be allowed to return. I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon."

There will always be false prophets who speak contrary to My Word. Hananiah predicted that in two years I would break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar on Judah. Also, that the stolen vessels would be returned to My Temple. This was the opposite of Jeremiah's prophecy (22:26-27; 27:16).

Then Jeremiah said as the priests and peoples were listening, "Amen. May this be so. I hope the temple articles will be returned and the captives released. However, listen to my words. Long ago prophets before us predicted war, disaster, and disease against many countries. So if you are predicting peace, we will know you are a true prophet only if that comes true."

Then Hananiah took the yoke off Jeremiah's neck and broke it, and he said, "In two years the Lord says He will break the yoke of Babylon in this way." Then Jeremiah left the temple. Soon after that I, the LORD, said, "Go

tell Hananiah, you broke this wooden yoke, but I'll put a yoke of iron on the necks of many nations to make them serve as slaves of Nebuchadnezzar. And as I said before, I will even let him rule over wild animals.”

Then Jeremiah said to Hananiah, “I know the Lord didn't send you to speak to us. But you urged the people to believe your lies. So the Lord says, ‘This very year you will die because you rebelled against Me.’” Two months later Hananiah died.

I, the LORD, condemned Hananiah because, “You have made the people of Judah trust in lies” (v. 15). Therefore, Jeremiah predicted, “You will die this year” (v. 16). Then the prediction was vindicated, “Hananiah died—that same year” (v. 17).

A Letter from Jeremiah to the Exiles

29Jeremiah sent a letter to the Jewish captives in Babylon, including the priests, prophets, and others Nebuchadnezzar took from royal officials, leaders, craftsmen, and other workers who were captives in Babylon. This was after King Jehoiachin, his mother, and court officials, leaders, and workmen were taken captives. He gave this letter to Elasah, son of Shaphan, and Gemariah, son of Hilkiah, when they were sent to Babylon by King Zedekiah. The letter said:

“The LORD of the heavens, the God of Israel, says to all the captives in Babylon. Build houses and settle there. Plant gardens and eat food you grow. Marry and have children, and help your sons find wives and your daughters husbands so you will have grandchildren. Increase in numbers; don't get smaller in number. Work for Babylon to be peaceful and prosperous. If it prospers, so will you. Don't let prophets and fortune-tellers trick you.

“Don't listen to their dreams because they will tell you lies. Remember that I, the LORD, haven't sent them.

“After you've been in Babylon 70 years, I'll keep My promise and bring you back to your land. My plans are to help you prosper, not to harm you, and to give you a future filled with hope. When you pray to Me, I will answer. And when you seek Me with all your heart, I will respond. I will bring you back to your land from being captives in nations where I scattered you.

“You may say I sent prophets to you in Babylon. But I’ll send war, starvation, and disease against the king on David’s throne and the people left in Jerusalem and Judah, and they’ll be like rotten figs. I’ll pursue them, as I said, with war, starvation, and disease. As a result nations will be horrified at you, and will curse, scorn, and mock you. All this will happen because you’ve not obeyed Me, even though I sent My servants the prophets to you again and again. And your captives didn’t listen either.

“You captives in Babylon, listen to what I, the LORD of the heavens, the God of Israel, say about the false prophets Ahab, son of Kolaiah, and Zedekiah, son of Maaseiah. I’ll have Nebuchadnezzar put them to death while you look on. Then when your captives curse someone, you will say, ‘May the Lord treat you like Zedekiah and Ahab, whom Nebuchadnezzar burned alive.’ They did terrible things, such as committing adultery with their neighbor’s wives and telling lies.”

Then I, the LORD, said, “Tell Shemaiah, the Nehelamite, the LORD of the heavens, the God of Israel, says you sent letters to the people in Jerusalem and to Zephaniah, son of Maaseiah, the priest and all the other priests that the Lord had appointed Zephaniah to be priest in place of Jehoiada. So you should put in stocks and iron collars anyone who claims to be a prophet. Jeremiah from Anathoth says he is a prophet, so why haven’t you done anything about him? Jeremiah wrote to the people here in Babylonia, saying we would be here a long time and we should build homes and plant gardens and grow our own food.”

When Zephaniah received Shemaiah’s letter, he read it to Jeremiah. “The Lord told me to write another letter to the captives, which said, ‘I, the LORD, say this about Shemaiah, the Nehelamite: He has prophesied to you, but I didn’t send him. He has tricked you into believing a lie. So I will punish him and his family. They will not live to see what good things I will do for My people because he has encouraged you to rebel against Me.’”

Israel and Judah Will Be Restored

30 Again I, the LORD, said, “I the LORD, the God of Israel, want you to write on a scroll everything I have told you. In the future I’ll bring My people Israel and Judah back home from captivity to the land I gave their ancestors.” Then I told Jeremiah to give them this message: “I, the LORD, say, ‘I hear the people crying in terror, and there is no peace. A man can’t give

birth to children, so why is every man pressing his hands against his stomach like a woman in child labor, with their faces pale? A time of trouble is coming for Israel, and nothing like it has ever happened before. But I will rescue My people.”

I, the Lord, promise both punishment and redemption to My people. But this prediction was not Israel's present punishment, but a future punishment that will be worse than Babylon's destruction. I promise, "The time of Jacob's trouble" (v. 7), which is the coming tribulation promised by Jesus (Matt. 24:4-26). Jesus called it "the great tribulation" (Matt. 24:29). It will be followed by 1,000 years of peace when Israel returns to the land. "I will bring again the captivity of My people Israel and Judah" (v. 3). David will rule over Israel (v. 9). I have a great plan for Israel.

“In that future day,” I, the LORD of the heavens, say, “I’ll break off your yokes and chains and you’ll no longer be slaves of other nations. You’ll serve Me your God and David your king whom I’ll raise up. So Israel, don’t be afraid or discouraged. I, the LORD, have spoken these words. I’ll bring you back home from a distant land, and you will again be at peace and have no fears. I’m with you. I’ll completely destroy the nations where I’ll scatter you, but I won’t completely destroy you. Yet I will punish you as necessary.”

I, the LORD, say, “Your wound can’t be cured, and no one can defend you just as no one has a remedy for your sore. Your allies don’t remember you and don’t care for you. I’ve wounded you as if I were your enemy. Why? Because of your great guilt and many sins. Why cry about your pain when there is no cure? I’ve done all this to you because of your great guilt and many sins. Those who destroy you will themselves be destroyed, and I’ll rob those who rob you. I’ll restore you to health even though you Jerusalem are like an outcast no one cares about.”

I, the LORD, also say, “I’ll bring you home from being captives and I’ll be kind to you. Jerusalem, in ruins, will be rebuilt and the king’s palace reconstructed. You’ll sing and rejoice, your numbers will increase, and other people will honor you and you’ll not be despised. Your children will prosper, and your nation will be well established. I’ll punish anyone who hurts you. One of your own people, not some foreigner, will be your ruler. When I invite him to come worship Me, he will respond. So you’ll be My people, and I’ll be

your God. Remember that My anger can be like a strong storm, or a driving wind on those who are wicked. My anger will continue until I've finished all I plan to do. Someday you'll understand all this."

The Return of My People

31 "In that first day," I, the LORD, says, "I'll be the God of all the families in Israel and they'll be My people. In the desert I helped those who escaped death by the sword." Long ago I, the LORD, appeared to Jeremiah and said, "I'll always love you and be kind to you. I'll rebuild your nation, and you'll dance for joy and play your tambourines."

"You'll plant vineyards on the hills of Samaria and you'll enjoy the grapes. Those who guard Ephraim will say, 'Let's go to Jerusalem to worship the Lord.'"

I, the Lord say, "Sing for joy for Israel, the greatest of the nations. I will save what is left of My people. I'll bring them from the north and from distant places on the earth. A great many will return, including the blind and the lame and expectant mothers. They'll weep with joy as I lead them home. I will lead them beside pleasant streams, and they'll walk on a level road and not stumble. I'm like a father to Israel, and I love Ephraim as if he were my oldest son.

"Listen to Me, you nations and tell My message in distant coastlands. I scattered My people, but I'll gather them together again and watch over them as a shepherd watches his flock. I'll rescue them from strong enemies. They'll come home and sing for joy in Jerusalem because I'll give them much wine and olive oil, and many flocks and herds. They'll be refreshed like a garden with plenty of water, and their sorrows will be gone. Young women, young men, and older people will dance with joy because I'll comfort them and turn their mourning into joy and their sorrow into rejoicing. I'll see that the priests have many offerings, and I'll bless My people with everything they need. I, the Lord, have spoken these words. But in Ramah Rachel is weeping for her children who have died, and she refuses to be comforted."

A picture is seen of "Rachel weeping for her children" (v. 15). Rachel is weeping prophetically from her grave over descendants who are slaughtered. This was fulfilled when Herod slaughtered the children

two years and younger in and around Bethlehem (Matt. 2:16). Herod was trying to kill the Christ-Child born to Mary.

But I, the LORD, say, “Don’t weep anymore, because your children will come home from captivity. So there is hope. The people of Israel moaned when I disciplined them for being like an unruly calf, and they said, ‘Restore us, Lord, for You alone are our Lord and God: We turned from you, and then were sorry. We were ashamed of all the things we did in our youth.’ Israel, you are My dear son, My delightful child. I often make threats against you, but I still love you. I long for you, and I’ll have mercy on you.

“As you go into captivity, put up guideposts on the highway to guide you as you return. Don’t keep wandering away from Me, because someday I’ll make things different, like a woman courting a man.” I, the LORD of the heavens, the God of Israel, say, “I’ll bring the people of Judah back to their hometowns. And when I do, they’ll say, ‘May the LORD bless you, O sacred hill where My temple stands.’ People in Jerusalem and farmers and shepherds will live together, for I’ll give rest to those who are tired.”

Then Jeremiah woke up and looked around from his pleasant sleep. Then I, the Lord, said to him, “The day will come when the people of Israel and Judah and their livestock will grow in numbers like a plant, in the past I uprooted and tore you down by terrible disaster. But in the future, I’ll plant you and build you up. People have said, ‘Parents eat sour grapes and their children have a sour taste in their mouths.’ But in the future, everyone will die for his own sins. Those who eat sour grapes, not someone else, will have a sour taste.”

I, the LORD also said, “The day will come when I’ll make a new agreement with Israel and Judah. This agreement will differ from the one I made with our ancestors after I rescued them from Egypt. They broke that agreement, though I was committed to them like a husband is committed to his bride. This is the agreement I’ll make with them. I’ll put My laws on their hearts and minds. I’ll be their God, and they’ll be My people. No one will need to teach someone to know and obey Me because everyone, both rulers and common people, will know and obey Me. I’ll forgive them their wickedness and never again think of their sins.”

I, the LORD, provide the sun to light the day and the moon and stars to light the night. I, the LORD of the heavens, stir up the sea and make its waves roar. I say, “Just as these things in nature will not vanish, so My people Israel

will continue as a nation. I would reject you, Israel, only if the heavens can be measured and the depths of the earth explored.

“The day will come,” I, the Lord, say, “when Jerusalem will be rebuilt from the Hananel Tower to the Corner Gate. From there the city boundary will go to Gareb Hill and then toward Goah. Even the Hinnom Valley, with its corpses and ashes, and the hills that slope down to the Kidron Valley on the east as far as the Horse Gate will be sacred to Me. And the people of Jerusalem will never again be captured, or the city destroyed.”

Jeremiah Buys a Field in Anathoth

32In the 10th year of Zedekiah, king of Judah, which was the 18th year that Nebuchadnezzar was king of Babylonia, I, the LORD, spoke to Jeremiah again. The Babylonian army had surrounded Jerusalem, and he was in prison in the courtyard of the royal guards. Zedekiah had put him there because he had said, “The Lord says, ‘I’ll soon hand over this city to the king of Babylonia. He’ll capture Zedekiah and the two of them will speak face to face. Nebuchadnezzar will take Zedekiah to Babylon, and I’ll deal with him there. If you fight against the Babylonians, you will lose.’”

Then when Jeremiah was in prison, I, the LORD, said, “Your cousin Hanamel, son of your uncle Shallum, will come see you, and he’ll say, ‘Buy my field in Anathoth. You have the right to do it because you are my nearest relative.’ Then as I, the LORD, had said to Jeremiah, Hanamel came to see Jeremiah and asked him to buy his fields in Anathoth in Benjamin. Jeremiah said, “I knew the LORD wanted me to do this, so I bought the field for 17 pieces of silver. I signed and sealed the deed of sale and had it witnessed. I took the sealed copy of the deed and an unsealed copy, and gave them to Baruch, son of Neriah, and grandson of Mahseiah as witnesses and Jews who were sitting in My Temple courtyard looked on.” I told Baruch, “The LORD of the heavens, the God of Israel, says for you to put the sealed and unsealed copies of the deed in a clay jar. That way they’ll last a long time.”

I, the LORD of the heavens, the God of Israel, say, “This purchase Jeremiah made was a good idea because in the future houses, fields, and vineyards will again be purchased here.”

Jeremiah gave the deed to Baruch, and then prayed to Me, “O Sovereign LORD, You’ve made the heavens and the earth by Your great power. Nothing is too difficult for You. You show steadfast love to thousands, and yet the

fathers' sins affect their children. You are the great and powerful God, the LORD of the heavens. Your plans and Your works are great. You see what everyone does, and You reward them. You performed amazing miracles in Egypt, and You continue to do so in Israel and elsewhere, which has made You famous. You rescued Your people from Egypt by performing great miracles with Your great power and You brought terror on all the Egyptians. You gave Your people this land that You had promised to our ancestors. They conquered the land, but they didn't obey You and Your laws. Since they didn't do what You told them to do, You brought this disaster on them. The Babylonians have built siege ramps against Jerusalem's walls, and the Babylonians will defeat the city, and people will die by the sword, starvation, and disease. Though the Babylonians will conquer the city, You, O Sovereign LORD, told me to buy Hanamel's field."

Then the LORD spoke to me saying, "I am the LORD, the God of the whole world. Nothing is too difficult for Me."

Jeremiah prayed, "There is nothing too wonderful for You to do" (v. 17, NKJV). Then I repeated Jeremiah's words in a question, "I am the LORD, the God of all flesh. Is there anything too hard for Me" (v. 27, NKJV)?

I, the LORD, say, "I will hand this city over to the Babylonians and their king Nebuchadnezzar. They will attack it and enter the city and set it on fire. They will burn down the houses where the people made Me angry by burning incense on the rooftop to Baal and pouring out drink offerings to other gods. From their earliest years Israel and Judah have done nothing but evil. And the idols they have made have made Me angry. So I have decided to get rid of the city. The sins of the kings, officials, priests, prophets, and everyone in Jerusalem have made Me very angry. They turned from Me. I tried over and over to teach them to obey Me, but they wouldn't listen and wouldn't respond to My discipline. They even set up their disgusting idols in My temple, and they built altars to Baal in the Hinnom Valley where they sacrificed their children to Molech. I never told them to do that, and such a terrible thing never entered My mind.

"Jeremiah, you are correct in saying that the city will fall to the king of Babylon by war, starvation, and disease. However, that's not the full story. I will bring My people back from the places where I scattered them, and they'll

be safe again. They'll be My people, and I'll be their God. I'll give them a significant heart and unique actions so that they will reverence and worship Me for their own good and the good of their children. I will make an agreement that will last forever, and I'll continue doing good for them and I'll encourage them to worship Me and not turn from Me. I'll bless them and plant them in their land again."

I, the LORD, say, "Just as I sent terrible calamities on them, so I'll prosper them as I promised. You have said, 'This land is like a desert, destroyed by the Babylonians.' But you will buy land in Benjamin, and villages around Jerusalem, in the towns of Judah, and the hill country, the western foothills, and the Southern Desert, and deeds of purchase will be signed, sealed, and witnessed. In this way I'll make them rich again."

Hope for My People

33 While Jeremiah was still being held prisoner in the courtyard of the palace guards, I, the Lord, said to him, "I am the Lord, who created the world. The Lord is My name. Ask Me and I'll tell you some interesting things about what will happen."

The phrase, "You have never heard these things before" (v. 3) means you don't realize all the things I do for you when I arrange small details to answer your prayers.

"Many of the houses in Jerusalem and the king's palace have been torn down to use materials to strengthen the city walls against the siege ramps of the Babylonians. But they will enter the city anyway, and I'll fill the city with dead bodies of the men of this city in My anger. I will ignore the prayers of My people because of their evil.

"But the time will come when I'll heal this place and My people, and they'll enjoy peace and security. I'll bring Judah and Israel back from being captives and rebuild their cities. I'll forgive them of their rebelling against Me. Then Jerusalem will bring Me joy and honor. All the nations will see the good things I'll do for My people, including giving them peace and prosperity, and they'll tremble with fear.

“Jeremiah, you say this land is a dry desert with no people or animals in it. But in the deserted towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem, you’ll again hear happy voices and the joyful sounds of brides and grooms and songs of people bringing thank offerings to the temple. They’ll say, ‘Thank the LORD of the heavens, for He is good, and His steadfast love will last forever.’ I, the LORD, will make the land prosperous, as it was in the past.”

I, the LORD of the heavens say, “This land is now desolate with no people or animals, but the time is coming when shepherds will take care of their flocks near towns in the hill country, the western foothills, the Southern Desert, the land of Benjamin, and villages around Jerusalem and in Judah. I, the LORD, have spoken these words. The time is coming when I will keep the promise I made to Israel and Judah. At that time, I’ll appoint a king from David’s family who will do what is right and fair. In those days Judah will be safe and Jerusalem will be at peace, and Jerusalem will be named ‘The LORD Is Just.’ A branch (descendant) of David will always be king, and priests of the tribe of Levi will always offer sacrifices to Me.”

I, the LORD, then gave Jeremiah this message: “I made an agreement with the day and the night. But if the sun and moon fail to shine, only then will I break the agreement I made with David and with the priests who serve in My Temple. In fact, the descendants of David and the priests who serve Me will be more in number than the stars in the sky or the grains of sand on the seashore.”

I also said, “No doubt you’ve heard people say, ‘How strange. The Lord chose the two nations of Judah and Israel and then rejected them.’ So they are now saying they are no longer a nation. But I say, ‘Just as I’ll never change My agreement with the sun and the moon, so I’ll never reject My people and David My servant or change My plans to have a descendant of David rule as king over the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I’ll be king of My people and bring them back to their land.’”

The mysteries of eternity that you don't know yet are available only when you call on Me, your Lord. Boldly calling gives you bold answers. Call on Me patiently; wait on Me.

Jeremiah Warns Zedekiah

34 When Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and his army and the armies of every nation in his kingdom were attacking Jerusalem and towns, I, the LORD, gave Jeremiah this message: “Go to King Zedekiah of Judah and tell him that I, the LORD, the God of Israel, will let the king of Babylon capture Jerusalem and burn it to the ground. You’ll be taken captive, and he’ll speak with you personally, and he’ll take you over to Babylon. Yet I won’t let you be killed in battle. You’ll die peacefully. People will burn a fire in your honor, just as they did for your ancestors. They’ll mourn your death saying, ‘How terrible. Our king is dead.’” Jeremiah told this to Zedekiah in Jerusalem, while Nebuchadnezzar was fighting against three remaining cities in Judah—Jerusalem, Lachish, and Azekah.

Zedekiah had made an agreement with everyone in Jerusalem that they should free all Hebrew men and women who were slaves. No Jew was to keep another as a slave. So the officials and all the people freed their slaves. But then they changed their minds and made them slaves again. So I, the LORD, gave Jeremiah this message: “I, the LORD, the God of Israel, made an agreement with your ancestors when I rescued them from slavery in Egypt. I told them they were to set slaves free after six years. But you didn’t do this. Recently you decided to do the right things and you set your slaves free. But now you have disgraced My name by taking back the slaves you had set free.

“Since you haven’t obeyed Me, I’ll now give you ‘freedom’—freedom to die in war or by starvation or disease. And nations will be disgusted with you. Since you haven’t kept the agreement we had, I’ll cut you apart just as you cut apart a calf and then walk between the two parts. All those who walk between the pieces of the calf—leaders, court officials, priests, and all the people—will be taken captives by your enemies. The wild birds and wild beasts will eat their dead bodies. The army of the Babylonian king will capture Zedekiah and his officials. If Nebuchadnezzar leaves the city, I’ll have him and his army come back. They’ll conquer the city, burn it down, and they’ll destroy all the towns of Judah and leave them completely empty.”

The Rechabites Used as an Example of Obedience

35 When Jehoiakim, son of Josiah, was king of Judah, I, the LORD, told Jeremiah, “Invite the Rechabite clan to meet you in one of My Temple side rooms and offer them wine.” So Jeremiah went to Jaazaniah, son of

Jeremiah, and grandson of Habazziniah, and all his brothers and sons, and took them to My Temple to the room of Hanan, son of Igdaliah, a prophet. This room was next to the room of the officials, which was directly above the room of Maaseiah, son of Shallum. Jeremiah set out large bowls of wine and some cups for them to have some wine. But they said, “No, but we don’t drink wine. Why? Because Jonadab, son of Rechab, our ancestor, told us, ‘Don’t ever drink wine.’”

There will always be a godly remnant that will obey Me, who separate themselves from sin, and live according to the Scriptures, as did the Rechabites.

“‘Never build houses or plant crops or vineyards. Instead live in tents. And if you follow these commands, you’ll live a long time.’

“So we have never drunk wine, or built houses, or had vineyards, farms, or crops.”

The Rechabites were offered wine. They refused based on their obedience to Me. So I used their faithfulness as an example to Judah. I would punish Judah for their disobedience.

“We have lived in tents and have obeyed our ancestor Rechab. But when Nebuchadnezzar invaded this land, with the armies from Babylonia and northeast Mesopotamia, we decided to move to Jerusalem.”

Then I, the LORD of the heavens, the God of Israel, said, “Tell the people of Judah and Jerusalem, ‘Come learn a lesson about obeying Me. Jonadab, son of Rechab, told his sons not to drink wine, and they haven’t. And yet I have spoken to you over and over, and you haven’t obeyed Me. I’ve sent you one prophet after another to tell you to turn from your sinful ways and not serve false gods, so that you may live in the land. But you’ve not listened. The Rechabites have obeyed their ancestor Jonadab, but you have not obeyed Me.’”

I am looking for obedient followers today just like the Rechabites who desired to obey My commands inwardly and outwardly.

“Therefore, I’ll bring on you all the disasters I’ve mentioned, all because you didn’t listen to Me or respond to My call.”

Then Jeremiah said to the Rechabites, “The LORD of the heavens, the God of Israel, says to you, ‘You have obeyed the command of Jonadab, following all his instructions. Therefore, his descendants will always serve Me faithfully.’”

King Jehoiakim Burns the Scroll

36In the fourth year that Jehoiakim, son of Josiah, was king in Judah I, the LORD, gave Jeremiah this message: “Write down on a scroll all My messages about Israel, Judah, and other nations beginning with My messages in the days of Josiah. Perhaps when you read these to Judah, and they hear about the terrible things I plan to bring on them, they will turn from their sin. If they do, I’ll forgive their wickedness.”

So Jeremiah dictated to Baruch, son of Neraiah, everything I, the LORD, had told him, and Baruch wrote it all down. Then Jeremiah said to Baruch, “Since I’m a prisoner here in the courtyard of the king’s guard, I can’t go to the temple. So you go instead on the next day of fasting and read aloud these words on the scroll to the people of Judah. Maybe they’ll realize how angry the Lord is with them, and they’ll ask Him to forgive them.”

Baruch read these messages from Me to the people who were at My Temple. This happened in the fall of Jehoiakim’s fifth year as king of Judah. This was a time of fasting when people came from all the towns of Judah to Jerusalem. Baruch read Jeremiah’s words from the scroll to the people who were at My Temple. He read from the room of Gemariah, son of Shaphan, the secretary, which was near the upper courtyard, near the New Gate entrance. Gemariah’s son, Micaiah, heard Baruch read what the Lord said. Then he went to his father’s room in the king’s palace, where he was meeting with his officials, including Elishama, the secretary, Delaiah, son of Shemaiah, Elnathan, son of Acbor, Gemariah, son of Shaphan, and Zedekiah, son of Hananiah. Micaiah told them what Baruch was reading to the people. Then the officials sent Jehudi, son of Nethaniah, and Shelemiah, son of Cush, to tell Baruch to bring the scroll. So he did, and they asked him to sit down and read the scroll to them, and Baruch did. After hearing these words, they were worried, and they said, “We must tell the king what we’ve heard. But first, Baruch, how did you get these messages?” Baruch answered, “Jeremiah

dictated the words, and I wrote them down.” Then the officials said, “Baruch, you and Jeremiah should go hide somewhere.”

The officials put the scroll in Elishama’s room and then told the king about it. When the king heard this, he had Jehudi get the scroll, and Jehudi got it and read it to the king and his officials. This was late fall and the king was sitting in front of a fire to keep warm. Every time Jehudi finished reading three or four columns of the scroll, the king cut them off and threw them into the fire until the whole scroll was burned up.

What a terrible thing to reject My Word, cut it to pieces, and then burn it in the fire. No wonder King Jehoiakim was punished.

The king and his attendants showed no fear about what they had read. Elnathan, Delaiah, and Gemariah begged the king not to burn the scroll, but he did anyway. Then the king told Jerahmeel, a son of the king, Seraiah, son of Azriel, and Shelemiah, son of Abdeel, to arrest Baruch and Jeremiah. But I, the LORD, kept them hidden.

Since Jehoiakim had burned the scroll, I, the LORD, told Jeremiah to make another scroll and write on it everything that was on the first scroll. “Also tell Jehoiakim, ‘You burned the scroll because it said that the king of Babylonia would destroy the land and people and animals in it. Therefore, because you questioned the Lord, He says that no descendant of yours will sit on David’s throne. And your body, Jehoiakim, will not be buried. It will be exposed to the heat of the day and the cold of the night. I’ll punish you and your children and your servants because they are all evil. I’ll bring on you all the disaster I promised, because you would not obey Me.’”

Jeremiah gave Baruch another scroll, and dictated to him again all the words on the first scroll that Jehoiakim had burned. Then Jeremiah added other words to it.

Many have denied the Bible, and many teach there are mistakes in the Bible. Others have attacked the Bible. But the Bible has bigger sales than at any other time in history. The Bible is read by more people than ever, and more people accept it as the accurate Word of God which will continue forever!

Jeremiah is Sent to Prison

37 King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylonia had removed Jehoiachin, son of Jehoiakim, from being king of Judah, and made Zedekiah, son of Josiah, king of Judah. But Zedekiah, his officials, and all the people ignored everything I, the LORD, told Jeremiah, to tell them. Yet Zedekiah sent Jehucal, son of Shelemiah, and Zephaniah, the priest, son of Maaseiah, to ask Jeremiah to pray for them. This was before he was imprisoned.

At that time Pharaoh's army from Egypt marched toward Judah. When the Babylonians heard this, they withdrew from surrounding Jerusalem. Then I, the LORD, said to Jeremiah, "Tell the king of Judah, who sent you to ask Me what will happen, that Pharaoh's army will soon return to Egypt. Then the Babylonians will come back and capture Jerusalem and burn it down. Don't think the Babylonians will leave again as they did before, because they won't. Even if you were to defeat the entire Babylonian army, their wounded soldiers would get up and burn this city down."

After the Babylonian army left Jerusalem because of Pharaoh's army, Jeremiah started to leave Jerusalem to go to the land of Benjamin to see the property he had bought. But when he got to the Benjamin Gate in Jerusalem, Irijah, son of Shelemiah, and grandson of Hananiah, the guard captain, arrested Jeremiah, because he thought he was joining the Babylonians. He told him that wasn't true, but he wouldn't listen. He took Jeremiah to the officials, who were angry with him and had some soldiers beat him, and put Jeremiah in the home of Jonathan, the secretary, which they made into a prison. Jeremiah was put into a cell in a basement room, where he was kept for a long time.

Later Zedekiah had him brought to the palace where the king asked him, "Do you have any messages from the LORD?" Jeremiah said, "Yes, I do. You'll be captured by the king of Babylonia." Jeremiah then asked, "What crime have I committed against you and your officials or others that I've been imprisoned? Where are the prophets who told you Babylon will not attack this land? I have a request: Please don't send me back to the prison cell in the basement, or I'll die there."

There is a time to be a martyr, and there is a time to avoid martyrdom. Some have died for Me such as Zacharias (Matt. 23:25) and Antipas (Rev. 2:13). On this occasion Jeremiah begged the king not to let him die.

So King Zedekiah had Jeremiah taken to the courtyard of the king's guards. And he told officials to give him a loaf of fresh bread every day until the city ran out of grain. So Jeremiah was there in the courtyard prison.

Jeremiah is Rescued from the Dungeon

38Four of the king's officials—Shephatiah, son of Mattan, Gedaliah, son of Pashhur, Jucal, son of Shelemiah, and Pashhur, son of Malkijah—heard what Jeremiah was telling the people: “If you stay here in Jerusalem, you'll die in battle or by starvation or disease, but whoever surrenders to the Babylonians will live. This city will certainly be captured by the Babylonians.” These four men went to King Zedekiah and said, “This man should be put to death. He is discouraging the soldiers and everyone else. He's trying to harm us, not help us.” Zedekiah said, “Alright. Do with him what you want. I won't stop you.”

So the officials lowered Jeremiah with ropes into an empty well that belonged to Malkijah, the king's son. Now water was in the well, but he sank down in the mud. Ebed-Melech from Ethiopia, an official in the king's palace, heard what they had done to him. He went to speak with the king who was sitting by the Benjamin Gate. He said to the king, “These men have done a terrible thing by putting Jeremiah in Malkijah's well. He will starve to death down there when the city runs out of bread.” So the king said, “Take 30 men and lift Jeremiah out.”

Ebed-Melech and 30 men went to a room in the palace below the treasury and got some old rags and worn-out clothes. He lowered these on a rope to Jeremiah, and he said, “Put these old rags and clothes under your armpits so the ropes won't hurt you. He did this, and they pulled him up out of the well. Then Jeremiah was kept in the courtyard of the palace guards.

Then King Zedekiah had Jeremiah brought to his private entrance to My Temple, and said, “I want to ask you something. Don't hide anything from me.” Jeremiah said, “If I tell you the truth, you'll kill me. And will you listen to my advice?” The king said, “As surely as the LORD lives, I won't kill you.” Then Jeremiah said, “The LORD of the heavens, the God of Israel, says, ‘If you surrender to Babylon, you won't be killed, and Jerusalem won't be burned. But if you won't surrender, the Babylonians will capture Jerusalem and burn it down and you'll not escape.’”

I have My servants who suffer, and I have My servants who help those who are suffering. Because Jeremiah predicted the fall of Jerusalem, the leaders accused Jeremiah, “He weakens the hands of the men of war” (v. 4). So they cast Jeremiah into a cistern (a place where water was stored). But Jeremiah sank in the mud for there was no water. He would have died, but Ebed-Melech the Ethiopian went to the king to get Jeremiah freed. He asked the privilege of releasing Jeremiah, “Before he died.”

Zedekiah then said to Jeremiah, “I’m afraid to surrender because the Babylonians may hand me over to the Judeans, and they may torture me.” Jeremiah said, “The Babylonians won’t do that. Just obey the Lord, and then your life will be spared. But if you don’t surrender, all the women in your palace will be given to officers of the Babylonian army. The women will make fun of you and say, ‘The friends you trusted in have misled you. You are trapped in mud, and they have left you.’ The Babylonians will take your wives and children captives, and you’ll be captured and not escape, and the city will be burned down.”

Then Zedekiah said, “Don’t tell anyone what we talked about, or you might die. If my officials hear that I talked with you, they may ask what we talked about. ‘If you don’t tell us, we’ll kill you.’ Then tell them that you were begging me not to send you back to the basement cell in Jonathan’s house where you would die.”

Soon the king’s officials did come and asked Jeremiah what he and the king talked about. He told them what the king said for him to tell them about the basement cell. So nothing more was said, and they left. Jeremiah remained a prisoner in the courtyard of the king’s guard until Jerusalem was captured.

Jerusalem Falls

39In January (588 BC) of Zedekiah’s ninth year Nebuchadnezzar returned to attack Jerusalem. They surrounded the city for a year and a half. Then on July 18, 586 BC, in Zedekiah’s 11th year, the Babylonians broke through the wall and captured the city. The Babylonian king’s officers sat in the city’s Middle Gate. These included Nergal-Sharezer of Samgar, Nebo-Sarsekim, a chief officer, and Nergal-Sharezer, a high official and others.

When King Zedekiah and his soldiers saw them, they tried to escape that night. They went by the king's garden through a gate between two walls and headed toward the Jordan Valley. But the Babylonian army chased them and caught up with them near Jericho. They arrested Zedekiah and took him to Nebuchadnezzar at the town of Riblah in the land of Hamath. The king of Babylonia sentenced Zedekiah to die. Then at Riblah the king of Babylonia killed Zedekiah's sons as he looked on, and Nebuchadnezzar also killed all the leaders of Judah's ruling families. Then he blinded Zedekiah and put him in bronze chains and sent him off to Babylon.

The Babylonians burned the royal palace and people's houses and broke down Jerusalem's walls. Then Nebuzaradan, commander of the guards, led everyone away as captives, people who remained in the city along with others who had deserted to Nebuchadnezzar. But Nebuchadnezzar left in Judah some of the poor people who owned no land, and he gave them vineyards and fields.

Nebuchadnezzar told Nebuzaradan to take care of Jeremiah and give him whatever he wanted.

I did not forget My promise to deliver Jeremiah (1:8). So Nebuchadnezzar gave orders, "Take him, look well to him, and do him no harm."

So Nebuzaradan and other officers of the king, including Nebushazban and Nergal-Sharezer, had Jeremiah taken from the courtyard prison and turned over to Gedaliah, son of Ahikam, and grandson of Shaphan who took him home. So Jeremiah stayed in Jerusalem with his people.

While Jeremiah was still in prison in the courtyard of the palace guard, I, the LORD, said to him, "Tell Ebed-Melech, the Ethiopian, that I, the LORD of the heavens, the God of Israel, will soon do to Jerusalem everything I have predicted, and you'll see it happen. But, I'll rescue you from those you fear. Because you trust in Me, I will keep you alive."

Jeremiah is Freed

40 Jeremiah was taken in chains with other captives from Judah who were being taken to Babylon. When he arrived in Ramah, Nebuzaradan said to him, "The LORD your God has brought this disaster on your land as He said

He would. But your people continued to disobey Him, and that's why this happened. I'll now take off your chains and set you free. If you want, you can come to Babylon. Or if you don't want to, you can go wherever you wish."

Jeremiah was released from prison and freed by order of Nebuchadnezzar. But when the deportees were rounded up in Ramah, Jeremiah was caught up in the crowd and chained. When the captain realized Jeremiah was in shackles (vv. 2-3), he announced, "I loose thee this day from the chains which were upon thy hand" (v. 4, KJV).

Nebuchadnezzar appointed Gedaliah governor of Judah and told Jeremiah to stay near him or go wherever you wished. Then Nebuzaradan gave Jeremiah some food and money and let him go. So he lived near Gedaliah in Mizpah with others who were left in the land.

The officers of the army of Judah in the countryside heard that Nebuchadnezzar had appointed Gedaliah governor of Judah and that poor people had not been taken to Babylonia. So several leaders went to see Gedaliah. They were Ishmael, son of Nethaniah, Johanan and Jonathan, sons of Kareah, Seraiah, son of Tanhumeth, the sons of Ephai, the Netophathite, and Jaazaniah, son of the Maacathite, and all their men. Gedaliah told them, "It's alright to surrender to the Babylonians. If you settle down here, all will go well. I'll stay here at Mizpah and meet with the Babylonians when they come visit us. But you are to harvest grapes, summer fruits, and olives."

Many Jews had escaped to Moab, Ammon, Edom, and elsewhere. Then when they heard that the king of Babylonia had appointed Gedaliah governor of Judah, they returned to Judah and harvested a lot of grapes and summer fruit.

Johanan, son of Kareah, and some army officers went to see Gedaliah. They said, "Did you know that Baal, king of the Ammonites, sent Ishmael, son of Nethaniah, to kill you?" But Gedaliah didn't believe them. So Johanan said to Gedaliah, "Let me kill Ishmael. Why should we let him take your life and cause us to be scattered and perish?" But Gedaliah said, "Don't kill Ishmael. What you said about him can't be true."

Gedaliah is Assassinated

41 In the fall Ishmael, one of the king's officials, went to Mizpah with ten men visit with Gedaliah. While they were eating together, Ishmael and the ten men killed Gedaliah, the one the king of Babylonia had appointed governor.

Jonathan, one of Israel's guerilla leaders, went to Gedaliah to warn him of a plot by Ishmael to assassinate him. Gedaliah didn't believe it and wouldn't let Jonathan help him. So Gedaliah was assassinated. You need wisdom to understand the truth in rumors brought to you.

Then they killed the Jews who were with Gedaliah and Babylonian soldiers who were there.

The next day, before anyone knew about the murders, 80 men came from Shechem, Shiloh, and Samaria with grain offerings and incense to My Temple. They had shaved their heads, torn their clothes, and cut themselves in mourning. Ishmael, pretending to be weeping, went out to meet them and said, "Come meet with Gedaliah." When they got to town, Ishmael and men with him killed them and put their bodies in a pit.

The assassination came in October, that is, on the Day of Atonement, or the Feast of Tabernacles. Ishmael had royal blood in his veins, so maybe he was avenging the injustice done to his relative Zedekiah. But his treacherous acts don't justify killing 70 pilgrims.

Ten of them then offered him wheat, barley, oil, and honey hidden in a field. So Ishmael didn't kill them. The well where Ishmael dumped the bodies of the men he killed was the well King Asa had made years earlier to protect himself against King Baasha of Israel.

Ishmael took as captives King Zedekiah's daughters and others in Mizpah under Gedaliah, and he headed toward Ammon. Johanan and the army officers with him heard what Ishmael had done. They chased him and caught up with him at the pool of Gibeon. When Ishmael's prisoners saw Johanan and the army officers with him, they were glad, and they left Ishmael and went to be with Johanan. Then Ishmael and only eight of his men escaped and went to Ammon.

Johanan and his officers rescued the soldiers, women, children, and court officials. They took them to the village of Geruth-Kimham near Bethlehem and went on from there to Egypt.

Hospitality was sacred in Bible cultures; therefore, Ishmael violated the laws of hospitality when he killed Gedaliah. Ishmael's warped patriotism caused him to break My law, commit murder, and leave My remnant without wise leadership. As a result, the remnant went to Egypt, and eventually disappeared.

They were afraid of what the Babylonians might do when they found out that Ishmael had killed Gedaliah, the ruler appointed by Nebuchadnezzar.

Jeremiah Prays to Me for the People

42 All the army officers, including Johanan, son of Kareah, and Jezaniah, son of Hoshai, and everyone else came to Jeremiah and said, "Please pray to the Lord your God for us. We used to have many people, but now only a few of us are left. Ask the Lord to tell us what we should do." Jeremiah said, "I'll pray to the Lord and then tell you everything He says."

Then they said to him, "The Lord will witness against us if we don't do what He says. Whether we like it or not, we will obey the Lord our God so that all will go well for us." Ten days later I, the Lord, gave him an answer.

The people came to Jeremiah asking, "Pray to the Lord your God" (v. 4, NKJV) and they promised, "We will obey the voice of the Lord our God" (v. 6, NKJV). Notice this principle about prayer. I don't always answer immediately. Perhaps I want to see your sincerity.

So Jeremiah called for Johanan and the army officers and all the people and told them, "This is the Lord's reply: 'If you stay here in the land, I'll build you up and plant you. I'm sorry I had to bring disaster on you. But don't be afraid of the King of Babylonia. I'm with you and I'll rescue you from him. I'll force him to be kind to you and give back your farms.'"

“But if you disobey Me by not staying in Judah and going to Egypt to try to be free from war and hunger, then you’ll face war and starvation there and you’ll die there. If you insist on going to Egypt, you’ll all die there by war, starvation, or disease.

“I, the LORD of the heavens, the God of Israel, say that if you go to Egypt, My wrath will be on you just as it was on those in Jerusalem. People will be horrified at your situation and will mock and curse you. And you’ll never see your homeland again. I, the LORD, have told you not to go to Egypt.”

Jeremiah said, “I told you what God said, and you said you would obey God. But you are still not obeying Him. And so in Egypt, where you insist on going, you will die from war, starvation, and disease.”

The People Do Not Listen to Jeremiah

43 When Jeremiah finished telling the people what I, the LORD, told him to tell them, Azariah, son of Hoshaiah, and Johanan, son of Kareah, and some proud men said to Jeremiah, “You are lying. The Lord didn’t tell you to say we can’t go live in Egypt. Baruch, son of Neriah, has encouraged you to say this so the Babylonians will kill us or take us captives to Babylon.”

So Johanan and his army officers and all the people disobeyed My command to stay in Judah. Johanan and his officers led the captives to Egypt who were now back in Judah. They also led everyone to Egypt whom Nebuzaradan had left with Gedaliah and Jeremiah and Baruch.

So in disobedience to Me they went to Egypt as far as Tahpanhes. In Tahpanhes I, the LORD, told Jeremiah, “Take some large stones to the entrance to Pharaoh’s palace and bury them under the brick pavement.”

I instructed Jeremiah to do another symbolic action. Jeremiah buried large stones in the pavement of Pharaoh’s headquarters at Tahpanhes in the sight of the people of Judah. Then Jeremiah announced Nebuchadnezzar would set his throne on those stones. A fragmentary inscription in the British Museum records Nebuchadnezzar actually invading Egypt in 568 BC, killing many Jews and taking others to Babylon.

“Then tell the people that I, the LORD of the heavens, the God of Israel, will bring My servant Nebuchadnezzar here to Egypt, and he will set his throne and his royal tent right over the stones you buried. He’ll attack Egypt and kill many Egyptians; and take others captive. He’ll burn the temples of Egypt’s gods and carry off the idols. Just as the shepherd wraps his garment around himself, so Nebuchadnezzar will wrap Egypt around himself and will return to Babylonia unharmed. He will demolish the columns in the temple of the sun-god and burn down the temples of Egypt’s gods.”

Jeremiah Speaks to the Jews in Egypt

44I, the LORD, gave Jeremiah this message to the Jews living in Northern Egypt in the cities of Migdol, Tahpanhes, and Memphis and those in Southern Egypt: This is what the LORD of the heavens, the God of Israel, says, “You saw Jerusalem and all the towns of Judah. They are now empty and in ruins because of the evil they did. They burned incense and worshiped other gods that neither they nor your ancestors knew, and this angered Me greatly. I repeatedly sent My servants the prophets to urge them not to do these terrible things that I hate. But they wouldn’t listen or turn from their wicked ways. And they kept right on burning incense to these gods. Therefore, My fierce anger raged against the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem so that they are in ruins today.

“Now I, the LORD of the heavens, the God of Israel, ask you, why are you destroying yourselves? This coming disaster will destroy you and every man, woman, child, and baby who has come here from Judah. Why have you insisted on making Me angry by burning incense to idols you’ve made here in Egypt? You’ll destroy yourselves, and people of other nations will curse and mock you. Don’t forget all the sins of your kings and queens and the sins you and your wives committed. Even now you haven’t humbled yourselves before Me or revered Me, and no one follows My laws and teachings I gave you and your ancestors.

“Therefore, I’ve decided to destroy every one of you. You were determined to come settle here to Egypt, but you’ll all die here by war or starvation. And people will be horrified at your situation and will curse and mock you. I’ll punish you in Egypt just as I punished those in Jerusalem, with war, starvation, and disease. None of you who have gone to live in Egypt will escape or return to Judah, except for a few of the fugitives.”

Jeremiah said, “A large number of Jews from both northern and southern Egypt heard Me, including many wives who were burning incense to idols. But they said to me, ‘We won’t listen to your message. We’ll continue to burn incense to Astarte, the queen of heaven, and pour out sacrifices of wine to her just as we, our ancestors, our kings, and officials did in Judah. When we did that, we had plenty of food and were well off and had no problems. But ever since we stopped burning incense to the queen of heaven and stopped giving her drink offerings, we’ve had nothing and have been dying from war and famine.’”

I had destroyed Jerusalem and My Temple because of the people’s idolatry. Yet theirs is an example of the blindness and rebellion in this chapter. Now in Egypt the Israelites were saying, “Since we stopped burning incense to the queen of heaven—we have—been consumed by the sword and by famine” (44:18, NKJV). Isn’t that like many today? They blame Me when things go wrong.

The women added, “When we worshiped the queen of heaven and offered her drink offerings and made cakes shaped like her, our husbands knew about it.” Then Jeremiah said to all of them, “Do you think the LORD didn’t know that you, your ancestors, your kings, officials, and everyone was burning incense to idols in Judah and Jerusalem? When He could no longer stand your disgusting actions, He placed a curse on your land and turned it into an empty desert, as it is now. This disaster happened because you sinned against the Lord by burning incense, and disobeying His laws, teachings, and regulations.”

Then Jeremiah said to everyone, including the women, “Hear what the LORD says to you people of Judah in Egypt. The LORD of the heavens, the God of Israel says, ‘You said you would continue to burn incense and pour out drink offerings to the queen of heaven. So go right ahead and do what you promised. But remember that I’ve said no Jew living here in Egypt will ever be able to make promises in My name by saying, “As surely as the Sovereign LORD lives.” I’ll watch over you for opportunities to bring you harm and not good. You’ll suffer war and starvation until all of you are dead, except for a very few who will be able to return from Egypt. Then you’ll know whose word is true—Mine or theirs.

“Here’s how you’ll know that what I’ve said will happen. I’ll hand over King Hophra of Egypt to those who want to kill him, just as I handed Zedekiah over to Nebuchadnezzar.” ’

Jeremiah Speaks to Baruch

45In Jehoiakim’s fourth year as king of Judah, Baruch, son of Neraiah, wrote down on a scroll everything Jeremiah told him to write. Then he said, “Baruch, the LORD, the God of Israel, says ‘You, Baruch, are feeling terrible because of your sorrows and pains and that you can’t get any rest.’”

I, the LORD, say, “I’ll tear down what I’ve built, and I’ll uproot what I planted. So don’t think of making big plans for yourself. True, I’ll bring disaster on My people, but you’ll escape with your life.”

I told Baruch, “Seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not” (v. 5, KJV). Perhaps you get discouraged because you are self-consumed and things don’t go the way you plan. Seek great things for Me and not for selfish reasons.

Jeremiah Speaks about Egypt

46I, the LORD, gave Jeremiah several messages to give to various nations. Concerning Egypt, I gave Jeremiah these words about the army of Pharaoh Necho of Egypt who was defeated by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylonia, at Carchemish on the Euphrates River in the fourth year of Jehoiakim’s reign over Judah.

This chapter introduces Jeremiah “a prophet against the Gentiles” (nations, v. 1). Jeremiah predicts the defeat of Egypt “by the River Euphrates” (v. 10, NKJV). This was the battle of Carchemish, an important city at the ford of the Euphrates, where Nebuchadnezzar defeated Pharaoh-Necho in one of the most decisive battles in Near Eastern history. Never again was Egypt a world power.

Jeremiah's message: "Grab your shields and go into battle. Harness your horses and get ready to mount them. Put on your helmets, sharpen your spears, and put on your armor. Look! The Egyptians are running away in terror and they aren't looking back. They are fast but not fast enough and being strong is no help. They stumble and fall in battle by the Euphrates River. What nation rises like the Nile River at flood time? It is Egypt rising like roaring waters and saying, 'I'll cover the earth and destroy many cities.' Tell your horses and charioteers to charge ahead, with your allies from Ethiopia, Libya, and Lydia who are armed with shields, and bows and arrows. In this day the LORD, the LORD of the heavens, will take revenge on His enemies. Many will die by the sword, and they will be like a sacrifice to the Lord, the LORD of the heavens, in the north near the Euphrates.

"You, Egypt, may go to Gilead for ointment, but it and no other remedy can heal you. Nations will hear of your disgrace and tears. Soldiers will stumble over each other in battle."

The LORD gave Jeremiah these words to announce in Migdol, Memphis, and Tahpanhes about Nebuchadnezzar's attack on Egypt: "Get ready to defend yourselves, because people everywhere are dying. Your soldiers are being killed because I, the LORD, am defeating them. These hired soldiers from other countries keep tripping over each other, and they want to go home. Yet they say Pharaoh talks big but has missed his opportunity to defeat Nebuchadnezzar. Egypt, I am King, the LORD of the heavens, but you need to know that the one coming against you is as tall as Mount Tabor or Mount Carmel by the sea. So pack up and get ready to leave as captives. Memphis will be empty and in ruins.

"An enemy from the north will attack you, Egypt, like a fly biting a cow. Soldiers hired from other countries are like calves fattened for a slaughter. They turn and run because they know disaster is coming. Egypt can only run like a snake crawling away as the enemy comes against her with axes to cut down trees. The enemy soldiers will be more in number than the swarm of locusts. Egypt will be ashamed when it is captured by the enemy from the north."

I, the LORD of the heavens, say, "I'll soon punish Amon, god of the city of Thebes, and I'll punish Pharaoh and all Egypt's gods and kings and those who trust in Pharaoh. I'll hand them over to Nebuchadnezzar and his army officers. Yet later Egypt will recover. I, the LORD, have spoken these words.

“But Israel, My servant, don’t be afraid or discouraged. I’ll bring you home from distant lands. You and your descendants will return from captivity, and you’ll again enjoy peace and security with no need to fear. Don’t be afraid, Israel, because I, the LORD, am with you. I’ll destroy the nations that have taken you captive, but I won’t destroy you. Yet I must discipline you.”

But in the midst of the nations that rise and fall, I promise to protect My people, the Jews. “Do not fear—I am with you—I will not make a complete end of you” (v. 28).

Jeremiah Speaks about the Philistines

47This is the message from Me, the LORD, concerning the Philistines before Pharaoh attacked Gaza: “An army is coming from the north like a flood. It will destroy the land and towns and people in them. People will cry in terror as they hear the hooves of galloping horses and the noise of enemy chariots. Fathers will be so frightened that they will run and won’t turn to help their children.

“The time has come for the Philistines to be destroyed, and no one will be able to help Tyre and Sidon. I’ll destroy the Philistines, who’ve come from Crete. People of Gaza will shave their heads and Ashkelon will be silenced in grief, and others will cut themselves as they mourn. Now will My sword rest? Sword, I’d like for you to go back to your scabbard. But I know you can’t rest until I destroy Ashkelon on the seacoast.”

Jeremiah Speaks About the Destruction of Moab

48I, the LORD of the heavens, gave Jeremiah this message concerning Moab: “How terrible it will be for you Nebo and Kiriath-Aim, for they will be ruined and shamed, and the fortress will be broken down. No one will ever brag about Moab again, and men in Heshbon will plot her downfall. The town Madmen (meaning ‘Silence’) will be silenced because of the sword killing so many people. When Horonaim is being attacked, people will cry for help. Moab will be shattered, and even her little ones will weep bitterly on the

way to Luhith on the road to Horonaim. Run for your lives and hide in the desert. Your power and wealth won't save you. You'll be taken captives along with your god Chemosh and your priests and officials. Every town will be destroyed, the valleys will be ruined, and the flatlands destroyed because I have spoken. Spread salt on the ground to keep crops from growing, her towns will be in ruins and empty.

“If anyone refuses to do the work I've given you, I'll put a curse on you. Moab has always lived in peace. She is like wine left to settle, never poured from one jar to another, and her aroma is the same. But I'll send men to pour out the wine and smash the jars. Then Moab will be ashamed because Chemosh can't save her, just as the god of Bethel couldn't save Israel.

“You claim that your soldiers are strong and brave, but I the King, the LORD of the heavens, will destroy Moab and your fine young men will be slaughtered. Moab's fall will happen soon. You who know Moab, weep for her. See how her scepter is broken and her staff is shattered. You people of Dibon, sit on the packed ground, and mourn, because those who destroy Moab will destroy you too. The people of Aroer will see people fleeing, and they'll ask why. They'll answer, 'Moab has been defeated.' Weep in shame as you tell everyone by the Arnon River that Moab is destroyed. The cities of the flatland lie in ruins, including Holon, Jahzah, Mephaath, Dibon, Nebo, Beth-Diblathaim, Kiriath-Aim, Beth-Gamul, Beth-Meon, Kerioth, and Bozrah. Moab's strength is broken like an animal's horn; and her arms have been broken.” I, the LORD, have spoken these words.

“You nations make Moab drunk because she has defied Me. She will wallow in her vomit and be laughed at. You made fun of Israel and you treated them like thieves caught in the act. Go live in the caves like doves making their nests in rocks. We've heard of Moab's pride and conceit, her arrogance and haughtiness. I know her pride, but it is useless, and accomplishes nothing.

“So Jeremiah, weep for Moab and the men of Kir-Hareseth. You people of Sibmah were like a vineyard with lots of grapes. Your branches spread to the sea and north to the town of Jazer. But your enemy has destroyed your fruit and grapes. Your joy is gone, and no one is happy. You can no longer tread grapes in the winepress. Weeping in Heshbon can be heard as far away as Elealeh and Jahaz and weeping in Zoar can be heard as far away as Horonaim and Eglath-Selishiyah. And even the Nimrim River is dried up.”

I, the LORD, say: “I'll punish Moab because they offer sacrifices at their shrines and burn incense to their gods. I groan for Moab and Kir-Hareseth like

playing a flute, because all their wealth is gone. In mourning people there shave their heads and cut their hands and wear burlap clothing. Crying is heard in every home in Moab and on every street; because I have shattered Moab like breaking a jar no one wants. Moab is broken, and you can hear the wailing. Nations are horrified at what has happened and they make fun of her.”

I, the LORD, say, “An enemy is swooping down over Moab, to capture its cities. Moab’s soldiers will be weak like a woman in child labor. Because Moab defied Me, I’ll destroy her. So you people of Moab will experience terror and a trap. I, the LORD, have spoken these words. If someone runs from terror, he will fall into a pit. And if he climbs out of the pit, he will be caught in a trap. You’ll experience traps near Heshbon.

“A fire burns in Heshbon and a blaze from Sihon to devour the entire land with its rebellious people. Moab, your destruction is certain. But in the days to come I’ll restore your good days even though you worshiped your god Chemosh.” This is the end of My words of judgment on Moab.

I delivered a prophecy against Moab because they had constantly fought My people and rejoiced every time persecution or destruction fell to them. The city Nebo was named on the Moabite stone (in London, England) erected by King Mesha of Moab (around 840 BC) to commemorate his victory over Israel (2 Kings 3:4-27).

Jeremiah Speaks a Prophetic Judgment against the Ammonites

49I, the LORD of the heavens, gave Jeremiah this message concerning the Ammonites: I, the LORD, say, “The people of Ammon worship the god Molech. So I’ll destroy the town of Rabbah and it will become a pile of ruins, and villages around it will be burned.

“Wail, Heshbon, because Ai and Rabbah are destroyed. So people should wear burlap clothing in mourning. And those people who worship the false god Molech will be taken captives with their priests and officials. So don’t boast of your beautiful valleys with all their good fruits. People all around you will make you afraid, but in the future, I’ll bring you back to your land.” I, the LORD, have spoken these words.

I, the LORD Almighty, gave Jeremiah this message concerning Edom: “Where are all the wise men of Teman? Is there no advice from the wise counselors? Is their wisdom fading away? You people in Dedan, run and hide in caves because I’ll bring disaster on Edom as a way of punishing them. People who harvest grapes leave a few on the vines for poor people. And thieves at night don’t take everything. But I’ll make the land of Edom so desolate that no one will be able to find a place to hide. Everyone in Edom, including your children, relatives, and neighbors, will perish. But I’ll take care of your orphans and widows.

“Innocent people often suffer, so you’ll certainly be punished, like drinking a cup of wrath. I affirm by Myself that your city of Bozrah and its nearby towns will become a heap of trash forever and people will be horrified.”

I, the LORD, told Jeremiah to send a messenger to the nations: “Prepare for battle against Edom.” I, the LORD, also said, “Edom, you will be a weak nation, and everyone will hate you. You’re proud that you make others afraid, but your pride tricks you. And you are proud that you live in rock cliffs and high in the mountains. You build your nest as high as the eagle’s, but I’ll bring you down. People who pass by Edom will be horrified and shocked, and they’ll ridicule you because of all your wounds. Your destruction will be like that of Sodom and Gomorrah and nearby towns. No one will live there anymore.

“I’ll come on Edom like a lion leaping from near the Jordan suddenly attacking sheep. I’ll chase Edom from its land, and I’ll not choose just anyone to attack you. I’ll do it Myself, because no leader can oppose Me. This is what I’ve planned for Edom, including those who live in Teman. Little children, like lambs, will be dragged off, and I’ll destroy their homes, like a sheep’s pasture. When Edom falls, the whole earth will shake, and your wailing will be heard hundreds of miles away at the Red Sea. Like an eagle, the enemy will swoop down over Bozrah, and your strong soldiers will be terrified like a woman in labor.”

I, the LORD, gave Jeremiah this message concerning Damascus: “Hamath and Arpad are afraid because of the bad news they have heard. They are discouraged and are troubled like raging waves. The people of Damascus have lost their courage, and in a panic, they turn and run gripped by anxiety and pain like a woman in labor. Your famous city is now empty. Your young men will fall dead in the streets, and your soldiers will all be killed,” say I, the

LORD Almighty. “I’ll start a fire at the city walls, and it’ll burn down the fortresses of King Ben-Hadad.”

I, the LORD, gave Jeremiah this message concerning Kedar and Hazor which Nebuchadnezzar attacked: “Advance against Kedar and kill the people of the East. take their tents and flocks and camels and all their goods. Everywhere people will hear shouts of terror. You people will run for your lives and stay in caves,” say I, the LORD. “Nebuchadnezzar has plotted against you and is getting ready to destroy you. You live alone, self-confident that you are safe, even though you have no city gates or walls. But Nebuchadnezzar will take all your camels and cattle, and people living in distant deserts will be scattered and will face disaster from every direction. Wild dogs will live in Hazor, which will be desolated forever.”

Early in the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah, I, the LORD Almighty, gave Jeremiah this message concerning Elam: “I’ll kill your archers, the best of your marksmen. I’ll bring enemies from all directions to attack you, and I’ll scatter you in every direction, and you’ll be captives to every nation on earth. I’ll shatter you before your enemies, and in My fierce anger I’ll bring disaster on you. Your enemies will chase you with swords until every one of you is killed. I’ll kill your king and officials, and I’ll rule over you. But in the future, I’ll bring you back to your land.”

Jeremiah Speaks about Babylon

50I, the LORD, gave Jeremiah this message concerning Babylon and the land of the Babylonians: “Announce what will happen and leave nothing out. Raise a flag and say, ‘Babylon will be captured and her god, Marduk (also called Balthazar), will be shamed and terrified.’ A nation will attack her from the north and devastate the land. People and animals will run away, leaving the land empty. Then the people of Israel and Judah will weep and seek Me. They’ll ask the way to Jerusalem, and they’ll join with Me in an everlasting covenant that will never be forgotten.

“My people, you are like lost sheep; your shepherds have led you astray in the mountains. And you’ve even forgotten where your field is located. When your enemies found you and destroyed you, they said, ‘We’re not guilty for attacking them, because they sinned against the LORD, their hope of their ancestors.’ Israel and Judah will escape from Babylonia and lead the way home.

“I’m raising against Babylonia a group of nations from the north, who’ll attack and capture her people. The arrows of their skilled soldiers hit their target every time. Babylonia will be defeated, and soldiers will carry off anything they want. You people of Babylonia were glad to rob My people. You jumped around like a calf threshing grain and made noises like a horse. Babylon was like a mother to you, but she’ll be the least of nations and a dry, desolate desert. No one will live there because of My anger. All who pass by her will be horrified, and they’ll ridicule you because of all her wounds.

“All you nations around Babylonia, get ready to attack. Archers, shoot your arrows and don’t spare any, because she has sinned against Me. Shout on every side. She is surrendering, her towers are falling, and her enemies are tearing down her walls. I am taking revenge on Babylon by doing to her what she did to others. No one will be left in Babylon to plant or harvest crops. Let the captives hurry back to their homelands to avoid being killed by the attacking armies. Israel is like a flock of sheep scattered by lions. The king of Assyria ate them up, and then Nebuchadnezzar crushed their bones. Therefore I, the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel will punish the king of Babylon just as I punished the king of Assyria. I’ll bring Israel back to their homeland, and like sheep they’ll graze on Mount Carmel and in Bashan and in the hill country of Ephraim and Gilead. In those future days I’ll forgive them, and their sin and guilt will be gone.

“My warriors, attack the towns of Merathaim and Pekod. Chase them and kill them all. Sounds and the noise of destruction are heard in the land. Babylon was like a hammer pounding all the earth, but now it is broken and shattered. Babylon is desolate among the nations. Babylon, you opposed Me, so I have set a trap for you and you are caught. I have brought out My weapons to pour out My wrath on you. This is My work, the Sovereign LORD of the heavens. You enemies of Babylon come against her. Pile up the grain in her storehouses and destroy it completely with everything else. And leave no survivors. Kill her young bulls. How terrible it will be for them too. For the time has come for them to be slaughtered too.

“Listen to the refugees, My people, who have escaped from Babylon. They’ll tell everyone in Jerusalem how I, the LORD, took revenge against Babylon for destroying My temple.

“Call for archers to attack Babylon and to surround the city so no one can escape. She has defied Me, the Holy One of Israel, so do to her what she has done to others. Her soldiers, all young men, will die in the streets. You proud

people, I am against you. The time has arrived for you to be punished. You will stumble and fall, and no one will be able to help you up. A fire in your towns will burn up everything in them.”

I, the LORD of the heavens, also say, “The people of Israel and Judah have been mistreated by their captors who refuse to let them go. But I, your Redeemer, am strong. I am the LORD of the heavens. I’ll defend your case and give you rest again in Israel. But for the people of Babylon there’ll be no rest. A sword will kill the people of Babylon and her officials, wise men, false prophets who’ll be shown to be fools, and soldiers who’ll be filled with terror, horses and chariots, and foreigners who’ll be weak as women. Also, all her treasures will be taken away. Your rivers and canals will dry up. All this will happen because Babylon is filled with idols, and the people are madly in love with them. No one will live in the city from generation to generation. Only desert creatures, hyenas, and owls will live there. The city will be destroyed just as I destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah and neighboring towns. No one will live there anymore.

“Look! An army is marching from the north with its allies from many parts of the world. They have bows and arrows and spears, and they are cruel and show no mercy. As they ride their horses, the many soldiers sound like the roaring sea. They are lined up for battle to attack you, Babylon. Your king has heard reports about them, and he is weak with fear. His anxiety and pain are like that of a woman in labor.

“I’ll come like a lion leaping from near the Jordan suddenly attacking sheep. I’ll chase Babylon from its land, and I’ll appoint the leader I choose. No one can oppose Me. Listen to My plans against Babylon and the land of the Babylonians. Young children will be dragged off and their homes destroyed. When Babylon is captured, the earth will shake, and her cry will be heard among many nations.”

Jeremiah predicts judgment against the Babylonians. Jeremiah is not a politician, but a prophet. He explains why I used the evil nation Babylon to judge the sins of My people in Jerusalem. Why? Because I hate the lesser sins of My people. Because My people sin with greater light; they sin against Me.

My Judgment against Babylon

51 I, the LORD, also say this about Babylon: “I’ll send a destroyer against Babylonia and its capital Babylon (also called Leb Kamar). These foreigners will winnow her, blowing her away like chaff. They’ll come from every direction in her day of trouble. Don’t let Babylonian archers string their bows or soldiers put on their armor. Don’t let anyone live; kill all her soldiers. Their soldiers will fall dead in Babylon’s streets.

“Israel and Judah, you are guilty before Me, the Holy One of Israel, and yet I, your God, the LORD of the heavens, have not forsaken you.

“Escape from Babylon. Run for your lives. Don’t stay and be killed along with Babylon because of her sins when I take revenge on her. Babylon has been like My gold cup, from which I made nations drink the wine of My wrath and caused them to go insane. Babylon will fall suddenly. Weep for her and give her medicine for her pain. Perhaps she can be healed. The foreigners answered, ‘We would have helped her if we could, but nothing can help her now. We may as well go home because her judgment will be so great.’”

The people of Israel say, “The Lord has taken revenge on Babylon for what she did to us. Let’s tell everyone in Jerusalem what the Lord our God has done.”

“Kings of Media, sharpen your arrows and take up your shields. I, the LORD, will use you to destroy Babylon because she destroyed My temple. Raise the flag and attack the city walls. Post more guards and prepare for an ambush. I’ll use you to carry out My plans against Babylon. Your city, Babylon, is by the Euphrates River and you have many canals. You are a wealthy city. But your end has come. I, the LORD of the heavens, affirm by My own name that your city will be filled with enemy soldiers, like locusts filling a field, and they will shout their victory over you.

“I, your God, have made the earth by My power and wisdom, and I spread out the stars in space. When I speak, clouds in the heavens roar, and I send clouds, lightning, rain, and wind. Everyone who worships idols is foolish and stupid, and even goldsmiths are shamed by their idols because their idols are a hoax and are not alive. Idols are worthless and are lies. The time is coming when they will all be destroyed. But I, the LORD, the God of Jacob, am not like them. I created everything, and I chose Israel to be My very own, and I am the LORD of the heavens.”

I, the LORD, say to Babylonia, “You were my battle ax and sword. I used you to shatter nations and destroy kingdoms. I used you to destroy horses and riders and to shatter chariots and drivers. I used you to shatter adult men and women, old men and young people, and young men and women. I used you to shatter shepherd and flock, farmer and oxen, and governors and officials. But now I’ll repay you for what you did to My people in Jerusalem.

“Babylon, you are strong like a mountain in destroying the earth. But I’m your enemy. I’ll raise My fist against you to roll you off cliffs and leave you a burned-out mountain. You will be desolate forever. Even your stone blocks will never be used again for cornerstones or foundations.

“Signal the nations to get ready to attack Babylon; and blow a trumpet. Bring out the armies of Ararat, Minni, and Ashkenaz. Appoint a commander and gather horses for battle like a swarm of locusts. Bring against Babylon the kings of the Medes with their generals and the armies of all the countries they rule.

“Babylon trembles and is in pain because I won’t change My mind about My purposes against you. I plan to make your land a desert where no one can live. Babylon’s soldiers have stopped fighting. They stay in their fortresses, and they are weak like women. Houses in the city have been set on fire, and soldiers broke down her city gates. One messenger after another runs to the king to tell him his city is captured, the escape routes are closed, the marshes are set on fire, and the soldiers are terrified.”

I, the LORD of the heavens, the God of Israel, say this: “The people of Babylon will soon be like wheat being trampled on a threshing place. King Nebuchadnezzar has stuffed himself with our treasures, made My people confused, and left them with nothing like an empty jar. Like a snake he gobbled down our riches and then spit out what he didn’t want. May Babylon be repaid for all the violence she brought on Israel and the blood she shed.”

I, the LORD, say to Jerusalem, “I’ll take revenge on Babylon. I’ll dry up her river and her water supply, and Babylon will become a pile of rubbish, haunted by wild dogs. People will be horrified and will sneer at her where no one lives. The Babylonians will roar like hungry lions. So I’ll give them a banquet and make them so drunk they’ll fall asleep and never wake up.

“I’ll bring them like lambs to the slaughter or like rams and goats to be sacrificed. Babylon (also called Sheshach) will be captured. Babylon was praised everywhere, but nations will be horrified when they see her downfall. Her enemies will rise over her like ocean waves and flood the city.

Babylonia's cities will be a desolate, dry desert where no one lives or even travels there. I'll punish your god, Marduk (also called Bel), and make him vomit everything he swallowed from other nations. The nations will no longer worship him for Babylon's walls will crumble.

"My people, run for your lives before I strike the city in My anger. Don't be afraid when you hear rumors of armies fighting to defeat Babylon. Rumors keep coming each year. But the time will come when I'll punish the idols of Babylon. The whole land will be disgraced, and her dead will lie in the streets. Then the heavens and the earth will be glad that Babylon will be attacked by armies from the north. Babylon has killed many people of Israel and others throughout the world. So now her people will be killed. Go, you who escaped Babylon's sword. Run while you have a chance. Think about Me, the LORD, and Jerusalem even though you're in a distant land.

"I feel ashamed and disgraced because foreigners entered My temple. But days are coming when I'll punish her idols, and the groans of the wounded will be heard throughout the land. Even if Babylon's walls reach the sky and she fortifies her strongholds, I'll send destroyers against her." I, the LORD spoke these words.

I, the LORD, also said, "Hear the cry of Babylon and the sound of destruction throughout the land. I am destroying Babylon and silencing her. Enemies are coming against her like ocean waves, and the noise of battle is heard throughout the city. An enemy is attacking and destroying Babylon, capturing her soldiers and breaking their bows. I am a just God and I take revenge on nations that do not obey Me. I, the LORD, am the King, the LORD of the heavens, who will make drunk her officials, wise men, governors, officers, and soldier, and they'll fall asleep and never wake up again."

This too is what I, the LORD of the heavens say: "The wide walls of Babylon will be torn down and its huge gates burned. The builders from other countries worked for nothing, because their work will be destroyed by fire."

Jeremiah gave this message to Zedekiah's staff officer Seraiah, son of Neriah, and grandson of Mahseiah, when he went to Babylon in the fourth year of Zedekiah's reign. Jeremiah had recorded on a scroll all the terrible things that would happen to Babylon. So he said to Seraiah, "When you get to Babylon, read aloud everything on this scroll. Then say, 'The LORD has said He'll destroy Babylon so that neither people or animals will remain there. It will be like an empty desert forever.' After you've read the scroll, tie it to a stone, and throw it in the Euphrates River. Then say, 'In this same way

Babylon and her people will sink, never again to rise because of the disasters I'll bring on her.” This ends Jeremiah’s messages.

The Rule of King Zedekiah

52 Zedekiah was 21 years old when he became king of Judah and he reigned in Jerusalem 11 years. His mother was Hamutal, daughter of Jeremiah from Libnah. But Zedekiah disobeyed Me, the LORD, just as Jehoiakim had done. I, in My anger, turned My back on the people of Jerusalem and Judah and caused them to be taken into captivity. Then Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon. So on January 15, in Zedekiah’s ninth year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar led his army against Jerusalem. They surrounded the city and built siege ramps against its walls. Jerusalem was under siege for a year and a half.

By July 18 of Zedekiah’s 11th year, the food in Jerusalem was gone. Then the Babylonians broke down a section of the wall, and Zedekiah and the soldiers in Jerusalem left the city at night through the gate between the two walls behind the king’s garden, though they knew the city was surrounded. They ran toward the Jordan River valley.

But the Babylonians chased them and caught Zedekiah in the Jericho plains, but Zedekiah’s men had scattered in various directions. The Babylonians brought Zedekiah to Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah in the land of Hamath, where Zedekiah was put on trial and found guilty. At Riblah the king of Babylon made Zedekiah watch while his sons and leaders of Judah were killed. Then they gouged out Zedekiah’s eyes, bound him in bronze chains, and took him to Babylon and kept him in prison till he died.

You see “the wages of sin” in this chapter. There are consequences whenever a people reject Me, or rebel against Me. Yes, I am merciful to forgive when you repent and ask for forgiveness. That’s because I am a loving God. But I am also Holy and I must punish all sin—whether in wicked people or in My children—so Israel was punished. Many were killed in battle, or by disease, or by execution. Only a few went into captivity.

On August 17 of that year (586 BC), which was Nebuchadnezzar's 19th year as king of Babylon, Nebuzaradan, captain of the guard, arrived in Jerusalem and burned down My Temple, the royal palace, and every house and important building in Jerusalem. The army then tore down all the walls around the city. Nebuzaradan took some of the poorest people into captivity and others who with craftsmen and troops had said they would be loyal to Nebuchadnezzar. But Nebuchadnezzar left in Jerusalem some of the poorest people to work the fields and vineyards.

The Babylonians broke up the bronze columns, movable stones, and the bronze water tank at My Temple and took the bronze to Babylon. They also took away the pots, shovels, wick trimmers, sprinkling bowls, dishes, and other bronze utensils used in making sacrifices. They also took the bowls, fire pans, pots, lampstands, ladles, and bowls used for drink offerings, and all other utensils made of gold or silver. They also took the two bronze columns in front of My Temple, the water carts, and the water basin with the 12 bulls beneath it, which King Solomon had made. All this bronze was more than could be weighed. Each column was 27 feet tall and 18 feet around. They were hollow with the walls 3 inches thick. The bronze capital on top of each column was 7 ½ feet high and was decorated with bronze pomegranates all the way around. Ninety-six pomegranates were on the sides, and 100 pomegranates were on the network around the top.

Nebuzaradan took captive Seraiah the chief priest, his assistant Zephaniah, and the three gatekeepers. Then he arrested the army commander, seven of Zedekiah's advisers, and an army officer in charge of recruitment, and 60 other citizens. Nebuzaradan took all of them to the king of Babylon at Riblah. And at Riblah, the king had them all killed. So the people of Judah were taken as captives from their land.

The number of captives taken to Babylon in Nebuchadnezzar's 7th year (597 BC) was 3,023. In his 18th year (586 BC) he took 832 more, and in his 23rd year he sent his captain of the guard, Nebuzaradan to take 745 more. This was a total of 4,600.

Chapter 52 is nearly identical to 2 Kings 24:18-25:30. It demonstrates the prophecies of Jeremiah were fulfilled verbally, accurately, and within a short period of time. I say what I mean, and I mean what I promise.

In King Jehoiachin's 37th year as a captive in Babylon, Evil-Merodach became king of Babylonia. He was kind to Jehoiachin and released him from prison on March 31 of that year (561 BC). He was kind to Jehoiachin and treated him better than the other kings who were captives. He even gave him new clothes to wear in place of his prison uniform, and he was allowed to eat at the king's table every day. And each day until he died, Jehoiachin was given a daily allowance.

I AM GOD

The Faithful One

The Book of Lamentations

This book was written within three months after the fall of Jerusalem in the summer of 586 BC, before the remnant departed for Egypt (Jer. 39:2, 41:1, 18, 43:7). Jeremiah sat on a Judean hill and watched the city smolder while the few remaining inhabitants scavenged through garbage and trash looking for food. The tears of the weeping prophet are never more evident than in his crying over everything: the destruction of My Temple, the priestly sacrificial system, the Jewish culture and life as it once prospered in Jerusalem.

In the midst of the gloom, the author framed the chapters with a beautiful literary acrostic style. Chapters 1, 2, and 4 each has 22 verses, corresponding to the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The first word of each verse begins with a Hebrew letter, progressing in order through the entire alphabet. Lamentations 3 does the same thing in blocks of three verses, for a total of 66 verses ($22 \times 3 = 66$). Although Lamentations 5 also has 22 verses, no acrostic mechanism is present.

The Septuagint (a Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, 285-247 BC) has this introduction, “It came to pass that after Israel was taken captive and Jerusalem was made desolate, Jeremiah sat weeping and lamented with this lamentation over Jerusalem, and said . . .”

Jeremiah realized it was My mercy that the remnant was not destroyed, even when I afflicted (keyword) My children for their sin and rebellion. He thanked Me that My mercies are “new every morning.” Then Jeremiah praised Me, “Great is thy faithfulness” (Lamentations 3:23).

The Sorrows and Desolation of Jerusalem

1 Jerusalem used to be crowded with people, but it is now empty. Known all over the world, the city is now lonely and in grief like a widow. Once queen of the nations, she is now a slave. Every night she cries, and tears run down her cheeks. Her former lovers offer her no comfort, and her friends have betrayed her and are now her enemies. The people of Judah are slaves, suffering in captivity. She has no rest in foreign nations. Her enemies have chased her and defeated her.

Even roads leading to Zion mourn because no one is traveling on them to celebrate her festivals. Her city gates are deserted, her priests mourn, her young women grieve, and she is bitter. Her enemies are now her masters and they prosper. She is grieving because I, the LORD, am punishing her for her sins. Her children are captives to their enemies.

Jerusalem's glory is gone. Her leaders are like starving deer that can't find pasture, and they are too weak to run. In her sadness and wandering she remembers the good life she had. Now that she is in the hands of her enemies, she has no one to help her. In fact, her enemies even laughed when their city was defeated. Jerusalem's terrible sins have resulted in her being spiritually unclean. People who used to respect her now hate her because they have seen her nakedness. And she groans and hides her face. Her sins have made her clothes filthy, and she doesn't think about what will happen. When Jerusalem fell to her enemies, no one comforted her. She prayed to Me, "LORD, see my problem. The enemy has defeated us."

The enemy stole her treasures, and she saw pagan nations enter My Temple, which I, the LORD, had forbidden. Everyone in Jerusalem groans as they search for food. And they even trade their treasures for food to stay alive. They pray to Me, "LORD, see how despised I am." People who pass by Jerusalem don't care about her suffering which I, the LORD, brought on her in My anger.

I, the LORD, sent a fire that burned in Jeremiah's bones. I set a trap for his feet and turned My back. I have left him miserable and weak all day. I bound Israel's sins around his neck like a yoke. I have sapped his strength and handed him over to his enemies, and he's helpless to do anything about it. I have rejected all Jerusalem's soldiers, and I have called for a foreign

army to defeat your young men. And they trampled on Jerusalem, the Virgin Daughter of Judah like grapes in a winepress.

Jeremiah weeps and tears flow down his cheeks because no one comforts or encourages him. My children are in distress because the enemy has defeated them. Zion pleads for help, but no one offers comfort. I, the LORD, have planned that Judah's neighbors become her enemies. To them Jerusalem is like a filthy rag. I, the LORD, am right. Jerusalem did not obey My commands. Everyone looked on Jerusalem's suffering because her young people have been taken away as captives. Jerusalem asked her allies for help, but they betrayed her. Her priests and elders died of starvation while they were searching for food.

Jerusalem says to Me, "LORD, see my misery and torment. My heart is broken because I turned from You. In the streets people are dying by the sword and at home there is death. People have heard my groanings, but no one offers comfort. My enemies know of my trouble and are glad for what You have done. You have promised to destroy them just as You destroyed me. Look on their sins and punish them just as You punished me for my sins. I groan continually, and I've lost all hope."

Jeremiah is grieved over the sin and rebellion of My people. It's not their loss of gold, or fine clothing, or food, or earthly things. Israel has lost My blessing, and Jeremiah weeps for Israel's spiritual emptiness.

I, the LORD, Punish My People

2I, the LORD, have cast a cloud of anger over Jerusalem, the Daughter of Zion. I have tossed Israel's beautiful city down from heaven to earth, and in My anger, I no longer think of it as a city over which I rule. Without mercy I have destroyed all Israel's homes. In My wrath I have broken down every fortress wall of Jerusalem and have tossed to the ground Jerusalem, the Daughter of Judah, and her leaders, leaving them in shame. In My intense anger I have killed every leader in Israel by not protecting them when the enemy attacked. I consumed everything in Israel like a raging fire. I was like an enemy shooting arrows at her, killing her loved ones. I poured

out My wrath like fire on the tent of the Daughter of Zion. I defeated her as if I were her enemy. I destroyed her palaces and fortresses. And everyone in Jerusalem, the Daughter of Judah, is moaning and sobbing. I destroyed My Temple, My meeting place, as if it were a mere hut in a garden. My people forgot its festivals and Sabbaths, and in My anger, I rejected both king and priests.

I abandoned My altar and temple. I let Jerusalem's enemies capture her palaces. And My people shouted so loudly in agony that it sounded like they were celebrating at an annual festival. I was determined to tear down the wall around Jerusalem, the Daughter of Zion, measuring it carefully to be sure it was all demolished, including every fortress and every part of the wall. Jerusalem's gates have fallen, and the bars to the gates are smashed. The city's king and royal family have been taken away as captives. My law is not followed, and no prophetic vision guides them. In grief Jerusalem's leaders sit on the ground in silence, have sprinkled dust on their heads, and wear coarse clothing. Young women hang their heads in sorrow.

Jeremiah's eyes are filled with tears because of his inner pain, and he is drained emotionally because many of his people are killed, and children and babies are fainting in the streets. They cry to their mothers for something to eat and drink, but they faint like wounded soldiers and they die in their mothers' arms. How can Jeremiah comfort you, O Daughter of Jerusalem? To what can he compare your agony? Who can heal your wounds that are as deep as the sea? Your prophets have had visions that are false and useless. They did not point out your sins in order to keep you from being taken captives. Instead they gave you false and deceptive messages. People who pass by make fun of you, Jerusalem, and shake their heads and say, "Is this the city people called 'the Most Beautiful in All the World' and 'the Joy of All the Earth?'" Your enemies curse you and scoff and grind their teeth and say, "At last we have defeated Jerusalem. This is the day we've been waiting for."

I, the LORD, did this just as I planned long ago. I destroyed Jerusalem without showing any mercy, and I let your enemy boast that they were able to be strong against her, like a bull with its horns. My people of Jerusalem, the Daughter of Zion, cry out to Me and let your tears flow in sorrow like a river with no relief or rest.

Israel thought she enjoyed a protected and privileged place in the world because of her covenant relationship with Me. But in her sin, she forgot her spiritual obligation to Me, her LORD. Now Israel has reaped a whirlwind, because she sowed to the wind (Hos. 8:7). My nation has forgotten all that I've done for her in the past. She has won wars, and she has prospered financially. But she sinned against Me. She has forgotten personal integrity and holiness. She has forgotten marriage fidelity and sexual purity. May your nation repent before I judge her, as I judged Jerusalem.

“Jerusalem, pray during the night and pour out your hearts to Me, the LORD, like pouring water out from a jar. Pray for your children who are starving at every street corner. Have I, the LORD, ever done this to anyone else? Is it right for mothers to kill and eat their own children? Is it right for priests and prophets to be killed right in My Temple? Young and old lie dead in the streets, and boys and girls have been killed by the sword. I have killed them in My anger, slaughtering them without mercy. I invited your enemies to come destroy her like inviting them to a festival. In My anger no one escaped or survived. The enemy has killed all your children.”

Turn Back to Me for Hope

3 Jeremiah had seen much trouble because of My wrath. I had put him in the dark, and I had turned against him. I made him grow old and I broke his bones. I forced him to sit in darkness like a dead person.

I built a wall around Jerusalem so that she couldn't escape, and I held her down with chains. When she prayed for help, I didn't listen. I put large stones in her way so that she had to follow a crooked path. I even waited for her like a bear or lion, and then dragged her from the road and tore at her, leaving her helpless. And I treated her as target practice, piercing her heart with arrows. People laughed at her, and all day long they sung mocking songs. I filled her with bitterness and made her life sour.

I have even made her eat gravel, which has broken her teeth, and I have rolled her in dust. Jeremiah has no peace and can't remember what it's like to be successful. Everything he had hoped for from Me is gone. As he

thought of his suffering and bitterness, he was emotionally discouraged, but then on the other hand he did have hope.

Because of My steadfast love he was not destroyed completely, and My tender love never fails, and it is fresh every morning. How great is My faithfulness.

In the middle of Jeremiah's lamentation (his cry of grief), Jeremiah realizes that afflictions serve to keep him humble. Jeremiah turns his thoughts to My faithfulness by worshiping Me with the phrase, "Great is Thy faithfulness" (v. 23).

Jeremiah said to himself, "You, God, are what I possess, and therefore I can depend on You. You are good to everyone who trusts You and who turns to You. Therefore, I will wait patiently for You to rescue me."

It is good for young men to be disciplined and to be silent before Me. After lying in humility in the dust, they may have hope. They should let their enemies strike them on their cheeks and experience shame. But I don't desert My people forever. I bring grief, but I also show tender love. My steadfast love is so great. I don't enjoy bringing trouble and grief to anyone.

Some people mistreat prisoners, and deprive them of their rights, and refuse to be fair to them. But I, your LORD, see such things. Only what I have planned will happen, including both calamities and good things. No one then should complain when he is being punished for his rebellion. You should think about how you are living and turn back to Me, lifting your hearts and hands to Me, the God of Heaven. And you should admit that you have sinned and rebelled against Me and that I have not forgiven you.

I have pursued you in My anger and have killed many without any mercy. I have hidden behind a cloud so that your prayers can't get through to Me. And foreign nations treat you like garbage, and they speak against you. You are afraid and trapped and are desolate and destroyed. And because of this, your eyes are filled with tears. You will get no relief from tears until I, the LORD, look down from heaven and respond. My heart is breaking because of what enemies are doing to the young women of your city.

Your enemies, whom you never harmed, hunted you down like a bird. They tried to kill you by putting you in a pit and throwing rocks at you. Water in the bottom of the pit covered your head, and you thought you would die. But you prayed to Me, your LORD, and I heard you say, “Listen to my plea for help. Save me.” Then I answered your prayer and I said, “Don’t be afraid.”

Jeremiah was glad I answered him. I saw how they abused you, and I made things right. I saw how they plotted against you, and I heard their insults and evil plans against you, and their verbal attacks against you all day long. No matter what they are doing, they make fun of you in their songs.

I will pay them back for everything they have done. I will harden their hearts and put a curse on them. I will chase them in My anger and destroy them completely beneath My heavens.

The Aftermath of the Fall of Jerusalem

4 The finest gold has lost its shine and is dull, and jewels are scattered at every street corner. In a similar way the people of Zion, valuable as fine gold, are treated like pots of clay.

Wild dogs nurse their young, but my people are like ostriches that ignore their babies’ cries. Babies’ tongues stick to the roofs of their mouths, and when children beg for bread, no one gives them any. People who ate expensive foods are now begging in the streets. They used to be dressed in royal clothing, but now they lie in piles of ashes.

I punished My people worse than I punished Sodom, which was destroyed in a moment without anyone to help.

The sins of Sodom and Gomorrah were so great that I rained down brimstone and fire upon them in judgment (Gen. 19:24). But the sin of Judah—idolatry—was worse in My sight. “The evil of my people’s city was worse than the sin of Sodom” (v. 6).

Your princes were healthy with skin as bright as snow and bodies that were shining like jewels. But now they are blacker than soot and no one recognizes them. Their skin sticks to their bones and is dry and withered. Being killed by the sword is better than slowly dying of starvation. Tenderhearted mothers have even cooked and eaten their own children.

I, the LORD, was so angry that I burned the city of Zion to the ground. No one, including even kings, believed that enemies could break through Jerusalem's gates. But it happened. Why? Because the prophets and priests had sinned against Me, even killing innocent people. Now these prophets and priests wander blindly through the streets. They are so covered with blood that no one dares touch them. People tell them to go away and not to touch them because they are unclean. So if they go to some foreign country, people there will say, "You can't stay here." I, the LORD, have scattered My people, and I don't help them. No one respects their priests and leaders. They keep looking for some nation to come rescue them, but none come. They couldn't even walk in their streets because enemies were following them. Jerusalem knew her end was near, and her days were up.

Her enemies swoop down on her faster than eagles. They hunt her in the hills, and they try to catch her in the desert. She had hoped that the leaders could help her, but she was caught in their trap. She had thought I would keep her safe no matter what she did.

The people of Edom who live in the land of Uz may rejoice now. But Edom will suffer under My wrath and be drunk and go around naked. Daughter of Zion, you have paid for your sins, and I, the LORD, will let you return home from captivity. But the people of Edom will be punished, and your sins will be made known.

A Prayer of Jeremiah

5 Remember what has happened to Jerusalem and see her disgrace. Foreigners have taken her land and homes. She is an orphan and has no father, and her mother is a widow. She must buy water to drink and wood to burn. Her enemies are right behind her, and she is tired out. She begged for bread from Egypt and Assyria.

Her fathers sinned, but she was left to pay for their sins. Slaves are now her rulers, and no one can rescue her. She went into the desert to get food, but she risked death from her enemies.

Her skin is black from fever and hunger. Women and girls in Zion and all Judah have been raped, her rulers are hung up by their arms, and no one respects her leaders. Young men are forced to grind grain at the millstone, and boys are forced to carry heavy loads of wood. Old men no longer sit at the city gate to decide court cases, and young people no longer play music.

Jerusalem has no joy. She moans instead of dancing. Her glory is gone, and how terrible it is for all, because of your sins.

Jeremiah felt weak and tired, and his eyes are dim because of tears. Mount Zion is empty with wild dogs prowling in it. But I, the LORD, remain the same forever, and I rule from one generation to another. Why then have I forgotten you for so long? I will bring you back to Me, and make you like you were before. I have not completely rejected you, but I am still very angry with you.

Jeremiah voices the heart cry of the people of Israel after Jerusalem is destroyed. This is a cry of suffering people who are sorry for their sin, "We have sinned" (v. 16). I allowed them to suffer to show My hatred for sin—both in believers and unbelievers. When it looks like I have destroyed My work on earth, I am sitting on My throne in heaven. My success is not measured by the success of My people on earth. Not at all. The chief end of mankind is to glorify Me. I am glorified when My people do right, then I reward them. I am glorified when I manifest My holiness by punishing My people when they do wrong.

I AM GOD

The Glory of Israel

The Book of Ezekiel

Ezekiel was born into the priestly tribe (Ezek. 1:3), but I, the LORD, gave him visions, and commanded him to be a prophet and tell them to the nation of Israel. Ezekiel was carried into Babylon in the first deportation (606 BC). He kept informing the nation of the sins which led to their captivity. He also predicted Israel's return to the land of promise (Ch. 37) and described My Temple in Jerusalem during the future millennial kingdom (Ch. 40-48). Ezekiel also predicted judgment upon the surrounding nations that had oppressed Israel. There are two reoccurring phrases in Ezekiel that establish the authority of his messages; "the hand of the LORD was there upon him" (Ezek. 1:3; 3:14, 22) and "The word of the LORD came expressly unto Ezekiel" (1:3).

I called Ezekiel "Son of man," to remind him of his humanity because he comes from flesh; yet I used him in supernatural ways. Jesus used the same term (80 times in Luke) in reference to Himself, that is, "Son of man" to accentuate that He was God but had come from the flesh. The term *Son of man* is found 107 times.

Ezekiel's Vision of My Glory

1 On July 31st when Ezekiel was 30 years old, while he was with the Judean captives beside the Kebar River, the heavens were opened and he saw My visions. This happened during the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's captivity. I, the LORD, spoke to Ezekiel, son of Buzi, a priest, by the Kebar River in the land of the Babylonians. "I, the LORD, have placed My hand on you."

I am waiting for you when your dreams fail, just as I had a task for Ezekiel when he couldn't minister in My Temple.

He saw a great windstorm blowing in from the north. Lightning flashed from a huge cloud, and the cloud was surrounded by a brilliant light. In the fire were four living creatures that looked like humans. But each one had four faces and four wings. Their legs were human-like, but their feet were split like calves' feet and were like polished bronze. Beneath their wings he could see human-like hands. The wings of each creature touched the wings of the two beings beside it. The creatures moved together in any direction, without turning their bodies.

Each creature had the face of a human in front, the face of a lion on the right side, the face of a bull on the left, and the face of an eagle on the back. Each creature had two wings that touched two wings of the living creatures on either side of it, and the other two wings covered his body. Wherever the spirit led them, they went in that direction straight forward without turning.

The winged creatures looked like bright coals of fire, like bright torches, and lightning flashed among them. And the creatures themselves darted in every direction, as quickly as lightning.

As Ezekiel looked at these creatures, he saw a wheel on the ground beside each one. The wheels sparkled like a green mineral. The four wheels looked alike, but each wheel had another wheel turning crosswise within it; so they could go in any direction without the wheels turning. The rims of the wheels were large and had eyes all around the edges.

When the winged creatures moved, the wheels moved too. And when the creature flew upward, the wheels moved up too. Wherever the spirit moved the creatures, the wheels moved too. And when the spirit moved, the creatures and the wheels moved. When the creatures moved, the wheels moved, and when the creatures stopped, the wheels stopped. And when the creatures rose from the ground, the wheels rose too, because the spirit of the creatures was also in the wheels.

Above the winged creatures he saw what looked like an expanse sparkling like crystal. Each creature's wings and each creature had two wings covering its body. Whenever they flew, their wings sounded like the roar of waves washing against the shore, or like the voice of I, the LORD of

the heavens, or the shouting of an army. When they stopped, they let down their wings. As they stood with their wings lowered, he heard a voice from above their heads.

Ezekiel saw what looked like a throne made of sapphire, and high above on the throne was what looked like a human. From the waist up, He looked like glowing hot metal and from the waist down He looked like a burning flame, and surrounding Him was a bright light like a rainbow in the clouds. This was the brightness of My glory. Then Ezekiel fell face down and heard the voice of someone speaking.

Ezekiel didn't understand everything that was happening to him, and neither will you.

I, the LORD, Choose Ezekiel

2 The voice said, “Son of man, stand up and I will speak to you.” I, the Spirit, came into him and raised him to My feet. He listened to My words.

Ezekiel was filled with the Spirit (v. 2) just as you are commanded, “Be filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18). When you're empty, and feel so useless, ask to be filled with the Holy Spirit so you can be used by Me.

I, the LORD, say, “Son of man, I am sending you to the Israelites, a nation that has rebelled against Me, they and their ancestors to this very day. They are a hardhearted and stubborn people. Say to them, ‘This is what I, the Sovereign LORD, say.’ Of course, they may not listen, because they are a rebellious people, but yet they must know that a prophet has spoken to them. Don't be afraid, though you may feel at times as if you're in a thorn bush or among scorpions. Don't be afraid of what they say or be frightened by them. Speak My words to them, whether they listen or not, for they are a rebellious people.”

I told Ezekiel, “Don’t be afraid of them (people)” (v. 6). This is the same thing I told Jeremiah (1:8). Don’t let people intimidate you, especially unsaved people. I will take away your fear of people and make you a bold witness for Me.

“You, Son of man, listen to what I say to you. Don’t rebel against Me as they’ve done. Open your mouth and eat what I’ll give you.”

Then Ezekiel saw a hand stretched out to him, and it held a scroll, which the hand unrolled for him. On both sides of the scroll were words of sorrow, mourning, and grief.

Ezekiel is Appointed as a Watchman of Israel

3 I, the LORD, say, “Ezekiel, after you eat this scroll then go speak to the people of Israel.” So he opened his mouth and I gave him the scroll. Then I said, “Eat this scroll.” So he did, and it tasted like honey. I then said, “Son of man, go to the people of Israel with My message. I’m not sending you to people who speak a language you can’t understand. No, I’m not sending you to people with a strange, difficult language. If I did, they wouldn’t listen.”

I told Ezekiel to go speak to Israel, “You are not being sent to a people whose speech you cannot understand. Their language is not difficult . . .” (vv. 5-6). You are like Ezekiel; you are sent to witness to people who speak your language. You don’t need a foreign tongue to witness for Me. You can use the language you already know. You don’t need to learn another language; just speak to people what you know and tell them what I’ve done for them.

“I’m sending you to the Israelites, but they won’t listen to you because they didn’t listen to Me. All of them are stubborn and hardhearted. But I’ve made you as hard and stubborn as they are. I’ve made your forehead as hard as a rock. So don’t be afraid of them or terrified by them, even though they are such rebels.”

I told Ezekiel, "I have made you hard-headed. But today, you're soft. Pray to become hard against criticism and persecution, yet have a tender heart to Me."

Then I added, "Son of man, listen carefully to what I'll say to you and then think carefully about My words. Then go to your people and say to them, whether they listen or not, 'This is what the sovereign LORD says.'"

Then the Spirit of the LORD lifted Ezekiel up, and as My glory lifted him up from its place, he heard behind him the rumbling sound of an earthquake. This was the sound made by the wings of the creatures brushing against each other, and the sound of the wheels beneath them.

The Spirit lifted him up and took him away, and Ezekiel was angry and bitter. My power was on him. Then I sent him to the Judean captives in Tel-Abib, beside the Kebar River. He sat with them for a week, overwhelmed at what had happened.

At the end of the seven days, I, the LORD, gave Ezekiel this message: "Son of man, I have appointed you to be a watchman for Israel. When you get a message from Me, pass it on to them right away. When I tell wicked people they'll die because of their sins, but you don't give them this warning, they'll die in their sins and you'll be responsible. If you warn them and they keep on sinning, they'll die in their sins and you won't be responsible. If good people turn bad and don't listen to My warning, they'll die. So if you don't warn them of the consequences of their sins, they'll die in their sins and their previous good deeds won't help them. I'll hold you responsible for their death. But if you warn them and they turn from their sin, they'll live, and you'll not be responsible."

I, the LORD, took hold of him and said, "Get up and get into the valley, and I'll talk with you there." Ezekiel got up and went, and there he saw My glory as he had seen it in my vision by the Kebar River. And he fell with his face to the ground.

Then the Spirit took control of him, and he got up and I said, "Go, lock yourself in your house. You'll be there so you can't go out. I'll make you unable to talk with My rebellious people. But when you give a message, I'll enable you to talk. Then you'll say to them, 'This is what the sovereign

LORD says.’ Some of them will listen, but others will refuse to listen because they are rebellious.”

The Siege of Jerusalem Portrayed

4 I, the LORD, said to Ezekiel, “Son of man, take a large brick and sketch on it a map of Jerusalem. Build siege ramps against the city walls and surround the city with enemy camps. Put an iron pan between you and the city and turn your face toward the city. The enemy will attack the city, and this will be a warning to the people of Israel.

“Then lie down on your left side for 390 days as a sign of Israel’s punishment, one day for each year of its suffering. After that, lie on your right side for 40 days, one day for each year of Judah’s sin.

“Get some wheat, barley, beans, lentils, millet, and spelt, and mix them together for bread. This will be food for you while you’re lying on your left side 390 days. Eat about eight ounces of bread each day, and drink about a quart of water each day. Make your bread like barley cakes. While the people are watching, bake it over a fire using dried human waste as fuel.” I, the LORD, then said, “Israel will eat defiled bread in Gentile lands where I’ll scatter them.”

“Lie there with your arm bared and prophesy against Jerusalem. I’ll tie you with ropes so you can’t turn from side to side till the days of the siege have been completed.” I told Ezekiel to do a symbolic action, just as I instructed Jeremiah. Ezekiel would play “toy soldiers” like children use things to represent armaments, soldiers, and defensive positions. I told Ezekiel to lie first on his left side, then his right. I use visual symbols because they effectively communicate truths or principles that are hard to see with the naked eye. I like symbols because they take away any excuses, such as; I didn’t understand. To be baptized is a symbol that tells the world you died with Christ, was buried; and rose again. Eat the bread of communion to know My body was broken for you and drink the cup because My blood was spilt to take away your sin. Respect My symbols and learn from them.

Ezekiel said, “O Sovereign LORD, I have never defiled myself by using human waste. I’ve never made myself ceremonially unclean by eating any animal that died of sickness or was killed by wild animals or anything that You said is unclean.” “Alright,” I, the LORD, said, “You may bake your bread using cow dung instead of human waste.” Then I said to him, “Son of man, food, and water will be rationed, and the people will be anxious and hopeless. Food and water will be so scarce that the people will look at each other in fear, and they’ll waste away under My punishment.”

The last statement of the chapter says, “They will become weak because of their sin” (v. 17). Sin weakens the will, because you’ve done something you know you shouldn’t do. Then sin weakens your character and inner perception. Realize every sin has its consequences. Strengthen yourself to stand against sin.

The Sharp Razor

5“Now, Son of man, shave your head, using weighing scales, divide your hair into three equal parts. When the days of your siege come to an end, burn a third of your hair. Scatter a third of your hair across your city and slash at it with a sword. Scatter the last third to the wind, for I will scatter My people with the sword. Tuck a few strands of hair into your robe. Then toss some of these hairs into the fire. A fire will spread from this remnant and will destroy all of Israel.”

This is what I, the Sovereign LORD, say, “This is an illustration of what will happen to Jerusalem. I have set her in the center of the nations. But she has rebelled against My laws and regulations and has been more wicked than those nations. She has refused to obey the laws I gave her.”

Here’s what I say about Israel’s sin, “You cause more confusion (about Me) than the nations around you” (v. 7). That means when My people sin, that causes more confusion about salvation in the minds of the unsaved than anything else. Think of all the claims of salvation from the Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and secular attacks

on My people. My people harm My cause with their sin more than criticism from any other source. Ask Me to forgive you when you sin against Me, and ask for forgiveness for hurting My cause with your sin.

So I, the Sovereign LORD, say, “Since You have refused to obey My laws and regulations and are more sinful than your neighbors, I, the Sovereign LORD, am now your enemy. I’ll punish you while all the nations watch. Therefore, I’m against you, Jerusalem, and I’ll punish you as the nations look on. Parents will eat their own children, and children will eat their parents. And those who survive I’ll scatter in every direction.

“As surely as I live, I’ll not favor you and I’ll show you no pity, because you defiled My temple as a place to worship Me with your detestable images and terrible practices.”

I allowed Nebuchadnezzar to destroy Jerusalem to demonstrate how strongly I felt about Israel’s sin. But worse than that, I, the Father, let Jesus Christ be tortured and suffer on the cross to tell you how strong I felt about your sin. Ask for forgiveness for not taking the death of Christ seriously. The cross is the most important thing in eternity. Worship Me in the holiness of justice.

“A third of you will die in Jerusalem from starvation or disease, a third will be slaughtered by the enemy outside the city walls, and a third will be scattered to the winds and pursued by soldiers with swords. Then My anger will be finished, and I will be avenged. Then you’ll know that I, the LORD, spoke in My jealous anger.

“Everyone who walks by your city will laugh at your destruction and every nation will make fun of you and will be horrified at what I did to you. I’ll shower you with deadly arrows of famine to destroy you. The famine will become so severe that you’ll have no more food. Also wild beasts will attack you and kill your children. Disease and war will work against you, and your enemies will defeat you with their swords.” I, the LORD, have spoken.

Prophecy Against False Worship

6 Again a message came to Ezekiel from Me, the LORD: “Son of man, look toward Israel’s mountains and tell them: ‘Listen, you mountains hear what I, the Sovereign LORD, say to the mountains, hills, ravines, and valleys. I’ll smash every altar and I’ll slay you in front of the idols of the people who worship them. I’ll lay their dead bodies in front of the idols, and I’ll scatter their bones around the altars. Every town in Israel will be destroyed, and every hilltop shrine and altar and other religious objects you have made will be smashed. Then when your people have died, the survivors will know that I, the LORD did all this.

“I’ll let a few of My people escape and they’ll be scattered among the nations. Those who escape will remember how I’ve been grieved by their rebelling against Me and worshiping idols. They will hate themselves for all their sinful ways.”

I told Ezekiel to tell Israel, “They will remember how I was hurt when they desired to worship their idols” (v. 9). Most of My people don’t realize how much I am hurt when they disobey Me and turn from Me to their sin. I have feelings of emotions, and I can grieve.

“They’ll know that I am the LORD, and that I’m serious when I told them all this would happen.”

I, the Sovereign LORD, say, “Son of man, clap your hands and stomp your feet in horror. How terrible it will be for Israel because of the disgusting things they did. Now they’ll die by the sword, starvation, and disease. Those who live far away will die from diseases, those who live nearby will die by the sword, and those who remain will die of starvation. They will all experience the fury of My wrath. Their dead will lie scattered by their altars on every hilltop and under every green tree and great oak tree, places where they offered incense to their idols. Then My people will know that I am the Lord. I’ll make their country desolate from the Southern Desert to Diblah in the north. Then they’ll know that I am the Lord.”

The End Has Come

7 Another message was given to Ezekiel from Me, the LORD: “Son of man, tell the people of Israel that this is what I, the Sovereign LORD, says: ‘Israel has come to an end! Your whole country—north, west, east, south—is finished. I’ll release My anger against you because of your sins and your detestable idol worship.’”

There is a point when My patience comes to an end. My people can sin only so long. I say to Israel, “The end has come for you” (v. 3). Your sin has worn out My patience.

“I’ll show you no pity and I’ll repay you for your conduct and your disgusting practices. Then you’ll know that I am the Lord. The coming disaster will be terrible. The end has finally come. O Israelites, your doom has finally arrived. Soon you’ll experience panic, not joy. I’ll pour out My wrath and punish you for all your repulsive sins. I’ll have no pity on you. I’ll repay you for your detestable ways. Then you’ll know that I, the LORD, am the one who is punishing you.

“The day is here. Like a plant, doom has budded, and arrogance has blossomed. Your violence will fall back on you as punishment for your wickedness. No one will survive, and they’ll lose everything of value. The time has come. Buying and selling will stop. People who sell property won’t be able to buy it back. Everyone must be punished for his sins. No one will survive, and I’ll not change My mind. The trumpet is sounded to call Israel’s soldiers to battle, but no one will go to war because in My anger I’ll strike everyone down.

“People who live in the countryside will be killed by enemy swords, and people in the cities will die by starvation and disease. If any escape to the mountains, they’ll moan like doves because of their sins.

“Your hands will be limp, and your knees will be weak as water. In mourning you’ll wear burlap, as you face terror. Your faces will be covered with shame, and you’ll shave your heads. You’ll throw away your silver and gold like trash. In the day of My anger your money won’t be able to save you. It won’t satisfy your hunger. In fact it’ll make you stumble into sin.

Your beautiful jewelry was used to make detestable and worthless idols. So I'll make your idols disgusting to you. I'll give your wealth to wicked foreigners as loot. I'll look away as robbers desecrate My temple.

“Get chains ready to drag away dead bodies. Bloodshed and violence are everywhere. I'll have the most wicked nations come and occupy your homes. But I'll also end their pride and ruin their temples. You'll be terrified and you'll long for peace, but none will be found. One tragedy will follow another, and bad news will follow other bad news. You'll want some word from a prophet, some teaching from the priests, or some counsel from the elders, but it won't be available. Your king and his princes will be in despair, and your people will tremble in fear. I'll treat you the way you treated others, and I'll punish you for your sins. Then you'll know that I am the Lord.”

Ezekiel's Second Vision

8 On September 17, 592 BC, during the sixth year of King Jehoiachin's captivity, as Ezekiel was talking with the leaders of Judah in his home I, the Sovereign LORD, took hold of him, and he saw something shaped like a human. He was like fire from the waist down, and bright as polished metal from the waist up. He reached out what seemed to be a hand and grabbed Ezekiel by his hair. Then the Spirit lifted him up and took him to Jerusalem to the north gate of My Temple's inner courtyard where there was an idol that provoked Me to jealousy, making Me very angry. Then Ezekiel saw My glory, just as he had seen it in the valley near the Kebar River.

I said to him, “Son of man, look north.” And when he did, he saw that disgusting idol by the altar near the gate. I then said, “Son of man, do you see the awful sins My people are committing? These detestable sins are driving Me from My temple. You'll see even worse sins than these.” Then I took him to the courtyard entrance, where he saw a hole in the wall. I said, “Son of man, dig into this hole.” When he did, he saw a doorway there. I said, “Go in and see the wicked and detestable things the people are doing there.” Inside he saw the walls were covered with pictures of reptiles and disgusting, unclean animals. He also saw the idols the Israelites were worshiping. Seventy Israelite leaders were standing there, including

Jaazaniah, son of Shaphan. Each one was holding an incense burner, and the room was filled with the smell of incense.

I said, “Son of man, do you see what terrible things these leaders are doing in the darkness, each in his own room with his idol? They say I can’t see them, because they think I’ve deserted them. But I’ll now show you something worse than this.” Then I took him to My Temple’s north gate. There he saw women mourning for the god Tammuz. I said, “I’ll now show you even greater sins than these.”

I took him to My Temple’s inner courtyard, and there at the entrance, between the porch and the bronze Altar of Burnt Offering, were about 25 men standing with their backs to My Temple, and they were bowing down, worshipping the sun.

Chapters 8-11 include a series of visions where I show Ezekiel the evils of Israel. When Ezekiel dug into the wall he found all types of unclean (abominable) animals. Ezekiel is shown 70 men (the Sanhedrin) with their backs to Me in My Temple, but they were worshipping the sun. Women were seen worshipping Tammuz, the Babylonian deity, husband of Ishtar. I see the sins of people that they keep hidden. Even when My people try to hide their sins, I see everything.

I said to Ezekiel, “Have you seen this, Son of man? Is it nothing to the people of Judah that they commit these awful sins? They have also spread violence and injustice throughout Israel and have made Me very angry. They have thumbed their noses at Me and caused Me to be very angry with them. So in My anger I’ll punish them without mercy, and when they shout to Me for help, I won’t listen to them.”

Some sin is against nature and the lower animals; other sins are against persons; still other sin is against yourself. But the worst sin of all is against Me. The first of the greatest commands is “You shall have no other gods before Me” (Exod. 20:3). Israel was involved in just about every type of idolatrous worship possible. No wonder I say, “I will act in anger” (v. 18).

I, the LORD, Punish the Idolaters

9 Then I, the LORD, spoke in a loud voice, “Come to Jerusalem, you men I’ve chosen to destroy the city. Bring your weapons.” I saw six men come from near the city’s upper gate, which faces north. Each one had a deadly weapon. With them was a man clothed in linen who had things to write with. They all stood beside the Altar of Burnt Offering.

My glory went from the winged creatures and moved to My Temple entrance. I, the LORD, said to the man in linen with a writing kit, “Go through Jerusalem and put a mark on the foreheads of those who are sad about the disgusting things being done in the city.”

I sent men (angels) who had charge over Jerusalem to go through the city, “Put a mark on the foreheads of the people who groan” (v. 4). The term groan meant both surprise and anguish. Are you surprised when sin creeps into your life or the life of other Christians you know?

Ezekiel heard Me, the LORD, say to the six men, “Follow him and kill everyone who does not have a mark on his forehead. Show no mercy. Kill old men, young people, women and children. But don’t harm anyone who has the mark. Begin here at My Temple.” So the men began with the old men who were in front of My Temple.

In the vision, those who sinned were killed. But good news; those who were marked because they groaned, were not touched but were protected. I, the LORD, know those who love and obey Me.

Then I, the LORD, said to the six men, “Defile My Temple by filling the courtyards with the corpses of those you kill.” So they went through the city and did as they were told. While they were carrying out their orders, Ezekiel was alone. He fell to the ground on his face and said, “O Sovereign Lord, in Your anger will You wipe out everyone in Jerusalem?” I answered,

“The sins of Judah and Israel are great. The land is filled with blood, and the city is full of injustice. The people think that because I’ve left the land, I don’t see them. Therefore, I’ll not spare them or have pity on them. I’ll repay them for what they’ve done.” Then the man in linen with the writing kit said, “I’ve done as You commanded.”

The Creatures

10Above the winged creatures Ezekiel saw what looked like a throne of sapphire. I, the LORD, said to the man in linen, “Go between the whirling wheels under the creatures and take burning coals in your hands and scatter them over Jerusalem.” Ezekiel watched as he followed My instructions.

Ezekiel saw an angel taking coals of fire from off the offering and scattered them throughout the city (10:2). Was this the fire of conviction spread over the people of Israel to bring them back to Me? Or, was this the fire of judgment that I, was coming to punish them?

The winged creatures were standing at the south side of My Temple when the man went in, and the cloud of My glory filled the inner courtyard. My glory rose from above the winged creatures and moved to My Temple entrance. The cloud filled the entire temple, and the courtyard was glowing brightly. The sound of the wings of the winged creatures could be heard in the outer courtyard. It was like My voice, the LORD of the heavens, when I speak.

I, the LORD, told the man in linen to take some burning coals from between the wheels under the winged creatures. So the man went in and stood beside a wheel. Then one of the creatures reached to the fire, took some coals, and put them in the hands of the man in linen who took them and went out. Under the wings of the creatures were what looked like the hands of a man.

Each of the winged creatures had a wheel beside it, and the wheels sparkled like a green mineral. All four wheels looked the same, and each

had a wheel turning crossways within it. The wheels moved together whenever the creatures moved so they could go in any direction without the wheels turning. The creatures' bodies including their backs, hands, and wings, and also the wheels, were covered with eyes. Ezekiel heard a voice referring to the wheels as "the whirling wheels." The winged creatures each had four faces—the faces of a bull, a human, a lion, and an eagle.

Then when the winged creatures, the ones Ezekiel saw by the Kebar River moved, the wheels beside them moved, and when the creatures spread their wings to rise from the ground the wheels were by their side. When the creatures stopped, the wheels stopped. And when the creatures rose into the air, the wheels rose with them. This is because the spirit of the winged creatures was in the wheels.

Then My glory moved from My Temple entrance and stopped above the winged creatures. They spread their wings and flew into the air with the wheels beside them. They stopped at the east gate of My Temple, and My glory was over them. These were the winged creatures Ezekiel had seen beneath Me, the God of Israel, by the Kebar River. Each had four faces and four wings, and under their wings were what looked like human hands. They had the same four faces as those near the Kebar. Each creature moved straight ahead without turning.

Ezekiel sees a horrifying vision that begins (v. 8:4, KJV) when "He saw My glory, the God of Israel." This was the Shekinah (a word meaning glory) cloud that led Israel daily through the desert for 40 years. This was the cloud that went up to stand between Israel and the attacking army of Pharaoh (Exod. 14:19-20). This cloud sat on the top of Mount Sinai because My presence was in the cloud when I, the LORD, dwelt with My people.

When Solomon dedicated My Temple, My cloud filled the temple. Fire came down from heaven and "the glory of the LORD filled the LORD's house" (2 Chron. 7:1, KJV). Why was this a horrifying vision? Because Ezekiel saw My slow departure from My Temple. Since I was going to allow the Babylonians to destroy My Temple, I would no longer be My Temple's protector, and surely no enemy could tear down My Temple when I was present in it.

First, Ezekiel saw My Shekinah cloud lift up into the air from its usual place on the sacred chest. “The glory of the God of Israel was gone up from the cherub where upon he sat” (9:3). It was as if I was waiting for someone to cry, “God, don’t leave us.” But there was no warning. No one cared that I was leaving.

Next, “The glory of the LORD—stood over the threshold of the house” (10:10). Doesn’t someone linger at the front door before they leave? That’s what I did. I was lingering because I wanted someone to ask Me to stay. The people were so spiritually blinded they couldn’t see I was leaving.

Next, “My Glory—departed from off the threshold” (10:18). I was lifted high above My Temple. Was I waiting high above My Temple so all could see that I was leaving? But only Ezekiel, 500 miles away, could see the vision of Me leaving. Finally, I went to the East of the city and tarried over the Mount of Olives. “The glory of the LORD—stood upon the mountain which is on the east side of the city” (11:23). In the Old Testament, My glory left My people from the Mount of Olives. In the New Testament, Jesus ascended back into heaven from the same place (Acts 1:9-12).

Pray I don’t leave you or your church the way I departed from My Temple. You need My protection and power, but most of all, you need to worship Me.

My Judgment Against Jerusalem

11 I, the Spirit of the LORD, lifted up Ezekiel and took him to the east gate of My Temple, where he had seen 25 men, including two leaders Jaazaniah, son of Azzur, and Pelatiah, son of Benaiah. I, the LORD, said to him, “Son of man, these men are giving wicked counsel to the people of Jerusalem and are making evil plans. They say, ‘Now is a good time to build more houses. This city is like a cooking pot, and we are the meat.’ Therefore, prophesy against them, Son of man.”

Then I, the Spirit of the Lord, came on Ezekiel, and I told him to say this to the people: “This is what the Lord says: ‘I know what you are saying, but I also know what you are thinking. You have murdered so many

people that the city is filled with dead bodies. Yes, the slain bodies are the meat, and the city is like a cooking pot. So I'll force you out of Jerusalem. You fear the sword, but that is exactly what I will bring against you,' say I, the Sovereign LORD. 'I'll force you out of the city and I'll send armies to attack you and punish you. You'll be slaughtered all the way to Israel's borders, and then you'll realize that I, the LORD, have done these things. No, this city will not protect you like a cooking pot. I'll execute judgment on you at Israel's borders, not in the city of Jerusalem. You'll know that I am the Lord, and that you have not obeyed My decrees or kept My laws, but instead have become like the nations around you.'" As Ezekiel was prophesying, Pelatiah, son of Benaiah, died. Then Ezekiel fell on his face and said loudly, "Lord, do you plan to kill everyone in Israel?"

I, the LORD, said to him, "Son of man, the people still left in Jerusalem claim that their relations who were taken captive to Babylonia are too far away to worship Me and so I have given this land to them. Therefore I, the Sovereign LORD, say to the captives in Babylonia, 'Although I scattered you among the world's nations, I will be with you wherever you are so you can worship Me.'"

Even though the glory cloud was leaving Jerusalem, I was not completely forsaking My people. I promised, "I have become a temple to them in the countries where they have gone" (v. 16). When they couldn't have My Temple, they could have My presence as a personal or "little sanctuary." Now in the New Testament, My Holy Spirit is not only with you, He dwell within you, "He dwells with you and will be in you" (John 14:17).

"I, the Sovereign LORD, will gather you from the nations and bring you back from where you were scattered, and I'll give you the land of Israel again. When that happens, you are to remove all disgusting idols. Then I'll give you a singleness of heart, and I'll put a new Spirit in you. I'll take away your stubborn hearts of stone and give you tender hearts. Then you'll follow My regulations and obey My statutes. You'll be My people and I'll be your God. But I'll punish those who worship idols." I, the LORD, have spoken.

Then the winged creatures with the wheels beside them, spread their wings that were above them. Then My glory went up from Jerusalem and stopped above the mountain east of the city. The Spirit lifted Ezekiel up and brought him to the captives in Babylonia in the vision I gave him. Then the vision of his visit to Jerusalem faded away, and he told the captives everything that I, the LORD, had shown him.

What the Exile Will Be Like

12 Again, a message was given to Ezekiel from Me, the LORD: “Son of man, you are among a rebellious people. They have eyes but they don’t see and ears, but they don’t hear. So pack your things as if you were going into exile. And in the daytime as they watch you go from Jerusalem to another location, perhaps they will understand that they are rebellious. Then in the evening while they are watching, go out as though going on a long march into captivity. Then while they are watching, dig a hole through the wall in your house and carry out your things with you. Load them on your shoulders while they are watching and go out like those going into captivity. Cover your face so you can’t see the land. All these actions are a sign to the people of Israel.”

Ezekiel did as I, the LORD, told him. He packed some things as if he were going into captivity. Then in the evening he dug through the wall of his house with his hands. While the people watched, he went out in the evening, carrying a few things on his shoulder. The next morning, I, the LORD, said, “Son of man, those rebellious people asked what you were doing. So say to them, ‘The Sovereign LORD says these things pertain to Zedekiah and all of Israel.’ Say to them, ‘You are a sign to them, to show what will happen to them. They will be taken away as captives.’ Zedekiah will place things on his shoulder and leave at night through a hole dug for him in the wall. And he’ll cover his face, so he can’t see the land. I’ll spread out a net for him and catch him in My snare as he tries to leave Jerusalem. I’ll lead him away to Babylon, but he’ll never see it though he’ll die there.”

I told Ezekiel the people are spiritually rebellious to Me, “They have eyes to see, but they do not see. They have ears to hear, but they do

not hear” (v. 2). Just as in Ezekiel’s day, there are many today who are blinded to spiritual truth. Why? Because they don’t want to see or hear what I want them to do.

“I’ll scatter in every direction the officials and troops, and I’ll track them down with the sword. Then when I force the remaining people in Jerusalem to live in foreign countries, they’ll know that I am the Lord.”

While Israel did not acknowledge Me as their Lord before the captivity, after I punish Israel, “Then they will know that I am the Eternal One, the LORD.”

“I’ll see that some of them survive war, starvation, and disease. That way, they can confess to their captors how terrible their sins were. Then they’ll know that I am the Lord.”

Again I, the LORD, said, “Son of man, tremble as you eat your bread and shudder as you drink your water. Then tell the Israelites, ‘The Lord says that you people will eat your food and drink your water in fear because your land will be stripped bare because of your sin. Every town will be destroyed, and the land will be like a desert. Then you’ll know that He is the Lord.’”

Again I, the LORD, said to Ezekiel, “Son of man, you know that proverb that says, ‘As time passes, every prophet is proved a liar.’ Tell your people I’ll put an end to that saying and people will no longer quote it because I’ll replace it with this proverb: ‘The time is near when every prophecy will be fulfilled.’ There will be no more false visions as misleading predictions about peace in Israel. What I predict will be fulfilled without delay, you rebels of Israel. I’ll fulfill My predictions about you.”

Then the Lord said to Ezekiel, “Son of man, the people of Israel are saying that My visions won’t come true for many years from now, and that all My prophecies pertain to the distant future. So give them this message from Me: ‘My words will soon come true, there’ll be no more delay. I’ll now do everything I have predicted.’”

Judgment against False Prophets

13I, the LORD, say, “Son of man, speak against the false prophets of Israel who are giving their own prophecies. Tell them to listen to My word. I say, how terrible it will be for false prophets who make up their own prophecies and say nothing. Your prophets, Israel, are like wild dogs digging around for food among ruins. They haven’t repaired breaks in the city walls to help it be firm in the battle on My day of the Lord. Your visions are false and your predictions are a lie. They say, ‘My message is from the Lord,’ but I never sent them. Yet they still think their words will come true. They say their messages are from Me, but I never sent them.”

Therefore I, the Sovereign LORD, say, “I’m against you because of your false words and lying visions. I’ll be against prophets whose visions are false and whose prophecies are lies. They’ll not be allowed to call themselves Israelites and they’ll not be allowed to be in My land. Then you’ll know that I am the Sovereign LORD.”

The false prophets will not inherit eternal life, for I condemn their “vanities” and “lies” (v. 9). “Neither shall they be written in the writings” (v. 9). This is a reference to the “Book of Life” (Rev. 3:5; 20:15); their names will not be written there.

These prophets tell My people there will be peace, but there’s no peace anywhere. They are people who built a flimsy wall and then tried to strengthen it with paint. Tell these painters that the wall will collapse under rainstorms, hailstorms, and windstorms. Then the people will ask the workers, “Why didn’t the paint hold up the wall?”

Therefore, I the Sovereign LORD, say, “I’ll make a violent wind, hailstorms, and a rainstorm fall in My anger to destroy your city. I’ll tear down your painted wall, leveling it to the ground with only the foundation showing. When it falls, it will crush you. Then you’ll know that I am the Lord. The city of Jerusalem and the prophets will feel My anger. Then I’ll announce that the prophets in Jerusalem who predicted peace when there was no peace are dead.

“Now Son of man, condemn the women of Israel who preach messages they make up. Say to them, ‘How terrible it will be for women who wear magic charms on their wrists and make veils of various lengths to trick people into thinking they can predict the future. Will you trap the lives of My people but preserve your own? You charge My people a few handfuls of barley and a couple pieces of bread and then give messages that insult Me. By lying to My people who love to listen to lies, you kill those who should live, and you let live those who should die.’”

Therefore, I, the Sovereign LORD, say, “I’m against all your magic charms by which you are trapping people like birds. I’ll rip those charms from your arms like setting birds free from a cage. I’ll tear off your magic veils from your heads and set My people free from your grasp. They’ll no longer be your victims. Then you’ll know that I am the Lord. You discouraged the righteous with your lies, and you encouraged the wicked by promising them life if they continue sinning. But you’ll no longer talk about visions you didn’t see or make false predictions. I’ll save My people from your grasp. Then you’ll know that I’m the Lord.”

The false teachers and those who encourage others to false doctrines will I punish. First, because they disobey My commands, and second, because they harm others. “By your lies, you counsel the heart of the person—not to stop being evil” (v. 22).

Judgment against Idolaters

14 One day some of Israel’s leaders came and sat in front of Ezekiel. Then I, the LORD, said, “Son of man, these men have set up idols secretly in their hearts, and these idols will cause them to stumble in sin. So refuse to give them a message.”

A group of men came to Ezekiel “and sat down in front of me” (v. 1). That meant they wanted to inquire of Me, the Lord. I told Ezekiel, “These men love to worship idols” (v. 3). Then I said, “Shall I allow

them to ask Me for help” (v. 3)? I know the hearts of all and hate hypocrisy.

“Therefore, tell them that if they worship idols, even in their hearts secretly, and then they go to a prophet to see what I’ll say, I’ll answer them Myself. And I’ll do this to capture the hearts and minds of My people who have turned from Me to worship idols.

“Therefore, tell the Israelites to turn from their idols and stop all their atrocious practices. When any one of your Israelites or any foreign resident rejects Me and sets up idols in his heart and falls into sin, and then goes to a prophet to ask My advice, I’ll answer him Myself. I, the LORD, will turn against him and punish him by making him a byword, one people talk about, and I’ll answer him Myself. Then you’ll know that I am the Lord.

“If a prophet is deceived and gives a message anyway, I am the One who caused him to lie. I’ll reject him and cut him off from My people. And anyone who goes to a false prophet will be punished in the same way. I’ll do this so Israel will return to Me and stop defiling themselves with their disgusting sins. They’ll be My people and I’ll be their God.”

Then I, the LORD, said, “Son of man, suppose an entire nation sins against Me, and I punish it by destroying the crops by a famine, resulting in both people and animals dying of starvation? Even if Noah, David, and Job lived there, they would only be able to keep themselves alive because of their righteousness,” say I, the Sovereign LORD.

“Or if I send wild beasts into the country and they kill all the children, and leave the country desolate, even if Noah, Daniel, and Job were there, they couldn’t rescue their sons or daughters. Only they alone would survive. Or if I bring a sword against the country to kill men and animals, again I affirm that if these three men were there, they couldn’t rescue their sons and daughters. Only they alone would survive.

“Or suppose I poured out My wrath by sending a terrible disease that killed both people and animals. Even if Noah, Daniel, and Job were living there, they could not rescue their sons or daughter. Only they alone would survive because of their righteousness.

“I, the Sovereign LORD, will punish Jerusalem by sending war, starvation, wild animals, and disease to kill all your people and animals.

Those who survive will be taken to Babylonia. When you see how sinful they are, you'll realize why I did these things to Jerusalem. You'll be convinced that I've done the right thing."

Jerusalem is Like a Useless Vine

15 Again I, the LORD, said to Ezekiel, "Son of man, how does the wood of a grapevine compare to a tree branch? The wood of a grapevine can't be used to make anything, not even pegs to hang things on. It can be used only as firewood. But after a fire burns the ends and chars the middle, it is useless. As fuel it burns too quickly. Before it was burned, it was useless, and after it is burned, it is completely useless.

"I, the Sovereign LORD, promise that just as the wood of a grapevine is burned as firewood, so I'll punish Jerusalem with fire. If they escape from one fire, they'll fall into another. When this happens, you'll know that I am the Lord. And I'll make Israel's land a desolate wasteland because the people have been unfaithful." I, the Sovereign God, have spoken.

I say Israel is like a vine, and the nature of a vine is fruit bearing. A vine is useless for lumber to build or to heat. When a vine's fruit bearing ceases, pull it up and burn it up. Thus, Israel is no longer useful to Me, so the nation will be destroyed.

Ezekiel Delivers My Message

16 I, The LORD, spoke to Ezekiel yet again. "Son of man, confront the people of Jerusalem about their terrible sins. Give them this message from Me: 'Jerusalem, you were born in the country of the Canaanites, and your father was an Amorite, and your mother was a Hittite. When you were born, no one cut your cord or washed your body. No one rubbed you with salt or dressed you in warm clothing. No one loved you enough to do these things for you, and no one felt sorry for you. You were despised and thrown out into a field left to die.

“Then I saw you lying there, kicking in your own blood. I said, ‘Live.’ I helped you grow like someone caring for a tender young plant: you grew up to be a beautiful young woman with full breasts and long hair, and yet you were still naked. When I saw you again, you were old enough to be married. So I covered you with My own robe. Then I promised that you belong to Me, and that I, the Sovereign LORD, will take care of you. I washed the blood off of you and rubbed you with olive oil. I gave you expensive clothes of linen and silk, and sandals made from the best leather. I gave you jewelry, bracelets, and a necklace, and a ring on your nose, and earring for your ears, and adorned you in gold and silver, and your clothes were made of only the finest material and embroidered cloth. Your food was fine flour, honey, and olive oil. You became very beautiful, much like a queen. I gave you your beauty and you became known around the world.

“Unfortunately, you trusted in your beauty and fame and you became a prostitute. You offered yourself to every man who came along. You made shrines and decorated them with some of your clothes, and you carried on your prostitution there. These things should never have happened. You made idols out of the gold and silver jewelry I gave you and you worshiped those idols. You put on them some of the clothes I gave you, and you offered them oil and incense. I gave you fine flour, olive oil, and honey to eat, but you sacrificed them to the idols.

“But worse than that, you sacrificed your sons and daughters as food to the idols. You slaughtered My children and sacrificed them to the idols. You never once thought about the days when you lay naked in a field, covered with your own blood. ‘How terrible for you,’ say I, the Sovereign LORD. Besides all these wicked things, you made a shrine for every public square. By these shrines you offered your body to everyone who passed by. You even offered yourself to the Egyptians, your lustful neighbors, and that increased My anger. So I punished you by letting the Philistines take over some of your land. Even they were shocked by your sinful conduct. Then you slept with the Assyrians. But still you weren’t satisfied, so also you had sex with the merchant Babylonians, but that didn’t satisfy you either.

“‘You have such a sick heart,’ say I, the Sovereign LORD, ‘that you do such things, acting like a disrespectful prostitute. You build shrines on every street corner and altars to idols in every city square. You were so eager for sex that you refused payment for your services. As an adulterous wife you

prefer love with strangers rather than your husband. Prostitutes receive payment for sex, but you give gifts to your lovers bribing them to come to you. You aren't like other prostitutes. No one pays you; you pay them.

“Jerusalem, you prostitute, hear this message from Me, the Lord. You exposed yourself to your lovers, you worshiped disgusting idols, you sacrificed your children to those idols. Therefore I, the LORD God, will gather all your lovers, those you liked and those you didn't. I'll strip you naked in front of them and they'll stare at you. I'll judge you for being an unfaithful wife and a murderer, and I'll cover you with blood in My jealous anger. Then I'll give you over to your lovers, those many nations, and they'll tear down your altars and shrines. They'll take your clothes, and your jewelry, leaving you naked and ashamed. An angry mob will stone you to death and cut you to pieces with their swords. They'll burn down your houses and punish you as other women look on. I'll stop you from being a prostitute and paying your lovers. Then I'll be calm and no longer be angry and jealous. You didn't remember how I took care of you in your youth, but instead you made Me mad with all these disgusting things you've done. You made things worse by acting like a prostitute. So I'll punish you,” say I, the Sovereign LORD.

“People will quote this proverb about you: ‘Like mother, like daughter.’ Your mother hated her husband and children, and your sisters hated their husbands and children. Your father was an Amorite, and your mother was a Hittite. Your older sister was Samaria, the city to the north. Your younger sister was Sodom, the city to the south. You followed their wicked ways and soon became more sinful than they were.

“As surely as I live,” say I, the Sovereign LORD, “the people of Sodom and its villages were not as sinful as you are. They were arrogant, gluttonous, and lazy, but she did nothing to help the poor and needy. They were haughty and did terrible things before Me, and so I destroyed them.

“You people of Jerusalem have done twice as many sins as Sodom. They seem righteous compared with what you've done. And their punishment may seem light compared to yours. Be ashamed of your sins, which make your sister's sins seem righteous.

“Someday I'll bless Sodom and Samaria, and you too, Jerusalem. Then you'll be ashamed of what you've done. And they'll feel good in comparison to you. Your sisters, Sodom and Samaria, and their villages will

be like they were before. And so will you. Jerusalem, you were so arrogant you wouldn't even mention Sodom. But now Edom and the Philistines and their villages hate you and despise you. You'll pay for all the disgusting things you've done." I, the LORD, have spoken.

"Jerusalem, you'll be punished because you didn't keep our agreement. But I'll keep the agreement I made with you when you were young, and I'll make an everlasting promise. You'll be ashamed when I make your sisters, Samaria and Sodom, as your daughters, even though they aren't part of our agreement. I'll keep this promise, and you'll know I am the Lord. I'll make a substitutionary payment for your sins. But you'll be too ashamed even to mention your sins," say I, the Sovereign LORD.

I show a picture of My love for Israel where I chose Israel to be My wife. I abundantly lavished My protection and riches on her. Even when Israel defected from Me, the Lord, I dealt with Israel in grace and mercy. But adultery and idolatry are intermingled. In idolatry, Israel turned to love idols, then worshiped foreign gods, and venerated them. As always, when the heart turns from Me, the Lord, love of the world's system quickly follows. May you never love or serve anything in place of Me.

A Parable About the Eagles and the Vine

17I, the LORD, said to Ezekiel, "Son of man, tell this story to the people of Israel. A big eagle with strong wings and pretty feathers flew to Lebanon. He grabbed the top branch of a cedar tree and broke it off and carried it away to a city of merchants where he planted it. He took some seed from Israel and planted it in fertile ground beside a river like a willow tree. It grew into a spreading vine. Its branches grew up toward the eagle, and its roots grew strong beneath it. It had lots of strong branches and lots of leaves.

"Then another eagle with strong wings and thick feathers came along. The vine extended its roots and branches toward the eagle for water. The vine was already planted in good soil by lots of water, so it would become a good vine with lots of leaves and delicious grapes. So I, the Sovereign

LORD, asked, ‘Should I let this vine grow? No, I’ll pull it out by the roots. Its fruit will be cut off and its leaves will wither and die. It won’t take a strong arm or a large army to pull it up by the root. Even if it’s transported, it won’t survive. It’ll wither when the desert wind blows against it.’”

I, the LORD said, “Say to the rebels of Israel, ‘Do you know what this story means? I’ll tell you,’ says the Sovereign LORD. ‘The king of Babylonia came to Jerusalem and carried off her king and officials to Babylon as captives. He chose a member of the royal family of Jerusalem and signed a treaty with him and made him agree to be loyal. He also led away many of Judah’s top leaders. So Judah could never be strong again. But this new king of Judah rebelled against Babylonia, sending to Egypt for horses and troops. Can Israel get away with breaking her treaty with Babylonia? No! For as surely as I live,’ say I, the Sovereign LORD, ‘the king of Israel will die in Babylon because he’ll break the treaty he made with the king of Babylonia. Pharaoh and his army in Egypt won’t help Judah when the king of the Babylonians builds siege ramps against the wall of Jerusalem. He’ll kill many in Jerusalem. Because the king of Israel broke his treaty, he won’t escape.

“As surely as I am the living Sovereign LORD, I’ll punish him for breaking the agreement he said he’d keep. He has despised My name, so I’ll throw a net over him to trap him. Then I’ll bring him to Babylon and punish him there because he was unfaithful to Me. His troops will run away, but they’ll be killed in battle, and survivors will be scattered in every direction. Then you’ll know that I, the LORD, have spoken these things.

“I’ll take a tender branch from the top of a tall cedar, and I’ll plant it on the top of Israel’s highest mountain. It will grow branches and produce large fruit. All kinds of birds will find shelter in the tree under its branches. Every tree will know that I, the LORD, can cut down tall trees and make green trees wither, and I can give life to dead trees.” I, the LORD, have spoken, and I will do what I said.

Ezekiel speaks My predictions. First, Nebuchadnezzar will take King Jehoiakim to Babylon (that is, 597 BC v. 12). Second, Nebuchadnezzar will make Zedekiah a “puppet king” to rule for Babylon (v. 13). Third, Zedekiah will break his treaty (covenant) and seek help from Egypt (vv. 13-17). Fourth, Zedekiah will break his

covenant with Babylon and rebel against Me (vv. 18-19). Fifth, Zedekiah would die, and his troops be defeated (vv. 20-21). I know the future because I live there. I predicted what will happen in the future. I know My people will rebel against Me, but I still give them opportunity to repent.

The Righteous Person Will Live; the Sinner Will Die

18 Again I, the LORD, said, “You people quote this proverb: ‘The parents have eaten sour grapes, and a sour taste is in their children’s mouths.’ But tell the people they’ll no longer say this proverb. Everyone belongs to Me, both parents and children. And only those who sin will be put to death.”

The people of Jerusalem were hiding behind the proverb that said, “The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge” (v. 2, KJV). Israel was saying Jerusalem was suffering from the sins of their fathers. While there are cumulative outward consequences of sin, each person is accountable for his own sin (v. 4). This is a lesson of accountability and responsibility. The people of Jerusalem would be punished for their sin.

“Suppose a man is righteous and always does what is right. Suppose he doesn’t eat meat sacrificed to foreign gods at hilltop shrines and worship those idols. Suppose he doesn’t have sex with someone’s wife or with a woman having her monthly period. Suppose he never cheats anyone and always returns anything he took as security for a loan. And suppose he gives food and clothing to the poor. Suppose he doesn’t charge interest on loans, and is fair to everyone, and follows My teachings and faithfully obeys My laws. This man is good and will live,” I, the Sovereign LORD, say.

“Suppose a man has a violent son who sheds blood and sins, doing things his father never did. He eats meat sacrificed to idols, has sex with

someone else's wife, cheats the poor, and needy, and keeps what is given to him as security for a loan. He worships idols and does disgusting things, and he charges high interest when he loans money. Such a man will not live. He'll be put to death because he has done all these detestable things.

“But suppose that sinful son has a son who sees his father's sins but decides not to do them. Suppose he refuses to worship idols at hilltop shrines, does not commit adultery, and does not cheat anyone or demand security for a loan. He gives food and clothes to the needy, helps the poor, and does nothing evil. He charges no interest on loans, and he follows My teachings and obeys My laws. He will not die for his father's sins, he will live. But the father will die for cheating and robbing and doing evil.

“But why isn't a son punished for the sins of his father? That's because the son is doing what is right and obeys My laws. But the son who sins will die. A child won't be punished for his parents' sins, and parents won't be punished for their child's sins. Good people will be rewarded for their goodness, and wicked people will be punished for their wickedness.

“Suppose wicked people stop sinning and start obeying My laws and doing what is right. They will live and not be put to death. Their past sins will be forgiven, and they'll live. I, the Sovereign LORD, don't like to see wicked people die. I like to see them turn from their wicked ways and live. However, if good people start sinning and doing detestable things, will they live? No. They'll die because of their sinful deeds.

“Do you think I'm not being fair? But who is unfair? You are, not Me. When righteous people turn from being good and start sinning, they'll die for it. And if wicked people turn from their wickedness, obey My laws, and do what is right, they'll live. They thought about it and turned from their sin. They will live and not die. And yet you people of Israel keep saying I'm unjust. But you, not Me, are the ones who are unjust.

“Therefore, I'll judge each of you for what you've done,” say I, the Sovereign LORD. “Turn from your sins, or you'll be punished. Get rid of your evil ways and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why should you die? I, the Sovereign LORD, don't want to see that happen. So stop sinning and live.”

I want a person to live for Me from the innermost part of his being that comes from a new heart and a new spirit. I will search you thoroughly to find hypocrisy or ignorant sin. I will forgive you when you walk uprightly.

A Song of Sorrow for Israel's Sins

19“Son of man, sing this funeral song for two of Israel’s leaders (Jehoahaz and Jehoiachin). What a brave lioness your mother was. She raised her cubs among lions. She raised one of them to be a strong lion, hunting prey and being a man-eater. When the nations heard about him, they trapped him in a pit. Then they led him with hooks to Egypt.

“When his mother saw that he would not return, she taught another of her cubs to be a strong lion. Prowling with the other lions as a leader, he devoured prey and he too became a man-eater. He destroyed fortresses and ruined towns. When he roared, people were afraid. Then nations planned to kill him. They spread out a net and caught him in a trap. They put him in a cage and took him to Babylonia. They locked him away, so his roar could never be heard again in Israel.”

I sing a lament of sadness over My people. They are likened to two young treacherous lions, that is, Jehoahaz and Jehoiachin, just as treacherous as they were dumb. Jehoahaz was devious, so he was led prisoner to Riblah in Egypt with a ring in his nose (2 Kings 23:33). Jehoiachin was taken prisoner to Babylon for 37 years (2 Kings 24:14).

“Your mother was like a vine, planted by a river. She had many branches and lots of grapes. Her branches became strong. And she became very tall, above all other trees. She stood out because of her height and green branches. But in anger I pulled her up by the roots and threw her to the ground. The desert dried up the grapes and its branches withered, and its stem was destroyed by fire. She was growing in the hot, dry desert, where her stem caught fire and flames burned her branches and grapes. No branch

is left, except for a ruler's scepter. The time for the funeral has now arrived."

My people are pictured as a fruitful vine (vv. 10-14), which was exalted by the nations. She was "pulled up by its roots in anger" (v. 12). There will be no king over My people until My Son, Jesus, returns to rule Israel during the coming Kingdom, when He shall rule with a rod of iron (Rev. 19:15).

Israel Rebelled Against Me

20On August 14, 591 BC, in the seventh year of King Jehoiachin's captivity, some of Israel's leaders came to Ezekiel to ask if there was a message from Me, the Lord. They waited as they sat in front of him. Then I, the LORD, said, "Son of man, these men have come to ask for My help. But tell them I'll give them no answer."

Again, the elders come to Ezekiel to inquire of Me (previous 14:1, now v. 1). The phrase "set before me" meant they went to a prophet to inquire of Me. But I, who knows all hearts, saw their insincerity, "I will not be inquired of by you" (v. 3). Is this a picture why I don't answer your prayers? I see your sins, or your insincerity, or your hypocrisy, and refuse to answer you. "The Lord does not hear sinners" (John 9:31).

"Remind them of the disgusting practices of their ancestors. Give them this message from Me, the Sovereign LORD: 'When I chose Israel to be My people, I promised that I would be their God.'"

I am known by those who want to know Me. I said, "I made myself known to Israel" (v. 9). So you must know Me before I show you My majesty and glory Show Me your love and kindness, so you can

know Me intimately. I'll show you forgiveness and grace, so you can praise My eternal compassionate nature.

“I promised I would rescue them from Egypt and lead them to a land with lots of milk from cows and lots of honey from bees. I told them to get rid of their disgusting idols and not to worship the gods of Egypt, because I am the Lord their God.

“But they rebelled against Me and wouldn't listen. They kept on worshipping their idols and foreign gods. So in My anger I decided to pour out My wrath on them in Egypt. But I didn't because I had promised to rescue them, and I didn't want other nations to think I couldn't keep My word. So I brought the Israelites out of Egypt and into the desert. I gave them My laws and regulations, so they would know how to live. I told them to respect the Sabbath as a way of showing they belong to Me.

“But in the desert they rebelled against Me, refusing to obey My laws and regulations and not respecting the Sabbath. So in My anger I decided to destroy the Israelites in the desert. But that would have been a problem because several nations knew I rescued the Israelites from Egypt. So I told the Israelites in the desert that I wouldn't lead them into the land I had promised them. Why did I tell them this? Because they ignored My laws and regulations and didn't keep the Sabbath and they worshiped idols. Yet I felt sorry for them and decided not to let them die in the desert.

“I warned their children not to follow their parents by worshipping idols. I told them I'm the Lord their God and that therefore they should obey My laws and teachings. Also, I told them to keep Sabbath days holy, because that shows that they are My people.

“Their children rebelled against Me too. Like their parents, they rebelled against Me, and refused to obey My laws and regulations and had no regard for the Sabbath days. So I decided to punish them in the desert. But then I decided not to because nations had seen Me rescue them from Egypt. Then in the desert I promised that I would scatter the Israelites to other nations, because they didn't obey My laws and didn't keep the Sabbath days holy and worshiped idols their ancestors had made. I gave them laws and customs that would not lead to life. I let them offer unacceptable sacrifices, including their firstborn children as offerings to their gods. I did this so they would know that I, the LORD, am God.

“Son of man, tell the Israelites that their ancestors criticized Me and insulted Me. They offered sacrifices, incenses, and wine to gods at every hilltop shrine and under every large tree. This made Me very angry. When I asked them where they went to worship these gods, they said, ‘At the hilltop shrines.’ And those places of worship are still called Bamah (“hilltop shrines”) or shrines.

“You Israelites, you follow the example of your ancestors by worshiping idols and sacrificing your children as offerings. But don’t think you can commit these sins and then ask Me for a message. As surely as I live, I, the Sovereign LORD, say, That won’t happen. You think you can be like other nations in worshiping idols of wood and stone. But not so,

“As surely as I’m the living Lord, I’ll rule over you in a strong way in anger and power. I’ll gather you from the nations where you’ll be scattered, and I’ll judge you, and I’ll lead you into a desert where I’ll punish you just as I punished your ancestors in the desert. I’ll force you to obey the regulations of our agreement. As surely as I live, I’ll separate the rebels from you. I’ll bring them from the countries where they’ll be scattered and in captivity, but they’ll never be allowed to return to Israel. Then you’ll know that I am the Lord.

“Go right ahead and worship your idols, but don’t turn around and offer Me gifts. In a future day, everyone in Israel will worship Me on Mount Zion, My holy mountain in Jerusalem. You’ll serve Me, and I’ll accept your offerings and sacrifices. When I bring you home from the places where you are scattered, I’ll be pleased with you just as I am pleased with the smoke of your sacrifices. Every nation will see that I am holy. And you’ll know that I am the One who brought you back to Israel, the land I promised your ancestors. Then you’ll remember your sins, and you’ll hate yourselves for doing such terrible sins. You’ll know that I am the Lord when I treat you with mercy when you deserve to be punished.”

I, the LORD, then said, “Son of man, speak against the Southern Desert, and say to people there, ‘The LORD God, will start a fire that will burn every tree, whether green or dry. Nothing will be able to put out the fire. Everything in its path from south to north will be burned.’ Everyone will know I started it and that it can’t be put out. But Ezekiel said, “LORD God, I don’t want to give them that message. Already they say I confuse them with my messages.”

The Swords of Judgment

21 I, the LORD, said, “Son of man, speak against My Temple in Jerusalem and warn everyone in Israel that I’ll soon punish them. I’ll have My sword ready to kill both the righteous and the wicked. I’ll not spare even the righteous, and many people will die. Everyone will know that I, the LORD, have done this. Groan in sorrow and despair. When people ask you why you are groaning, say to them, ‘Every heart will faint and tremble in fear and lose courage.’”

Then I, the LORD, said, “Son of man, give the people of Jerusalem this message: ‘I’ve sharpened My sword to kill; it’s strong and it’s polished. Punishment is coming because people have ignored My warnings. My sword is sharpened and polished, ready to kill.’”

“‘Son of man, cry out in sorrow and beat your thigh because that sword will kill My people and their leaders. They’ll all die.’”

I told Ezekiel, “Cry and yell.” Judgment is not a time for mirth and joyfulness. Never gloat when a sinner is punished, and that goes double when I punish a saved person.

“It will put them all to the test, so what chance will they have for survival?” I, the LORD God, ask. “Son of man, clap your hands together. Wave the sword twice, in fact, three times, as a sign of the great massacre My people will face. They’ll lose courage, because a sword is at every gate, flashing like lightning and ready to kill. The sword will slash to the right and to the left wherever it wishes. I too will clap My hands and I’ll stop being angry.” I, the LORD, have spoken.

Then I, the LORD said, “Son of man, trace two roads on a map for the king of Babylonia to follow when he comes with his sword. Put a signpost where the two routes separate and go in different directions. Show that one road leads to Rabbah, the capital of the Ammonites, and that the other road leads to Jerusalem. The king of Babylonia will ask his magicians to foretell which route to take. They’ll shake arrows, ask his idols, and examine the liver of a sacrificial animal. By these means they’ll decide to go to Jerusalem. They’ll attack the city gates with battering rams, announcing the

battle cry. Then they'll put up siege ramps against the walls. The people of Jerusalem will think this is a mistake because they had made a treaty with the Babylonians. But the king of Babylonia will think of their rebellion against him, and so he'll attack and defeat them."

I, the LORD God, say, "Again and again you are guilty because of your continued wickedness. All your actions are sinful, so now you will be punished. Zedekiah, you wicked ruler of Israel, your final day has arrived. I, the Sovereign LORD, tell you to take off your diadem and crown. Things are now changing. The poor will be in charge, and the rich will be nobodies."

The picture of "remove the diadem, and take off the crown" (v. 26, KJV) is My removing the high priest from the office, and the crown is a reference of My removing the king from the throne. The kingdom of Israel will never be fully restored. There will be high priests, and kings that is, Caiaphas and Herod, during the time of Jesus; but they will not be My anointed servants in those offices.

"I'll destroy the kingdom of Judah. And it won't be restored until the One appears who has the right to rule. Then I'll give the kingdom to Him.

"Son of man, prophesy against the Ammonites who mocked Israel. Tell them, My sword is ready to slaughter you. It is polished and sharpened and flashes like lightning. Your magicians and false prophets have lied in telling you false visions and untrue messages that your gods will save you from the Babylonians. But the sword will come on the wicked and you'll be slaughtered. I won't put My sword away till I punish you. I'll destroy you in your own country. I'll pour out My fury on you, and My anger will be like a flaming fire. I'll hand you over to cruel men who are experts in killing. You'll be burned, and you'll die in your own country, you'll be wiped out and completely forgotten." I, the LORD, have spoken.

Jerusalem is Guilty of Sin

22I, the LORD say, "Son of man, get ready to judge Jerusalem as a city of murderers. Announce the people's sins publicly, and give them this

message from Me, the Sovereign LORD: ‘You are a city of murderers and a city full of idols. You are guilty of both murder and idolatry, so your day of doom has come, and you’ve reached the end of your years. Nations around the world will laugh at you. And people everywhere will mock you, an infamous, confused city.

“Every leader in Israel is a murderer. You don’t honor your parents, and foreign residents are required to pay for protection, and orphans and widows are treated wrongly. You despise My sacred places and you treat the Sabbath like other days. People tell lies about others, resulting in their deaths. Idols are worshiped at every hilltop shrine and people take part in sexually immoral acts. Men have sex with their father’s wives and with women who are having their monthly period. Some men have sex with someone else’s wife or with their daughter’s in-law or sisters. Others accept money to murder someone and some get money illegally. And they don’t even think of Me and My commands,” say I, the Sovereign LORD.

“I shake My fist in anger at your dishonest gain and your murders. But your strength and courage will disappear when I deal with you. I, the LORD, have spoken, and I’ll do all I said. I’ll scatter you among the nations, and I’ll stop your wicked ways. Other nations will look down on you, and then you’ll know that I am the Lord.”

I, the LORD, say, “Son of man, the people of Israel are as worthless as the leftover metal in a furnace after silver is purified. So give them this message: ‘Because you are worthless metal, I’ll bring you to My furnace in Jerusalem, where I’ll melt you down in the heat of My anger, just as copper, tin, iron, and lead are melted in a furnace, I’ll blow the fire of My wrath on you, and you’ll melt like silver in intense heat. Then you’ll know that I, the LORD, am the One who poured wrath on you.’”

I, the LORD say, “Son of man, tell the people of Israel, in My wrath you’ll be like an uncleared wilderness or a desert without rain. Your prophets are against you, like lions stalking prey. They put many people to death, and they steal treasures, and make many women widows. The priests disobey My laws and have defiled My temple. They make no distinction between what is holy and what is not, and the Sabbaths are like any other day, so that My reputation is greatly dishonored by them.

“Your leaders are like wolves, tearing apart their victims, and destroying lives to gain money. Your prophets tell of their visions, which are false, and

speaking false messages. The people take advantage of the poor, the needy, and foreign residents.

“I, the LORD, looked for someone to build up the wall and to keep Me from destroying the city, but I found none. So I’ll punish them in My anger because of all their sins,” say I, the Sovereign LORD.

Jerusalem is again condemned. “Why does Ezekiel keep repeating this theme?” Because there are different messages that Ezekiel actually preached against Israel at different times. These are the many evidences that I loved My people and wanted them to repent.

Samaria and Jerusalem, the Sinful Sisters

23I, the LORD say, “Son of man, two sisters were young. In Egypt, they became prostitutes. The older was Oholah, which stands for Samaria, and her sister was Oholibah, which stands for Jerusalem. I married them, and they gave birth to My children.

“Then Oholah turned from Me to other gods, and she gave herself to the Samaritans. They were handsome young men, high-ranking officers in the attractive blue uniforms. She had sex with these important officials and worshiped their idols. When she was in Egypt, she continued doing these things and she was always ready for sex.

“So I gave Oholah over to the Assyrians, and their gods, whom she loved very much. They took off her clothes and killed her, and then took her children away as slaves. Every woman in the area talked about her sinful behaviors.

“But when Oholibah (Jerusalem) saw what had happened to her sister, she was more sinful than her sister Oholah. She longed for the Assyrians’ handsome young men on fine horses. They were in attractive uniforms. Like her sister she did vulgar things.

“She was even more debased than her sister Oholah (Samaria) because she loved the images of Babylonian military officials on the wall, handsome young men on fine horses and in red uniforms, and they had belts around their waists and large turbans on their heads. They reminded her of

Babylonian cavalry officers. She sent messengers to Babylonia to ask them to come to her. So men from Babylonia came and had sex with her. But later she got disgusted with them and broke off all relations with them.”

In this chapter is a picture of My people giving themselves to the nations around them in spiritual adultery when they worship the gods (idols) of the pagan. I accused them, “As soon as she saw them with her eyes, she doted on them and sent messengers to them” (v. 16, KJV). The phrase, “She doted on them” is translated in this version, “She wanted to have sex with them.” Doesn’t sin usually get to you through the eyes? You want the illicit things you see with your eyes.

“Oholibah let everyone see her naked body, and she didn’t care if they knew she was a prostitute. She became even more immoral, living as if she were back in Egypt. She wanted to have sex with every Egyptian man. And she longed for the days when she was a young prostitute.”

I, the LORD God, said, “Oholibah, you turned against your lovers, but now they’ll come against you as enemies. I’ll gather the young officers and high-ranking cavalymen from Babylonia and Assyria, the tribes of Pokod, Shoa, and Koa. They’ll come from the north with chariots and wagons filled with weapons. They’ll surround you ready for battle and I’ll let them do whatever they wish. I’m angry with you, and so I’ll let them be cruel to you. They’ll cut off your nose and ears, kill your children, and kill any survivors. They’ll take your children away as captives and anything that is left will be burned. They’ll take your beautiful clothes and jewelry. In this way I’ll stop your prostitution and you’ll never want to think about those days again.”

I, the Sovereign LORD, said, “You can be sure that I’ll hand you over to your enemies whom you now despise. Hating you, they’ll rob you and they’ll strip you naked. Your terrible sins led to this. You were determined to have sex with men from other nations and to worship their idols. You followed in your sister’s footsteps, so now you must be punished as she was.”

What will Israel's lovers do? I say, "They will treat you with hatred" (v. 29). Have you ever noticed that the thing you love you will eventually hate? Then, that thing you love, will hate you and destroy you. The youth loves his alcohol, but it will destroy his will-power and body. And what he loved, he ends up hating. The one who loves promiscuous sex will end up with a sexual disease that hates his physical life.

"I, the LORD God, gave your sister a large cup filled with My anger. Everyone will mock you because you must drink from this cup too. You'll reel like a drunkard because the cup is filled with insults and distress. You'll drink every last drop. Then you'll smash it and beat your breast in anguish. I, the Sovereign LORD, have spoken these words. Because you turned your back on Me, and lived as a prostitute, you must be punished."

I, the LORD, said, "Son of man, tell Oholah (Samaria) and Oholibah (Jerusalem) they are guilty of their sinful ways. They are guilty of both adultery (by worshiping idols) and murder (by sacrificing their children as offerings to idols). Also, they make My temple unfit for worship and did not keep the Sabbath day. When they murdered their children in front of the idols, they went into My temple to worship.

"You even sent messengers to attract men from places far away. When they arrived, you two sisters took baths, painted your eyelids, and wore your finest jewelry. They sat on a nicely embroidered couch, and olive oil and incense were on a table in front of them. Noisy drunkards came in from the desert, and they gave the sisters bracelets and beautiful crowns. The men wanted to have sex with the women, even though they were exhausted from being prostitutes. In fact, the men had sex over and over with Oholah and Oholibah. But good men will judge the two sisters of being unfaithful."

So I, the LORD God, say to those sisters: "I'll call together an angry mob to crush and rob you. They'll stone you and kill you and your children with swords and burn your houses. I'll get rid of prostitution and idolatry in this country. This will be a warning everywhere for women not to act as these women have. I'll punish you for becoming prostitutes and for worshiping idols, and you'll know that I'm the LORD God."

The Rusty Boiling Pot

24Nine years after King Jehoiachin and others who were led as prisoners to Babylonia, I, the LORD, spoke to Ezekiel. This was in January, 588 BC. “Son of man, write down today’s date because this is the day the king of Babylonia has begun his attack against Jerusalem. Then give this illustration to My rebellious people. Put a pot of water on the fire to boil. Fill it with the legs and shoulders of sheep and all the tender cuts. Use the best sheep from the flock. Pile wood under the pot and boil the meat until it is well done.”

On the very day that Nebuchadnezzar set the siege against Jerusalem, Ezekiel prepared a stew pot with water and meat, symbolic of the people in Jerusalem that will be cooked “to death.” Have you noticed that My timing is impeccable? I’m not late or early. The Psalmist tells you, “Your times are in My hand” (Ps. 31:15).

I, the LORD, God, say, “How terrible it will be for Jerusalem, a city of murderers. She is like a rusty pot. Take out the meat piece by piece in whatever order they come. The people of Jerusalem murdered innocent people and didn’t even bother to cover up their blood on the ground. The blood on the ground cries out to Me for revenge.”

I, the LORD God, say, “How terrible it will be for Jerusalem, city of murderers. I’ll pile logs of fuel under her. Heap on the wood, light the fire, and cook the meat. Then boil away the broth and let the bones be burned. Set the empty pot on the coals to clean the pot and burn off all the rust. The rust (that is, the corruption) is still remaining, despite the hottest fire. This is the rust of your sexual sin and your worshiping idols. I tried to cleanse you, but you refused. So you’ll remain filthy until My fury against you has been satisfied. I, the LORD, have spoken these words. I won’t change My mind. You, Jerusalem, will be punished for your wicked actions.”

Again I, the LORD, said, “Son of man, I’ll take the life of your wife. She’ll die suddenly. But don’t express sorrow. Don’t weep. You may sigh, but only quietly, don’t wail at her grave, don’t remove your turban or take off your sandals. And don’t accept food brought to you by your friends.”

When I took away, “the desire of your eyes” (v. 16), which was his wife, Ezekiel was not to show the normal signs of mourning and grief. He wasn’t even allowed to eat the bread that neighbors brought into him.

Then Ezekiel told this to his people, and suddenly at sunset his wife died. The next morning people asked Him why he wasn’t mourning for his wife and what it all meant.

Ezekiel announced, “The LORD God said, ‘I’m ready to destroy My Temple in which you take pride. Your sons and daughters in Jerusalem will be killed. Then you’ll do the same things Ezekiel has done. You’ll not mourn in public; and you’ll refuse to eat food brought by friends. You’ll not take off your turbans or your sandals. You won’t weep or mourn but you’ll mourn privately because of all your sins. Ezekiel is an example. Everything he’s done, you’ll do. Then when that time comes, you’ll know that I am the Lord.

“‘Son of man, I’ll soon destroy the temple, your stronghold, joy, and glory in which you are proud. I’ll also take away your sons and daughters. On that day someone will leave Jerusalem to tell you in Babylon what has happened. On the day he arrives, your voice will return to you so you can talk to him. You’ll be a symbol for these people, then they’ll know that I am the LORD.’”

Prophecy against the Ammonites

25I, the LORD God, again said, “Son of man, prophesy against the Ammonites and its people and tell them, ‘Listen to what the Sovereign LORD says. You were glad when My temple was destroyed, and you were glad when Israel was taken into captivity, and you were glad when Judah was taken captive. Therefore, because you did this, I’ll cause some tribes from the east to set up their camps among you and pitch their tents there. They will steal your fruit and your livestock. And your capital city of Rabbah will be pastureland for camels, and your entire country will be pastureland for sheep. Then you’ll know that I am the LORD.’”

I, the Sovereign LORD, say, “Out of hatred for Israel you clapped and cheered when Israel was taken captive. Therefore, I’ll give you over to other nations. You’ll no longer be a nation. I’ll destroy you. Then you’ll know that I am the Lord.

“And because Moab thought Judah was no different from other nations, I’ll let Moab’s eastern towns along its border be attacked, including Beth-Jeshimoth, Baal-Meon, and Kirjathaim. The same eastern tribes that invaded Ammon will invade Moab, and Moab too will no longer be a nation. I’ll destroy Moab, and they’ll know that I am the LORD.”

Moab also lived on the other side of the Jordan. They, like Ammon, came from the incestuous relationship between Lot and another daughter (Gen. 19:36-37). They constantly fought Israel and would not recognize My special covenant with Israel. Nebuchadnezzar conquered both Ammon and Moab five years after destroying Jerusalem.

I, the LORD God, then said, “The people of Edom are guilty of taking revenge on Judah. Therefore I, the Sovereign LORD, will punish Edom, killing all its men and animals. From Teman to Dedan. I’ll send My own people to take revenge on the Edomites. They’ll feel my wrath and anger and My vengeance,” say I, the Sovereign LORD.

Edomites were descendants of Esau, Jacob’s twin brother. Edom was located south of the Dead Sea in a mountainous terrain that seemed unconquerable to invaders. Edom always hated Israel; probably going back to Jacob’s tricking Esau out of the birthright and blessing (Gen. 26-27). I say of Edom, I will “take vengeance” (v. 12) which means, “revenging with revenge.”

I, the Sovereign LORD, also say this: “The Philistines have tried repeatedly to take revenge on Judah and to destroy it. Therefore, I say I’ll treat the Philistines as My enemies. I’ll cut off the Kerethites and others on the seacoast. In My anger I’ll take revenge on them. When I punish them, they’ll know that I am the Lord.”

The Philistines originally settled in the Aegean Sea region but moved and conquered southern Israel. They were always hostile to Israel. Notice the Philistines “have taken vengeance with a despiteful heart, to destroy it for the old hatred” (v. 15, KJV).

Tyre Will Be Destroyed

26 Ezekiel says that eleven years after King Jehoiachin and the rest of us were taken captive to Babylon (586 BC), I, the LORD, spoke to Ezekiel the first day of this month, saying, “Son of man, Tyre is rejoicing over Jerusalem’s fall, saying, ‘Jerusalem controlled the north-south trade routes along the coast and also the routes to the Jordan River. But now that she is destroyed, I’ll be heir of her wealth.’ Therefore I, the Sovereign LORD, say, ‘I’ll bring many nations against you like waves crashing against the shore. They’ll destroy the walls of Tyre and your towers, and I’ll scrape away your soil and make you bare rock. Your island will be uninhabited, a place where fishermen spread their nets. I have spoken these words. The nations will rob you, and your villages on the mainland will be destroyed. Then you’ll know that I am the Lord.’”

I, The Sovereign LORD say, “From the north I’ll send against you Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylonia, like a king of kings, with a great army and many chariots and horsemen. He’ll destroy your villages and then put up siege ramps against your city walls and set up rows of shields around you. He’ll pound your walls with battering rams, and he’ll destroy your watchtowers with sledgehammers. The hoofs of his many horses will choke your city with dust. As his chariots and horsemen enter your broken-down gates, your walls will shake. His horsemen will trample every street, murdering your people and toppling your huge pillars.

“They’ll carry off all your wealth and tear down your walls. They’ll also destroy your homes and throw your stones, timber, and rubble into the sea. I’ll stop all music in your city, and harps will not be played. I’ll make your island a bare rock, a place where fishermen will spread their nets. You’ll never be rebuilt.” I, the Sovereign LORD, have spoken.

The Phoenicians lived north of Israel and were known as a maritime nation. Nebuchadnezzar besieged the city for 13 years (585-572) and finally destroyed it. The city was re-built on an island close to the shore of the Mediterranean Sea. Alexander the Great built a causeway out to the city to capture and destroy it. He threw the debris into the sea. Today, fishermen's nets can be seen drying on the rocks of the causeway. I predicted, "the spreading of the nets in the midst of the sea," reflecting My accuracy to predict the future.

I, the Sovereign LORD, say this to Tyre: "People on the whole coastline will shake when you fall and when they hear the wounded scream and moan. Then all the rulers along the seacoast will set aside their beautiful royal robes and sit on the ground shaking with fear. Then they'll sing this funeral song: 'O famous island city, how you've been destroyed. Your people who ruled the sea have spread fear everywhere. Now that Tyre is in ruins the people on the coast tremble in fear.'"

I, the Sovereign LORD say, "Tyre, I'll make you a city of ruins with no people. You'll sink beneath the ocean depths, and the seas will swallow you up. I'll send you to the world of the dead, to be with those who went there years ago. Your city will lie in ruins like people who've gone to the world of the dead. You'll never return to the land of the living. You'll come to a horrible end. People will look for you but won't find you." I, the Sovereign LORD, have spoken these words.

Lament Over Tyre

27I, the LORD said, "Son of man, sing this funeral song for Tyre, the city that trades with nations along the coast. Give Tyre this message: 'Tyre, you boast about your beauty, and you've extended your boundaries into the sea. Your builders made you great. Builders used cypress trees from Mount Hermon to build your ships, including your sail mast. From the oaks of Bashan they carved oars, and made your decks from pine trees from Cyprus, which they covered with ivory. Sails are made from linen from Egypt, and they were sailed like banners. Blue and purple awnings were made bright with dyes from eastern Cyprus.'

“Your oarsmen came from Sidon and Arvad and your own helmsmen were from Tyre itself. Men from nearby Gebal repaired your ships, and sailors came from many places to barter for your goods. Men from Persia, Lydia, and Libya served in your army. They honored you by hanging their shields and helmets on your walls. Men from Arvad and Cilicia were your guards, and men from Gammad manned your towers. They hung their shields on your walls, thus adding to the attractiveness of your city.

“Merchants from Tarshish in Southern Spain traded silver, iron, tin, and lead for your products. Merchants from Greece, Tubal, and Meshech traded slaves and bronze dishes, and merchants from Togarmah traded riding horses, chariot horses, and mules for your various goods. Merchants came from Dedan, the island of Rhodes, and people from nations along the coast gave you ivory and black wood in exchange for your goods.

“Edom sent merchants to buy your goods in exchange for turquoise, purple cloth, embroidered material, fine linen, coral, and rubies. They bought from you your finest wheat, best figs, honey, olive oil, and spices. Damascus brought you wine from Helbon and white wool from Zahar. Vedan and Juvan brought iron and spices to trade for your goods. Dedan traded their expensive saddle blankets, and people from Arabia and Kedar traded lambs, sheep, and goats. Merchants from Sheba and Raamah brought spices, jewels, and gold in exchange for your items. You also traded goods with merchants from Haran, Canneh, Eden, Sheba, Asshur, and Chilmad, and they brought to you expensive clothing, purple cloth, and embroidered material, colored rugs, and strong rope. Large ships of Tarshish carried your goods wherever you wanted to take them. And with all your trading, your warehouse was filled from wall to wall and from floor to ceiling.

“But beware! Your oarsmen are rowing your ship into a hurricane. And it will be wrecked by strong winds from the east. Everything on that ship will be lost—your riches, wares, sailors, helmsmen, ship builders, merchants, and soldiers. Everything that day will sink into the depths of the sea.

“People on the shore will hear the cries of the drowning crew. The oarsmen will leave their ships as oarsmen, sailors, and captives stand on the shore mourning for you. They’ll show their mourning by throwing dust on their heads, rolling in ashes, wearing burlap, and crying in despair. In their grief they will sing this funeral song; “Tyre, you were such a great city. But

you are now at the bottom of the sea—like no other city. Many nations were pleased with all your merchandise, and many kings got rich with your goods. But now you are a wrecked ship, lying at the bottom of the sea and your cargo and crew have gone down with you. People living along the coast are shocked at the news of your defeat. Rulers are horrified at what has happened, and their faces show their terror. Merchants of many nations shake their faces in disbelief at what has happened, because you’ve come to a horrible end and are gone forever.” ”

Tyre is pictured as a great commercial ship (v. 1-9) that travels the waters of the Mediterranean. At the end of the chapter she shipwrecks (vv. 26-36). Her material riches are lost.

The King of Tyre Will Fall

28I, the LORD God, said to Ezekiel, “Son of man, give this message to the prince of Tyre: ‘You are so arrogant. In your pride you even claimed, “I am a god, I sit on a divine throne in the heart of the sea.” But you are only a mere human, not a god. You think you’re wiser than Daniel, and that you know everything. With your wisdom you have become very rich, and your storehouses are filled with gold and silver. Yes, you are extremely wealthy, and your wealth has made you very proud.’”

Therefore, I, the Sovereign LORD, say, “Since you think you are as wise as a god, I’ll bring ruthless foreigners against you. They’ll draw their swords against you and destroy all the belongings you worked so hard to get. They’ll kill you, and you’ll die there on your island home. When these enemies come against you, will you still claim to be a god? To them, you’ll be a mere human, not a god. You’ll die by these foreigners like an outcast.” I, the LORD, have spoken.

I, the LORD God, said to Ezekiel, “Son of man, sing this funeral song for the king (satan) of Tyre: ‘At one time Lucifer you were perfect in wisdom and beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God. You wore jewelry made of brightly colored gems and precious stones, including ruby, topaz, emerald, chrysolite, onyx, jasper, sapphire, turquoise, and beryl. They were all set in gold and were ready for you when you were created. I

appointed you as a winged creature to guard my holy mountain where you walked among stones of fire.

“From the day I created you, Lucifer, you were blameless until you started being wicked. So I forced you to leave My mountain, I caused you to leave the mountain, O guardian winged creature, where you had been among the stones of fire.

“Your beauty led you to be filled with pride, and your splendor spoiled your wisdom. So I tossed you to the ground and let kings gaze at you.”

Lucifer is described as “full of wisdom and perfect in beauty” (v. 12). Since I am perfect, it’s the only way I could create an angel, that is, an incorporeal being who could think, feel, and possess free choice. Lucifer was the highest in the order of angels, and is called “the anointed cherub” (v. 14). The word “covereth” (v. 14) suggests Lucifer guarded or protected My throne. Also, as a person’s hair that covers the head gives beauty, Lucifer gave beauty to Me. But, it’s impossible to make Me more beautiful, for I am the originator and embodiment of beauty.

Lucifer had access to “the holy mountain” (v. 14) which suggests he entered My actual presence. Lucifer was closer to Me than any other angel. When it describes Lucifer “walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire” (v. 14), it suggests Lucifer could go or carry out decisions I made. Lucifer was in My presence when I was creating the rest of creation.

Lucifer is described as “perfect in your ways from the day you were created” (v. 15). Then “iniquity was found in you” (v. 15). Lucifer’s sin was not an outward transgression of turning to evil things, such as prohibited in My Ten Commands. Lucifer’s sin was in the free choice he was given to worship Me, but he chose to follow a selfish urge to magnify himself and lift himself into My place. Sin is not a thing; sin is an act or attitude.

Lucifer sinned when he said, “I will ascend into heaven” (Isa. 14:13). Then he said, “I will exalt my throne above the stars (angels)” (Isa. 14:13). I will sit in the mount of the congregation (where I sit, Isa. 14:13). Then Lucifer added two more expressions

of pride, “I will ascend above the heights of the clouds” (get My glory) and I will be like the Most High” (Isa. 14:14), meaning Lucifer wanted My rulership.

“Iniquity was found in you” (Ezek. 28:15). So I said, “You sinned; therefore I cast you as a profane thing out” (Ezek. 28:16).

“Your places of worship are corrupt because of your many sins and you cheat your merchants. So I caused your city to be on fire and I burned it down. Now everyone sees only ashes where your great city was located. Every nation that knew you is amazed. You have come to a horrible end and you are gone forever.”

I, the LORD, said to Ezekiel, “Son of man, prophesy against the city of Sidon, and give them this message from Me, the Sovereign LORD: ‘Sidon, I, the LORD God, am your enemy and when I punish you and show you My holiness, you will know that I am the Lord. I’ll send a disease against you, and I’ll send enemy nations against you from every direction. Blood will flow in your streets from people who will be killed by the enemy. Then you’ll know that I’m the Lord.’

“No longer will Israel’s neighbors be like painful thorns to them. The Israelites will know that I am the Sovereign LORD.” Then I, the Sovereign LORD, said, “I’ll gather the people of Israel from the nations where they’ve been scattered, and those nations will see that I am holy. My people will again live in their own land which I promised to them and to My servant Jacob. They’ll be safe and will build houses and plant vineyards. And I’ll punish their neighboring nations who hated them. Then Israel will know that I am the Lord their God.”

The Prophecy Against Egypt

29In January 587 BC, the tenth year of King Jehoiachin’s captivity in Babylon, I, the LORD, spoke to Ezekiel and said, “Son of man, prophesy against Pharaoh, king of Egypt and against all Egypt. Give him this message from Me, the Sovereign LORD. ‘I am your enemy, Pharaoh. You were like a big crocodile lying in the Nile. You said, “The Nile River is yours and you made it for yourself.” I’ll put hooks in your jaws and pull

you out of the water and I will leave you and all your fish on the desert to die. You'll be unburied, and wild animals and birds will eat your flesh. Then everyone in Egypt will know that I am the LORD.

“You've been like a broken stick when Israel looked to you for help. You were like a cracked stick broken in half, and you stabbed her in the armpit. When Israel leaned on you, you gave way and her back was thrown out of joint. So I, the LORD God, will bring an army against you, Egypt, and they'll kill your people and animals. Egypt will be a desolate desert, and you Egyptians will know that I am the Lord.

“You said you made the Nile River, and it is yours. But I'm now against you and your river. I'll make your nation a desolate waste from Migdol in the north to Aswan in the south, all the way to the border of Ethiopia. For 40 years Egypt will be completely uninhabited, so no human or animal will travel there. Egypt will be surrounded by other desolate nations, and Egypt will be barren. Every city in Egypt will be desolate for 40 years, and Egyptians will be scattered to other nations.”

I, the Sovereign LORD, also say, “After those 40 years, I'll bring the Egyptians back to their land. Again they'll live in Pathros and I'll make them prosperous again. But Egypt will remain a weak kingdom, unable to rule other nations, as in the past. My people Israel will no longer trust in you, Egypt, for help. Your condition will show Israel how wrong they were to turn to you for help. Then Israel will know that I alone am the Sovereign LORD.”

Ezekiel predicts the destruction of Egypt and Tyre in this chapter: When Pharaoh came to the aid of Jerusalem, Babylon left to fight Egypt. Nebuchadnezzar had previously laid siege to Tyre for 13 years producing economic loss. His soldiers got nothing from Tyre, so he went to Egypt for “wages for his army” (v. 19). I said, “I will give the land of Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar —and take her spoil” (v. 19). Babylon invaded Egypt (vv. 8, 9). Egypt never again became a world power, “They shall no more rule over the nations” (v. 15). This amazing prediction was fulfilled.

In the 27th year after King Jehoiachin and the rest were taken captive to Babylonia (571 BC) I, the Lord, again spoke to Ezekiel in the spring. I said, “Son of man, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon made his army fight hard against Tyre. In carrying heavy loads, their heads were rubbed bald and their shoulders were red and sore. But Nebuchadnezzar and his army still could not capture the city. So I’ll give Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar. He’ll take their wealth, looting everything of Egypt in order to pay his own soldiers. I’ve given Egypt to him as a reward for following My orders.” I, the Sovereign LORD, have spoken.

“The day will come when I’ll restore Israel’s glory, and then your words will be respected. Then Israel will know that I am the Lord.”

Egypt Will Be Punished

30I, the LORD, gave Ezekiel another message: “Son of man, give Egypt this message from Me, the Sovereign LORD: ‘Weep because the terrible day, My day of the Lord, is almost here. It’ll be a time of darkness and gloom, a day of despair for the nations. Your nation Egypt will be attacked, and the corpses of people who are killed will cover the ground. Their wealth will be taken away. Ethiopia will be invaded too. Libya, Lydia, and Arabia will be destroyed. All of your allies will fall, and their strength will end. People from Migdol in the north to Aswan in the south will die.’”

I, the Sovereign LORD, say, “Egypt will be terribly deserted with its cities in complete ruins. I’ll set Egypt and her allies on fire. I’ll send messengers to Ethiopia to frighten them out of their complacency. And they’ll be terrified at the thought of their coming destruction.”

I, the Sovereign LORD, say, “I’ll cause Nebuchadnezzar of Babylonia to destroy the many people in Egypt. He and his ruthless army will invade Egypt, kill many with the sword, and fill the land with Egyptian corpses. I’ll dry up the Nile River and sell the land to evil men. I’ll use foreigners to destroy the land of Egypt and everything in it.” I, the LORD, have spoken these words.

I, the Sovereign LORD, also say to Egypt: “I’ll smash all the idols you Egyptians worship in the city of Memphis. No ruler will be left in the land only terror will exist. Pathros will be in ruins and Zoan will be burned.

Thebes, your capital, will also be destroyed. Pelusium will feel My fierce wrath, and all the soldiers at Thebes will be killed. I'll set fire to all of Egypt. Pelusium, Thebes, and Memphis will all be terrified. Young soldiers, Heliopolis and Bubastis, will be killed in battle, and the women will be taken as slaves. When I break the power of Egypt, it will be a sad day for Tahapanhes too. A dark cloud will cover the land as your daughters are being led away as captives. I'll greatly punish you, Egypt, and you'll know that I am the Lord."

Eleven years after King Jehoiachin and the rest were taken captive to Babylonia (586 BC) I, the Lord, spoke to Ezekiel in April of that year, and said, "Son of man, I, the Lord, have defeated the king of Egypt. I broke his arm, but no one has put a cast on it or put it in a sling to make it strong enough to hold a sword. So tell him that I, the Sovereign LORD, will break both his arms, and his sword will drop from his hand, and I'll scatter the Egyptians throughout various nations. I'll strengthen the arms of Babylon's king, and I'll break the arms of the king of Egypt. He'll lie there wounded, moaning in pain. I'll strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon, but the arms of Pharaoh will fall weak and limp. When I put My sword in the hands of Babylon's king, he will use it against Egypt, then Egypt will know that I am the Lord. Also, when I scatter the Egyptians among the nations, then they will know that I am the Lord."

Because Egypt was a wealthy nation, she hired mercenary soldiers for defense, "They that uphold Egypt shall fall" (v. 6) and "all her helpers will be destroyed" (v. 8). The wealth of Egypt was seized and multitudes of Egyptians were carried off captive, mostly to Babylon.

Egypt is Like a Fallen Cedar Tree

31 Eleven years after King Jehoiachin and the rest were taken captive to Babylonia (586 BC) I, the Lord, spoke to Ezekiel in June of that year and said, "Son of man, tell the king of Egypt these words: 'You are great and powerful. You are as Assyria was, a mighty nation. Assyria too was once like a cedar tree in Lebanon, with large branches reaching to the sky.

Deep springs watered it and helped it grow tall. And nearby streams watered nearby trees. But this tree was taller than the other trees, and it grew long, thick branches.

“Birds rested in its branches, and animals enjoyed its shade. All the nations of the world lived in its shadow. It was beautiful and strong because it had lots of water. It was taller than all the cedar trees in the garden of Eden. No cypress tree could match it, nor did any tree in the garden compare with its beauty. Because I made this tree so majestic, all the trees in Eden wanted to be like it.

“Therefore, king of Egypt, this is what I say about this tree: Because it grew so tall and was proud of its height, I, the LORD God, will hand it over to a nation that will destroy it because of its wickedness. A foreign army will cut it down and leave it on the ground. Its branches will be scattered across the mountains and valleys. Nations who lived beneath its shadow went away and left it lying there. Birds nested on the fallen trunk, and wild animals lay among its branches. No other trees should ever grow as tall as this tree, for every tree, no matter how tall or how well watered will not survive. They are all destined for death with all the proud people of the world.”

I, the Sovereign LORD say, “When this tree died, I, the LORD God, caused rivers and streams to mourn its death. I held back the rivers and streams. When I cover Lebanon with darkness, all the trees will wither. This tree will crash to the ground and I’ll send it to the world below. Then the nations will tremble. The trees of Eden and of Lebanon, already in the world of the dead, will be glad when this tree falls. The tree’s allies were destroyed and sent to the world below to join the dead.

“Egypt, you were like this tree—taller and stronger than anyone on earth. You’ll be brought down to the world of the dead with all the other nations. There you’ll join the many godless and the wicked who have died by the sword.” I, the LORD God, have spoken.

I compare Egypt to Assyria. Assyria is the most beautiful and lofty cedar tree in Lebanon, greater in beauty than any other tree (nation). “O Egypt—You too, will be brought down to the pit with all these other nations” (v. 18, NLT). The nation Egypt served My purpose, then I allowed it to be cast aside.

The Pharaoh is Like a Sea Monster

32In the spring of the 12th year of King Jehoiachin's captivity (585 BC) I, the LORD, gave Ezekiel this message: "Son of man, mourn for Pharaoh King of Egypt and say to him, 'You think of yourself as a strong young lion, but you are really just a crocodile in the Nile River, churning up the water with your feet and muddying the water.' Therefore I, the Sovereign LORD, say this: 'I'll send many people to catch you in My net and bring you out of the water. I'll leave you on the land to die. Birds will land on you, and wild animals will eat your flesh. I'll spread your rotting flesh on the mountains and in the valleys, and your blood will fill up the streams. I'll darken the stars with thick clouds and the sun and moon will stop shining. Your country will be in total darkness.'" I, the Sovereign LORD, have spoken these words.

"When I tell foreign nations you never heard of how I destroyed you, they'll be shocked. I'll bring terror to many lands, and their kings will be horrified because of what could happen to them when I wave my sword before them."

I, the Sovereign LORD, say, "I'm bringing the king of Babylon against you, Egypt. The swords of mighty soldiers—who terrify the nations—will destroy you. They'll shatter your pride, Egypt, and all your many soldiers. I'll destroy all your cattle that graze beside the streams. And the feet of men and animals will never again muddy those streams. Then I'll let your waters, Egypt, be calm again, and they'll flow as smoothly as olive oil. And when I smite Egypt, strip you bare, and strike all your people, you'll know that I am the Lord. Here is the funeral dirge people will sing for Egypt. 'Let all nations weep. Let them mourn for Egypt and its masses.'" I, the Sovereign LORD, have spoken these words.

In the spring of the 12th year of King Jehoiachin's captivity (585 BC) I, the LORD, gave Ezekiel another message: "Son of man, weep for the many soldiers of Egypt and of other nations for I'll send them to the world below. Say to them, 'O Egypt, are you lovelier than other nations? Obviously not. So you'll go down to the pit and be there where those godless people are. You Egyptians will be slaughtered with others who have died by the sword.

You'll be dragged off for judgment, mighty leaders, already down in the grave will welcome you there, Egypt, along with your allies.' They'll say, 'Now that you are here, lie with the ungodly and all the victims of the sword.

“Assyria is in the grave with all her soldiers slain by the sword. Their graves are in the depths of the earth, and they are surrounded by her allies. They used to terrify people, but now they lie in shame with their enemies. Elam lies buried there with its many soldiers. They terrorized nearby nations, but now they are ashamed and lie in their graves with others who were killed in battle.

“The graves of soldiers from Meshech and Tubal are there. They terrified people, but now they are killed in battle. They were not given proper burials like former heroes who were buried with their swords under their heads and with their shields over their bodies. While still alive, they terrified everyone.

“You Egyptians will be defeated by the sword and buried with the godless soldiers. Edom's kings and leaders are in the grave. They used to be mighty, but they now lie buried with other godless leaders in the grave. All the princes of the north and the Sidonians are in the grave. They too are victims of the sword. They used to be a terror to other nations, but now they lie in shame with the other dead who are in the grave.

“When Pharaoh arrives in the grave, he'll be relieved to know that his soldiers are not alone,” I, the Sovereign LORD, say. “He had spread terror among other nations, but now he and all his soldiers will be lying with the godless who died by the sword.” I, the Sovereign LORD, have spoken these words.

Pharaoh likens himself to a young lion to be feared, but I said he is like an ugly crocodile that only muddies the Nile (v. 2). The crocodile may be feared in water, but will be taken from the waters and left on the land to die. All will scavenge him.

Listen to the Watchman

Again I, the LORD, spoke to Ezekiel, saying, “Son of man, give your
33 people this message: ‘When I bring an army against a country, have a
watchman sound a warning that the army is coming. Then if any of the
people hear the warning but ignore it, then it is their fault if they are killed
in battle. If they hear the warning but disregard it, they are responsible. If
they had paid attention to the warning, they could have saved their lives.
But if the watchman sees the enemy coming and doesn’t sound the alarm,
he is responsible for their deaths if some die. They’ll die in their sins, but
the watchman will be responsible.’”

I, the LORD, said, “I have made you, Son of man, a watchman for
Israel. Warn the people when I give you a message. If I say to the wicked,
‘You are on a slippery road to death’ and you don’t warn them to repent;
they will die in their sins and I will hold you responsible for their death. But
if you warn the wicked and they don’t repent, they will die in their sins. But
you will have saved your life.”

Ezekiel is a spiritual sentry—watchman—for Me. Just as a “look out” on the wall warns of a potential attack, Ezekiel was responsible to warn My people of an attack by wickedness. He was responsible to point out sin and call the people to repent by turning to Me Lord.

I, the LORD, say, “Son of man, the people are complaining that their
sins are causing them to waste away. As surely as I live, I don’t like to see
wicked people die. I prefer to see them turn from their sins and live. Turn
from your sins, you people of Israel, so you’ll live. Tell them that the
people’s good deeds won’t save them if they sin, nor will the sins of evil
people destroy them if they turn from their sins. If I promise good people,
they’ll live and then they start sinning, thinking their good deeds in their
past will save them, then they’ll be put to death and I’ll not remember their
good deeds. Or suppose I tell some wicked people they’ll die but then they
turn from their sins and start doing what is right. They might return
something they’ve taken as a security for a loan, or return what they’ve
stolen, and begin obeying My laws and stop sinning, then they’ll live. I’ll
forget their past sins, and they’ll live because they have done what is right.

“Ezekiel, your people are saying I’m being unfair. But they are the ones
who are unfair. As I said before, if good people start doing evil, they’ll be

put to death. But if wicked people turn from their sins and do what is right, they will live. You Israelites think I'm not fair. But you'll be judged by your deeds."

Ezekiel said, "Twelve years after King Jehoiachin and the rest of us were taken as captives to Babylonia (BC 585) a man had escaped from Jerusalem and told me, 'The city has fallen.' The previous evening the LORD healed me so that again I could speak when this man arrived."

Then I, the LORD, said, "Son of man, the people living in the ruined cities keep saying, 'Abraham was one man, and the LORD gave him the whole land of Israel. There are many of us, so the land should be ours.' So Ezekiel, give this message to them: 'How can you think the land is yours when you eat meat with blood in it, worship idols, murder innocent people, are unfaithful in marriage, and spread violence?' As surely as I am the living LORD God, you people in the ruined cities will be killed by the sword. Those living in open fields will be killed by wild animals. And those hiding in caves and fortresses will die of diseases. I'll make the country desolate and your pride will come to an end. Even the mountains will be bare so that no one will cross them. When I've made the land desolate because of your sins, then you'll know that I'm the LORD.

"Son of man, your people are talking about you in their houses, and they are saying, 'Let's ask Ezekiel what the LORD has said today.' So they come and listen to you, but they don't intend to do what I tell them. They talk about love, but they are interested only in money. They treat you as if you are only singing love songs and playing musical instruments. They listen to what you say, but they don't put those things into practice. When those terrible things happen, as they certainly will, then they'll know that you are a prophet."

A Prophecy Against the Shepherds of Israel

34This message came to Ezekiel from Me, the LORD: "Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds, the leaders of Israel, and give them this message. 'How terrible it will be for you shepherds who only take care of themselves and neglect your sheep. You drink their milk, make clothes from their wool, and butcher the best animals. You haven't helped the weak ones, or taken care of the sick, or bound up the injured. You haven't looked

for those who wandered off. Instead you treated them harshly. They are scattered without a shepherd and are prey for wild animals. They have wandered over mountains and hills, and no one has searched for them. Therefore, you shepherds, hear My Word: “As surely as I live,” say I, the Sovereign LORD, “because My flock lacks a shepherd, they have been attacked and eaten by wild animals. And My shepherds, you didn’t look for My flock when they were lost. And you took care of your own needs and not those of My flock; you let them starve.” Therefore, you shepherds, hear My Word from Me, the Sovereign LORD: “These shepherds are My enemies, and they are responsible for what has happened to My flock. I’ll not allow them to tend their flock and I’ll not let you feed yourselves, butcher and eat the sheep.”

This is what I, the Sovereign LORD say, “I’ll look for My sheep and care for them. I’ll be like a shepherd looking for his lost sheep. I’ll find and rescue them from the places where they were scattered on that dark, cloudy day. I’ll bring them back to their land of Israel from the nations where they’ve been scattered. I’ll let them enjoy grazing in the hills and mountain pastures of Israel. I’ll care for them and keep them safe,” I, the Sovereign LORD, say. “I’ll look for and bring back home the ones who’ve strayed away. I’ll bandage the injured and strengthen the weak. I’ll destroy the powerful, fat shepherds. I’ll feed the flock, yes—but for you, I’ll feed you punishment.”

Ezekiel pronounced judgment against the shepherds of Israel, that is, false prophets, priests, kings and elders who lead My people astray. The sheep are described as “sick, diseased, broken, and scattered” (vv. 4-6). Then Ezekiel becomes prophetic by describing the re-gathering of Israel from the nations where I scattered them.

I, the Sovereign LORD, say this to My sheep, the people of Israel: “I’ll separate the sheep, and also the sheep from the goats. You eat the greenest grass and trample down the rest. And you drink the clean water, and then walk in the water to make it muddy. Other sheep have only grass that’s been trampled on, and only muddy water to drink.”

Therefore, this is what I, the Sovereign LORD, say: “I’ll separate the fat sheep from the weak sheep. You fat sheep push and butt My weak sheep so

that they are scattered. I'll rescue My flock, and they'll no longer be abused. I'll know which of My sheep are fat and which ones are weak. I'll give you one shepherd, My servant David, and he'll provide for and care for you. I, the LORD, will be your God, and My servant David will be a prince." I, the LORD, have spoken these words.

"I'll give My people peace, and I'll force out the dangerous animals from the land. My people will be able to camp peacefully in wild places and sleep in the woods. I'll bless you and the places around My holy hill. I'll send rain, showers of blessings, and they will come at just the right time. Trees will produce their fruit, and crops will grow, and everyone will be safe. When I've set you free from slavery, then you'll know that I am the LORD. No longer will other nations defeat you, nor will wild animals attack you. You'll be safe and unafraid.

"Your land will be known for its abundant crops, and you'll never go hungry and never be laughed at by foreigners. You'll know that you, the people of Israel, are My people. You are My flock, the sheep of My pasture. You are My people, and I am your God," I, the Sovereign LORD, say.

Judgment Against Mount Seir and Edom

35 Again I, the LORD, spoke to Ezekiel: "Son of man, prophesy against the people of Mount Seir (Edom). Give them this message from Me, the Sovereign LORD: 'I'm your enemy, Mount Seir, and I'll destroy you completely. I'll destroy your cities and make your land a desert waste, and then you'll know that I am the LORD.'"

Seir means rugged country, and Edom was the nation south of the Dead Sea inhabited by the descendants of Esau. They had hated My people ever since Jacob tricked Esau out of the birthright for a mess of pottage. When My people were judged, Edom gloated and killed the survivors fleeing from danger. I said to Edom, "I will stretch out my hand against you" (v. 3).

"Your hatred for the people of Israel led you to kill them when they were helpless and being punished for their sins. As surely as I live," says

the Sovereign LORD, “since you enjoy blood so much, I’ll give you a bloodbath. I’ll make Mount Seir deserted, and I’ll kill any who try to escape and any who return. Dead bodies will cover your mountains, hills, and valleys, and your streams will be filled with people killed by the sword. You’ll be deserted forever, and your cities will never be rebuilt. Then you’ll know that I am the LORD.

“You thought Israel and Judah belonged to you, and that you could take over their land. But as surely as I live, I’ll pay back your angry deeds with Mine. I’ll punish you for being angry and hateful toward My people. I’ll honor My name by what I did to you. Then you’ll know that I, the LORD, heard every disrespectful word you said against Israel. You said, ‘They’ve been destroyed, and now we can take their land.’ But in saying that, you were speaking against Me, and I heard all that you said.”

I, the Sovereign LORD, say, “Everyone will be glad when they hear that I have made you desolate. You rejoiced that the land of Israel became deserted. Now I’ll rejoice that your land, Edom, will be desolate. You, Edom, will be desolate. Then you’ll know that I am the LORD.”

A Prophecy to the Mountains of Israel

36I, the LORD, said, “Son of man, prophesy to Israel’s mountains, and say, ‘Mountains of Israel, hear the Word of the Lord. Your enemies said your mountains belong to them.’ So, Son of man, give the mountains this message from Me, the Sovereign LORD. ‘Your enemies attacked you from every side, and now foreign nations have possessed you and make fun of you. Therefore, mountains of Israel, hear My Word. All you mountains, hills, streams, and valleys, listen to Me. Your towns will lie in ruins and are deserted, and foreign nations have destroyed them and made fun of you. But My anger is against these nations, especially Edom, because they laughed at you and took over your land.’” Therefore I, the Sovereign LORD, say to the mountains, hills, streams, and valleys, “I am very angry because you have suffered at the hands of foreign nations. Therefore, I now promise that those nations will suffer shame.

“Trees on your mountains will produce lots of fruit for My people who will soon return home. Israel, I’ll take care of you and help you by plowing your soil and sowing your crops. I’ll increase the population of Israel, and

the people will rebuild their ruined cities. Also, your flocks and herds will multiply. Mountains of Israel, I'll bring people to live on you again. And I'll make you more prosperous than before. Then you'll know that I am the Lord. I'll cause My people to walk on you again. You'll belong to them. And you'll never again be a place where they burn their children alive to idols."

I, the Sovereign LORD, say, "Other nations have made fun of you saying, 'Israel is a land that devours her people.' But you'll never do that again," say I, the Sovereign LORD. "I'll not allow these nations to make fun of you, and they'll no longer put you to shame."

This message also came from Me, the Lord: "Son of man, when the people of Israel were living in their land, they made it unclean by their sins. Their conduct was filthy as a bloody rag. They committed murder and worshiped idols, which further polluted the land. So I poured out My wrath on them, and I scattered them to other nations to punish them for their sins. But when they were in these other countries, they dishonored My holy name. The nations said, 'These are the Lord's people, and He couldn't keep them safe in His own land.' Then I was concerned that My holy name had been dishonored throughout the world."

Give the people of Israel this message from Me, the Sovereign LORD: "You don't deserve it, but I'm bringing you back to your land. Why then am I doing this? To protect the reputation of My holy name, which you dishonored. And My bringing you home will show the nations that I am the Lord. I'll gather you from the nations and bring you home again.

"It will be as if I sprinkle clean water on you, and you'll be clean. I'll wash away the filth of your sins, and you'll no longer worship idols. I'll give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you. This will replace your present stony hard heart of sin with a new, obedient heart."

Israel is the key to understanding My timetable of the future. Because of Israel's sin in the Old Testament, she was judged and scattered among the Gentile nations. In My time I sent My Son Jesus to live among the Jews and die for the sins of the world. Ezekiel's prediction will have a double fulfillment. Ezekiel said I will give a "new heart—and put a new spirit—within you and I will take away the stony heart" (v. 26). This is a picture of your regeneration when

you are born again and given new desires to serve Me. But it also has a second fulfillment when Israel is brought back to the land of promise and they are transformed inwardly.

“And I’ll put My Spirit in you to help you obey My laws and do what I command.”

Ezekiel also promises the double fulfillment of “I will put my Spirit within you” (v. 27). Jesus promised the Holy Spirit, “He dwells with you and will be in you” (John 14:17). This is a double enablement: first, believers have a new nature; and second, the nation Israel is given spiritual renewal when I bring her back to the land.

“You’ll again live in the land I gave your ancestors. You’ll be My people, and I’ll be your God. I’ll cleanse you of your sins, and give you abundant crops, and you’ll never again have famine in the land. You’ll have abundant crops from your fruit trees and fields, and never again will your neighboring nations make fun of you for having famines.

“You’ll remember your sinful ways and despise yourselves for what you did. But remember,” I say, “I’m not doing this because you deserve it. In fact, you should be ashamed of what you’ve done. I, the LORD, have promised this, and I’ll do it.”

I, the Sovereign LORD, say, “When I cleanse you from your sins, I’ll bring people to live in your cities, and the ruins of houses and cities will be rebuilt. Fields that used to be empty and desolate will again be farmed, after 70 years when the people were first taken into captivity. People will be amazed at the difference between the deserted land and the land that now looks like the Garden of Eden. Then surviving nations will know that I, the LORD, rebuilt the ruins and planted crops in the desert. I, the LORD, make this promise.”

This is what I, the Sovereign LORD, say: “I’ll once again hear your prayers, and I’m ready to grant these requests. The towns will be filled with people, and in the festivals, Jerusalem will be filled with flocks. Ruined cities will be filled with people once again, and everyone will know that I am the Lord.”

The Valley of Dried-Up Bones

37I, the Spirit of the LORD, carried Ezekiel to a valley filled with bones. I showed him the old, dry bones scattered on the valley floor. Then I said to him, “Son of man, can these bones come alive again?” Ezekiel replied, “Only You know the answer to that.” Then I said, “Tell the bones this: ‘Dry bones, listen to Me, the Word of the Lord. I, the LORD, will put breath in you. I’ll put muscles and skin on you and breathe life into you. Then you’ll know that I am the Lord.’”

Israel had given up hope when the people heard Jerusalem had fallen and was destroyed, “Our hope is lost” (v. 11). The dead bones are Israel, and this chapter is a message of hope and encouragement. Israel will live again. There are two aspects of the resurrection; first, it will be a national re-emergence of the nation Israel as individuals are brought together without life, that is, bone to bone. This is a reference to the nation Israel coming together politically in May, 1948 in the land of Israel. They did not recognize Me as their Lord, so they were in unbelief.

So I, the LORD, spoke those words, and immediately Ezekiel heard a rattling noise all across the valley. The bones were coming together and attached to each other. Muscles and skin covered the bones, but they had no life in them.

Then I, the LORD, told Ezekiel to tell the wind to blow from all four directions and to breathe life into these bodies. So, I the LORD, gave them this command and they came back to life and stood up. There were so many, it was like a vast army.

The second resurrection refers to the spiritual regeneration of physical Jews into the future millennium. Jews will repent and return to Me their Lord, and then they will be regenerated. The Jews who died in faith will be resurrected and join them in the land. Jesus will be the ruler. Israel will no longer defile themselves. I predicted this great plan for the Jews and I will raise them up.

Then I, the LORD, said, “Ezekiel, the people of Israel are like these dead bones. They complain that they are old and dried out and that they have no hope. So say to them that I, the Sovereign LORD, say I’ll open your graves and bring you out. And I’ll bring you back to the land of Israel. Then when I do this, you’ll know that I’m the Lord. I’ll put My Spirit in you and you’ll live, and I’ll settle you in your land. Then you’ll know that I’ve done as I said, and that I’ve spoken these words.”

Again I, the LORD, said, “Get a stick and write on it ‘The kingdom of Judah.’ Then get another stick and write on it, ‘The kingdom of Israel.’ Join them together so that they are like one stick. When people ask you what this means, tell them, ‘I, the Sovereign LORD, will join Israel and Judah, making them one.’ Hold these sticks together and tell the people of Israel that I’ll bring them home from the nations where they are scattered. They’ll be one nation in the land with a king over them. They’ll no longer be two nations. They’ll no longer worship idols and commit other sins. I’ll wash them from their sins and make them clean, and I’ll keep them from backsliding. They’ll again be My people, and I’ll be their God.

“My servant David will be their king, and he’ll be like a shepherd to them. They’ll obey My regulations and keep My laws. They’ll live in the land where their ancestors lived, the land I gave My servant, Jacob. I promise to give them eternal peace. I’ll multiply them as a nation, and I’ll have My temple stand in the land forever. I’ll live among My people, and I’ll be their God and they’ll be My people. Everyone will know that My temple is in Israel and that I’ve set the Israelites apart to be holy to Me.”

A Future Invasion of Israel

38I, the LORD, said, “Son of man, speak against Gog, in the land of Magog, who rules over Meshech and Tubal. Give him this message from Me, the Sovereign LORD: ‘I, the LORD God, am your enemy, and I’ll put a hook in your jaws, and drag away you and your army, with your cavalry, and shields and swords. Your army includes soldiers from Persia, Ethiopia, and Libya with their shields and helmets, and also Gomer and Beth-Togarmah in the far north.

“Be prepared for your armies to fight because in the future I’ll command you to invade Israel, a people recovered from war but who’ll

have returned from foreign nations where they once lived. They now live in safety in the mountains of their own land. But you'll attack them, advancing like a storm and surrounding them like a cloud.

“In that future day you'll have evil thoughts and you'll devise a wicked plan. You'll plan to invade a land of unwalled villages where the people are peaceful and living in safety and in towns without walls, gates, and bars. You'll rob people in towns that were once in ruins. They are now filled with people who were captives in foreign nations, but they have now returned to Israel and are rich in livestock and goods. People of Sheba and Dedan and merchants from southern Spain will be your allies. You'll loot some of their silver and gold and livestock and goods.’

“Son of man, prophesy against Gog and say in that day, when My people are living in peace, you'll lead your powerful cavalry, and go against My people like a cloud. In the future days, Gog, I'll bring you against My land. Then every nation will know that I, the LORD, am holy.”

I, the Sovereign LORD, say, “Years ago I had My prophets warn the people of Israel that I would send an enemy to attack them. But when you invade Israel, I'll be very angry, and in My anger, I'll send a terrible earthquake. All living things: wild animals, reptiles, and humans will tremble in fear of Me. Mountains will be overturned, cliffs will crumble, and cities will collapse. I, the LORD, will summon the sword against you. Your soldiers will be so frightened that they'll attack each other. I'll punish you with disease and death. I'll pour rain, hail, and burning Sulphur on you and your army. In this way I'll show My greatness and holiness and I'll make Myself known to the nations. Then they'll know that I, the LORD, am holy.”

Note the following timeline. 1. Israel will be scattered among the Gentiles, without a home of her own. (First by Babylon, 586 BC, then by Rome, AD 70). 2. The U.N. recognized Israel's home west of Jordan in May, 1948. 3. After the rapture of the church, the antichrist will make a covenant with Israel to give them safety for 7 years in their home land (Dan. 9:26-27). 4. The antichrist will do miracles and impose himself as deity upon the world, including Israel (2 Thess. 2:4; Rev. 13:4-10). 5. A coalition of the nations will make war against Israel (Rev. 16:13-16). 6. The Lord Jesus will

return from heaven (Rev. 19:19) and overcome them (Rev. 19:20-21). 7. Then He will usher in the Millennium.

Prophecies Against Gog

39“Son of man, prophesy against Gog and tell him, ‘You are the leader of Meshech and Tubal, but I, the LORD, am your enemy. I’ll drag you from the north, and I’ll bring you to the mountains of Israel. I’ll knock the bow out of your left hand and the arrows out of your right hand. You and your vast army will die on the mountains. Birds and wild animals will eat your dead bodies in the open fields.’ I, the Sovereign LORD, have spoken. ‘I’ll set Magog on fire as well as nations on the coast. They’ll know that I am the Lord.

“My people will no longer desecrate My holy name. Everyone will know that I am the Lord, the Holy One of Israel. The day is coming when these things will happen just as I have said. When that day comes, people in the towns of Israel will collect the weapons of their enemies—shields, bows and arrows, spears, and clubs—and will use them for fuel for seven years. They won’t need to gather wood from the fields or chop down trees. This will be the Israelites’ way of taking revenge on those who robbed and looted them.

“I’ll make a vast graveyard for Gog and his army east of the Dead Sea. That graveyard will block the way of anyone who tries to walk through the valley. So it will be known as “the Valley of Gog’s Army.” The Israelites will spend seven months burying dead bodies. Everyone in Israel will help, and I, the LORD, will honor them when they see My glory. After those seven months people will be appointed to bury those that remain on the ground. When one of them finds a human bone, he’ll set up a marker beside it. Then the gravediggers will bury those bones in “the Valley of God’s Army.” A town named Hamonah (meaning “Gog’s Army”) will be nearby.

“Son of man, call all the birds and wild animals to come from every direction to a great feast at the mountains of Israel where they’ll eat the flesh and drink the blood of the dead soldiers. They will feast on the dead bodies of great men as though they were rams, lambs, goats, and fat young bulls of Bashan. The birds and animals may eat till they are full and drink

until they are drunk. At My banquet table you may feast on horses, riders, and great warriors,’” say I, the Sovereign LORD.

Therefore I, the Sovereign LORD, say, “I’ll bring back My glory among the nations. Everyone will see the punishment I’ve inflicted on them. Then the Israelites will know that I am the LORD their God. Foreign nations will realize the Israelites had to leave their land because of their sin against Me. They deserved to be punished because of their wicked ways.”

Now I, the Sovereign LORD, say, “I’ll show mercy to the Israelites and bring them back from the nations where they were captives. They’ll be safe in their land, but they’ll be ashamed of their sinful ways. Foreign nations will know that I am the Lord their God when I bring them back to their land. I’ll never again turn My back on the people of Israel, and My Spirit will live in them.”

Most biblical scholars agree that Gog (38:1) is a symbolic name for the nations that live north of Israel. Meshech is Moscow. Tubal, a son of Japheth (Gen. 10:2), lived in the Caucasus Mountains. Persia is today’s Iran, Ethiopia is today’s nation in Northern Africa, and Libya another nation in Northern Africa on the Mediterranean Sea. Gomer is modern-day Germany, and Togarmah is modern Turkey (38:2-6). Some of these nations in opposition to Israel are Arabic. Israel’s enemies appear to oppose Israel to the end, just as some people will hate you because of your faith. They will not change their hatred until I transform them through the new birth or commit them to eternal punishment.

I, The LORD, Show Ezekiel My House

40In the 25th year of the captivity of King Jehoiachin and the rest of the people in Babylon and 14 years after the Babylonians captured Jerusalem (574 BC), My power took hold of Ezekiel on the tenth day of the first month. In this vision I carried Ezekiel to a high mountain in Jerusalem and on the south side of the mountain there were some buildings that looked like a city. I, the LORD, took him closer, and he saw a man who was sparkling like bronze. He was standing near one of the gates and holding a

tape measure in one hand and a measuring rod in the other. The man said to Ezekiel, “Son of man, pay careful attention to what I’ll show you, because that is why I’ve brought you here. Then you are to tell the people of Israel what you’ve seen.”

The first thing Ezekiel saw was a wall surrounding My Temple area. The man took his measuring rod, which was 10 feet long, and he measured the wall. It was 10 feet high and 10 feet thick. Then he went to the gate that faced east, and he walked up steps that led to a long passageway. It was 10 feet deep. Guard alcoves were built into the gateway passage. Each alcove was 10 and a half feet deep, and they were separated by a distance between them of 8 feet. The gateway’s inner threshold, which led to the foyer at the end of the passage, was 10 feet deep, and faced My Temple. The last guardroom was 13 feet from the doorway to the opposite wall, and the distance from the doorway to the wall on either side was three feet. The three guardrooms on each side of the passageway were the same size, and the walks that separated them were the same thickness.

Then the man measured the width of the passageway, and it was 22 feet, and the two doors of the gate were 16 feet wide. In front of each alcove was a wall 21 inches thick. And the alcoves were 100 feet square. He measured the entrance room at the far end of the passageway, and it was 42 feet. The entrance room at the far end of the passage was 34 feet wide. He also measured the inside walls of the gate complex; it was 90 feet from the porch to the courtyard. The man also measured the length of the passageway, and it was 85 feet. The three walls in the guardrooms had small windows in them, like the ones in the entrance room. The walls along the passageway were decorated with carved palm trees.

The man then led Ezekiel through the passageway and into the outer courtyard of My Temple. Thirty rooms were built against the outer wall, and in front of them was a sidewalk around the courtyard. This was called the lower sidewalk, and it was 85 feet wide. He saw the gates leading to the temple’s inner courtyard, and he saw that they were higher than the gates leading to the outer courtyard. The distance between the outer and inner gates was 175 feet.

Then the man measured the north gate leading to the outer courtyard. This gate also had three guardrooms on each side of the passageway. The measurements of these rooms and of the walls between them, and the

entrance room at the far end of the passageway were the same as those of the east gate. The north gate was also 85 feet long and 42 feet wide. The windows, the entrance room, and the carvings of palm trees were exactly like those in the east gate. The entrance room also faced the courtyard and had seven steps leading up to it. On the north side was another gateway leading to the inner courtyard opposite the outer gateway. The distance between the outer and inner gates was 175 feet.

The man then took Ezekiel to the south gate. He measured the walls and the entrance room of this gate, and the measurements were the same as those of the other two gates. Windows were in the guardrooms of this gate and in the entrance room, like the others, and this gate was 85 feet long and 42 feet wide. Seven steps led up to the gate, and palm tree decorations were along the dividing walls. Another gateway led into the inner courtyard. The distance between the two gateways was 175 feet.

Then the man took Ezekiel to the south gate that led into the inner courtyard. It had the same measurements as the other gateways. Everything along the passageway was the same size, and this included the guardrooms, the walls separating them, the entrance room at the far end, and the windows. This gate was like the others, 85 feet long and 42 feet wide. Its guardrooms and entrance and exit halls and windows were identical to the others. The one difference is that eight steps, not seven, led up to the gate. Palm tree decorations were on the passageway walls.

Next, he went through the east gate to the inner courtyard. This gate had the same measurements as the others. The guardrooms, the walls separating them, the windows, the entrance rooms, and everything along the passageway was the same size. This gate was 85 feet long and 42 feet wide. The entrance room faced the outer courtyard, and palm trees decorated the walls. Eight steps led up to this gate.

Then the man took Ezekiel to the north gate. Its guard rooms, the walls separating them, and its entrance rooms were the same size as the others. The guard rooms, the walls separating them, and the entrance room were the same size as the other gates. The entrance room had windows and the gate was 85 feet long and 42 feet wide. The entrance room faced the outer courtyard, and the passageway walls were decorated with carvings of palm trees. Eight steps led up to this gate.

A door led from the foyer of the inner gateway on the north side into a side room where there were four tables where animals to be sacrificed were killed. Outside this room was a small building used for washing animals before they were offered as sacrifices to Me, the LORD. Outside the foyer were two more tables leading to the north entrance. So there were eight tables in all, four inside and four outside. At these eight tables the sacrifices were cut up and prepared. Four stone tables were 21 inches high and 31 inches square where animals were butchered for burnt offerings. The butchering knives and other implements were kept on the tables. Hooks, each three inches long, were attached to the walls. The flesh of the offerings was to be laid on the tables.

The man then took Ezekiel to the inner courtyard where there were two one-room buildings, one beside the inner northern gate facing south, and one beside the inner southern gate facing north. The man said to Ezekiel, “The building beside the north gate is for the priests who supervise the temple, and the building beside the south gate is for the priests who serve at the altar. They are descendants of Zadok, the only Levites allowed to serve as My priests.”

The man measured the inner courtyard, and it was 175 feet square. An altar was in front of My Temple. Then he measured the doorway of the porch. Ten steps led up to it from the inner court. The doorway was 24 feet long, eight feet wide, and the distance from the doorway to the wall on either side was five feet. The entry hall was 34 feet by 20 feet, with steps leading up to it with a column on each side.

Ezekiel is transported in a vision to My Temple mount. What is this temple? 1. Some say it describes Solomon's Temple that was destroyed. 2. Some say it is the blueprint for Zerubbabel to rebuild My Temple. 3. Some say it is the place for the returning Jews to build during the Tribulation. But notice what is left out, that is, the sacred chest, the mercy seat, the Table of Showbread, and the golden lamp stand. 4. Some say this is an allegory of the future temple in heaven where the Body of Christ will worship. 5. Perhaps all these views are wrong, and that Ezekiel is describing a real temple in Jerusalem in the future. I will keep My promises to Israel and they will worship Me in this temple in Jerusalem in the future

Millennium. But you don't need a temple, because wherever My presence is located, that's My sanctuary.

My Temple Measurements

41 Then the man brought Ezekiel into the holy place, the large main room of My Temple. He measured the doorway to this room, and it was 10 feet wide, 17 feet long, and the distance from the doorway to the wall on either side was eight feet. This main room was 68 feet by 34 feet. Then the man walked to the far end of the holy place, and he said, "Beyond this doorway is the most holy place." He measured the doorway. It was three feet wide, 10 feet long, and the distance from the doorway to the wall on each side was 12 feet. The most holy place was 34 feet square.

Ezekiel is shown "the most Holy Place" which is the "Holy of Holies." This is the room where the sacred chest was located, and the High Priest entered with blood on the Day of Atonement to make redemption for My people. It is the Holy of all Holies, because I, a holy God, came to dwell in that room. Nothing can be more holy than Me. Let Me make your heart a "holy of holies," the sanctuary of My presence.

The man then measured the wall and found that it was 10 feet thick, with a row of rooms along the outside wall, each seven feet wide. These rooms were in three levels, one above the others, with 30 rooms in each level. They rested on ledges attached to My Temple walls, so that nothing was built into the walls. My Temple walls were thicker at the bottom than at the top, so that the level of rooms at the top were wider than those at the bottom. A stairway at the side of My Temple led from the bottom level to the middle level to the top level.

My Temple was built on stone base ten feet high, which was also the foundation for the storage rooms. The outside walls of the storage rooms were eight feet thick. The nearest buildings were 34 feet away from a row of rooms in the inner court. One door led into the storage rooms on the

north side of My Temple, and another door led to the storage rooms on the south side.

Another building faced the west end of My Temple. It was 117 feet wide, 150 feet long, and its walls were over eight feet thick. The man measured the length of My Temple, and it was 175 feet. The courtyard around the back wall of My Temple was also 175 feet. And the distance across the front of My Temple was 175 feet. The length of the west building with its side rooms was also 175 feet.

The inside walls of My Temple porch and the holy place and most holy place were paneled with wood along with the window frames and side rooms. The space above the door leading into the most holy place was also paneled. The walls were decorated with carvings of creatures. Each had two faces, and a carving of a palm tree was between each winged creature. One face was that of a man, and it looked to one of the palm trees. The other face was that of a young lion, and it looked to the palm tree on the other side. These figures were carved all along the inside of My Temple; from the floor to the top of the walls.

Square pillars were at the entrance to the holy place and the most holy place. A wooden altar in front of the doorway to the most holy place was five feet high and four feet square. Its corners, base, and sides were all made of wood. The man said, "This altar is a reminder of the Lord's presence."

The doorway to the main room of My Temple and the doorway to the most holy place had two doors, and each door had two sections that could be opened. The doors leading into the holy place were decorated with carvings of winged creatures and palm trees like those on the walls. And there was a wooden covering over the porch outside these doors. Small windows decorated with carvings of palm trees were on each side of the porch.

Chambers to the North and South

42The man (angel) led Ezekiel into the outer courtyard and brought him to the rooms against the north wall of the courtyards. This set of rooms was 175 feet long and 87 and a half feet wide. The rows of rooms were on

the inner wall of the courtyard. The rooms were on three levels with doors opening toward the north, and in front of them was a walkway 18 feet wide and 175 feet long. Each level of rooms was narrower than those below it. Since the levels did not have supporting pillars as the courtyards, the central and top levels were set back from the level below it. An outer wall separated the rooms from the outer courtyard. It was 87 and a half feet deep. But the rooms closest to My Temple measured 175 feet. A door led from the outer courtyard to the lower level of rooms.

Also, a set of rooms was on the south side of the outer courtyard, opposite the outer wall. These were like rooms on the north and had the same length and width. Also, a walkway was in front of these rooms. The door to the beginning of the passageway to these rooms was like the passageway on the wall on the east.

Then the man said to Ezekiel, “The rooms on the north and south sides of the temple are for the priests to eat the food from the holy offerings. These include grain offerings, sin offerings, and guilt offerings. After the priests enter these rooms, they are not to go into the outer courtyard until they leave behind the garments in which they minister, for they are holy, and are to put on regular clothes.”

When the man finished measuring the inside of My Temple area, he took Ezekiel back through the east gate and measured the wall around the entire area. The east side was 840 feet long, the north side was 840 feet long, the south side was 840 feet long, and the west side was 840 feet long. The distance was the same on all four sides, making My Temple area a perfect square. The wall separated the holy from the common.

Because Ezekiel was born in the Tribe of Levi and had been a priest (1:3), he was concerned with the rooms in My Temple and gave their exact measurements.

My Glory Returns to My Temple

43 Then the man took Ezekiel to the gate facing east, and he saw My glory, the God of Israel, coming from the east. He heard a sound like the roar of rushing water, and the land was radiant with My glory. The

vision was like what he had seen when he came to destroy the city of Jerusalem and like the visions he had seen by the Kebar River, and he fell facedown. I, the LORD's glory, entered My Temple through the eastern gate.

Ezekiel saw My glory return to Jerusalem through the East Gate. This is the same gate by which My glory left Jerusalem (10:19). There is a principle to remember: I return the way I left. When you sin in any area of your life, you must get My presence back through the way I left.

The Spirit lifted Ezekiel up and took him into the inner court, and My glory filled My Temple.

Attend a church every Lord's Day to meet Me there. Speak to Me when you obey My command to gather with other believers.

The man was standing beside Ezekiel, and he heard Me, the LORD, say from inside My Temple, "Son of man, this temple is My throne on earth. I'll live here among the Israelites forever. They and their kings will never defile My holy name again by their prostitution and their worship of lifeless idols at their hilltop shrines. They built their idol temples right next to Mine, with only a wall between them. This and their evil ways ruined My holy name and so I destroyed them in My anger. But if they stop worshiping these idols and tear down the pillars to honor their kings, I'll live among them forever.

"Son of man, describe My Temple to the Israelites, so they'll be ashamed of their sins. Show them the plan, explaining the design and shape. Then if they are truly sorry for having sinned against Me, explain to them the gates and measurements, and the regulations about worshiping there. Then write these things down so they can study and obey them. The most important thing about My temple mount is its holiness.

"These are to be the measurements of the altar. Around the altar at the bottom there is to be a gutter 20 inches wide and 20 inches deep, with a 9-

inch ledge on the outer rim. The altar is to rest on a base of three sections, each of them square. The bottom section is to be 27 feet on each side and three feet high. The middle section is to be 24 feet on each side and 7 feet high, with a 10-inch rim around the outer edge. The top section, which is to be 20 feet on each side and 7 feet high, is where sacrifices were burned. The four corners of the altar looked like the horns of a bull. Steps leading up to the altar were on the east side.”

I, the LORD God, said to Ezekiel, “Son of man, I, the Sovereign LORD, say that after the altar is built, it must be dedicated to Me by having the priests of the family of Zadok slaughter a young bull as a sacrifice for sin. Smear some of the animal’s blood on the four horns of the altar, the four corners of the upper ledge, and the rim that runs around that ledge. This will cleanse it and make atonement for the altar. Then take the young bull for the sin offering and burn it at the appointed place outside My Temple area.

“The next day offer as a sacrifice for sin a goat with no physical defects. Sprinkle its blood on the altar just as you did with the blood of the bull. Then choose a young bull and a young ram that have no physical defects and bring them to Me at the temple. As a cleansing ceremony sprinkle salt on them and offer them as sacrifices to Me.

“Every day for seven days sacrifice a male goat and young bull, and a ram as a sin offering. These animals are to have no physical defects. Do this each day for seven days, thus setting it apart for Me. On the eighth day and each day after that, the priests are to sacrifice on the altar the burnt offerings and thank offerings of the people. Then I’ll be pleased with you,” I, the Sovereign LORD, say.

The Laws Concerning My House

44 The man took Ezekiel back to the outer courtyard and near the east gateway, but the doors to this gate were closed. Then I, the LORD, said to him, “This gate must remain closed because I, the LORD, the God of Israel, entered here. No one must use it.”

Ezekiel deals with those who may minister in the new temple. Ezekiel sees the East Gate is shut permanently, “It shall not be

opened” (v. 2). That’s because the Lord came through that gate and a human would desecrate it.

“The ruler of Israel may come here to eat a sacrificed meal that’s been offered to Me, but he must use only the entrance room of this gate.”

Then the man took Ezekiel through the north gateway. He saw that My glory, the presence of the LORD, filled My Temple, and he fell with his face to the ground.

Again Ezekiel “looked and behold My glory of the LORD filled My house: and he fell on his face” (44:4).

Then I, the LORD, said, “Son of man, I’ll give you laws for My temple. So listen carefully to what I tell you, who can be admitted to My Temple and who is to be excluded. Say to these rebellious foreigners that you have sinned greatly by letting godless pagans enter My temple. You let them enter My temple to offer sacrifices to Me, and you have put foreigners in charge of worship at My temple. And so I, the LORD God, say that no godless foreigners will be allowed in the temple. And this includes foreign residents living in Israel.”

I, the LORD, said, “The people of the tribe of Levi who worshiped idols must be punished. They’ll be allowed to serve only as temple workers by guarding the gates and killing animals to be sacrificed and helping the worshipers. But because these Levites worshiped idols, I, the LORD God, will see that these Levites will be punished. These priests did not stop the Israelites from sinning. So now I’ll no longer let the Levites serve as My priests. They may not touch any of My holy things or the holy offerings, because they must bear the shame of all the sins they’ve committed. All they’ll be allowed to do is maintenance work and helping the people in a general way.

“The Levitical priests who are descendants of Zadok were faithful to Me when other Israelites disobeyed Me. So these priests will continue to stand in My presence and offer the fat and blood of sacrifices,” say I, the Sovereign LORD. “They are the ones who’ll enter where they’ll offer sacrifices at My altar. When they enter the inner courtyard, they must wear

their linen priestly garments. My priests must never wear anything made of wool when they are on duty in the courtyard or the temple. Their turbans and undergarments must also be of linen, because wearing wool will cause them to perspire. Before they return to the outer courtyard, they must remove their linen garments and leave them in the sacred rooms and put on their regular clothing. That way no one will touch their garments and be consecrated by them.

“They must not shave their heads or let their hair grow long, but they must keep it properly trimmed. They must not drink wine before entering the inner courtyard. They may marry only virgins from Israel or widows of another priest. Priests must teach My people the difference between what is sacred and what is ordinary, between what is clean and what is unclean. They’ll make decisions in different legal cases, according to My laws. They must also observe the religious festivals My law requires and must respect the Sabbath.

“A priest must not go near a dead body unless it’s one of his parents or children, or his butler or an unmarried sister. If a priest touches a dead body, he is unclean and must go through a ceremony to make himself ceremonially clean. Seven days later he must go to the inner courtyard and offer a sacrifice for sin. After that he may again serve as My priest.” I, the LORD God, have spoken these words.

“The priests are not to own any property, because I’ll provide for them. Instead they’ll receive part of the grain sacrifices and part of the sin offerings and part of the guilt offerings. They’ll also receive anything in Israel that has been completely dedicated to Me. Also, the first part of every harvest will belong to the priests. And they’ll receive part of all gifts and offerings the Israelites bring to Me. The first part of the people’s flour must be given to the priests, and I’ll bless the homes of the people who do this. The priests must not eat any bird or animal that dies a natural death or that has been killed by a wild animal.”

The Division of the Land

45When you divide the land among the tribes of Israel, you must first give a section of it to Me. This area will be eight miles long and three miles wide. My Temple will be on a piece of land 840 feet square, and My

Temple will be surrounded by an open space 84 feet wide. The most holy place will be located on a sacred piece of land eight miles long and three miles wide. I'll give half of my sacred land, eight miles long and three miles wide, to the priests who serve in My temple. Their houses and My Temple will be in this half.

I'll give the other half of My land to the Levites who work in My temple, and the towns where they live will be there.

Next to the larger sacred land will be an area eight miles long and two miles wide. This will belong to the people of Israel and will include the city of Jerusalem.

Ezekiel described the portion of land that is designated for the priest. It is to be on a high hill (v. 2) with walled courts for privacy and protection (v. 4). Notice the place they live "shall be holy" (v. 1). That suggests you must dedicate your house (apartments, condos, or rooms) to Me to be holy.

I, the LORD, say, "The area west and east of My sacred land and the city of Jerusalem will belong to the ruler of Israel. He'll have the region between the western edge of My land, the Mediterranean Sea, and between the eastern edge of My land and the Jordan River. The length of this property will be the same as the sections of land given to the tribes. These sections of land will be for the prince of Israel."

I, the LORD God, then said, "You leaders of Israel will no longer oppress and rob My people. Assign the rest of the land to the people, giving an allotment to each tribe. You must do what I, the Sovereign LORD, say. 'You princes of Israel, start doing what is right and stop expelling people from their homes. Use only honest weights and scales, honest dry volume measures, and honest dry and liquid volume measures. The homer (about six and a half bushels) will be your standard dry measure, and the ephah will be one-tenth of a homer for dry measure and the bath will be one-tenth of a homer for liquid measure. The standard unit of weight will be the shekel (about half an ounce). One shekel will equal 20 gerahs, and 60 shekels will equal one mina.

“You must give the prince a bushel of wheat or barley for every 60 you reap, 1 percent of your olive oil, and one sheep for every 200 in your flocks. These will be the grain offerings, burnt offerings, and peace offerings that will be substitutionary payment for sin,’ say I, the Sovereign LORD. ‘The people must join the prince in bringing these offerings. The prince is to provide offerings that are given at religious festivals, the new moon celebrations, the Sabbath days, and all similar occasions.’”

I, the Sovereign God, say, “In early spring, on the first day of each new year, sacrifice to Me a young bull that has no physical defects. This is to purify My Temple. The priests are to put some of the blood of this animal on the doorposts of My Temple and on the four corners of the altar and on the doorposts of the gates that lead into the inner courtyard. The same must be done on the seventh day of the month, so that anyone who sins accidentally without knowing it will help keep My temple holy.

“Each year celebrate the Passover, beginning on the 14th day of the new year and continuing for seven days. Eat only bread made without yeast. On the first day of the Passover the prince is to offer a young bull as a sin offering for himself and the people. Each day of the Passover the prince is to bring seven bulls and seven rams without any physical defects as a burnt offering to Me, the LORD. Also, a male goat is to be offered each day for a sin offering. The prince will give half a bushel of flour as a grain offering and a gallon of olive oil with each bull and ram.

“During the seven days of the Festival of Shelters which occurs every year in early autumn, the prince is to provide these same sacrifices for the sin offering, the burnt offering, and the grain offering, along with the required amount of olive oil.”

The Prince and the Offerings

46I, the Sovereign LORD, say, “The east gate of the inner courtyard is to remain closed during the six work days of each week. Then it is to be opened on the Sabbath and on the days of the new moon festival. The prince will go into the entrance room of this gate and stand by the doorpost while the priest offers a burnt offering and a fellowship offering. He is to worship inside the gate passage and then go out the way he came in. And the gate is to stay open till the evening. Each Sabbath day and on the days

of new moon festivals the people of Israel are to come worship Me, the LORD, in front of the east gate.

“Each Sabbath day the prince is to present to Me a burnt offering of six lambs and one ram with no physical defects. With the ram he is to bring a grain offering of half a bushel of flour and with each lamb he may bring whatever amount of flour he wishes. Also, he must offer a gallon of olive oil for each half bushel of flour. For the new moon festival, he is to offer a bull, six lambs, and one ram, with no physical defects. With the bull he is to bring a half bushel of flour for a grain offering, and the same with the ram. And with each lamb he may bring whatever amount of flour he wishes. Also, he must offer a gallon of olive oil for each half bushel of flour.

“The prince must enter My Temple area through the entrance room of the east gate and exit the same way. But when the people come through the north gateway to worship Me in the religious festivals, they must leave through the south gateway. And those who enter through the south gateway must leave by the north gateway. They must never go out the same way they came in, they must always use the opposite passageway. And on these occasions the prince will enter and leave with the people.

“For the special festivals the grain offering will include half a bushel of flour with each bull, another half bushel of flour with each ram, and as much flour as the prince chooses for each lamb. Also, a gallon of olive oil is to be given with each half bushel of flour. Whenever the prince offers a voluntary burnt offering or fellowship offering to Me, the LORD, the east gateway to the inner courtyard will be opened and he’ll offer his sacrifices as on the Sabbath. Then he’ll leave, and the gate will be closed.

“Each morning a year-old lamb without any physical defects is to be sacrificed as a burnt offering to Me, the LORD. With the lamb a grain offering is to be given to Me consisting of about three pounds of flour and half a gallon of olive oil to mix with the flour. This law must never change. The lamb, the flour, and the olive oil must be given every morning to Me.”

I, the Sovereign LORD, also say this: “If a prince gives some land to his son, it will belong to him and his descendants forever. But if the prince gives some land to a servant of his, the servant may keep it till the Year of Jubilee, which comes every 50 years. Then it will be returned to the prince. Only what the prince gives to his sons will be permanent. The prince must never take land from someone by force. If he gives property to his sons, it

must be from his own land. I don't want My people losing their property by force."

Ezekiel then said, "The man brought me through the entrance between the gateway and took me to the sacred rooms assigned to the priests that faced north. He showed me a place at the west end of these rooms, and said, 'This is where the priests are to boil the meat of the trespass offerings and the sin offerings and to bake the flour from the grain offerings into bread. They are to do these things here, so they won't have to carry the offerings through the outer courtyard where someone could accidentally be sanctified by them.

"Then the man brought me back to the outer courtyard and took me to each of its four corners. In each corner was an area 70 feet long and 52 and a half feet wide enclosed by walls. Around the inside of these walls was a low ledge of stone and fireplaces along the ledge.' The man said, 'These are the kitchens where the temple workers will boil the meat of sacrifices offered by the people.'"

The Waters Flowing From My House

47 Then the angel brought Ezekiel back to My Temple entrance. There he saw a stream flowing from beneath My Temple flowing eastward to the right of the altar. Then the angel brought him outside the wall through the north gateway and around the east gate. The stream was flowing east through the south side of the east gateway. The angel measured along the streams for 1,680 feet. Then he told Ezekiel to wade across, and he did, and the water was up to his ankles. The angel measured off another 1,680 feet, and told Ezekiel to wade through it there. When he did, the water was up to my knees. Another 1,680 feet downstream and the water came to Ezekiel's waist. After another 1,680 feet the stream was a river that was so deep Ezekiel could cross only by swimming.

The angel told Ezekiel to keep in mind what he'd seen. They then went back along the riverbank.

Ezekiel saw a river "trickling" (v. 1, NASB) out from under the throne. This is a picture of My grace or mercy that "trickles" down

to you. The water kept getting deeper: “to the ankles” (v. 3), “to the knees” (v. 4), “to my waist” (v. 4), “water to swim” (v. 5). Even when storms and deep water threaten you, you can swim in My grace. The more you need My forgiveness, the more I have for you. My grace meets your needs, and that no matter how deep the troubles; I have grace to cover all your sin.

Ezekiel was surprised to see trees growing on each side of the river. The angel said to him, “This river flows east to the Jordan River valley and enters the Dead Sea, where it turns salt water into fresh water. Wherever this river flows, fish will abound, for its fresh waters will bring life.”

Ezekiel was told, “Everything will live wherever the river goes” (v. 9). This will happen literally in the Millennium; but for you today, symbolically, My grace gives you new life. You are regenerated, transformed and given a new purpose in life.

“From En-Gedi to En-Eglaim people will fish in the sea and dry their nets along the coast. Fish of every kind will fill the Dead Sea just as they do the Mediterranean. But marshes along the coast will still be salty, so that in that way people will have access to salt.

“All kinds of fruit trees will be growing on both sides of the river and will produce fresh fruit every month. These leaves will never fade and drop. The trees will be watered by the river flowing from the temple, and the leaves will be for healing the people.”

I, the Sovereign LORD, say this: “These are the instructions to follow in dividing the land for Israel’s twelve tribes. The tribe of Joseph will receive twice as much as each of the other tribes. Each tribe will receive an equal share, as I promised to your ancestors and which you’ll receive. The borders of the land are these.

“The northern border will run from the Mediterranean Sea toward Hethlon, then on through Lebo-Hamath to Zedad. Then it will run to Berothah and Sibram, which are on the border between Damascus and Hamath, and finally to Hazer-Hatticon, on the border of Hauran. So the

northern border will run from the Mediterranean Sea to Hazar-Enan, on the border between Hamath to the north and Damascus to the south.

“The eastern border will start at a point between Hauran and Damascus and run south along the Jordan River between Israel and Gilead, past the Dead Sea and as far south as Tamar. This will be the eastern border.

“The southern border will go west from Tamar to the waters of Meribah at Kadesh and then follow the course of the brook of Egypt to the Mediterranean Sea. This will be the southern border.

“On the west side, the Mediterranean Sea itself will be your border from the southern border to the point where the northern border begins, opposite Lebo-Hamath.

“These are the boundaries for the land of Israel. The land is to be an inheritance for you and foreign residents with their families. They are to be like native-born Israelites and their children are to receive an inheritance in the land with the same rights as your own children. These foreign residents are to receive a share of the land in the territory of the tribe with whom they now live.” I, the Sovereign LORD, have spoken these words.

The Division of the Land

48“Here is a list of the tribes and the territory each is to receive. The territory of Dan is in the extreme north. Its boundary line follows the Hethlon road to Lebo-Hamath and then runs on to Hazar-Enan on the border of Damascus, with Hamath to the north. Dan’s territory extends all the way across the land of Israel from east to west. Asher’s territory lies south of Dan’s and also extends from east to west. Naphtali’s land lies south of Asher’s, also extending from east to west. Then comes Manasseh south of Naphtali, and its territory also extends from east to west. South of Manasseh is Ephraim, and then Reuben, and then Judah, all of whose boundaries extend from east to west.

“South of Judah will be land set aside for a special purpose. It will be eight miles long and its width will run from Israel’s eastern border to the Mediterranean Sea, with My temple in the center.”

“The area for the temple will be eight miles long and three miles wide. Half of this land will be for the priests, with the strip of land eight miles

long and one and a half miles wide. This land is for the descendants of the Levitical tribe of Zadok who were faithful to Me when the Levites and other Israelites started sinning. The land will be their special portion, and the other Levites will live next to the descendants of Zadok. The land I give to the Levites is to be the same size and shape as for the Zadok priests—eight miles long and one and a half miles wide. None of this land is to be sold or traded for it belongs to Me.”

This chapter indicates where each tribe will be located. Each tribe is given a portion without any regard to the original assignment given in Joshua 13-21 after the conquest.

“South of My sacred land will be a section eight miles long and two miles wide. It will belong to the people and will include the city of Jerusalem with its houses and pastureland. The city will be a square of one and a fourth miles on each side. An open area for pasture of about 20 feet wide will surround the city. The land on the east and west sides of the city will be farmland for the people of Jerusalem. Both portions will be three miles long and two miles wide. People from the city may farm the land no matter which tribe they belong to. This special section of land, including the city, will be a square of eight miles on each side.

“The land on both sides of this area, for eight miles to the eastern and western boundaries of Israel, will belong to the prince. This land will include everything between the territories allotted to Judah and Benjamin, with Judah being the northern border and Benjamin the southern border, except for the area set aside for the sacred lands and the city.

“These are the territories allotted to the rest of the tribes. Benjamin’s territory lies south of the prince’s land, and it extends across the entire land of Israel from east to west. South of Benjamin’s territory lies that of Simeon, also extending across the land from east to west. Next is the territory of Issachar with the same eastern and western boundaries.

“Next is the territory of Zebulun, which also extends across the land from east to west. The territory of Gad is just south of Zebulun with the same borders to the east and west. The southern border of Gad runs from Tamar to the waters of Meribah at Kadesh and then follows the brook of

Egypt to the Mediterranean Sea. These are the allotments that are to be set aside for each tribe's exclusive possession." I, the Sovereign LORD, have spoken!

"The city of Jerusalem will have 12 gates, three on each side of the city wall. These gates will be named for the 12 tribes of Israel. In the north the gates will be named for Reuben, Judah, and Levi. On the east wall, the gates will be named for Joseph, Benjamin, and Dan. The south wall will have gates named for Simeon, Issachar, and Zebulun. And on the west wall the gates will be named for Gad, Asher, and Naphtali. Each side of the wall will be a mile and a half long, and so the total length of the wall will be six miles. And from that day the name of the new city will be 'The Lord Is There.'"

I, the LORD, gave the sanctuary a new name, "The name of that city from that day shall be: THE LORD IS THERE" (v. 35). This is another name for Me, Jehovah-Shammah. I have been active in all the earth and universe, but then I will go there to rest (Gen. 2:1, 2). Wherever I go, I want you with Me. I will be in the eternal city, and want you there to worship Me eternally.

I AM GOD

The Giver of Prophetic Dreams

The Book of Daniel

Whereas most prophets speak primarily to My people, the Jews; Daniel focused on secular world empires. Daniel properly predicts the coming of four empires that conquered the Western civilized world (Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, Rome 2:31-43). But Daniel's focus was on My coming world dominion. The reader should pray for worldwide evangelization and for the coming of the Jewish Messiah, Jesus Christ, who will judge all evil when He establishes His worldwide rule.

Daniel and His Friends Are Tested

1 In the third year of Jehoiakim's reign over Judah (605 BC) Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, went to Jerusalem and surrounded it. He took Jehoiakim and some articles from My Temple to his god, Marduk, in Babylonia and put them in his treasure room. Nebuchadnezzar told Ashpenaz, his chief official, to bring to him some Israelite captives who were of Jewish royalty.

I want My people to have healthy and holy bodies. Your body enables you to do My will and it is a testimony to the world that you serve Me. Daniel was chosen from among those of the nobility because of his healthy body. That suggests some of the nobility were passed over because of their unhealthy bodies. Doesn't it suggest My child shouldn't smoke (it takes 6 to 10 years off your life) nor should they get involved in drugs, alcohol, etc. "What, know you not that your body is My temple?" (1 Cor. 6:19).

He wanted young men who were physically attractive, mentally strong, well informed, and capable of serving in the king's palace. Ashpenaz taught them the language and literature of the Babylonians, and each day they were served food from the king's table. After a three year training period, they would be qualified to serve the king.

Four of these men were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. The chief official gave them new Babylonian names: Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Daniel asked permission not to eat non-kosher food, which would violate the Mosaic law.

Daniel and his friends refused to eat the same kind of food the king ate. Was it against the Jewish ritual law? Was it offered to idols? Or, was it alcohol? Daniel had deep convictions about eating the food put before him. "Daniel purposed in his heart." He was more concerned with displeasing Me, than he was of disobeying Nebuchadnezzar.

Ashpenaz liked Daniel, but he said, "The king would kill me if I did that because he would see you looking pale and thin compared to the other young men." Daniel said to the guard who was over him and his friends, "Here's a suggestion. For 10 days give us only vegetables and water. Then see how we look compared to the others who eat the king's food." The guard agreed to this.

After 10 days the four young men looked healthier than any of those who ate the king's food. So he continued to give them a vegetable diet. These four gained knowledge in all kinds of literature and other subjects. And David could interpret visions and dreams.

At the end of three years they were presented to Nebuchadnezzar. As he talked with them, he realized the four were tops in every way, and so they were made servants of the king. As Nebuchadnezzar questioned them on various subjects; he found them much wiser than his magicians and enchanters. Daniel lived in Babylon till the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia (539 BC).

There were long-range results of a healthy diet. “Daniel continued to be the king’s personal servant until the 1st year that Cyrus was king” (Dan. 1:21). Daniel must have been in his teen years when he was first tested. Then he lived 70 years in captivity in Babylon, plus another few years under Cyrus the Persian. Daniel lived to be almost 100 years old. Long physical health comes from a healthy body.

King Nebuchadnezzar’s Dream

2In Nebuchadnezzar’s second year, he had dreams and couldn’t go back to sleep. So he asked his magicians, enchanters, sorcerers (who supposedly made contact with spirits), and astrologers to tell what he dreamed. He told them he had a troubling dream and he wanted to know its meaning. They said, “Tell us your dream, and we’ll interpret it.” The king said, “If you don’t tell me my dream and interpret it, I’ll cut you into pieces and turn your houses into rubble. But if you tell it to me and explain what it means, I’ll give you many gifts and honors.” Again they said, “You’re asking the impossible. How can we interpret it if you don’t tell us what you dreamed?” The king said, “You are stalling for time. If you don’t tell me the dream, you’ll be killed, as I said. You plan to tell me lies, hoping I’ll change my mind. But if you tell me the dream, then I’ll know you can interpret it.”

The astrologer replied, “No one can tell you what you dreamed. That’s impossible. No king has ever asked a magician, enchanter, or astrologer to do such a thing. That’s a difficult thing to do. Only the gods could do that, and they aren’t available to us.” This made the king so angry that he ordered all his wise men to be executed. So men were sent to find and kill all the wise men, including Daniel and his three friends.

When Arioch, commander of the king’s guard, went to execute all the wise men, Daniel spoke tactfully to him, and said, “Why such a harsh order?” After Arioch explained the situation, Daniel went to the king and asked that the execution be delayed so he would have time to know the king’s dream.

Daniel went home and explained to his friends what happened, and he asked them to ask Me for mercy and to tell the dream and its meaning, so

they wouldn't be executed.

Have you ever noticed how I chose the young and call them to serve Me? Daniel was probably under 20 years when he was chosen to interpret the dream. I chose to use Daniel in his teen years because he chose Me. "Daniel purposed in his heart" (Dan. 1:8).

Then in the night I revealed the mystery in a vision, and Daniel praised Me, the God of Heaven, because I am wise and powerful. I change the times from one season to another, and I set up kings and I dethrone them. I increase wisdom and knowledge to the wise, revealing things hidden in the darkness. And I dwell in the light. Daniel thanked Me, the God of his ancestors because I had given him wisdom and power. I answered his request making the king's dream known to him.

Then Daniel told Arioch, "Don't execute the wise men of Babylon. Take me to the king, and I'll explain and interpret his dream." So Arioch hurried to the king and said, "I've found one of the captives from Judah who can explain your dream." The king asked Daniel, "Is it true that you can tell me what my dream was and what it means?" Daniel replied, "No wise man, enchanter, magician, or fortune-teller can interpret the dream. Only the God in heaven who reveals secrets can do so. He has shown me what will happen in the future. I will now explain to you your dream and your vision."

Daniel didn't take credit for interpreting the dream. He gave Me the credit. Nebuchadnezzar asked, "Are you able to make known to me?" (2:26). Daniel answered, "There is a God in heaven who reveals secrets" (2:28).

"You dreamed about future things, and I, the God who reveals mysteries, has shown you what will happen. And this is not because you are wiser than anyone else, but because God wanted you to know the future. You saw a huge, bright statue, awesome in appearance. The head was made of fine gold, its chests and arms were of silver, its stomach and thighs were of bronze, its legs were of iron, and its feet were of iron and clay. As you

watched, a rock cut out supernaturally from a mountain struck the feet of iron and clay and smashed them. Then the statue collapsed, and the pieces were like chaff on a threshing floor, blown away by the wind without a trace. The rock became a huge mountain that covered the earth.

“To you, O king, I, the God of Heaven, have given you power and glory and has made you ruler over humans and animals and birds. You are the head of gold. The kingdom after you will be inferior to yours. Then a third kingdom, of bronze, will rule over the earth. A fourth kingdom will smash everything just as iron breaks things to pieces. And it will demolish the other three kingdoms. The feet and toes, made partly of clay and partly of iron, will be a divided kingdom, partly strong like iron and partly weak like clay. The people will be a mixture and will not be united.”

I, the God of Heaven say, “In the days of those kings, I will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed or left to others. It will demolish them, but it will endure. This is the meaning of the rock, cut out supernaturally from a mountain which will crush the iron, bronze, clay, silver, and gold to pieces. I have shown the king in this dream what will happen in the future. And you can rely on the truth of this dream and its interpretation.”

Daniel put himself and Me on the spot when he volunteered to interpret Nebuchadnezzar's dream. It wasn't a leap in the dark; Daniel stepped out into My light. Daniel didn't know the interpretation, but he knew I could interpret the dream. You could step out into the unknown like Daniel, if you know Me as intimately as Daniel.

Nebuchadnezzar honored Daniel by falling down in front of him and ordering that an offering and incense be brought to him. He said to Daniel, “The fact that you could reveal this secret shows that your God is the God of gods, and the LORD of lords.” Then the king put Daniel in a high position of authority, gave him many gifts, and made him ruler over the province of Babylon, and chief of all the wise men. Also, Daniel asked if Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego could be made administrators over the province of Babylon, while Daniel was in the royal court.

The Golden Idol

3 King Nebuchadnezzar made a gold statue 90 feet tall and 9 feet wide and set it up on the Dura in the province of Babylon. He then invited all his officials—princes, prefects, governors, counselors, treasures, judges, magistrates, and others—to come to the dedication of the statue. So as all these officials stood in front of the statue, a herald announced, “You people of every nation and language, when you hear musical instruments being played—the horn, zither, lyre, harp, pipes, and others—bow down and worship the gold statue Nebuchadnezzar has set up. If you don’t bow down, you will immediately be thrown into a blazing furnace.”

Notice how people make idols to themselves, just like Nebuchadnezzar made a gold idol of himself, and demanded that everyone worship it. People make idols of their jobs, their achievements, their homes, or cars. Remember an idol is anything that gets between you and Me.

So as soon as these musical instruments were being played, people of every race, nation, and language bowed and worshiped the statue.

Some astrologers went to Nebuchadnezzar and complained about the Jews. They said, “Long live the king. You ordered that everyone is to bow down and worship the gold statue when they hear the musical instruments being played, and that those who don’t will be thrown into a blazing furnace.”

The three young men knew when they made a positive decision for Me, that they might need Me to intervene. They knew they might have to die in that furnace. They said, “Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us—but if not . . .” (Dan. 3:17-18, KJV).

“But some Jews—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who are over the affairs of the province of Babylon—have refused to serve your gods and to worship the statue you have set up.”

Nebuchadnezzar was very angry when he heard this. So he ordered Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to be brought to him. He said, “Is it true that you won’t serve my gods or worship the gold statue I set up? I’ll give you another opportunity to obey me. If you bow down and worship the statue when you hear the music, all will be all right. But if you don’t, you’ll be thrown immediately into a blazing furnace. Then what god can rescue you?” Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied, “We don’t need to defend ourselves. If you toss us into the blazing furnace, the God we serve can rescue us. But if He doesn’t we’ll never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you set up.”

Nebuchadnezzar was so mad at them that his face was distorted with rage. He had the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual, and he ordered some of his strongest soldiers to tie up the three Jews and throw them into the blazing furnace. So these three, fully clothed, were tied up and tossed into the furnace. The fire was so hot that the flames killed the soldiers, and the three Jews fell into the blazing furnace.

Nebuchadnezzar jumped up in amazement. He asked his advisers, “Weren’t three men tied up and thrown into the fire?” They said, “Yes, O king.” He said, “But look. Four men are unbound, walking around in the furnace. And the fourth looks like a divine being.”

When Nebuchadnezzar looked into the fire, he expected to see three burned corpses, but he exclaimed, “Lo, I see four men loose—and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God” (3:25, KJV). Nebuchadnezzar saw a Christophany, that is, an Old Testament appearance of My Son, Jesus. Isn’t it good to know when I don’t deliver from fire, I will be with you in the furnace?

He then went to the opening of the furnace, and shouted, “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out and come over here.” So they came out of the fire, and the king’s officials crowded around them. The officials saw that the fire hadn’t hurt the bodies of the three. And their hair was not singed, their clothes weren’t scorched, and they didn’t even smell of smoke.

Nebuchadnezzar praised Me, the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. I rescued My servants. They trusted in Me and were willing to die rather than serve or worship any god except Me their own God.

Nebuchadnezzar said, “Therefore if any person of any race, nation, or language says anything against the three men’s God, they’ll be cut in pieces and their houses turned into rubble. Obviously, no other god can rescue like this.” Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to higher positions in the province of Babylon.

The Second Dream of Nebuchadnezzar

4 King Nebuchadnezzar sent this message to the people of every race, nation, and language in his empire: “I wish you well. I’m pleased to tell you about the miracles the Most High God has done for me. His signs are great, and His wonders are powerful. His kingdom will last forever, and His rule will last for generations.

“One night when I, Nebuchadnezzar, was in my palace, contented and prosperous, I had a dream and visions that frightened me. So I ordered all the wise men to come and tell me what my dream means. When the magicians, enchanters, astrologers, and future-tellers came, I told them the dream, but they didn’t know what it meant. Then Daniel came, and I told him the dream. He was called Belteshazzar after my god and the spirit that is in him.”

Nebuchadnezzar said, “I know that the spirit of the gods is in you, and that you can solve great mysteries. Tell me what my dream last night means. While I was laying bed, I saw a huge tree in the middle of the earth. It grew very tall and strong. It was so tall that everyone could see it. It had lots of leaves and fruit for everyone. Wild animals lived in its shade, birds made nests in its branches, and everyone was fed from it.

“Then in my dream I saw a messenger, a divine being, coming down from heaven. He shouted, ‘Cut down the tree, lop off its branches, shake off the leaves, and scatter its fruit. Chase away the animals and birds. But leave the stump and its roots in the ground, bound with a band of iron and bronze. Let him be drenched with dew and have him live with the animals. Let him be like an animal instead of a human for seven years. The heavenly

messengers decreed that the Most High is sovereign over the world's kingdoms and gives those kingdoms to anyone He chooses including even the least qualified.' That was my dream. Now what does it mean? None of my wise men can interpret it, but I'm sure you can, because the spirit of the gods is in you."

At first Daniel (also called Belteshazzar) was puzzled and alarmed. The king said, "Don't let the dream or its meaning upset you." Daniel said, "I wish the dream applied only to your enemies. You saw a huge and strong tree that everyone can see. It had lots of leaves and fruit and was a shelter for animals and birds. You are that tree. You are strong and great, and your greatness everyone can see, and your rule is to the ends of the earth.

"You saw a messenger, a divine being, coming down from heaven and saying, 'Cut down the tree, but leave the stump, with a band of iron and bronze while it remains in the ground. Let him be drenched with dew and have him live like a wild animal for seven years.' This is what the dream means, and what the Most High has said will happen to you. You'll be removed from people and will live with wild animals, and you'll eat grass like a cow, and be drenched with dew. After living like this for seven years, you'll realize that the Most High is over all the world's kingdoms and gives them to anyone He chooses. But why leave the stump of the tree with it? This means that you'll receive your kingdom back again when you've admitted that heaven rules. Therefore, O king, stop sinning and do what is right and be kind to oppressed people. Then you will be well again."

All these things happened to Nebuchadnezzar, just as Daniel said. A year later as he was walking on the flat roof of his palace in Babylon, the king said, "I have built this great city of Babylon and my palace by my own power and by my royal authority." As he was still saying these words, he heard a voice from heaven saying, "Your royal authority will be taken from you. You'll be removed from people, and you'll live with wild animals, and you'll eat grass like a cow. You'll be like this for seven years until you realize that the Most High is over all the world's kingdoms and that He gives them to anyone He chooses."

Immediately these things happened. Nebuchadnezzar was removed from people, and he ate grass like a cow. His body was wet with dew, and his hair grew like an eagle's feathers and his nails grew like bird's claws.

There is an eternal struggle in the hearts of all people over who will control their lives. Everyone wants to be a king. Will they let Me control their lives, or will their ego sit on the thrones of their lives? Who will be glorified with your life? Will I get the glory over all you say and do, or will you glorify yourself? The problem, Nebuchadnezzar had conquered more territory than anyone else before him. No one could defeat him, and no nation could defend itself against him. Yet I demonstrated that I am greater than Nebuchadnezzar.

After the seven years, Nebuchadnezzar looked up to heaven, and was no longer insane. Then he praised and worshiped Me, the Most High, who lives forever. I said, “My rule is forever, and My kingdom will last for generations. I do as I please in heaven and on earth. No one can challenge Me by asking, ‘What are You doing?’”

When Nebuchadnezzar was no longer insane, I restored his honor and glory and kingdom. His advisers and officials looked up to him again, and he was restored as head of his kingdom and with greater honor than before. Now Nebuchadnezzar praised and exalted and glorified Me, the King of heaven, because I always do what is just and true, and I can humble those who are proud.

Perhaps Nebuchadnezzar was converted after this humbling incident. He recognized that I, the LORD, am the “Most High God.” He recognized that I gave him back his great honor and power as king. Nebuchadnezzar became a worshiper of Me, the true Lord of heaven.

The Handwriting on the Wall

5 In the year 539 BC King Belshazzar gave a great festival for a thousand of his nobles and they all drank wine together. He gave orders to bring in the gold and silver cups that his predecessor Nebuchadnezzar had taken from My Temple in Jerusalem. Belshazzar wanted his nobles to drink wine

from them. So the cups were brought in, and Belshazzar and his nobles, his wives, and his concubines drank from them, and as they did so, they praised their gods made of gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, and stone.

There had been other drunken festivals that were not judged by Me. There were probably many other sins that didn't destroy the Babylonian kingdom. The thing that angered Me was that "they brought the gold vessels that had been taken from My temple which had been in Jerusalem; and—drank from them" (5:3). What sacrilege! What blasphemy! It's almost as if Belshazzar wanted to defy Me.

Suddenly they saw the fingers of a human hand writing on the plaster wall near a lampstand. The king watched as the hand wrote, and his face turned pale and he was so terrified his knees knocked together and his legs were so weak he couldn't stand. Belshazzar called in the enchanters, astrologers, and future-tellers, and he said to them, "Whoever can read this writing and can tell me what it means will be clothed in purple, the color of kings, and will have a gold chain around his neck, and he'll be the third ruler in the kingdom, after Nebuchadnezzar and Nabonidus." The king's wise men couldn't read the writing or explain what it meant. So king Belshazzar grew more afraid and his face grew more pale. Also, his nobles were mentally shattered. When the queen mother heard what was happening, she went to the banquet hall, and she said, "O king, may you live forever. Don't be alarmed. And don't look so pale. A man in your kingdom has the spirit of the gods in him. In your father's days this young man had great insight, intelligence, and wisdom. In fact, Nebuchadnezzar made him chief of the magicians, enchanters, astrologers, and future-tellers. Daniel has a sharp mind and has a lot of knowledge, and he can interpret dreams, explain riddles, and solve difficult problems. He can tell you the meaning of the writing."

So when Daniel was brought to the king, the king asked, "Are you Daniel, one of the captives my predecessor brought here from Judah? I've heard that the spirit of the gods is in you, and that you have intelligence and unusual wisdom. My wise men and enchanters couldn't read this writing on the wall or tell me what it means. I've heard that you can interpret things

like this and can solve difficult problems. If you can read and explain this wording, I'll clothe you in royal purple robes and place a gold chain around your neck and make you the third highest ruler in my kingdom."

Daniel answered, "No need to give me any gifts or rewards. Give them to someone else. But I'll read and explain the words on the wall. The Most High God gave your predecessor Nebuchadnezzar sovereignty, majesty, glory, and honor. People of every race, nationality, and language feared him. He killed those he wanted to kill and kept alive those he wanted to live. He promoted those he wanted to promote and demoted those he wanted to put down. But when he became filled with pride, God took his throne from him. He was removed from being with people and he had the mind of an animal. He lived with wild donkeys and ate grass like a cow, and his body was drenched with dew. Then he realized that the Most High God rules over the world's kingdoms and appoints anyone He wants to rule over them."

Then I, the LORD, said, "You, his successor, O Belshazzar, have not humbled yourself before Me, though you knew all this. You have defied Me, the Lord of heaven, by drinking from the cups brought from My temple. You and your nobles and wives and concubines all drank wine from them as you praised the gods of silver, gold, bronze, iron, wood, and stone, idols that can't see or hear or know anything. You have not honored Me, the God who gives you life and controls your future. Therefore, I sent the hand that wrote on the wall. This is the message: *Mene, Mene, Tekel, Parsin*. These words mean this: '*Mene*' means 'Numbered'—I have numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end. '*Tekel*' means 'Weighed'—You have been weighed on the balances and you have been found lacking. '*Parsin*' means 'Divided'—Your kingdom will soon be divided and given to the Medes and Persians."

Then Belshazzar had Daniel clothed in a royal purple robe and placed a gold chain around his neck and made him the third highest ruler in the kingdom. That very night Belshazzar, the Babylonian king, was killed, and Darius, the Mede, ruled over Babylon starting at age 62.

My reaction was swift in two ways. First, I sent a message, "The same hour" (5:5). A man's hand began writing on the wall. Then My second reaction was that the Babylonian kingdom fell in one night. It was October 12, 529 BC, when the Medes and Persians took the

city of Babylon in one night. Sometimes the siege of a city as big as Babylon would last several years, but My reaction was swift.

Daniel is Thrown Into the Lion's Den

6Darius the Mede divided the kingdom into 120 provinces with a governor over each province. He also chose Daniel and two others to supervise the governors and to watch out for the king's interests. Daniel was more capable than all the other 122 leaders, and so Darius planned to put him over the whole kingdom. The 120 governors didn't like this idea, so they tried to find some fault in the way Daniel handled his government affairs. But they couldn't find anything wrong, because he was faithful and always responsible.

There is much jealousy in the work place. People who are ruled by their sin natures will hate believers because of their ethnic background, language, education or because of their work ethic or walk with Me. You can't help how fellow workers respond to you, but you are responsible how you react to them.

They said, "The only way we can accuse Daniel is in connection with his religion."

So the 122 went as a group to the king and said, "O King Darius, may you live forever. We princes and advisers and others have agreed that anyone who prays to any god or man in the next month except to you should be thrown to the lions. So we suggest you issue an order that can't be changed like a law of the Medes and Persians." So King Darius signed the law.

Daniel heard that the law had been signed. But he kept on praying as usual in his upstairs room with its windows opened toward Jerusalem. He prayed on his knees three times every day just as he had always done. The officials went to Daniel's house and found him praying. So they went to the king and reminded him that if anyone prayed to any god or man except to him, that person would be thrown to the lions. The king said, "Yes, the

order still stands, as part of the laws of the Medes and Persians, which can't be withdrawn." Then they said, "Daniel, one of the captives from Judah, has ignored your order. He still prays three times a day." This upset the king because he wanted to rescue Daniel. He spent the rest of the day trying to find a way to get Daniel out of this situation. In the evening the men went again as a group to Darius and said, "Remember that the laws of the Medes and Persians can't be changed."

So the king gave the order and Daniel was thrown into the lion's den. Darius said he hoped the God he served will rescue him. A stone was placed over the opening to the den, and the king sealed it with his royal seals and the seals of his officials, so that no one could rescue Daniel. Darius ate no supper and had no evening entertainment, and that night he couldn't sleep.

A remarkable fact in this story is that an unsaved pagan king is concerned about Daniel and spends the night fasting for him. May you have such a deep influence on the unsaved around you that they would seek Me as their Lord.

Early in the morning the king got up and ran to the den. He called anxiously to Daniel, "Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God whom you worship been able to rescue you from the lions?" Daniel answered, "O king, may you live forever. My God sent an angel who shut the lions' mouths so that they couldn't hurt me. I'm innocent, having done you no wrong."

Did you see in the story that I sent an angel to shut the lions' mouths? How did the angel do it? Did the angel take away the lions' hunger? Did the angel put up an invisible fence that the lions couldn't cross? Did the angel constrain the hungry lions to not eat? Whatever way, I used an angel as an instrument to save Daniel.

The king ordered that Daniel be lifted out of the den. Not a scratch was on him because he had trusted in Me, his God. Then the king gave orders to throw into the den the men who had falsely accused Daniel, along with their

wives and children. The lions jumped on them and killed them before they even reached the floor of the den.

The world has a slogan, "Don't get mad, get even." That was not Daniel's way. Daniel was a man of prayer, and you too must pray, that is, pray for protection and pray for those who persecute you. Jesus said, "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you" (Luke 6:27-28). Why? "For in doing so you will heap coals of fire on his head" (Rom. 12:20). Don't try to get even. I keep score. Let Me punish them as I punished the king's cabinet who conspired against Daniel. Remember, I can hit back harder than you.

Then Darius wrote to all the people, races, and languages in his kingdom: "May all of you enjoy peace and success. I now issue an order that in every part of my kingdom people must fear and reverence the God of Israel. He is the living and eternal God. His kingdom will never be destroyed, and His reign will never end. He rescues, and He performs amazing miracles in the heavens and on earth. And he has rescued Daniel from the lions." Daniel prospered during the reign of Darius and on into the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

Daniel's Dream About the Four Animals

7In the first year of Belshazzar's reign in Babylon (553 BC) Daniel had a dream and saw visions as he was lying on his bed. He wrote down the dream. He said, "In my vision I saw a wind storm stirring up the Mediterranean Sea, with strong winds blowing from all four directions. Four huge beasts each one different from the others, came out of the water.

"The first beast was like a lion with eagles' wings. As I watched, its wings were plucked off, and it was standing on its back feet like a human.

"Then the second beast I saw looked like a bear. It was raised on one side and had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. I heard a voice saying, 'Get up, and devour many people.'

“A third beast looked like a leopard. It had four wings like those of a bird on its back, and it had four heads. It had great authority to rule.

“The fourth beast I saw was frightening and powerful. With large iron teeth it crushed and devoured its victims and stomped on whatever was left. It was unlike the other three beasts. And it had 10 horns. Suddenly another small horn appeared, and it tore out three of the 10 horns, roots and all. This small horn had human-like eyes and it spoke boastful words.

“As I watched, thrones were put in place, and the Ancient One, the LORD, sat down to judge. His clothing was white like snow, and His hair was white like wool. His throne was aflame with wheels ablaze, and a fiery river was flowing from Him. Millions of angels served Him. The court session began, and books were opened.”

Here is a picture of Me the Judge who will judge the world at the end of this age. I am seen having a fiery river flowing from Me (7:10). This is My judgment in the future at the end of the age. It will be vicious and complete. But then the judgment of sin by the death of My Son, Jesus Christ, was vicious and complete. I have judged your sins in Christ, I will not punish you in the future coming judgment.

“I continued to watch because of the little horn’s boastful talking. Then the fourth beast was killed, and his body was burned. Authority was taken from the other three beasts, but they continue to live a little longer. Then I saw someone who looked like a man, coming in the clouds. He approached the Ancient One and was led into His presence. He received authority, honor, and royal power over all the world’s nations. People of every race, nationality, and language worshiped Him. His rule will be forever; it will never be destroyed.

“I was troubled by what I had seen, and my visions bothered me. So I asked one of the angels standing by the throne what this all meant. He gave me this explanation: ‘These four large beasts represent four kingdoms. But in the end the saints of the Most High will be given the kingdom and they will rule forever.’

“Then I asked about the fourth beast, which differed from the other three and was so fierce-looking. It devoured its victims with its iron teeth and bronze claws and stomped on whatever was left. I also asked about the 10 horns on the fourth beast and the little horn that appeared later and destroyed three of the other horns. This was the horn that looked worse than the 10 and that had human-like eyes and spoke boasting words. This little horn was fighting against the saints and was winning. But then the Ancient of Days judged in favor of the saints of the Most High. Then the saints possessed the kingdom.”

Then the angel said to Daniel, “This fourth beast is the fourth power that will rule the world. It will differ from the other three, devouring the world and trampling it down. Its 10 horns are 10 kings that will rule that empire. Then another king, different from the 10, will destroy three of the 10. He will speak against the Most High, make life hard for the saints, and try to change the Jewish festivals and laws. And they will be under the little horn’s control for three and a half years.

“Then the court will decide the case and take away his power and destroy him completely. Then the power and greatness of all the kingdoms in the world will be given to the saints of the Most High. They will rule forever, and all rulers will worship and obey Him. That concludes the dream and its interpretation. I was frightened by all of this and my face was pale with fear. But I didn’t share this with anyone.”

Daniel’s Vision of the Ram and the Goat

8In Belshazzar’s third year of his reign (551 BC) Daniel saw another vision similar to the one with four beasts. In his dream he was at the fortress of Susa, standing beside the Ulai River. He saw a ram with two long horns standing beside the river. One of the horns was longer than the other horn though it began to grow later than the shorter one. The ram charged against everyone to the west, the north, and the south. No one could stop it and no one could help its victims. It did as it pleased, and it became great.

Suddenly a male goat appeared from the west. It was going so fast its feet didn’t touch the ground. This goat had a big horn between its eyes, and it was going toward the two-horned ram that was standing beside the Ulai

River. The goat charged at the ram in anger. He hit the ram so hard that he broke off the ram's two horns, and the ram was helpless. The goat knocked him down and trampled on it.

The goat became very powerful, but at the peak of his power its large horn was broken off. In its place grew four big horns pointing to the north, east, south, and west. From one of these four came a small horn with great power. It moved toward the south and east and toward the wonderful land of Israel. It was so powerful it even attacked the angels and threw some of them on the ground and trampled on them. He even opposed the Commander of the angels by doing away with daily sacrifices and destroying My Temple. But some angels wanted to destroy him, but they were kept from doing so. But My Temple ceremonies were not carried out properly. The horn succeeded in everything it did, and yet truth was not upheld.

Then a saint asked another, "How long will these events last? How long will the daily sacrifices be withheld and how long will the rebellion continue that causes things to be desolate? And how long will the temple and the angels be trampled on?" The other answered, "It will take 1,150 days and then the temple will be restored."

As Daniel was trying to understand this vision, someone who looked like a human suddenly appeared in front of him. Then a voice near the Ulai River said, "Gabriel, tell this man the meaning of his vision." As Gabriel approached Daniel, he was terrified and fell to the ground. He said, "Son of man, the events you saw relate to future times." Daniel went into a deep sleep and then the angel touched him and helped him get up. Then Gabriel said, "I'm here to tell you what will happen in the time of wrath. Your vision pertains to future times. The ram with two horns represents the kings of Media and Persia, and the male goat represents the king of Greece. The large horn between its eyes represents the first king of the Greek Empire. The four large horns on the goat represent four sections of the empire with four rulers, but no one of them will be as great as the first king of Greece.

"At the end of their rule a fierce king, a master of deception, will come to power. He'll be very strong, but not by his own power. He'll cause a lot of destruction and he'll succeed in whatever he does. He'll put down powerful men and devastate many saints. He'll be very deceitful and think of himself as better than anyone else. When they think they are safe, he'll

destroy them. And he'll even stand against the Prince of princes. He'll be destroyed, but not by a human. This vision about the 1,150 days is true. But these things won't happen for a long time, so don't tell anyone about them yet."

Daniel was exhausted, and sick for several days. Then he got up and carried on with his work for the king. But he continued to be troubled by the vision because he couldn't fully understand it.

Daniel Prays for Israel

9Darius the Mede, son of Xerxes, became king of the Babylonians in 539 BC. In that year as Daniel was reading the prophecies of Jerusalem, he learned that Jerusalem was to be desolate for 70 years. He pleaded with Me, the Lord God, in prayer and fasting; and he wore burlap clothing and sprinkled ashes on his head.

Daniel read that Israel would be enslaved to the Babylonians for 70 years. Daniel realized the 70 years were over, so he began praying for Me to take him and his people back to the Promised Land.

Daniel prayed to Me, the LORD God, and confessed: "O Lord, you are a great and awesome God. You keep Your agreement of unfailing love to those who love You and obey You. Our people have sinned and done wrong by rebelling against You and ignoring Your commands and regulations. We have not listened to Your servants, the prophets, who represented You in giving Your messenger to our kings, princes, ancestors, and all our people.

"Lord, You are righteous, and we are ashamed. This is true of all of us, including our people in Judah and Jerusalem and all Israel, and those who are in distant lands, wherever You scattered them because of our being unfaithful to You. O LORD, we and our kings, princes, and ancestors are ashamed because we've sinned against You. But You, the Lord our God, are merciful and forgiving, even though we have rebelled against You. We've disobeyed You, O LORD our God, and we've not followed the laws You gave us through Your servants, the prophets. In fact, every one of us has disobeyed your law and turned from You, refusing to obey You.

“Therefore, the punishments written in the law of Moses, Your servant, have been poured out on us because of our sin.”

There is a principle of “identificational repentance.” That means you identify with the sins committed by your forefathers, and confess them to Me. I don’t forgive their personal sins because someone else confessed for them. No, each person is responsible to Me for his own sin. But you identify with their national sins because the consequences of their sin affects you. You confess their sins so the consequences (the curses) of their sins are removed and you don’t have to suffer them. Daniel is in captivity because of his people’s sins, so he confesses their sins to Me so he can return to the Promised Land.

“I have done exactly what I warned Israel and its rulers about. No disaster has ever matched what I did to Jerusalem. The disaster on Jerusalem has come about just as it is written in the law of Moses. Yet you have not asked for My favor by turning away from your sins and attending to the truth. I have brought on you the disaster I planned, because I am righteous in everything. And yet you did not obey Me.

“I brought honor to Myself by rescuing My people from Egypt with great power. But you have sinned and done wrong.”

Daniel prayed, “O Lord, in view of Your righteous deeds, please turn Your anger away from Jerusalem, Your city, Your holy hill. Because of our sins and the sins of our ancestors, other nations ridicule us. Our God, please hear Your servant’s prayer. For Your reputation look with favor on Your desolate temple. O my God, please listen to my prayer and see the desolate condition of the city that bears Your name. I’m not asking these requests because we deserve help, but because You are so merciful. O Lord, please hear my request, and please forgive us. O Lord, please hear and act. For Your sake, O my God, please do not delay because Your people and Your city bear Your name.”

Daniel kept on praying, confessing his sins and the sins of My people Israel, pleading with Me, the LORD his God, for Jerusalem, and My holy hill. As he was praying, Gabriel, the angel came to him swiftly about

mid-afternoon, the time of the evening sacrifice. He said, “Daniel, I’ve come to give you insight and understanding. I’ve come to tell you that your God thinks highly of you. So here is the meaning of the vision.

“A period of seventy ‘sevens’ has been decreed for Your people and Your holy city. In that time transgressions will be ended, sin will be done away with, guilt will be atoned for, eternal righteousness will be brought in, prophetic visions will be confirmed, and the temple will be anointed.”

This is closest to actually predicting the time my Son Jesus Christ would come on earth the first time. The vision says it begins when the command is given to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. The vision says 69 weeks. (A week means the number 7. So, $69 \times 7 = 483$ years till My Son, the Messiah comes; that is, until Jesus comes to earth.)

“Listen and you’ll understand. Sixty-nine sets of sevens will pass after the decree to rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One comes. Jerusalem will be rebuilt with streets and strong defenses, though it will be perilous times.

“After this 69 sets of ‘sevens’ the Anointed One will be killed and will be left with nothing. Then a ruler will arise and his armies will destroy Jerusalem and the temple. The end will come rushing in like a flood, and wars and desolate times will continue from them to the end. The ruler will make a treaty with Israel for one set of seven, but after half that time he’ll stop the sacrifices and offerings. Then he’ll set up a repulsive idol in the wing of the temple that will cause desolation. Then the end that is predicted for him will occur.”

Daniel’s Vision of a Man

10In the third year of Cyrus, king of Persia (536 BC), a message was given to Daniel, also known as Beltshazzar. The message pertained to events that will happen in the future, in times of great wars. Daniel wrote, “For three weeks I mourned in sorrow. I ate no rich food or meat and drank no wine and I put no olive oil on my body.”

*For three weeks, Daniel was on a limited fast. He didn't eat "fancy foods" like desserts or "chef-type" meals. He ate only vegetables. Today, this is called a Daniel Fast. (See **The Daniel Fast For Spiritual Breakthrough**, by Elmer L. Towns, 2010 (www.elmertowns.com.) Daniel was fasting because of a burden. You might want to follow this limited fast when praying seriously about grave matters.*

Daniel continued, "On the 24th day of the first month, as I was standing on the bank of the Tigris River, I saw a man dressed in linen and wearing a solid gold belt. His body was like a green mineral, his face bright like lightning, his arms red like flaming torches, his arms and legs like polished bronze, and his voice like the shouting of many people.

"Though the people with me didn't see the man, they were so frightened that they ran and hid. So as I was alone, watching this vision, I felt very weak, and my face turned pale. Then at the sound of his voice I fell face down in a deep sleep.

"He raised me up to my hands and knees, and said, 'Daniel, God values you highly, and He has sent me to you. Stand up and listen carefully to my words.' So I stood up, still trembling with fear. Then he said, 'Don't be afraid, Daniel. From the day you asked for understanding, God in heaven heard you, and I have been sent in answer to your prayer. But the demon over the Persian Empire blocked my way for three weeks. Then one of God's chief angels came to help me. Now I'll explain what will happen to your people, the Jews, in the future. This vision concerns a time yet future.'"

Many times satan or demons oppose you, and you don't even know it. Too often you accept defeat as part of life. Only those who live close to Me realize what's happening. Did Daniel know what was happening to him? Not until he was told. "He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world" (1 John 4:4). I will protect you even when you don't realize you're in trouble. When there is evil, I will give you wisdom to know what's happening and how you should react.

While Michael was speaking, Daniel looked at the ground, unable to say a word. Then one who looked like a man touched his lips and Daniel said, “This vision has frightened me, and I am very weak. How can I, your servant, talk to you, my lord, when I am so weak and can hardly breathe?”

Spiritual warfare takes all our energy away. Daniel said, “As for me, no strength remains in me now, nor is any breath left in me” (10:17). I, the LORD, will give you strength as you need it. Claim My promise, “As the day demands, so shall thy strength be” (Deut. 33:25). Get your strength from Me so that you say, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13).

The angel touched Daniel again and said, “Don’t be afraid. God thinks highly of you. Calm yourself, take heart, and be strong.” As he spoke these words, Daniel felt stronger and said, “Please speak, my lord, for you have made me feel stronger.”

The angel replied, “Do you now see why I have come? I must leave soon to fight the demon of the Persian Empire, and after that to fight the demon of the Greek Empire. But first I’ll tell you what is written in the Book of Truth.” (No one is here to help me against these two demons, except Michael, who guards the nation Israel.)

The Future After Darius

11 The angel also said, “I have been protecting and helping Darius the Mede in his first year as king.”

This is one of the most difficult chapters in Scripture to understand. It deals intricately with people and places in the Near East after Daniel’s death and before the coming of My Son, Jesus Christ.

“What I am about to tell you will certainly happen. Three more kings will rule over Persia. Then a fourth one, who will be very wealthy, will use his wealth to turn everyone against the Greek Empire.

“Then a strong king will come to power and will do whatever he pleases. But suddenly, at the height of his power his kingdom will break apart and will scatter in four directions—north, south, east, and west. The kingdom will not be ruled by any of his descendants, nor will the kingdom be as powerful as it once was.

“The king of the South will become strong, but one of his own officials will become even more powerful. Years later they’ll become allies, and the daughter of the king of the South will marry the king of the North. But she’ll lose her power and she, her husband, and her supporters will be killed. Later one of her relatives will become ruler of the southern kingdom. He’ll enter the fortress of the king of the North and defeat him. He’ll take their idols, metal images, and valuable articles of gold and silver to Egypt. Then he’ll not bother the king of the North for a long time. Years later the king of the North will invade the southern kingdom, but he’ll go back to his own country. The sons of the king of the North will gather a great army, will sweep down like a flood, reaching the fortress of the king of the South. This will make the king of the South angry, and he’ll defeat the king of the North. This will make the king of the South proud, but the king of the North will gather an even larger army than he had before, but he’ll be defeated.

“Many will rise against the king of the South, but the forces of the king of the South will be defeated. Then the king of the North will capture a fortified city. The best troops of the South won’t be able to stand against this onslaught. The invader will do as he pleases, including even capturing the Holy Land. He’ll try to make peace by giving the king of the South a bride from the northern kingdom, but this plan won’t work. Then he’ll defeat some coastal cities, but a military commander will defeat him and he’ll lose his pride. He’ll go back to his own country but will be defeated and will never be seen again.

“The next king of the North will try to collect taxes to advance the glory of his kingdom. But in a few years he’ll be dead, but not in battle or because of someone’s anger. The next king of the North will be a scoundrel, who didn’t come from a royal line. He’ll take over the kingdom by flattery and deceit. He’ll destroy armies including a priest. He’ll make a treaty but he’ll break it. He’ll invade a wealthy province, something his ancestors never did. Then he’ll share with his followers the wealth of the rich.

“He’ll gather a large army and attack the king of the South, but the king of the South won’t be able to defeat the king of the North. Even though he’ll have an army much larger, he’ll be destroyed by men in the royal court and most of his soldiers will be killed.

“The two kings will meet at a conference table and lie to each other. But their plans will not succeed because the God of the universe has already decided what will happen. The king of the North will go home with great treasures. On the way he’ll oppose the people of the holy covenant.

“At God’s appointed time the king of the North will invade the southern kingdom again, but this time it’ll be different. Warships from the west will come to attack him, and he’ll be discouraged and will return home. On the way he’ll take out his anger on God’s people of the holy covenant and he’ll reward those who turn from the covenant. He’ll send troops into the temple to pollute it and to do away with the daily sacrifices. The he’ll set up a repulsive idol that will cause desolation. He’ll flatter those who are unfaithful to God and influence them to side with him, but the people who are faithful to God will resist the king.

“Those who are wise will teach many people, though many of them will die by the sword or be burned alive, and others will be robbed and jailed. They’ll receive a little help, but many of them will not be honest. Some of the wise people will suffer, but this will result in their being pure and spotless until the end, which is yet to come.

“This king will do as he pleases. He’ll claim to be greater than any God, even blaspheming the true God. He’ll be successful until God is no longer angry with His people.”

We see many characteristics of the antichrist in this passage. (1) He will exalt himself (11:36); (2) he will reject Me (11:37); (3) he is a strong, self-willed man (11:36); (4) he will desecrate My Temple in Jerusalem (11:31; Matt. 24:15); (5) he shall be a persuasive speaker (11:36); (6) he knows a strange god (satan) (11:38-39); and (7) he has hatred toward the Jews (11:41).

“He’ll reject the gods of his ancestors and has no desire for women. He’ll reject all gods, and he’ll worship only the so-called god of fortresses,

whom his ancestors never knew. He'll give it gold, silver, precious stones, and other expensive items. With the help of this so-called god, he'll capture many fortresses. And he'll honor people who worship his idol, and he'll give them positions of authority and wealth and land.

“At the time of the end the king of the South will attack the king of the North. But the king of the North will respond by attacking him with chariots, cavalry, and a navy. He'll invade many nations, going against them like a flood, including the Holy Land. But Moab, Edom, and Ammon will escape. Egypt is one of the many countries that will not escape. The king of the North will take Egypt's great treasures of gold and silver, and he'll conquer Libya and Ethiopia. He'll be disturbed by news from the east and the north, and he'll set out in anger to destroy many. The he'll set up his royal tents between the Mediterranean Sea and Mount Zion. His time will come to an end, and no one can help him.”

The End of Days

12 “At that time Michael, the great angel who protects your people, will come at a time of suffering greater than any since nations came into existence. But every one of your people whose name is written in the Book will be rescued.”

You can have confidence in your relationship with Me because, “Everyone whose name is written in My book will be saved” (12:1). My followers have great confidence. “This is our confidence that we have in Him” (1 John 5:14). They rest in the assurance of My salvation.

“Many whose bodies are dead and buried will rise from the dead, some to everlasting life and others to eternal shame and dishonor. Those who are wise will shine as bright as the sky, and those who show others how to live for Me will shine like the stars forever.

“But you, Daniel, seal up this book about the end times. Many people will go everywhere, searching for the knowledge in it.”

“Then I, Daniel, saw two angels, one on this side of the Tigris River and one on the other side. One of them said to the man clothed in linen, who was standing above the river, ‘How long will it be before these shocking things will happen?’ The man clothed in linen, who was above the river, lifted his hands toward heaven and said, ‘In God’s name who lives forever, it will all happen in three and a half years. When the suffering of the Lord’s people comes to an end, then all these things will have happened.’”

Daniel heard his answer but didn’t understand. So he said, “How will all this finally end?” The angel replied, “Don’t continue to be concerned about this, Daniel, because the message is sealed up until the end times. Many people will have their lives made pure and clean, but the wicked will continue to be wicked. The wicked won’t understand any of this, but the wise will understand.

“From the time the daily sacrifices are stopped and the repulsive idol that results in desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days. God will bless those who reach the end of the 1,335 days. And so Daniel, be faithful until the end. You will rest, and then at the end of time you will rise from the dead and receive your reward.”

Daniel is promised death and that he will not return physically to the Promised Land, for which he prayed. He was told he will die, “You, go your way till the end; for you shall rest, and will arise to your inheritance at the end of the days” (12:13). I’ve promised all will die, “It is appointed unto men once to die” (Heb. 9:27). But you have the promise of My Son, Jesus, “I will come again and receive you to Myself” (John 14:3).

I AM GOD

Who Responds To Repentance

The Book of Hosea

I told Hosea to marry a woman with a predisposition to adultery as a picture of Israel who has a predisposition to worship false gods. I established a “covenant of love” with the Jews when I led them out of Egypt. But Israel constantly worshiped the idols and gods of the surrounding nations. The rough language of Hosea 2:2-7 is a picture of My disgust at Israel’s spiritual adultery. In Israel, the penalty of adultery was death (Lev. 20:10), so when I tell Hosea to receive back his wife, it’s a picture of My grace to receive back Israel who rejected Me.

In Hosea you’ll learn that I am a demanding God who punishes your unfaithfulness to Me. But I have another side. I am long-suffering to you and will forgive and receive you. Pray that you will be protected from backsliding, but also pray for forgiveness when you sin, “the blood of Jesus Christ My Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

Hosea’s Wife and Children

1 I gave Hosea, son of Beeri, these messages when Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah were kings of Judah and Jeroboam son, of Jehoash was king of Israel.

I said to him, “Hosea, Israel has been unfaithful to Me. So go marry a prostitute and have children by her.” So he married Gomer, daughter of Diblaim and she became pregnant and bore a son. I told him to name the boy Jezreel, because the descendants of King Jehu had murdered people in Jezreel. In fact I said that in Jezreel he would break Israel’s power.

Gomer became pregnant again and gave birth to a daughter. I told him to name her Lo-Ruhamah, which means “Not-Loved,” because I said I

would no longer show love to the Israelites or forgive them. “But,” I said, “I’ll show love to the people of Judah. I’ll deliver them, but not by the sword or bows or cavalry. Only I will do it, I will save them.”

Gomer became pregnant again and had a second son. I said, “Name him Lo-Ammi, which means ‘Not My people,’ because Israel is not My people, and I’m not their God.”

This story is difficult to understand, but I deal with people in difficult situations. I accept people where I find them, and lift them to where they should be. I will do that with you; I’ll lift you up to where you should stand for Me.

“However, the time will come when Israel will become a great nation and its people will be as numerous as the sand on the seashore. They are now called ‘Not My People,’ but in the future they’ll be called, ‘You Are My Children of the Living God.’ Israel and Judah will be united under one leader and they’ll return back to their land. This will be a great day for Jezreel.”

Unfaithful Gomer–Unfaithful Israel

2 “I want you to call your children Ammi (meaning ‘My People’), and you’ll call your sisters Ruhammah (meaning ‘The Ones I Love’).

“Tell Israel she is no longer My wife and I’m no longer her husband. Tell her to remove her suggestive clothing and quit being a prostitute. If she doesn’t I’ll strip her naked as she was on the day she was born. I’ll let her die of thirst and be like a dry desert. I’ll not love her children, because they are not My own. They were conceived in adultery. Their mother was a prostitute and she said, ‘I’ll run after my lovers and sell myself to them for food, water, wool, linen, and olive oil.’”

I, the LORD, will block her in with thorn bushes so that she can’t find her way. She’ll chase after her lovers but won’t catch them. She’ll look for them but not find them. Then she’ll think, “I may as well go back to my husband. I was better off with him than I am now.” She didn’t realize that I

was the one who gave her grain, new wine, olive oil, and even gold and silver she used in worshipping Baal.

So I'll now hold back the harvest wine and grain, and I'll take back the wool and linen clothing I gave her, and I'll strip her naked while her lovers look on. No one will be able to rescue her. Also I'll stop all her celebrations, including her new moon festivals, Sabbath days, and other festivals. She said her vines and fig trees were her lovers' payment for sex. But I'll ruin those vineyards and fig trees; they'll become weeds, and wild animals will eat them. I'll punish her for all the times she burned incense to Baal, and wore jewelry and earrings to attract her lovers. I, the LORD have spoken these words.

I'll win you back again by leading you into the desert and speaking tenderly to you. I'll give back your vineyards to you, and I'll change Trouble Valley into Valley of Hope. You'll respond to Me as you did long ago when I rescued you from Egypt. From then on you'll call me your husband, not your master. I'll no longer let you even mention the names of the Baals. I'll encourage the animals, birds, and creatures that move on the ground not to harm you. And I'll remove all weapons of warfare from the land so you can live in peace. You'll be My wife forever, and I'll show you justice, fairness, love, and compassion. I'll be faithful to you. Then you'll know Me as your LORD.

In that day I'll tell the sky to send rain on the earth. The earth will answer the cries of the grain, grapes, and olive oil for rain. And they'll sing together "Jezreel" (meaning "God Plants"). I'll plant you, Israel, for Myself in the land, and I'll show love to those I called "Lo-Ruhamah" (meaning "Not My Loved One"). And I'll say to those I called "Lo-Ammi" (meaning "Not My People"), you are now My people. And they'll say, "You are my God."

Once you were a stranger to My grace; you followed your selfish ways and rebelled against My laws. I sent the Holy Spirit who convicted you of sin. Now thank Me for forgiveness that comes through My cross. Now you are My child and you belong to Me. Submit to My plan for your life. Work My perfect will in your life.

Hosea Accepts His Unfaithful Wife Again

3 Then I said to Hosea, “Go love your wife again even though she was an adulteress. This will show that I love Israel, even though they worship idols and enjoy the cakes made with raisins.” So he bought her back for 15 pieces of silver and 10 bushels of grain and some wine. He said to her, “You are to remain in my house and be faithful to me and not have sex with anyone including me.”

This illustrates that for a long time the Israelites will be without a king or prince, and without sacrifices at My Temple, and any way of getting guidance from Me. But later Israel will turn back to Me and David their king. They’ll come to Me with fear and trembling, and I’ll be good to them.

Five things were predicted about Israel, “The children of Israel shall abide many days without a (1) king—(2) prince—(3) sacrifice—(4) priestly vest—(5) teraphim” (3:4, KJV). This prophecy has been remarkably fulfilled in Israel since AD 70. Israel has retained her identity, “shall abide many days” (3:4) but without a king, or kingly succession, sacrifices, or temple. I am not finished with Israel, but will fulfill My promises to restore her to prominence and the nation shall occupy the Holy Land in peace. Because I will keep My promise to a nation, I want you, the reader, to keep your promises to Me.

My Blame is Directed to Israel

4 You Israelites, listen to My Word as I file a lawsuit against you with these charges: “You are not faithful to Me, and you do not show kindness, and you have no knowledge of Me. You swear, lie, kill, steal, and commit adultery. Violence is everywhere and one murder follows after another. This is why your land is a desert and everyone is dying, including people, wild animals, birds, and fish.

“Don’t try to blame someone else. You priests are at fault. You and your prophets will stumble in daylight. And you Israel are being destroyed because you don’t know Me. Your priests are to blame because you refuse

to obey Me. So now I refuse to recognize you as My people. Because you've forgotten My laws, I won't bless your children. By adding more priests you increased your sin against Me. They exchanged their high position for the disgrace of idols.

“The priests like it when the people bring sin offerings to them because then the priests can eat. Since the priests are wicked, so are the people. That explains the saying, ‘Like priests, like people.’ The priests will eat, but they’ll still be hungry. And though the people are prostitutes, they won’t have children. That’s because they have rebelled against Me and been unfaithful to Me.

“You drink wine and so you can’t think straight! How stupid! You are asking a piece of wood to tell you what to do. Do you think the way a stick falls can tell you the future? How foolish! Wanting sex at pagan shrines has caused you to serve other gods and desert Me. You offer sacrifices to idols in hilltop shrines, and you burn incense to your gods in the shade of oak, poplar, and other trees.

“Your daughters and daughters-in-law became prostitutes. But I won’t punish them because you men are sinning with harlots and shrine prostitutes. You are so foolish! And so you will come to ruin.

“Israel, though you are a prostitute, don’t influence Judah in that direction. Stop worshiping idols at Gilgal and don’t go to Beth-Aven (which means ‘House of Wickedness’). Your worship is not genuine as you take oaths but not keep them. Israel, forget about your idols. You men get drunk and then sleep with prostitutes, and you love your shameful ways. A whirlwind will sweep you away, and you’ll die in shame.”

By My holiness I should destroy you. You are like all people, you are not perfect. You fall short in so many areas. I will look on you in mercy, not judgment. When I see your sins, I will look to the cross of Christ who died for your sins. I will show you love and acceptance in Christ.

My Judgment on Israel

“You priests, leaders of Israel, and members of the royal family, listen to **5** these words. You trapped My people with idols at Mizpah and Tabor, and you dug a deep pit to trap them.

“I know all about you, Israel; you can’t hide from Me. But turning to prostitution, you have become spiritually corrupt. You can’t return to Me because of your sinful deeds. You are so given over to prostitution that you can’t know Me.

“Your arrogance works against you, and you’ll stumble in your sin, and so will Judah. When you come with your flocks and herds to offer sacrifices to Me, it’ll be too late. You won’t find Me because I’ve turned from you. You’ve been unfaithful to Me, giving birth to illegitimate children. So at the new moon festivals, you and your wealth will disappear.

“Blow the trumpet in Gibeah and in Ramah. Raise the battle cry in Beth-Aven. Lead into battle, you soldiers from Benjamin. When I punish you, you’ll be a pile of rubble. Judah’s leaders are as sinful as people who move boundary stones to extend their territory. Because of this I’ll pour out My wrath on them like a waterfall. I’ll oppress and trample you, Israel, in judgment because you insist on worshiping idols. I’ll destroy you, Israel, the way moths ruin wool, and Judah, I’ll destroy you like dry rot ruins wood.

“When Israel and Judah saw how weak they were, Israel turned to Assyria’s great king. But he couldn’t cure them. Israel and Judah, I’ll be like a lion, tearing them to pieces and carrying them off and no one will be able to rescue them. Then I’ll leave them alone to go back to Jerusalem until they admit their guilt and look to Me for help from their misery.”

Learn to properly pray to Me. When your prayers are not answered, learn why I will correct you when you pray for the wrong thing. I will correct you when you don't properly intercede. And when you have sin in your life, I will convict you of sin. I will forgive you for any hidden sin, or if you sin presumptuously (Ps. 19:13).

Return to Me

I, the LORD, said for Hosea to tell his people, “Let’s return to the LORD. He has torn us to pieces, but He can heal us and bandage our wounds. He’ll restore our strength so we can live in His presence. Let’s do our best to know Him, and He’ll respond to us as surely as the dawn will come each morning and rain will come in early spring.”

When you are parched and thirsty, come drink from Me. I have some “mercy drops” for you. You need a refreshing shower. You need rain that awakens and grows fruit in your life. Wait and pray for rain.

I, the LORD, said, “Israel and Judah, what shall I do with you? Your love for Me vanishes like the morning mist or dew. That’s why I sent My prophets to cut you to pieces and to slaughter you with My words. My judgments on you were as sharp as lightning. I’d rather you show mercy than offer Me sacrifices. And I’d rather you know Me than bring Me burnt offerings.

“Like Adam, you betrayed Me by breaking our agreement. Everyone in Gilead is wicked, and your hands are covered with the blood of your victims. Gilead’s people are robbers, lying in ambush for their victims. Your priests are robbers in ambush, murdering travelers on the way to Shechem, and they practice every kind of sin. What a terrible thing I’ve seen in Israel. My people have defiled themselves by worshiping false gods. Judah, your time of punishment is coming, but I wanted so much to bless you.”

Israel Rebels

7 “I wanted to heal you, Israel, but your sins were too great. Everyone in Samaria is a liar, a thief, or a bandit. You don’t seem to realize I’m watching you.”

I, the Lord, wish you were perfect, but you are “prone to wander.” When you give into your fleshly passion, you feel the sting of sin. You need forgiveness to deal with your fleshly passion. You need cleansing by the blood of Christ (1 John 1:7).

“Your king and princes know about your sins. You are all adulterers, burning with desire like a hot oven, whose fire smolders in the night and in the morning flames like a raging fire. On royal holidays, your princes get drunk, and the king makes a fool of himself as he drinks with those who make fun of him. You killed your kings, and no one calls for help.

“You Israelites associate with foreigners who are as worthless as a small cake cooked on only one side.”

Don't be a cake half-baked. Seek balance in all things. Balance prayer with outward service. Balance inward love with outward worship.

“Worshiping foreign gods has sapped your strength, and you don't seem to realize it. You are like an old man with graying hair who is weak. Your pride has kept you from returning to Me your God.

“Also you Israelites have become like a senseless bird, going first to Egypt and then flying to Assyria. But I'll catch you in a net, and I'll punish you for your sinful ways. How terrible it will be for you, My people, who have rejected Me. Because you rebelled, you deserve to die. I wanted to rescue you, but you told Me lies. You don't pray to Me with sincere hearts. Instead you sit on your couches and wail. And you cut yourselves as you ask Baal and other false gods to give you good crops.

“I taught you and made you strong, but now you plot against Me. You look everywhere for help except to Me, the Most High God, in heaven. You are no more useful than a crooked bow that misses its target. Your leaders will die because they insulted Me, and the Egyptians will laugh at you.”

Israel Continues to Sin

8 “Sound the alarm. The enemy descends like a vulture on My people, because they've broken our agreement and ignored My laws. Israel, you asked that I help you. But it's too late. Your enemies will chase you because you rejected everything that is good. You chose kings and princes but you didn't check with Me. You made idols from silver and gold and that has led

to your downfall. Samaria, I'll have nothing to do with this calf-idol you made; I'm so angry with you. Will you never be innocent again? Some human hands made this calf. I certainly didn't. Therefore it must be smashed to pieces.

“You've sown the wind, and so you'll reap the whirlwind. The stalks of wheat wither and produce no grain. If you do harvest some grain, enemies will steal it and eat it.”

Ask forgiveness for every sin you've ever done, and forgiveness for thoughts of sin that never become acts. I will judge you for your sins.

“Israel you are ruined. You are useless as a broken pot. Like a wild donkey looking for a mate, you've gone to Assyria. In fact you've sold yourself to many lovers. But yet I'll gather you together, and then you'll suffer under the burden of the great king.

“You built many altars for sin offerings, but they are altars of sin. I wrote out My laws, but you said they weren't for you. You eat the meat of your own sacrifices, but they mean nothing to Me. I'll remember your sins and punish you. Then you'll go again to Egypt. You've forgotten Me, your Creator. You built palaces and great fortified cities. But now I'll send fire on your cities and burn your fortresses.”

Remember Me when you arise in the morning because I created sleep to give you enjoyable rest. Remember when I work for you and give you strength to do your tasks in life. Remember Me when you sit down to eat because I bring food out of the earth to strengthen you. Remember Me all day for each day that you live. But most of all, remember Me as your Maker.

Hosea Announces the Punishment of Israel

“Don't rejoice as others do, for you've been unfaithful to Me and you've been like a prostitute, earning wages at every threshing floor. Your harvests

I won't give you enough food to feed your people, and you won't have enough grapes for wine. I won't let you stay here in the land. You'll be taken to Egypt and Assyria, where you'll eat ceremonially unclean food. You won't pour out wine offerings to Me, and I won't be pleased with your sacrifices. They'll be polluted like the food eaten by mourners. You may eat this food to feed yourselves, but you may not offer it to Me.

“What will you do on your festivals? Even if you escape alive from Assyria, Egypt will conquer you and you'll be burned in Memphis. Your silver treasure will be covered with weeds, and thorns will grow in your tents. Your time of punishment has arrived. You'll get what you deserve, and you will know it. You say the prophets are fools and My messengers are crazy, and this is because your sins are so many and you're filled with hatred. The prophets are My watchmen, but you set traps for them and you hate them even in My temple. You are as bad as what they did in Gibeah years ago. I won't forget; I'll punish you for your sins.

“When I found you, loving you was like finding grapes in the desert. When I saw your ancestors, it was like seeing first ripe figs. But then you deserted Me for Baal-Peor, giving yourselves to that awful idol. Soon you became as vile as that god. Your glory will fly away like a bird. And your children will die at birth, or die in the womb, or not even be conceived. Even if your children do survive, I'll take them from you. How terrible it will be when I turn from you. Israel, you like Tyre, are in a pleasant location. But you'll lead your children to be slaughtered.

“I will give them wombs that don't give birth and breasts that give no milk.

“I hated you at Gilgal because of your sin there. So I'll no longer love you because your leaders are rebels.”

This verse should scare you. You have ignorant sin in your life. You've stopped loving Me. Claim My promise, “I retain not My anger forever” (Mic. 7:18). Claim Jesus as your High Priest “who lives to make intercession for you” (Heb. 7:25, ELT). Claim life because I promised “he shall live forever” (John 6:51).

“Like a plant you, Israel, are blighted, your roots are withered, and you bear no fruit. If they bear children, I’ll slay them. I’ll reject you because you’ve disobeyed Me, and you’ll roam from one nation to another.”

The Coming Judgment

10 “How prosperous you are, Israel. You are like a vine loaded with grapes. But as you grew more grapes, you built more altars to foreign gods. And as you prospered, you built more idols.”

Here is your priority. Live for Me first, then for your family, and then friends, next for the poor, and finally for your nation. Ask forgiveness for your selfish obsession with your pleasure, or your belongings, or your ambition. May you find joy in living for others.

“You’re deceitful, so you must now be destroyed. I’ll break down your foreign altars and smash your sacred stones. You’ll say, ‘We don’t have a king because we don’t reverence You. But so what? What could a king do for you?’ You make promises you don’t intend to keep. So justice is like poisonous weeds in the fields.

“You people in Samaria are concerned about the calf-idol at Beth-Aven. People and priests mourn over it because its glory has been stripped away. When you are taken as captives to Assyria, your idol will be carried there. But then people will laugh at you for worshiping this idol. Your king will disappear like a chip of wood in a stream. The pagan shrines at Bethel (which means ‘House of God’) will be destroyed. Thorns will grow over those altars, and you’ll beg the mountains and hills to fall on you.

“Israel, since that time in Gibeah, you’ve never stopped sinning. I’ll punish you by bringing nations against you. You were like a trained heifer threshing grain. But now I’ll put a yoke on your neck, and you and Judah must plow the hard ground.”

Serving Me is easy, like the heifer treading in the grain mill. But serving sin is hard and agonizing. Serve Me joyfully for the joy it

gives you.

“Plant seeds of justice and you’ll harvest My love. Now is the time for you to seek Me so I can shower righteousness on you. But you’ve planted evil and harvested deception. You have depended on your own strength and on armies to keep you safe. But now war will break out, and your fortifications will fall just as they did when Shalman destroyed Beth-Arbel. Mothers and their children were beaten to death against rocks. Bethel, this will be your fate too because of your great sin. When that day comes, your king will be destroyed.”

I, The LORD, Still Love My People

11 “Israel, when you were a child, I loved you as a father loves his son. And I called you out of Egypt.”

God says of Israel, “I—called My son out of Egypt” (11:1). It’s a picture of Me delivering the nation of Israel from Egypt. But these words are quoted by Matthew and applied to Jesus (Matt. 2:15), because there are 3 similarities. First, both Jesus and Israel were objects of the Father’s love. Second, both were called “My son” because Jesus was eternally begotten (Ps. 2:7, John 3:16) and Israel was generated by the Father’s promise (Gen. 12:2-3). Third, both were in Egypt. Jesus as a refugee from the tyranny of Herod, and Israel held in slavery by Pharaoh. Lord, thank You for prophecy given here that was fulfilled in the baby Jesus. I know everything about Jesus is true because what was predicted about Him was fulfilled accurately. I praise You for working all things together for good.

“But the more I called you, the more you rebelled, and you kept on sacrificing to Baal and burning incense to idols. I taught you how to walk, leading you by the hand. But you ignored Me. I led you with kindness and love. I lifted the yoke from your neck so you could eat. I bent down to feed you.

“But since you refused to listen to Me, you’ll go back to Egypt and Assyria will rule over you. War will enter your cities, and your enemies will break through your gates. You are determined to reject Me. You call Me the Most High, but I won’t honor you.

“Israel, I can’t give you up. I can’t destroy you as I destroyed Admah and Zeboiim. My heart goes out to you. I won’t destroy you in My fierce anger, all because I’m God and not some human. I’m the Holy One, so I won’t demolish you.

“In the future when I roar like a lion, you’ll come trembling from the west. You’ll come from Egypt like a flock of birds and from Assyria like doves. I’ll bring you home again and settle you in your homes.

“But now you, Israel, tell Me lies and are deceitful, and you, Judah, reject Me, the faithful Holy One.”

The Nation of Israel is a Liar

12 “You people of Israel chase the wind and feed on the whirlwind all day long. You’re filled with lies and violence, you’ve made a treaty with Assyria, and you’ve sent gifts to Egypt.”

Recommit yourself to Me this day to do My will. Feed on My Word and I will fellowship with you in prayer. Do not feed on the wind for you get nothing from the world, the flesh, and the devil.

“Now I’m bringing a lawsuit against Judah, and I’ll punish you for your sins. Before you were born, you struggled with your brother Esau in the womb; and when you became a man, you fought against Me. At Bethel you wrestled with My angel and won. Weeping, you begged Me to give you a blessing. There at Bethel you met Me—the LORD God Almighty—face to face. The LORD is My name so return to Me, show love and justice, and always wait patiently for Me.

“Israel, your merchants cheat by using dishonest weighing scales. You boast, ‘I’m very rich, and I’ve gotten all this wealth by myself.’ But you didn’t get it by sinning. I’m the LORD your God who rescued you from

Egypt. You'll live in tents again, as you do every year in the Festival of Shelters. By visions and parables My prophets have warned you of My coming judgment.

“Gilead is wicked and worthless. And in Gilgal people sacrifice bulls on altars that are like stones lined up in a field. Jacob, you went to Syria to get a wife by tending sheep. Then I used Moses, a prophet, to rescue you from Egypt and to care for them. You people of Israel have angered Me, so I'll now make you pay for your sins.”

I, The LORD, Am Very Angry With Israel

13 “It used to be that when your leaders spoke, every one of you in Israel shook with fear and respect. But then you sinned by worshiping Baal, and this sealed your doom.”

Remember that compromise with sin will lead to spiritual weakness, and when you add one sin to another sin, you weaken yourself so much that you can't stand.

“But now you keep on sinning by using silver to make idols that are skillfully designed by craftsmen in the shape of calves. You offer humans as sacrifices, and you kiss these idols shaped like calves. Therefore you'll vanish like the morning mist and early dew, and you'll disappear like chaff blowing away from a threshing floor and like smoke from a chimney.

“I'm the LORD your God, who rescued you from Egypt. I'm the only God you know and the only one who can take care of you. I cared for you in the dry, hot desert. When you had eaten and were full, then in your pride you forgot Me. So I'll attack you like a lion and like a leopard watching for you on the roadside. And I'll rip you to pieces like a bear robbed of her cubs. I'll devour you like a lion.

“Because you are against Me, your Helper, I'll destroy you. You wanted a king and rulers. So now where is your king and your leaders? In My anger I gave you kings, and then I removed them.

“Israel, I’ve kept a record of your sins. You’re like a child who refuses to be born when it’s time. Yet I’ll free you from death and the grave. One day, O Death and the Grave, I’ll destroy you and I’ll show no mercy.

“The tribe of Ephraim prospered more than the other tribes. But I’ll send from the desert an east wind that’ll dry up the land. Your springs and wells will disappear, and your treasures will be looted, all because you rebelled against Me. You’ll be killed in war. Children will be dashed to death against the ground, and pregnant women will be ripped open.”

Hosea Pleads With Israel to Change

14 “Israel, return to Me,” your LORD. “Your sins have caused you to fall. When you return to Me, say, ‘Please forgive our sins and receive us back so we can praise You.’”

You must worship Me with your lips for they speak what is in your heart. Nothing you could give Me would be greater than to give Me your heart.

“Admit that Assyria can’t save you. Promise never again to worship idols you’ve made and call them your gods. Only I show mercy to orphans.

“Israel, I’ll cure you of your idolatry, and My love for you will know no limits, for My anger is gone. I’ll refresh you like dew from heaven. Then you’ll blossom like lilies, and your roots will go deep like cedars in Lebanon. Your branches will spread out like an olive tree and be as fragrant as the cedars of Lebanon.

“You’ll return from captivity, and you will enjoy your shade and you’ll grow like grain. You’ll blossom like a well-watered vineyard and be as well-known as the wine from Lebanon. O Israel, stay away from idols. I’ll take care of you. I’ll be to you like an evergreen tree, giving you fruit all year long. If you are wise, you’ll know what I mean and if you are discerning, listen carefully. My paths are true and right. If you’re righteous, you’ll follow My paths. But sinners will stumble and fall.”

*Love Me and understand what I say about sin; but more importantly,
show your love by obeying My words.*

I AM GOD

Who Judges With Locusts

The Book of Joel

Joel predicts My coming locust-judgment on the nation because of her sins against Me. Joel calls it “The day of the LORD.” The plague and drought will be so devastating that the nation cannot sacrifice offerings to Me. The second half of Joel (2:28-3:21) predicts the future repentance and restoration of the Jews. Joel teaches you to pray for the true meaning of revival, that is, “My pouring My presence on My people” (2:28-32) and I am safety for all who call upon Me (2:28-32).

The Threat of Locusts

1 I, the LORD, gave this message to Joel, son of Pethuel. “Listen, you leaders and everyone else in the land. Has anything like this ever happened before? Tell your children about it. And have them tell your grandchildren and great-grandchildren. The cutting locusts ate crops; the swarming locusts ate what was left. Then came two other kinds of locusts. You drunkards, wake up and weep because all your grapes are gone. Like locusts, a powerful nation with troops too numerous to count will invade your land. They have teeth and jaws like a lion. This army of locusts has destroyed My grapevines and fig trees, stripping off their bark and leaving the branches white.”

Open your eyes to sin in your life so you can repent before judgment comes. Pray against the sin of our nation. Repent for your nation before judgment comes. Pray for forgiveness and mercy!

“Grieve like a young woman mourning for her fiancé who died. No grain offerings or drink offerings are available to offer in My Temple and the priests mourn. The fields have no crops, and the grain, wine, and olive oil are gone. You farmers and vine growers, weep, because there’s no wheat or barely or other crops. Grapevines have dried up. And so have the fig trees, pomegranates, date palms, and apple trees, so that all joy is gone.

“You priests who serve at the altar, wear burlap clothing in your grief. Lie all night at the altar, weeping because there are no more grain offerings or drink offerings at My Temple. Announce a time to fast and call the people together. Urge the leaders and all the people to go to My Temple and pray. Soon destruction from Me, the Almighty, will come. That will be a terrible day.”

Call your own private solemn assembly (serious meeting) to fast. Confess any hidden sin or ignorant sin. Seek forgiveness by the blood of Christ (1 John 1:7-10) and seek My mercy.

“Your food is gone, and there’s no more celebrating at My Temple. Seeds rot in the ground and grain crops die. Your barns are empty with no grain stored in them. Cattle groan with hunger for pasture and wander around, and sheep bleat because of lack of food. Pray, ‘LORD, we need Your help. Heat has devoured our pastures and burned up all the trees. Wild animals have no water because the streams are dried up and the pastures are burned.’”

My Day, the Day of the LORD, is Near

2 “Blow the trumpet in Zion to sound an alarm. All you people tremble because the day of My judgment is at hand. That day will be dark and gloomy, with black clouds overhead. A mighty army will appear like dawn spreading across the mountains. This army is powerful like no other army before or after it.

“Flames surround them. Before they invaded, your land was like the Garden of Eden, but now it is a desert. These ‘soldiers’ look like horses, and they run like fast chariots. They sound like chariots as they leap over

mountains. They make a terrible noise like the rumbling of chariots, or like a fire sweeping across a field to consume straw, or like an army going into battle. The sight of them is frightening. They climb over walls like soldiers, and they march in line, without losing rank. They don't push each other; they keep marching straight ahead. No weapon can stop them. They swarm over city walls and enter into your homes, crawling through windows like thieves. As they approach, the earth shakes and the heavens shake. The sun and moon grow dark, and the stars don't shine. I, the LORD, lead this army with countless troops, and they follow My orders. The day of My judgment is so terrible that no one can endure it.

“Return to Me now,” I, the LORD, plead. “Come back to Me with all your heart. Fast, and cry and mourn. Don't tear your clothes in your grief; instead come to Me with torn hearts. Return to Me because I'm gracious and merciful, I don't easily get angry, and I'm full of love. I'm not anxious to punish you.”

Your serious sin demands serious fasting and repentance. All sin is serious to Me, so open your eyes to see the awfulness of your sin. Repent with all your heart.

“Who knows? Perhaps I'll bless you so that you'll again have enough for grain offerings and drink offerings for Me, your God.

“Blow the trumpet in Zion. Call everyone together and show your sorrow by fasting. Have everyone come, including adults, children, babies, and even newlyweds. You priests, serving in My presence, should weep between the porch and the altar, and pray that I'll spare My people. Don't let other nations make jokes about you. Don't let them say, ‘Where is their God? He must be helpless.’”

I'm concerned about My land, and I take pity on My people. You prayed and I said, “I'm sending you enough grain, new wine, and olive oil to satisfy your needs. I'll never again let the nations laugh at you. I'll chase the army from the north away from you, sending them into a parched desert where they'll die. Some will be driven into the Dead Sea and some into the Mediterranean Sea. The stench of the rotting corpses will be terrible. I'll do

great things for you. So don't be afraid, but be glad and rejoice because of these great things I'll do for you.

"You don't need to be afraid of starving because pasturelands are again becoming green, trees are bearing fruit, and fig trees and vines are covered with figs and grapes. You people of Zion, be glad in Me, the LORD, I'll send you lots of rain in both the fall and spring. Threshing floors will be filled with grain, and the jars will be filled with new wine and olive oil.

"I, the LORD your God, will give you back the crops the locusts ate. They were like a great army I sent to you. Again you'll have plenty of food, and you'll praise Me, the LORD your God, who has done miracles for you. You'll never be put to shame again. You'll know that I'm here with you and that I alone am the LORD your God and there is no other god. As I said, you'll never be put to shame again.

"Later I'll pour out My Spirit on everyone, and your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your old men will dream dreams, and your young men will see visions. In those days I'll also pour out My Spirit on My servants, both men and women. I'll work wonders in the sky and on the earth. There'll be blood and fire and clouds of smoke. The sun will turn dark, and the moon will be red like blood before My terrible day of judgment arrives."

Ask now for My Spirit to pour out on you. Find the pitcher and stand under the spout so the oil of My Holy Spirit will pour on you. Are you there?

"I'll save everyone who calls on My name. As I said, My people on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem will escape judgment, for I've chosen some to survive."

I, The LORD, Will Judge the Nations

3 "At that time I'll restore Judah's and Jerusalem's prosperity again. I'll bring together the nations that scattered you, My people. I'll bring them to the Valley of Jehoshaphat, and I'll punish them for dividing up My land. Those nations cast lots to see which of you would be their slaves. Also, they

sold the boys to pay for prostitutes and they sold the girls to have money to pay for wine.

“You people of Tyre and Sidon and you Philistines, are you trying to get even with Me for something I’ve done? If so, I’ll get even with you quickly. You’ve taken My silver and gold and treasures and have taken them off to your pagan temples. You’ve sold My people to the Greeks, who took them far away from their homeland. But I’ll bring them back home, and I’ll do to you what you did to them. I’ll sell your sons and daughters to Judah, who’ll sell them to the Sabeans far away.” I, the LORD, have spoken these words.

“Announce to the nations: ‘Prepare for war. Get the soldiers ready for the attack. Melt your plows into swords and make spears out of garden tools. Let the weak say that I’m strong.’”

There is a time for war, so prepare for an enemy. There are also times of peace, so live peacefully in My presence.

“All you nations, come quickly, and bring Your warriors. Bring the nations’ armies to the Valley of Jehoshaphat, where I, the LORD, will judge them. Let the sickle do its work, for the harvest is ripe. Tread the nations like grapes in the winepress and let the vats be filled, for the nations’ wickedness is great. Thousands are waiting in the valley of death for My decisions, because the day of judgment will soon come. The sun and the moon will be dark, and the stars won’t shine.”

Read in Scripture what will happen in the end times. Be spiritually prepared. Know Christ as Savior, and in the end times, you will be saved.

“I’ll roar from Zion like a lion, and I’ll thunder from Jerusalem. Then the sky and the earth will shake. But I’ll be a refuge and a strong fortress for My people. Then they’ll know that I’m the LORD their God in Zion, My holy hill. Jerusalem will be holy, and foreign nations will never again invade her.

“New wine will drip from the mountain vineyards, and cattle and goats will produce lots of milk. Water will fill Judah’s dry riverbeds, and a stream will flow from My temple to water Acacia Valley, east of the Dead Sea. Egypt and Edom were both cruel to Judah, killing innocent people. Judah will be inhabited forever, and Jerusalem will endure for many generations. I, the LORD, will live on Mount Zion with My people, and I’ll forgive them of their sins.”

You live in a time of testing where you must live triumphantly over sin. You must face threats of all types, and triumph over them. You yearn for peace and security. But more importantly, yearn to live with Me.

I AM GOD

Who Executes Judgment

The Book of Amos

Amos predicts the coming destruction of Israel, Judah and the surrounding nations. He prophesied the destruction of Jeroboam's kingdom when it was strong and prosperous, and his prediction seemed unlikely to happen. Yet 50 years later the kingdom was completely destroyed. This teaches you to claim My promises in prayer, even when it seems an answer may not be in sight. "Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel" (4:12).

Punishing Israel's Neighbor Nations

1 "I gave this message to Amos who raised sheep near Tekoa when Uzziah was king of Judah and Jeroboam was king of Israel. Two years before the earthquake (in 760 BC) I, the LORD, gave him several messages about Israel. I, the LORD, said, 'When I roared like a lion from My temple on Mount Zion and thundered from Jerusalem, the shepherds' pasturelands and the grass on Mount Carmel dried up and turned brown.'"

I, the LORD, said, "The people of Damascus, Syria's capital, have sinned not just three times, but four. And so I'm angry with them. They threshed My people in Gilead as grain is threshed with iron teeth. So I'll send fire on King Hazael's palace, and I'll destroy Ben-Hadad's fortresses. I'll break the gate of your city, and I'll destroy the king in the Valley of Aven (meaning 'Wickedness') and I'll destroy the king in Beth-Eden. And you people of Syria will be taken back to Kir as slaves." I, the LORD, have spoken.

I, the LORD, then said, "The people of Gaza in Philistia have sinned not just three times, but four. And so I'm angry with them. They sold My people as slaves to Edom. So I'll set fire to the walls and fortresses of Gaza. I'll kill the people of Ashdod and the ruler in Ashkelon and the people of

Ekron. The few remaining Philistines will perish.” I, the Sovereign LORD, have spoken.

I, the LORD, then said, “The people of Tyre have sinned not just three times, but four. And so I’m angry with them. Like Gaza, the people of Tyre sold My people as slaves to Edom breaking their treaty with Israel their brother. So I’ll set fire to the walls and fortresses of Tyre.”

I, the LORD, then said, “The people of Edom have sinned not just three times, but four. And so I’m angry with them. They chased their relatives, Israel, with the sword, and they were fierce in their anger. So I’ll set fire on Teman, and Bozrah’s fortresses will be destroyed.”

I, the LORD, said, “The people of Ammon have sinned not just three times, but four. And so I’m angry with them. When they attacked Gilead to extend their property, they ripped open the pregnant women of Gilead. So I’ll send fire on the walls of Rabbah, and its fortresses will be destroyed. War cries on the day of battle will be heard, and violent winds will blow. Her king and his officials will be taken into captivity.” I, the LORD, have spoken.

You are My message to the unsaved. Faithfully tell others what I will do for them before you tell them of My punishment for sin. Remember, punishment begins with those closest to Me. Repent of your sin and seek forgiveness. Turn from your sin and cling to Me.

Moab, Judah, and Israel

2 Then I, the LORD, said, “The people of Moab have sinned not just three times, but four. And so I’m very angry with them. They burned the homes of Edom’s kings. I’ll send fire on Moab and I’ll destroy the palace in Kerioth. Shouts of battle will be heard, along with the trumpet blast. I’ll destroy Moab’s ruler and his officials will go with him.” I, the LORD, have spoken.

Then I said, “Judah has sinned not just three times, but four. They have rejected My law and refused to follow My decrees. They have been led

astray by the false gods their ancestors worshiped. So I'll send fire on Judah and burn down Jerusalem's fortresses."

Then I, the LORD, said, "Israel has sinned not just three times, but four. And so I'm angry with them. They've sold honest people for money, and they sold needy people for the price of a pair of sandals. They take advantage of poor people, and they aren't fair to people who are oppressed and helpless. My holy name is not honored, because a man and his son sleep with the same woman. They lie down beside altars wearing clothing taken as security for loans. In the temple of their god they drink wine bought with money received from fines.

"When you entered Canaan, I destroyed the Amorites, who were as tall as cedar trees and as strong as oak trees. I destroyed their fruit and their roots. I brought you out of Egypt and led you in the desert 40 years. Then I gave you the land of the Amorites. Also, I chose some of your sons to be prophets and others to be Nazarites. You know this is true, you people of Israel," say I, the LORD. "You sinned by making the Nazarites drink wine and by telling the prophets not to prophesy.

"So I'll crush you as a cart crashes when it is loaded with too much grain. Your fast soldiers will stumble as they run to escape. Your strong soldiers will lose their strength and their lives. Your archers will fall; fast runners won't be fast enough to get away; and horsemen won't be able to run fast enough. Your bravest soldiers will run away." I, the LORD, have spoken.

I punish those close to Me so discipline your mind, so you'll not think about evil. Keep your heart so you'll not desire sin. Guard your hands and feet so you'll not walk to sin.

They Ignore Me, Their God

3 "You people of Israel, hear this word from Me. I rescued you from Egypt. I chose only you from among all the nations on the earth. That's why I must punish you for your sins.

“Two people don’t walk together unless they’ve agreed to do so. And a lion doesn’t roar unless it has caught a victim. And he doesn’t growl in his den if it hasn’t caught anything. A bird doesn’t get caught in a trap if no bait has been set out. A trap doesn’t spring shut when nothing is there to catch. In a similar way people aren’t afraid if a trumpet doesn’t signal an attack. And disaster doesn’t come to a city unless I’ve planned it. In fact, I, the Sovereign LORD, do nothing without revealing My plans to My servants the prophets. I, the LORD, have roared like a lion, so naturally people are afraid. Since I, the Sovereign LORD, have spoken, Amos will prophesy My message.

“Announce this to Ashdod in Philistia and to Egypt and tell them to come to the mountains of Samaria in Israel so they can see the unrest and injustices in that city.” I, the LORD say, “My people don’t know how to do what is right. They load their fortresses with loot that has been robbed.”

I, the Sovereign LORD, say, “An enemy will overrun the land and destroy your fortresses and loot your belongings. Only a few in Samaria will escape alive. Like a shepherd pulling a lamb’s two leg bones or part of an ear from a lion’s mouth, so I’ll rescue a few people in Samaria with just parts of their beds and couches.”

I, the LORD, say this against Israel: “When I punish Israel for her sins, I’ll demolish the pagan altars at Bethel and even the corners of the altars will be cut off and fall to the ground. I’ll destroy the beautiful winter and summer homes of the wealthy. Their houses and palaces decorated with ivory will be demolished.”

I, the LORD, search your heart and actions for sin. If you have hidden sins, show them to Me. If you have unconfessed sins, repent and beg forgiveness. Fear My punishment of sin among My followers. Love Me with all your heart and seek My blessing on all you do.

Oppression

“You women of Samaria are like fat cows. You abuse the poor and needy and you always ask your husbands to bring you another drink. I, the

4 Sovereign LORD have affirmed that the time will come when you'll be taken away like fish on hooks. You'll be dragged through holes in your city walls, and you'll be thrown out toward Mount Hermon.

“Go ahead and sin in Bethel and Gilgal. Bring sacrifices every morning and a tenth of your crops every third day. Present bread made with yeast as a thank offering. Also bring freewill offerings you can brag about, for you Israelites love to do this.

“I caused food to be lacking in every town, and yet you haven't returned to Me,” say I, the Sovereign LORD. “Also, three months before harvest time I hold back the rain. I let it rain on some towns but not on others, and some fields had rain, and others didn't, and they dried up. People staggered from one town to another for a drink of water, but there was never enough. Still you didn't come back to Me, your LORD.

“I struck your farms with blight, and locusts devoured your fig trees and olive trees. But still you didn't come back to Me. Therefore, I did terrible things to you just as I did in Egypt. Your young men died in war and their horses were slaughtered. Your camp was filled with the stench of death. But still you didn't come back to Me, your LORD.

“Therefore, I destroyed some of your cities, as I destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah. You who survived were like a burning stick snatched from fire. But still you didn't come back to Me. Therefore, I'll bring on you all these calamities I've mentioned. So prepare to meet Me, your God, when I come in judgment. I created the mountains and the wind, and I reveal My thoughts to man. I turn dawn into darkness and I tread on mountains under My feet. I am the LORD God Almighty.”

Repent of your sin and beg forgiveness. I am powerful; serve Me. I am high and lofty, worship Me. I created all things; realize everything you have comes from Me. I am the high and lofty One.

A Song of Grief

5 Listen, Israel, to this lament song: “Israel, you have fallen, and you'll never rise again. You lie deserted in your land with no one to help you

get up.” I, the Sovereign LORD, say that for every thousand soldiers who go to battle only a hundred will survive, and for every hundred only 10 will come home alive. I keep saying to Israel, “Return to Me and live. Don’t go worship idols in Gilgal, Bethel, or even Beersheba. The people of Gilgal will be carried off into captivity, and Bethel will end up as nothing. Return to Me and you’ll live. Otherwise I’ll attack like a fire and you’ll be devoured, and Bethel, your gods won’t be able to save you from the flames. You wicked people twist justice and reject upright living.

“I created the stars including the well-known constellations Pleiades and Orion. I turn darkness into the light of dawn and day into night. I draw up water from the oceans and pour it down as rain. I destroy strong soldiers and strong fortresses.

“You hate judges and honest witnesses. You mistreat poor people and force them to give you grain. You’ve built expensive homes, but you won’t live in them. You’ve planted vineyards, but you’ll drink no wine from their grapes. I’m aware of your many sins and the many times you’ve rebelled against Me. You cheat good people by taking bribes, and you keep the poor from getting justice in court. In these evil times wise people keep quiet.

“If you want to live, then start doing what is right and stop doing what is sinful. Then I, the LORD God Almighty, will be with you as I’ve promised. Hate sin and love what is good, and see that justice is carried out in the courts. Then I, the LORD of the heavens, will have mercy on you people of Joseph’s descendants (that is, Israel) who are left.

“Therefore, I, the LORD, the LORD of the heavens say that crying will be heard in every town and every street. Farmers will be asked to weep with you and with those who are hired to mourn. People will wail in every vineyard, because I’ll pass through and destroy them.” I the LORD have spoken these words.

“How terrible it’ll be for you who wish the day of the LORD were here. You think I, the LORD, will rescue you from your enemies. But you’re wrong. That day will bring darkness, not light, gloom, not joy. You’ll run from a lion, but you’ll meet a bear. You’ll escape from the bear, but when you’re home you’ll lean your hand against a wall and a snake will bite you. The day of the LORD’s judging will be a day of darkness. It’ll be pitch dark with no ray of light.

“I hate your religious festivals and assemblies. I won’t accept your burnt offerings and grain offerings, and I’ll have no regard for your fellowship offerings. I don’t want to hear your noisy songs, and what I want is justice and fairness being like a river that never runs dry.

“For 40 years you wandered in the desert without bringing Me offerings or sacrifices. No, you’re interested only in your pagan gods—Sakkuth, your king god, and Kaiwan, your star god. So I’ll force you to become captives in a land beyond Damascus.” I, the LORD of the heavens, have spoken these words.

There is “a time to weep” (Eccl. 3:4, KJV). Weep over the sins of your family and friends. Mourn over those who reject Me. You know they will be judged in the future, but weep over them today because of My promise to judge unrepentant rebellion in the future.

Israel Will Be Destroyed

6“You rulers in Zion and Samaria think you are safe. You are famous and popular, and people go to you for help. But you’ll face trouble. Look what happened to Calneh, Hamath, and Gath in Philistia. You’re no better than they are. You try to forget the thought of coming disaster, but your actions bring the day closer.

“You rich people lie around on beds with ivory posts, while you dine on the meat of the most choice lambs and calves. You sing songs on your harps as David did and on other instruments. You drink bowls of wine, and you wear expensive perfumes. But you have no concern about the ruin of your nation. Therefore, you’ll be the first to be led away as captives, and your feasting and lounging around will end.”

I, the Sovereign LORD, the LORD of the heavens, say, “I hate your pride, Israel, and your fortresses. I’ll surrender your city and your belongings to your enemies. If 10 of you survive by hiding in a house, they too will die. And if a relative of theirs comes to carry out the corpses to bury them, he may ask ‘Is anyone with you?’ And if he answers ‘No,’ the relative may say, ‘Be quiet. Don’t mention the name of the LORD.’” I, the LORD, have ordered that big and small houses shall be smashed to pieces.

“Horses can’t run on rocks, and oxen can’t plow rocks. But that’s how you are when you turn justice into poison and you make fairness bitter. You’re also stupid in claiming you defeated Lo-Debar and Karnaim on your own. But I, the LORD of the heavens, will send a nation against you, Israel. They’ll capture Lebo-Hamath in the north and the Arabah Valley in the south.”

You should be uneasy in a world of sin. You should also be uneasy when My people are hard-hearted and think only of enjoyment and pleasure.

A Vision of Locusts

7I, the Sovereign LORD, gave Amos a vision of locusts attacking your crops. “This will happen,” I said, “after the king’s share has been harvested and before the rest of the grain has been harvested. Then the locusts will eat every crop in the land.” Amos asked, “O Sovereign LORD, how can our nation survive when it’s so small?” I, the LORD, decided then not to fulfill this vision and said, “I won’t let the nation be destroyed.”

Then I, the Sovereign LORD, showed Amos another vision in which I was getting ready to punish My people with a great fire that would burn up everything on earth and the ocean. Again, Amos said, “O Sovereign LORD, won’t You please stop? How can our nation survive when it’s so small?” Again I, the LORD, decided not to do this either.

Then I, the LORD, showed Amos a vision of Me standing beside a wall that had been built using a plumb line. I was checking to see if the wall was straight. Then I said, “Amos, what do you see?” He said, “A plumb line.” Then I, the LORD, said, “I’m using this plumb line to show My people they don’t measure up and I won’t ignore their sins. The pagan shrines of your ancestors will be destroyed, and I’ll bring a sword against the family of King Jeroboam.”

Then Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, sent this message to Jeroboam, king of Israel. “Amos is plotting against you right here in the center of Israel. Our nation can’t put up with this any longer. He’s saying that you’ll be killed, and the people will be taken into captivity.” Then Amaziah said,

“Amos, get out of here and go back to Judah and prophesy there. Don’t prophesy any more here in Bethel, especially at the king’s sanctuary.” Amos answered, “I’m not a prophet or the son of a prophet. I was a shepherd and I took care of sycamore-fig trees.” Then I, the LORD, told Amos to leave his flocks and go prophesy to My people, Israel. I am saying to Amos not to prophesy against Israel and to stop preaching against the house of Isaac (that is, the people of Israel).

Here’s what I, the LORD, say to you: “Your wife will become a prostitute, and your sons and daughters will be killed. Your land will be divided up and you, Amaziah, will die in a foreign country. Israel will be captives away from their homeland.”

Your nation is given over to pleasure and they ignore Sunday worship. Your nation is consumed by greed, and they worship money. Their time is spent fulfilling the lust of the flesh (sex) and the lust of the eyes (stuff) and the pride of life (power). Who will intercede for them?

A Vision of a Basket of Summer Fruit

8 I, the Sovereign LORD, showed Amos a basket of ripe fruit. I asked, “What do you see, Amos?” He replied, “A basket of ripe fruit.” Then I said, “This fruit means that My people are ripe for punishment. I’ll wait no longer. Instead of singing in My Temple, people will cry. Dead bodies will be everywhere, so you should be silent.” I, the LORD, have spoken these words.

“Listen to this, you who crush the needy and wipe out the poor. You want the new moon festival to be over, so you can sell grain, and you want the Sabbath day to be over so you can sell wheat. You want to reduce the amount of grain you sell and increase the price by cheating with dishonest weighing scales. You mix chaff with the wheat. And since the poor don’t have any money, you buy them as slaves for a piece of silver or even a pair of sandals.”

I, the LORD, say, “You take pride in your ancestor Jacob, but I’ll remember your sins. The earth will tremble because of your deeds, and

everyone will mourn. The land will be like the Nile River that rises up at flood time and then sinks back down. In that day, I, the Sovereign LORD, will make the sun go down at noon, and I'll turn daylight into darkness. I'll turn your religious festivals into times of mourning and your singing into weeping. In sorrow you'll wear burlap clothing and shave your heads. This will be like mourning for the death of an only son. It will be a terrible day.

“The days are coming,” I, the Sovereign LORD, say, “when there'll be not only a shortage of food and water, but also a famine of hearing My words. You'll go everywhere from sea to sea and from north to east and south to west, searching for a message from Me, but you won't find it. In that day lonely young women and strong young men will faint because of thirst for My Word. You who worship the idols of Samaria, Dan, and Beersheba will fall and will never rise again.”

Israel Cannot Escape From Me

9“Then I, Amos, saw a vision of the LORD standing by the altar in the temple.” He said, “Smash the tops of the temple pillars so hard that the foundations will shake. Make the pillars fall on the people below and kill them. Others who are left I'll kill with the sword. No one will escape. They may dig to the depths of the grave, but I'll reach down and get them. Or if they climb to the heavens, I'll bring them down. If they escape to Mount Carmel, I'll find them. If they try to hide from Me at the bottom of the ocean, I'll tell My sea monster to bite them. If they are taken as captives by their enemies, I'll kill them with the sword; I'll hurt them, not help them.

“When I, the LORD of the heavens, touch the earth, it melts, and the people mourn. I make the ground rise and then fall, like the Nile River. I built My palace in the heavens, and its foundation is the earth. I draw up the water from the ocean and pour it down as rain. I am the LORD.

“Israel, I'm your LORD God, and you and the Ethiopians are equally important to Me. I brought you out of Egypt, but I also brought the Philistines from Crete, and the Arameans from Kir. I've seen what a sinful nation you are, and so I'll destroy you from the face of the earth. But I'll not completely destroy the descendants of Jacob. At My command you, Israel, will be persecuted by other nations as grain is sifted in a sieve with

not one kernel falling to the ground. All you who are sinners will die by the sword, including those of you who say you'll never get caught.

“In that future day I'll restore David's fallen kingdom. I'll build it from the ruins and set it up just as it used to be. And you Israel will capture Edom and other nations that follow Me.” I, the LORD, have spoken, and My words will come true. “The days are coming when there'll be such a harvest that the grain and grapes will grow faster than they can be harvested. The mountains will be covered with vineyards. I'll bring back My people from captivity, and they'll rebuild their towns and live in them. You'll plant vineyards and gardens and eat your crops. I'll firmly plant you in the land I've given you, and you'll never be uprooted from your land again.” I, the LORD God, have spoken these words.

Bless My holy name from the depths of your heart. Lift holy hands to worship in My presence. Stand before Me with praise on your lips in prayer. Magnify Me. This is the transforming power of worship.

I AM GOD

Who Predicts Doom

The Book of Obadiah

Obadiah prophesies against a tribal nation named Edom or Esau. Edom means “red,” and perhaps the people get their name when Esau was born, “The first (Esau) came out red, all over like a hairy garment” (Gen. 25:25). So the Edomites came from Esau, and were named “red” after their father. But Esau “despised” the spiritual birthright of My people. He didn’t want to be My man to carry on the Abrahamic promise. Also, they are called “red” because they lived up in the “red” rocks south of the Dead Sea.

Obadiah’s name means “servant of the LORD.” This tells you four things. First, being My servant is more important than your family background or experiences or preparations. Second, the message of My servant is more important than the messenger. Third, don’t bring attention to yourself in ministry, but rather bring attention to the message I give you to deliver. Finally, the greatest thing that can be said is you are “My servant.”

The Edomites Will Be Humbled

1 I, the LORD God, gave Obadiah a message about Edom, and this is what I said: “I, the LORD, have sent a messenger with orders for the nations to attack Edom.”

Family is important, and Esau, the family head, made a bad decision out of his greedy heart that influenced his future line. The people took on the characteristics of Esau and continually “fought” against the children of Jacob. You are not responsible for the family into which you are born, but you are responsible for your future.

Rise above the weaknesses of your parents and be strong for Me, your God.

“Edom, I’ll make you small among the nations and they’ll despise you. You live in a rock fortress, making your home high in the mountains. In your pride you ask, who can reach us up here? You may soar as high as an eagle and build your nest, as it were, among the stars, but still I’ll bring you down.” I, the LORD, have spoken.

“If thieves break in at night, they take only what they want. People who harvest grapes always leave some on the vines. But Edom, you’ll be completely wiped out and all your hidden treasures stolen. Your allies can’t be trusted. They’ll trick you and set a trap for you, but you won’t be aware of it.”

The Edomites trusted in their mountain stronghold, but they were vanquished, and their territory occupied. Only those who trust in Me have any security at all. Do not trust in houses, policemen, armies, or retirement funds. Trust Me to protect you. Use resources for protection, but your trust must be in Me.

“In that future day I, the LORD, will destroy all your wise men. Soldiers from Teman will be frightened, and your descendants of Esau will be wiped out. Because you were cruel to your relatives, the descendants of Israel, you’ll be ashamed and destroyed forever.”

Just as Esau swore to kill Jacob, so the Edomites hated the sons of Jacob from that day on (Gen. 27:41). Family prejudice is strong, and it’s passed from father to children. Let hatred and prejudice stop with you. Love and pray for your physical and spiritual relatives.

“You stood and watched as foreign soldiers went to Jerusalem and carried off their wealth and cast lots to divide the loot. You were just like one of Israel’s enemies.

“You looked down on your brother Israel in the time of his misfortune. You shouldn’t have been glad and boasted when your relatives were taken captive. You shouldn’t have looted their towns in the day of their disaster or gloated over the destruction of your relatives in the day of their disaster. You shouldn’t have stood at the crossroads, killing your relatives who tried to escape. You shouldn’t have handed the survivors over to their enemies in that terrible day of trouble.”

The Edomites rejoiced when Jerusalem and My Temple were destroyed by the Babylonians and Nebuchadnezzar. Then they joined the looters to pillage the treasures of Israel. Finally, when Jews were trying to escape, the Edomites captured them and sold them into slavery. The Edomites did a hateful thing to their relatives, and I never forgot. I sent Obadiah to announce a punishment greater on Edom than on the Israelites. They would be wiped out completely.

“The day of My judgment for all nations is approaching. As you have done to Israel, so it will be done to you. I forced the people of Judah to drink the wine of My wrath. Now the nations will do the same to you, drinking continually, and disappearing without a trace. But Mount Zion will be a refuge for those who escape. It will be holy, and Jacob’s descendants will possess its land. Jacob’s descendants will be a fire that will burn Edom like straw. No survivors will be in Edom.” I, the LORD, have spoken.

“People from the Southern desert will occupy Edom’s mountains, and those who live in the foothills of Judah will possess Philistia, Ephraim, and Samaria. And Benjamin will occupy Gilead. Those who return from captivity to their land of Canaan will occupy the Phoenician coast as far as Zarephath. And those who return from captivity who are in Shepharad will capture the towns of the Southern Desert. Those I have saved will go up to Mount Zion and will rule over Edom. And the kingdom will be Mine.”

I AM GOD

Of a Second Chance

The Book of Jonah

Jonah was a bigoted Jew who was unwilling to preach repentance to an enemy of Israel, i.e., Nineveh. This book tells how I dealt with Jonah to motivate him to preach to unsaved Gentiles.

Jonah is a picture (type) of Christ who was raised from the dead then carried salvation to the Gentiles. I give credibility to the historical reliability of Jonah (Matt. 12:39-41) and the fish's belly was a picture of My entombment. To reject the historical accuracy of Jonah being swallowed by a great fish is tantamount to rejecting My credibility and reliability. As you read Jonah, search your heart for any excuses or resistance to your obligation to share the gospel with lost people.

Jonah Disobeys Me

1 I, the LORD, gave this message to Jonah, son of Amittai: “Go to the great city of Nineveh and say to the people I have seen how wicked you are and so I’ll punish you.” But Jonah went in the opposite direction to Joppa and boarded a ship headed for Tarshish in Spain, hoping to escape from Me.

I, the LORD, sent a strong wind over the sea, causing a violent storm that threatened to break the ship in pieces. All the sailors were afraid, and so they prayed to their gods. They threw a lot of cargo overboard to make the ship lighter. Jonah had gone below deck and was sound asleep. The captain went to Jonah and said, “How can you sleep in a storm like this? Pray to your God. Maybe He’ll have pity on us and will keep us from perishing.”

The sailors said, “Let’s cast lots to see who is to blame for this terrible storm.” So they did, and the lot fell on Jonah. They asked Jonah, “What

have you done to bring this storm on us? Where are you from? What's your nationality?" Jonah answered, "I'm a Hebrew, and I worship the LORD, the God of Heaven, the one who made the sea and the land." This frightened the sailors because he had already told them he was running away from Me. The storm kept getting worse, so they asked Jonah, "What shall we do to you to stop this storm?"

Jonah said, "Toss me into the sea and the storm will stop. I'm the cause of this terrible storm." The sailors tried even harder to get the ship to the shore. But they couldn't, and the storm kept getting worse. Then they prayed to Me, "Don't make us die for this man's sin. Don't hold us guilty for killing an innocent man. You sent this storm on us for Your good reasons." Then they tossed Jonah into the sea, and the storm stopped immediately. This caused the sailors to recognize My great power, and they offered Me a sacrifice and made promises to Me. Then I sent a big fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was inside the fish for three days and three nights.

Jonah Prays to Me

2 When he was in the fish, Jonah prayed to Me, his God. He said, "I prayed to You, LORD, when I was in trouble, and You answered me. From deep in the world of the dead I called to You for help, and You listened. You threw me to the bottom of the ocean, and great waves swirled around me and over me. I felt I was no longer in Your presence and would never see Your temple again. I was almost drowned by the waves that closed in around me, and seaweed was wrapped around my head. I sank below the underwater mountains, and I felt I would be a prisoner there forever. But You, LORD, rescued me from the pit.

"My life was slipping away, but I remembered You, LORD, and I prayed to You in Your holy temple. People who worship false gods turn from You who offers them mercy. But I'll offer sacrifices to You with songs of praise, and I'll keep the promises I made to You. I'm so grateful that You can deliver me from problems."

Jonah called to Me because I've answered in the past. Also, he called to Me because I've promised to answer those in trouble. This poor man cried, and I heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles (Ps. 34:6).

Then I, the LORD, told the fish to vomit up Jonah on the shore. And it did.

Jonah Obeys Me

3 I spoke to Jonah a second time, “Go to the great city of Nineveh and give My message of judgment.” This time Jonah obeyed and went to Nineveh. It was such a large city that it took three days to walk all through it.

After walking in the city for a day, Jonah said, to the people, “In 40 days Nineveh will be destroyed.” But the people of Nineveh believed My message, and they all decided to go without eating and to wear burlap clothing to show their sorrow for their sin.

When Nineveh’s king heard what was happening, he too wore burlap clothing, and sat in the dust. He and his officials sent this order throughout the city. “Not one of you or your animals is to eat or drink anything. Wear burlap clothing and even cover your animals with burlap. Pray to the LORD with all your heart and give up your sinful ways and stop all your violence. Perhaps God will have pity on you and hold back His fierce anger, so you won’t perish.”

When I saw that the people of Nineveh stopped their evil ways, I had pity on them and didn’t destroy them as I had threatened to do.

I look beyond the sin of any person to see My greater plan in the world. I do not completely reject you each time you disobey because of ignorance, or because of weakness, or because of a rebellious heart. Just as it is human nature to sin, it is My nature to forgive.

Jonah Becomes Angry at Me

4 When Jonah learned that the Ninevites turned from their evil ways, he became very angry. He complained to Me and said, “Before I left home, I knew You would do this to Nineveh. That’s why I went toward Tarshish. I know You are gracious and loving, slow to get angry and filled with love. And I know You can easily cancel Your plans to destroy wicked people. But, LORD, let me die. I’d rather be dead than see what I predicted about Nineveh’s downfall not happening.”

I said, “Do you have a right to be angry?”

Jonah went east of the city and made a shelter and sat within its shade, and he waited to see what would happen to the city. Then I, the LORD, made a vine grow up over Jonah to give him some shade. Jonah was very pleased with this. At dawn the next day I had a worm chew the vine, and it withered. When the sun came up, a scorching wind from the east beat down on Jonah’s head and he became faint. Jonah said, “I wish I could die.” But I said to Jonah, “Do you have a right to be angry about the vine?” Jonah said, “Yes, I do. I’m so angry I want to die.”

I said, “You’re concerned about the vine, though you didn’t take care of it. And it grew overnight and then died. But Nineveh has more than 120,000 people living in spiritual darkness, and many cattle are there too. Shouldn’t I be concerned about that great city?”

I bring small things into your life to prepare you for My will. See My hand in the small things that enter your life (such as a vine and worm), as well as the large things (national revival). I will give you wisdom to always seek My will, then do it and reflect a Christian attitude at all times.

I AM GOD

Listen When I Speak

The Book of Micah

Micah prophesied between 750 and 725 BC and was a contemporary of Isaiah, Hosea, and Amos. He focused on Samaria the capital of Israel the Northern Kingdom and Jerusalem the capital of the Southern Kingdom of Judah. He had a dual theme of first judgment of sin, and second, future restoration. He had a strong sense of social justice in the courts (3:11; 7:3), in business (6:10-12), and in places of authority and power (2:1-9; 3:1-10; 6:12; 7:2-6).

Micah preached against a Jewish religious system that had much ritual but little repentance or holiness. Therefore, a person's responsibility was "to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with Me, their God" (6:8).

Micah Warns the People

1 I, the LORD, gave Micah these messages in the form of visions about Samaria and Jerusalem when Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah were kings of Judah. "Listen, everyone. All the people in the world, listen carefully. I, the Sovereign LORD, have accusations against you from My holy temple. I'm coming down from heaven to walk and inspect the high places of earth."

I am everywhere present, but sometimes Christians act like the unsaved, that is, that I am only in heaven. Ask for forgiveness when you think I don't know what sin is happening on earth. Learn My constant presence is with you in all you do.

“They melt beneath Me and valleys split apart like wax in a fire and like water rushing down a hill. This is happening because of the sins of Israel, Jacob’s descendants. Samaria led Israel to sin, and the pagan altars at Jerusalem made Judah sin.

“So I’ll make Samaria a heap of rubble, a place where only vineyards can be planted. I’ll roll the stones of her walls to the valley below and expose her foundations. I’ll smash her idols to pieces, and the wages paid to the temple prostitutes will be destroyed by fire. The temple gifts provided prostitutes in Samaria will be used as wages to pay prostitutes in other countries.

“Because of this, Micah, I want you to weep and walk around naked and barefoot in sorrow. You’ll howl like a wild dog and moan like an owl.

“The people’s wound can’t be healed. It has come to the attention of Judah even to the gates of Jerusalem.

“Don’t tell our Philistine enemies in Gath, and don’t even cry. You people in Beth-Leaphrah [meaning “House of Dust”], roll in the dust to show your grief. And you people of Shaphir [meaning “Beautiful”], you’ll go as captives naked and ashamed. The people of Zaanah [meaning “One Who Goes Out”] will not go outside their walls. The people of Beth-Ezel [meaning “House Next Door”] mourn because no one helped them. The people of Maroth [meaning “Bitter”] wait for help, but disaster has come from Me, the LORD, even to the gate of Jerusalem.

“You people of Lachish, get your chariots ready. You caused Jerusalem to sin. Give a going-away gift to Moresheth. The town of Achzib [meaning “Deception”] deceived the kings of Israel, because it promised help but couldn’t send it. You people of Mareshah [meaning “Conqueror”] I’ll bring a conqueror to capture your town. And Israel’s glorious king will go hide in the Adullam Cave. Shave your heads in mourning, for the children you have will be taken away as captives. Make yourselves as bald as a buzzard in your grief for your children who’ll be taken to a foreign country.”

Judgment Against Those Who Oppress Others

“How terrible it will be for you who lie awake in bed, plotting evil plans.

Then at dawn you quickly carry out those plans you have the power to
2do.

“You grab any field or house you want, and you cheat people out of their homes and their land.” Therefore, I the LORD, say, “I’m planning disaster against you, and you won’t be able to escape. You’ll no longer be able to walk proudly in the streets.

“People will make fun of you by singing, ‘We’re ruined, and God takes Israel’s fields and has given them to traitors.’”

Accept the truth that everything you own and have was given to you by Me. Yield it all to Me. Let Me manage it all for My glory.

“So you’ll have no one to say how your land is to be divided.

“You’ll say, ‘Don’t prophesy such things. These disasters will never happen.’

“Descendants of Jacob, don’t say I, the LORD, did these things because I was angry. If you do what is right, I will bless you. Yet you people, like an enemy, steal clothes from soldiers returning home from battle. Also you take over the homes of widows and cheat their children of their inheritance. You thieves, get out of here. This is not your land because all your sin has ruined the land completely. The only kind of prophet you want is the one who says he’ll prophesy if you pay him enough wine. But he’s a liar and a deceiver.

“In that future day I, the LORD, will gather together those of you who are left. I’ll bring you together as a shepherd gathers his sheep. I’ll break down the gate and lead them out of captivity. I, your King, will guide you.”

Judgment Against the Leaders

3“You rulers of Israel, listen. You’re supposed to know right from wrong, but you hate what is good and you love what is evil. You skin My people alive, tearing their flesh from their bones.

“You eat their flesh, break their bones, and cook it in a pit. Someday you’ll ask Me to help you, but I won’t because of your sins.”

This is what I, the LORD, say to false prophets: “You’re leading My people astray. If someone promises you security, you give him false message of food. But if he refuses to pay you, you declare war on him. You’ll live in the dark with no visions or messages from Me. Then the sun will set for your prophets and the daytime will be dark. Your prophets and fortune-tellers will be ashamed, covering your face because you have no message from Me.

“As for you, Micah, you’re filled with power from the Spirit of the LORD. Speak about justice and tell Israel her sins. So you leaders of Israel, listen to My message. You hate justice and you twist the truth. You build Zion by murdering people and you build Jerusalem by your wickedness. You leaders accept bribes for dishonesty, and you priests and prophets teach and prophesy but only if you are paid for it. You tell people because you are depending on Me, the LORD, then you promise no disaster will come to them. Therefore Zion will be plowed like an open field, and Jerusalem will be a heap of ruins. A hill with thorns will cover the area where My Temple now stands.”

I, The LORD, Will Rule Forever

4 “In that future day, My temple in Jerusalem will be the most important place on earth. People from every nation will go there to worship. Many nations will say, ‘Let’s go to the mountain of the LORD God of Jacob. He’ll teach us His ways so we can obey Him.’ In those days Jerusalem will be the place where My teachings and My Word will be taught. I’ll settle disputes between many distant nations. The nations will beat their swords into plows and their spears into pruning hooks. Nations will stop going to war against each other, and will stop training for war. Everyone will live peacefully and without fear. My people will enjoy their own grapevines and fig trees. I, the LORD of the heavens have promised this. Other nations will worship their idols, but you’ll follow Me, the LORD your God, forever.”

I, the LORD say in that future day I’ll gather My people who are lame, and who were captives, and all those into whose lives I brought grief.

I, the LORD, love lost, straying sheep. I went after Paul the Apostle and brought him home. I also came after you. You wouldn't be saved, except I chose you. Then I put you under My loving care and healed your "crippledness." Now pray for your friends and relatives who are straying; I can bring them back home.

“The lame and the former captives will be strong again. I, the LORD, will rule from Mount Zion as their King forever. Jerusalem, you are like a watchtower looking over My people, or like a hill over My people, the Daughter of Zion.

“Jerusalem, why are you screaming? Don't you have a king? Have you no counselors? Why are you in pain like a woman in childbirth? Yes, you should groan in pain because you must leave the city for the open fields, and then you'll be taken as captives to Babylon. But in the last days I'll rescue you from there from your enemies.

“Many nations are surrounding you, and they are anxious to see you destroyed. But those nations don't know I, the LORD, have gathered them together to grind you like grain on a threshing floor. Listen, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, you will destroy these nations one day in the future,” say I, the LORD. “You can break them to pieces as if you had iron horns and bronze hoofs. You'll give their wealth to Me, the LORD of the earth.”

A Ruler Will Come From Bethlehem

5 “Jerusalem, call your troops together because the enemy is surrounding your city. They'll strike Israel's ruler in the face. But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, are one of the smallest towns in Judah. But out of you will come the One who will rule Israel, One whose ancestry is eternal.”

I predicted the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem (5:2). This prediction is historically verified by the Septuagint and the Dead Sea Scrolls. I moved Mary and Joseph from Nazareth to Bethlehem by the decree of Caesar Augustus, another historically verified date. Bethlehem demonstrates My power to predict the future and My

ability to control contemporary events so that “all things work together for good” (Rom. 8:28). O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie! Above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by; yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting Light; the hopes and fears of all the years are met in Thee tonight.

“I, the LORD, will abandon Israel until this ruler is born, and his family returns from captivity. I’ll take care of them as a shepherd cares for his sheep by My power and reputation as the LORD, their God. My people will live securely, and everyone will know of My greatness, and I’ll give them peace. If Assyria attacks you, I’ll raise eight rulers to lead you against him. You’ll defeat the Assyrians, and I’ll rescue you from them if they cross your borders to invade your land.

“Some of Judah’s descendants will survive and will be refreshing like dew and rain. They’re now scattered, but they’ll be strong like a lion pouncing on sheep, with no one to rescue them. They’ll defeat their enemies, and all foes will be destroyed.

“In that future day,” say I, the LORD, “I’ll destroy your horses and chariots, and your cities and fortresses. I’ll put an end to your witchcraft and your fortune-telling. I’ll destroy the idols and sacred stones you’ve made so that you’ll no longer be able to bow down to them. I’ll also get rid of your Asherah poles and destroy the towns where those idols stand. I’ll take vengeance in anger against all the nations that refuse to obey Me.”

I, The LORD, Speak Out Against Israel

6I, the LORD, said to My people, “State your case before the mountains and the hill. I call on the mountains and the earth’s foundation to hear My complaint and charge. My people, how have I wronged you? Answer Me. I rescued you from Egypt where you were in slavery, and I sent Moses, Aaron, and Miriam to lead you. Don’t forget that Balak, king of Moab, wanted to have you cursed and that Balaam, son of Beor, blessed you instead. And remember how I, the LORD, taught you as you traveled from Shittim to Gikal.

“What can you bring to Me, the LORD, to make up for what you’ve done? Shall you sacrifice year-old calves? Will I, the LORD, be pleased with thousands of sheep and thousands of rivers of olive oil? Or shall you offer the firstborn child in each of your families as payment for your sins? No, I, the LORD, do not want any of these! Instead I want you to do what is good, to see that justice is done, to love mercy, and to walk in humility before Me.”

Don’t try to impress Me with a gift of money, things, or wonderful feats done for Me. Give Me yourself and pledge to walk as honestly as you know how. Show Me your love for mercy and show Me your ability to treat others fairly.

“I’m the LORD, and it makes sense for you to respect Me. I’m calling everyone in Jerusalem to pay attention to My rod of punishment. You wicked people, I won’t forget the treasures you’ve stolen and your cheating by using dishonest weighing scales. I’ll punish your merchants for using dishonest scales and weights. You rich people are violent, and everyone tells lies.

“Therefore, I’ll wound you because of your sins. You’ll eat but not be satisfied. You’ll store up goods but end up with nothing. What you save will be captured by your enemies. You’ll plant crops but not harvest them. You’ll press your olives but not get enough olive oil to do you any good. And you’ll tread your grapes, but you’ll get no juice for wine. You’ve followed the sinful ways of King Omri and King Ahab. So I’ll now destroy you, and people of other nations will ridicule and insult you.”

Do Not Put Your Trust in Men

7“Now you are miserable. After the harvest you can’t find any grapes or figs to eat. Godly people are all gone, and no one is left who does right. Everyone is a murderer, setting traps for their own brothers. They use both hands in doing evil. Rulers and judges demand bribes. Powerful people work with others in getting what they want. Even the best of them is prickly as a thorn bush, and the most honest of them are worse than a hedge of

thorns, injuring any who come in contact with them. The judgment your prophets predicted is coming swiftly, and you'll be confused."

When everyone does their own thing, and calls evil good, you must not be like them, but follow Me. Though no one else is concerned with personal integrity, you must be holy. Judge yourself by My standard, not your standard.

"Don't trust anyone, not even your neighbors or friend or your wife. Sons dishonor their fathers, and daughters despise their mothers. Daughters-in-law oppose their mothers-in-law. Your enemies are right in your own home.

"I will protect those who look to Me for help. Those who waited for Me, I'll hear them. They will be glad when in trouble because they will get up. When sitting in darkness, I, the LORD, am their light. When they sin against Me, they must bear My wrath. But I, the LORD, will take up their case and make things right for them. I will bring them out of darkness into light, and I'll make things right. Their enemy will be ashamed and yet will say, 'Where is the LORD your God? Can't He help you?' But they will see their enemies trampled in the mud in the streets.

"Judah, the day is coming when your towns will be rebuilt, and your borders extended. People from Assyria, Egypt, and Babylonia, and elsewhere will come and honor you. They'll even come from the Euphrates River and from many distant seas and mountains. But the lands will be desolate because of the sins of the people who live there.

"I will shepherd My people in open pasturelands. You are isolated like sheep in a fortress. So enjoy the pastures in Bashan and Gilead as you used to do."

You will ask Me to be your Shepherd to lead you beside still waters. You may lie down in green pastures. I will lead you in right paths. I will walk with you through the valley of the shadow of death. I will protect you from the fear of evil. I will protect you with My rod and staff. I will feed you from My table, prepared in the presence of

enemies. I will anoint you with healing oil and let you dwell in My house forever.

I, the LORD say, “Yes, I’ll work miracles for you just as I did when I rescued you from Egypt. Nations will be ashamed when they see what I’ll do for you. Embarrassed, they’ll be speechless, and they’ll not even be able to hear. They’ll realize they are lowly creatures, like snakes and other creatures that crawl on the ground. They’ll come trembling out of their dens and will reverence Me, and none will be afraid of you, Israel.

“There is no other God like Me. I pardon the sins of My people, and I don’t stay angry forever because I enjoy showing mercy. I’ll have compassion on you and I’ll trample on your sins and toss them into the sea. I’ll be true to Jacob and Abraham, as I promised our ancestors years ago.”

I AM GOD

Who Takes Vengeance on Sin

The Book of Nahum

Little is known about the prophet Nahum, the Elkoshite (Nah. 1:1) and nothing is known about Elkosh; even its location is unknown. Nahum prophesied against Nineveh 200 years after Jonah preached repentance (852 BC) to Nineveh. The city turned to Me (Jonah 3:1-10). But Nahum does not call for repentance. He warns of the city's destruction that occurred in 612 BC. Nahum preached around 650 BC.

Nineveh stands for false religions among Gentiles, and thus represents all morally corrupt cultures that I will judge. "There is no healing" (Nah. 3:19) for morally corrupt apostasy, only My complete judgment (Rom. 1:18-32). But in the middle of My awesome vengeance is a picture of My protection for those who put their trust in Me, "A strong hold in the day of trouble" (Nah. 1:7). Yes, "I am jealous, and I, the LORD, revengeth" (1:2), but "I, the LORD, am good" (1:7).

I, The LORD, Am Angry

1 Nahum is from Elkosh. This is the message I, the LORD, gave Nahum about Nineveh. "I'm a God who wants you to worship only Me. In My anger I take revenge on those who oppose Me, and I express My wrath on My enemies. I'm slow to get angry, and I'm powerful. I don't let the guilty go unpunished. I show My power in whirlwinds and storms, and clouds are like dust under My feet. I rebuke the ocean and it dries up, and I can make rivers run dry, the pastures of Bashan and Carmel wither, and the flowers of Lebanon fade. Mountains quake in My preserve, and hills melt away. The earth and people on it tremble at My presence. Can anyone endure My wrath and anger, which flashes out like fire and shatters rocks?"

Sometimes I do things so quickly that you would be amazed. Sometimes it seems like circumstances dictate that I can never solve a problem. Yet I can. When daylight is almost gone, and hope is lost, trust in Me. In My time I will judge all sin and rebellion.

“I, the LORD, am good. I protect those who face trouble, and I care for those who trust in Me. I destroy My enemies, including Nineveh, like a terrible flood, and I pursue My enemies into the darkness of night. Don’t plot against Me, the LORD. I’ll stop you in your tracks, and I won’t need to do it again. You’ll be tangled in thorns, and you’ll be so drunk you’ll be like dry thorn bushes burning in a fire. Who is this king of Nineveh, who is making evil plans against Me?”

I, the LORD say this: “Assyria, you are great in numbers, but you’ll be cut down. I’ve punished you, but I won’t do it again. I’ll break the yoke, of the Assyrians from your neck and release you from them.” Assyria, I, the LORD, say this about Nineveh: “Your name will be forgotten. I’ll destroy the carved images and idols in your temple. And I’ll send you to the grave because you are of no account.”

I may delay judgment, but I will never cancel it. Come to Me for forgiveness of sin and trust Me for eternity in heaven.

“Look, Judah. A messenger is coming down from the mountain with good news of peace. Celebrate your festivals. Keep the promises you made to Me. The enemy from Nineveh will not invade your country again, for they’ll be completely destroyed.”

Trust Me to take you through the valley of the shadow of death. If your destination is life on the other side of the valley, trust Me for it. If your destination is heaven on the other side of the valley, trust Me for it.

Nineveh Will Be Destroyed

2 “Nineveh, you are surrounded by enemy troops: So guard your fortresses, and prepare for battle. The land of Israel lies empty after your attacks; they’re like trees with broke branches. But I, the LORD, will restore their honor and power. Nineveh, your enemies’ shields are red, and their uniforms are scarlet. The metal on their chariots glistens in the sun, and the soldiers swing their spears. The chariots rush through the streets like flaming torches and lightning. An officer gives a command, but his soldiers stumble as they hurry to the walls to set up their defenses. The river gates are open, the enemy has entered, and the palace collapses.

“Nineveh’s people will be taken captives, and slave girls will mourn like doves. They’ll beat their breasts in sorrow. Nineveh is like a pool with leaking water. People shout, ‘Stop!’ but the people keep going. Enemy soldiers shout, ‘Loot the silver and gold. The city is full of treasures and vast wealth.’ Nineveh is doomed. Her people’s hearts melt, and their knees are weak. People tremble, and their faces are pale.”

Nothing is impossible for Me. If I can destroy world empires, then I can remove any barrier that blocks your work today.

“Where now is that great Nineveh like lion of the nations? Where are the people who thought they were lions with nothing to fear? Nineveh was like a lion, crushing your enemies to feed your cubs and filling your city with captives. But I’m against you, Nineveh. I’ll burn your chariots, and an army will kill your young soldiers (lions). You’ll never again bring back loot. And you’ll never again send messengers to demand submission.”

Nineveh is Doomed

3 “How terrible it will be for Nineveh, the city of murders and lies. She is full of loot and victims. Listen to the cracking whips, rumbling wheels, galloping horses, clattering chariots, swords and spears flashing, and soldiers stumbling over numerous dead bodies. This is all because Nineveh

was a beautiful prostitute, using her charms and witchcraft to enslave nations.

“I’m against you,” say I, the LORD of the heavens, “I’ll lift up your skirts over your face so the nations can see your nakedness and shame. I’ll cover you with filth and show everyone how terrible you are. All who see you will be amazed that you are in ruins. Yet no one regrets your destruction.

“Nineveh, do you think you’re safer than the city of Thebes on the Nile, protected by the water? Thebes trusted in Ethiopia, and Egypt and Put and Libya were her allies. But Thebes was taken captive, and her babies were dashed to death at every street corner. Soldiers drew straws to see who would get Egypt’s officers as servants. All her leaders were taken away in chains.

“Nineveh, you’ll stagger like a drunkard and will hide in fear. Your fortresses are like first-ripe figs. They’ll fall to the attackers as easily as figs fall into someone’s mouth. Your troops will be weak and helpless as women. Fire will consume the bars on your gates, and the enemy will rush right in your city. You are under siege, so draw water and strengthen your defenses. Start making bricks to repair your walls. Yet fire will devour you, and swords will cut you down. The enemy will consume you like wheat attacked by locusts. You’ll not escape even if you multiply like locusts. Merchants, numerous as the stars, fill your city with vast wealth. But like locusts they’ll strip the land and then fly away. Your guards and officials are like locusts. They settle on a fence on a chilly day, but when the sun comes out, they fly away.

“King of Assyria, your officials and leaders lie dead. Your people are scattered on the mountains, but there is no shepherd to gather them and lead them. Your wound can’t be healed; your injury can’t be cured. Everyone who hears this news about you is glad because you were so cruel to so many.”

I am concerned with the cities of the world. I am concerned about New York, London, Tokyo, Beijing, and New Delhi. During the Bible times I was concerned with the great cities that influenced world culture, and war. But I, the LORD, am the most concerned with Jerusalem then, and Jerusalem now. I will keep an eye on Jerusalem

to see what is happening in the world. Your schedule is not important; My schedule is all that matters. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem.

I AM GOD

The Giver of Vision

The Book of Habakkuk

Habakkuk never mentions the nation of Assyria which was destroyed in 612 BC meaning he wrote after that date. He describes Babylon as a great force, but “My people are not yet subdued by them” (began in 605 BC). So Habakkuk writes between these two dates. Habakkuk asks why My justice is silent. Habakkuk is like people today who ask when troubles approach, “Where is God?” People today see victorious evil winning over My people and ask why am I silent.

Habakkuk announces I will judge Judah for her spiritual sins by rejecting Me. But Babylon is violent and morally wicked. Habakkuk asks, “Why is My judgment silent against this Gentile nation?” He was not reluctant to question My purpose.

Finally, Habakkuk realizes I, God, reign in heaven no matter what happens on earth, “But I, the LORD, am in My holy temple: let all the earth keep silent before Me” (Hab. 2:20).

Habakkuk Complains to Me

1 This is the message I, the LORD, gave Habakkuk, the prophet, in a vision.

Habakkuk complained, “How long, O LORD, must I call for help, but You don’t listen. I cry out ‘Violence,’ but You don’t save us. Why do I have to keep looking at injustice, destruction, violence, strife, and conflict? Laws aren’t enforced, and justice is not carried out in the courts. There are more wicked people than righteous ones, and they twist the laws.”

I, the LORD, answered, “Look at the nations and be completely amazed. I’m going to do something that will amaze you. You won’t believe

it even if someone told you. I'm raising up the Babylonians, a cruel and vicious nation who'll march across the world defeating many towns. People fear them, and they do as they please. Their horses are swifter than leopards, and they are fiercer than wolves hunting at sunset. Their horsemen come from distant lands, and they swoop down like falcons to pounce on their prey.

"They are determined to be violent, as they swoop down like the desert wind, picking up captives like sand. They make fun of rulers and all their defenses. And they pile up mounds of dirt against their walls and capture cities. They sweep past like the wind and are gone. They worship their own strength.

"I, the LORD, your God, am holy, I am eternal, and I'll not let you die. I am the LORD, your Rock. I am causing Babylonians to punish you for your sins. I can't tolerate sin in any form. So why do I permit the wicked to take advantage of people like you who are better than they are?"

"You are like fish to be caught and killed. You are like sea creatures with no ruler. Your wicked enemies pull you up with hooks and fishing nets, and they are glad. Then they worship their nets and burn incense in front of their nets. They say that these nets have made them rich and provide choice foods. Will I let them keep hauling in their nets and destroying poor nations?"

My Vision for the Prophet

2 "Climb to your watchtower and wait to see what I, the LORD, will say to you and how I'll answer your complaint."

I will meet you in a private place where you can focus your whole mind on Me. Go there on a regular basis to watch and pray. Reach out to touch Me, your Lord; I will reach back to touch you.

I replied, "Write My answer in large letters on a tablet, so that a runner can read it and tell others what it says. These things won't happen right

away. My words, which speak of the future, will eventually happen so wait for them patiently.

“Proud people trust in themselves, but the righteous will live by their faith.”

Write down the lessons I am teaching you. Make them clear. Write them in an understandable format so you can learn and grow.

“Wine betrays these proud Babylonians, and they are never at rest. They are as greedy as death itself, taking people as captives. But all their captives will mock them and will say, “How terrible it will be for you who pile up loot you’ve stolen and who cheat others. Your debtors will demand payment, and this will frighten you. You robbed many nations, so they’ll rob you. And you’ve murdered many people and destroyed their property.

“How terrible it will be for anyone who gets rich by unjust means. You tried to be free from harm like an eagle building a high nest. You’ve brought shame on yourself and your family because of what you’ve done to others. The stones in the walls of your houses and the ceiling beams will speak against you.

“How terrible it will be for you who build cities with money gained from murders and robbery. I, the LORD of the heavens, have promised that the nations’ wealth will turn to ashes. They work hard but all for nothing. But the time will come when people will know and honor Me, the LORD, just as the waters fill the sea.

“How terrible it will be for people who get their neighbors drunk so they can gaze on their nakedness. Soon it’ll be your turn, and you’ll be filled with shame instead of praise. So drink and be exposed. Drink from My cup; judgment and vomit will cover you. You cut down the trees of Lebanon, and now you’ll be cut down. You terrified wild animals you caught in your traps. Now you’ll be in terror because of your murders and violence everywhere.

“What did you gain by worshiping man-made idols? It’s a lie to think they could help you. And it’s foolish to trust in idols you made and that can’t talk. How terrible it will be for those who tell wooden idols to come to life and tell stone images to wake up. They can’t guide you in any way.

They may be covered with gold and silver, but they have no life. I, the LORD, am in My holy temple, and everyone should be silent in My presence.”

Habakkuk Prays to Me

3 Habakkuk sang this prayer before Me, the LORD. “I’ve heard about You, LORD, and I’m amazed at what You’ve done. Turn from Your anger and be merciful and help us as You helped our ancestors in the past.”

Be filled with awe as you read My Word; I can do miracles again in your life. I can revive the nation.

“I am the God who led you across the desert to Teman in Edom and came from Mount Paran. My brilliance fills the heavens, and people everywhere praise Me. From My hands flash rays of brilliant light, and you rejoice in My great power. I caused evil people to be struck with terrible diseases. When I stopped, the earth shook, and I made the nations tremble in fear. Old mountains and hills may collapse, but My ways will last forever. The people living in tents in Cushan and Midian are in fear of Me.

“I, the LORD, am angry with the rivers and streams when the enemy attacked with horses and chariots. They were ready with bows and arrows. I split open the earth with rivers. The mountains watched, and trembled, as raging waters swept by. The deep waters cried out in surrender to Me, the LORD. The brilliance of the sun and moon faded in view of the brightness of My lightning.

“In My anger I walked across the land and trampled on the nations. I rescued My people and saved My chosen people. I crushed the leaders of the wicked and stripped him from head to foot. With their own weapons, I defeated them when they rushed out to destroy you, thinking they could easily defeat Israel. Then I trampled the sea with My horses, and the water piled high.

“When Habakkuk heard this message, his heart pounded, his lips quivered with fear, and his legs were weak. But he’ll wait patiently for the

disaster that will strike the people who invaded Israel.

“Fig trees may have no blossoms, and there may be no grapes on the vines, and no olives on the trees. And the fields may be barren, and flocks may die in the fields, and cattle stalls may be empty. Yet Habakkuk rejoiced in Me, the LORD, and was joyful in the God of his salvation. I, your Sovereign LORD, give you strength. I can make your feet as sure as those of a deer, and I can help you stand on the mountains.”

I AM GOD Of Revival

The Book of Zephaniah

Zephaniah (means I, the LORD, hides) was the great-greatgrandson of Hezekiah, the king who reformed and brought revival to Jerusalem. Then Zephaniah prophesied during King Josiah, also a revival king. Zephaniah wrote before AD 612 because he predicted Nineveh will fall. He also prophesied prior to Josiah's 18th year (622 BC)

Zephaniah's key words describe My judgment, "The day of the Lord's anger." It describes Nebuchadnezzar's invasion, but also predicts the restoration of Israel and My future blessing on them.

The Day of My Anger is Coming

1 I, the LORD, gave this message to Zephaniah, son of Cushi, grandson of Gedaliah, great-grandson of Amariah, and great-great-grandson of Hezekiah when Josiah, son of Amon, was king of Judah.

"I, the LORD, will destroy everything on the earth. I'll destroy people, animals, birds, and fish. I'll reduce the wicked to heaps of rubble along with all of the human race. I'll crush Judah and Jerusalem, and Baal will be completely wiped out. I'll destroy Baal's priests so that no one will even remember them. People go on their rooftops to worship the sun, moon, and stars, and the god Molech, while claiming to follow Me, the LORD. I'll destroy those who used to worship Me but no longer do and those who no longer ask for Me to guide them.

"Be quiet in the presence of Me, the Sovereign LORD, for My day of judgment is near. I have prepared My people for a great slaughter and have consecrated those I have invited."

Everything that happens in the universe is in My hands. Humankind will not pollute itself to death, nor will humankind populate itself into extinction. The rulers of the nations will not finish the earth with a nuclear explosion. I know the beginning and the ending. Nothing takes Me by surprise. Judgment is in My hands. Therefore, seek Me with everything in your being. Obey My word, which is plainly presented to you. Come before My presence in humility.

“On that day I’ll punish the princes and the king’s sons and all those who wear pagan clothing. I’ll punish those who follow the pagan practices of stepping over the threshold and those who fill their pagan temples with loot gained by violence and deceit. On that day crying will be heard at Jerusalem’s Fish Gate and the New Quarter, and a great noise will be heard in the hills. If you live in the market area, you should wail because everyone who buys and sells there will die.

“I’ll search Jerusalem with lanterns to find and punish those who are not worried, thinking I won’t do anything good or bad. Their belongings will be looted, and their homes ransacked. They won’t live in the new homes they’ve built, and they won’t drink wine from the vineyards they’ve planted.

“That terrible day will come soon and quickly. On that day strong men will cry bitterly. My anger will be poured out, and it will be a day of darkness, gloom, clouds, and blackness. A trumpet and a battle cry will be sounded against walled cities and strong fortifications. Because you have sinned against Me, you’ll be helpless like a blind person. Your blood and your insides will be poured out into the dust. Your silver and gold will not be able to save you on that day of My wrath. The whole land will be overrun by the fire of My jealousy. I’ll speedily get rid of all the people of Judah.”

Seek Me With All Your Heart

2 “Gather together and pray, you shameless nation, before it’s too late. Gather while there’s still time, before judgment begins and the day of My wrath sweeps you away like chaff. Seek Me, the LORD! You who are

humble before Me and obey Me, and do what is right, you'll be safe when I, the LORD, release My anger.

“The Philistine cities of Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, and Ekron will be left in ruins. How terrible it will be for you people of Philistia who live along the coast and in Canaan because I'll be against you too and will destroy you completely. The coastal area will become a pasture, a place for shepherds' huts and sheep pens. The survivors of Judah will pasture their flocks there and in the evening, they'll sleep in abandoned houses in Ashkelon. I, the LORD, will care for them and bring My people home from captivity.

“I, the LORD, have heard Moab and Ammon mocking My people and invading their land. Now, as surely as I live, Moab and Ammon will be completely destroyed like Sodom and Gomorrah. Their land will be covered with weeds and salt pits and eternal desolation. Those of My people who are left will loot their belongings and will take over their land. They'll be punished by Me, the LORD of the heavens, because of their pride and their making fun of My people. I'll frighten them as I destroy all their idols. Then people of nations from around the world will worship Me. And you people of Ethiopia will be killed by the sword.

“I'll have the people to the north crush Assyria and make Nineveh a desolate dry desert. Wild animals will live in its rubble, and desert owls will live among its ruins and will hoot from its windows. Rubble will block all the doorways, and the cedar paneling will lie open to the wind and weather. This is the great city that was secure and boasted, ‘No city is as great as I.’ But now it is in complete ruins, a place for wild animals to live. Everyone who passes that way will sneer at the city and shake their heads in unbelief.”

The Sins and Salvation of Jerusalem

3 “How terrible it will be for Jerusalem, that rebellious and corrupt city. In her pride she doesn't listen to Me. In fact, she refuses correction and doesn't trust Me or draw near to Me. Her leaders are like boisterous lions gone hunting, and her judges are like wolves that attack in the evening and leave nothing in the morning.

“Jerusalem’s so-called prophets are proud and unreliable. And her priests defile My Temple and disobey My laws. But I’m there in the city and I do no wrong. Every morning I see that justice is done, yet the wicked pay no attention and know no shame.

“I, the LORD, have wiped out many nations, and demolished their fortresses. Now their cities are in ruins and are deserted with no survivors. With the cities destroyed, no one is left to tell what happened. I thought that you would listen to Me and obey Me. Then I wouldn’t punish you. But you were eager to go on sinning. Then I said, ‘The time is coming when I’ll accuse the nations of their sins. I’ll gather all the nations together and pour out My anger. I’ll consume the earth in My jealousy.’”

Don’t fear the final judgment because you are safe in Me. All will be judged by two criteria. First, they will be asked if they have believed in Me. If so, their name is listed in the Lamb’s book of life (Rev. 21:27). Second, people will be judged by the “Book of works,” that is, what have they done with the light they have (Rev. 20:12, 13). This will determine the severity of their punishment. It’s good to know I am truthful to reward good, and I am truthful to not let one evil deed go unpunished.

“On that day I’ll purify the speech of everyone, so that they together may worship Me. My people who live beyond Ethiopia will bring Me offerings. Then you’ll no longer need to be ashamed. I’ll get rid of the proud people among you, and there’ll be no arrogance on My holy mountain. Those who are left will be humble and trust in Me. The survivors will live right and won’t tell lies or deceive each other. They’ll eat, live peaceful lives, and lie down in safety with nothing to fear.

“Sing, O daughter of Zion, and shout, ‘O Israel.’ Be glad with all your heart. I’ll cause your enemies to leave. And I, the King of Israel, will live with you. Your troubles will finally be over, and you won’t have to worry about harm. In that future day people will say to you, ‘Don’t be discouraged, or weep.’ I, your God, am with you, and I can rescue you. I’ll take great delight in you, I’ll calm all your fears with My love, and I’ll sing with joy because of you.”

*When I sing over you, sing back to Me the melody and words,
“Holy, Holy, Holy . . . early in the morning, my song shall rise to
Thee.”*

“You, who were mourning when you came to worship Me, will no longer weep. I’ll punish those who mistreated you, and I’ll save the weak and helpless ones. I’ll regather those who have been scattered, and I’ll honor My people who were captives, and were mocked and shamed. At that time, I’ll gather you together and bring you home again. I’ll give you a good name and I’ll praise you among all the nations of the earth. They’ll honor you when I restore your prosperity in your homeland.” I, the LORD have spoken these words.

I AM GOD

The Rebuilder of My Temple

The Book of Haggai

Haggai preached to the Jews who came back from the Babylonian captivity (beginning in 520 BC, Zech. 1:1, 7). He called the people to proper worship of Me as his first priority. His second priority was to motivate the Jews to rebuild My Temple, that is, My house of worship. To do this, he motivated the people to gather the materials to start the work (Hag. 1:7, 8). His key phrase was to “think about” or “consider” the consequences if they didn’t do it. But he also mentioned My glory would fill the house (2:9). That was a reference to the day Jesus would come to My Temple to cleanse it (Jn. 2).

Haggai reminds us that My work is more important than your homes, jobs, and material things. If you don’t put Me, your LORD, first, your prayers won’t be answered.

Rebuild My House, the House of the LORD

1 In August of the second year of the reign of King Darius over Persia, I, the LORD, told Haggai, the prophet, to give this message to Zerubbabel, Judah’s governor, and to Joshua, the high priest. I, the LORD, said, “You say it isn’t time to rebuild My Temple.” Then My Word came by Haggai, saying, “But is it right for you to live in expensive houses when My Temple is in ruins?” I, the LORD, of the heavens, say, “Look at what’s happening. You’ve planted a lot, but you’ve harvested only a little. You never have enough food to eat, or wine to drink, or enough clothing to keep you warm. Your income disappears as if you were putting it in pockets with holes.

“Think of what I said,” says the LORD of the heavens. “Go to the hills, bring down timber, and rebuild My temple. Then I’ll be pleased with it and will be worshiped there. You hoped for rich harvests, but when you brought

your harvest home, I blew it away. Why did I do this? Because My temple is in ruins and you don't seem to care."

The people were greedy. The greater their greed for money, the greater their disappointment with life. Those who find their satisfaction in Me find the true meaning of a satisfying life. Seek first the Kingdom of God and My honor in your life, and then you'll find the secret to the meaning of life.

"That explains why I'm holding off morning dew and the rain and you have no crops. So a drought will wither your grain, grapes, and olives and all your other crops. So you and your cattle will starve, and the drought will ruin everything."

Zerubbabel and Joshua and a few others who returned from being captives obeyed Haggai's message from Me and started worshiping Me sincerely. Then Haggai gave this message from Me, the LORD: "I'm with you, and I'll bless you." Then I, the LORD of the heavens, gave them a desire to work on My Temple. And the work began in September of Darius' second year as king.

My House Will Be Filled With Glory

2 The next month I, the LORD, told Haggai to ask Governor Zerubbabel and High Priest Joshua and all the others this question: "Does anyone here remember how wonderful My Temple used to be? Now by contrast it seems like nothing. But take courage, because I, the LORD of the heavens, will be with you to help you. I'm with you. When I rescued you from Egypt, I promised your ancestors that My Spirit would be with you. So don't be afraid."

I, the LORD of the heavens say in just a little while I'll shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. I'll shake the nations and encourage them to bring their treasures to My Temple. Then the brightness of My glory will fill My Temple.

Haggai pointed the people to the coming Messiah—Jesus Christ—who eventually would be the final answer to their political problems. “The desire of all nations shall come” (Hag. 2:7, KJV).

“All silver and gold are Mine,” says the LORD of the heavens. “So the future of this temple will have greater glory than the first temple. And here I’ll bring peace.”

Usually the work you do for Me is not as big as you want it to be, nor is it as perfect as you want it to be. In the same way the prophet Haggai encouraged the people not to look at the present size or beauty of My Temple. He wanted them to focus their attention on the future temple and what a glorious thing it would be.

In the next month I, the LORD of the heavens, told Haggai to ask the priests this question: “If one of you is carrying some meat in your robe to be sacrificed to Me and the clothing rubs against some bread or stew or wine or olive oil or some food, would those foods that were touched be acceptable for sacrifice?” The priests answered, “No.” Then Haggai said, “If someone becomes ceremonially unclean by touching a dead body, and then brushes against those foods, would the meat for sacrifice be defiled?” The priests answered, “Yes.”

Haggai said that contaminated food when it touches good food doesn’t automatically become good just by touching it. So the new altar will not become good just by building it on the site of the former altar (Hag. 2:12-14).

So I, the LORD, said, “You people were defiling your sacrifices by selfish attitudes and evil hearts. But from now on things will be better. Before you started laying My Temple foundation, when you hoped for a 20-bushel crop, you harvested only 10. And when you hoped to get 50 gallons from the wine-press, you got only 20. I sent blight and mildew and hail on the work of your hands, but you still didn’t return to Me.

“Today you’ve completed building My Temple foundation, so think now of the future. You haven’t yet harvested any grain, grapes, figs, pomegranates, or olives. But I’ll richly bless you from this day onward.”

That same day I, the LORD, gave this message to Haggai: “Tell Governor Zerubbabel that I’ll shake the heavens and the earth, and I’ll overthrow kings and their kingdoms. I’ll overturn chariots and their drivers, and horses and their riders will fall as the troops slaughter each other. Then when that happens,” says the LORD of the heavens, “O Zerubbabel My servant, I’ll honor you like a signet ring on My finger, for I, the LORD of the heavens, have chosen you to be My servant.”

I AM GOD

The Giver Of Grace

The Book of Zechariah

Zechariah began prophesying in 520 BC about 2 months after Haggai prophesied. The Babylonian kingdom had previously fallen to the Medo-Persian Empire in 539 B. C., and, a year later, King Cyrus specifically predicted by Isaiah 44:24-28; 45:1-13, issued a decree which allowed some of the Jews to return to their homeland (2 Chron. 36:22-23 and Ezra 1:1-11; 2:1ff). Approximately 42,000 of the exiles made the long trip under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Joshua (Ezra 2:2, 64). By 536 BC, the first group had arrived in Palestine and laid the foundation of My Temple. However, because of opposition from neighboring peoples, work on My Temple stopped (4:4-5).

Construction was not resumed until I raised up two prophets (Haggai and Zechariah) 16 years later. They preached to motivate the Jewish people to complete the reconstruction project. The combined preaching of these two prophets—Haggai and Zechariah—was perhaps the most effective preaching ever. The people began building the temple immediately and didn't stop until it was finished.

Return to Me, Your LORD

1 I, the LORD, gave this message to Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, and the grandson of Iddo, in the fall of the second year of Darius' reign as king of Persia.

“Israel, I, the LORD of the heavens, was very angry with your ancestors. But if you return to Me, I'll return to you. Don't be like your ancestors who wouldn't listen when prophets told them to turn from their evil ways. Your ancestors and their prophets have been dead a long time.

Everything I said through My prophets happened to your ancestors. So they turned back to Me and said, ‘You, LORD of the heavens, have punished us as You said You would do.’”

I never change. I am always angry with disobedience and rebellion. When you repent of your disobedience, and procrastination, I will forgive you for your rebellion. Obey instantly when I speak. I won't deal with you in judgment but will look at you through eyes of grace.

In February of the second year of Darius' reign, I, the LORD, gave Zechariah, another message. “In a night vision Zechariah saw a man on a red horse standing among some myrtle trees in a valley. Behind him were riders on red, brown, and white horses. An angel was standing near me, and so Zechariah asked him who these riders were. ‘I'll tell you,’ the angel answered. ‘These are the ones the LORD has sent to find out what's happening on the earth. Then the riders said to the angel of the LORD, ‘We have gone everywhere and have seen that the whole world is at peace.’ Then the angel of the LORD said, ‘O LORD of the heavens, You've been angry with Jerusalem and the towns of Judah for 70 years. Will You ever show mercy to them?’”

I, the LORD, answered with kind words to the angel who then spoke to me. The angel said, “Shout this message for everyone to hear: ‘I, the LORD of the heavens, love Jerusalem. I'm very angry with other nations that enjoy security. I was angry with My people, but the nations punished them more than I intended. Therefore, I'll show mercy to Jerusalem and My temple will be rebuilt. I, the LORD of the heavens, say again that the towns of Israel will prosper, and I'll comfort the people of Zion.’”

Do you love those places I love? Do you love those places where I manifest Myself? Go back to them when you feel empty. When you can't go physically, visit them in your mind. Seek My presence everywhere. I have said, “I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (Matt. 28:20, KJV).

Then Zechariah saw four animal horns. He asked the angel what they were. And the angel answered, “These horns represent the nations that scattered the people of Jerusalem, Judah, and Israel.” Then I, the LORD, showed him four blacksmiths, and he asked, “What will they do?” I, the LORD, replied, “They will terrify and crush the four horns.”

A Man with a Measuring Line

2 Then when Zechariah looked up, he saw a man with a yardstick in his hand. When he asked the man where he was going, he said, “To measure the width and length of Jerusalem.” Then the angel who was talking with him left and another angel came to meet him. This other angel said, “Hurry and tell that man with the yardstick that someday Jerusalem will be so full of people and animals that many will have to live outside the city walls and yet they’ll be safe.” I, the LORD, Myself will be a protective wall of fire around Jerusalem, and I’ll be the splendor of the city.

My protection for Jerusalem will be great, but My protection of you will be even greater. As much as I love the city, I love these people even more.

I, the LORD, say to you, “My people in captivity will return from the land of the north, from Babylon. I scattered you to the four winds, but I’ll bring you back to Jerusalem.” Then I, the LORD of the heavens, sent Zechariah against the nations that oppressed them because I said that anyone who harms you is like hurting Me.

Pray daily, “Deliver me from evil” which means you ask Me to deliver you from the evil one. If satan can’t tempt you to sin, he will try to destroy you with persecution or trials. He even uses accidents to destroy My people. I will protect you by My presence.

“I’ll raise My fist against your enemies and their slaves will become their rulers. Then you’ll know that I, the LORD of the heavens, have sent

you.

“Shout, O Daughter of Zion, for I’m coming to live among you. Many nations will turn to Me and be My people, and they’ll know that I, the LORD of the heavens, sent you. Judah will be part of the Holy Land, and I’ll again choose Jerusalem as My very own city. So everyone, be silent before Me, the LORD, because I have come to earth from heaven.”

A Vision About Joshua

3 Then the angel who had been talking with Zechariah showed him Joshua the high priest standing in front of the angel of the LORD. And satan was there standing at Joshua’s right side, accusing him of many things. I, the LORD, said to satan, “Satan, these accusations are wrong. I’ve chosen Jerusalem as My holy city, and Joshua, like My people, has been snatched from the fire of captivity.”

You’ve never seen satan in your presence, but you know about him because I said satan would come to tempt you. Protect yourself with prayer and the Word of God. I will give you wisdom to know how to thwart satan’s attacks. I will give you power to do My will.

Joshua’s clothing was filthy as he stood before the angel. So the angel told some people there to remove his clothing. Turning to Joshua the angel said, “Removing these clothes of yours means you and my people are foreign. Now I’ll give you new clothes.”

Zechariah, then said, “Could he also have a clean turban?” So they gave him priestly clothes and a turban. Then the angel of the LORD said to Joshua, “This is what the LORD of the heavens says: ‘If you follow Me and obey My commands, then I’ll put you in charge of My temple and the courtyard. I’ll let you be with Me and those angels. Listen carefully, Joshua, the high priest, and the other priests with you. You are a sign of good things to come, because you, Joshua, represent My Servant, the Branch Descendant of David, whom I’ll send.’”

My Son, Jesus Christ is called a Branch, which is a description of a live sprout that springs up out of a dead stump. The Kingdom of David that ruled from Jerusalem was cut down by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC. But the great tree that was the Kingdom of David will come back in a sprout—a branch—that will grow. Jesus is the Branch who will rule from Jerusalem in the future millennium. Christ will come back as the Servant-King. What is predicted in the Old Testament is fulfilled in the New Testament. This is a supernatural book and its promises will transform you.

“And Joshua, I’ve set a stone in front of you with seven sides. I, the LORD of the heavens, will engrave this inscription on each of the seven sides: ‘I’ll remove the sins of this land in a single day. On that day,’ says the LORD of the heavens, ‘you’ll live in peace and you’ll invite your neighbors to sit under your vineyard and fig tree.’”

The Golden Lamp Stand

4 Then the angel who had been talking with Zechariah, woke him up and said, “What do you see?” Zechariah answered, “I see a golden lampstand with a bowl of olive oil on top of it. Around the bowl are seven lamps, each with seven flames. And he saw two olive trees, one on each side of the lamp-stand.” Zechariah asked the angel what these mean? He said, “Don’t you know?” He said, “No, I don’t.” Then he said, “This is what the LORD says to you: ‘I’m the LORD of the heavens. So don’t depend on your power or strength, but on My Spirit.’”

Look to the Holy Spirit who does the real spiritual work. It is not you, nor is it human effort. It’s My Spirit. So today, invite the Holy Spirit to come to you, indwell your heart, anoint your words; to use you in the work of Jesus Christ.

“Zerubbabel, no mountain, however high, can stand against you. It’ll be leveled to the ground. Then you’ll set in place the east stone of the temple

and everyone will shout, ‘May God bless it, He is very kind.’”

Then I, the LORD, gave Zechariah another message. I said, “Zerubbabel laid the foundation of the temple, and he’ll complete it. (Then everyone will know that I, the LORD of the heavens, sent this message to you.) Don’t make fun of this small beginning because you’ll be glad to see a work begin and to see the plumb line in Zerubbabel’s hand. These seven lamps represent My eyes that see everything in the world.”

The Jews who returned to Jerusalem from Babylon were a small remnant. They built the wall, temple, and houses of Jerusalem, but it would not be as glorious as the city destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. Do not compare My inward work within your heart to the outward show of the world. Outwardly the church seems small, but it is powerful to transform the addicted, make godly women out of prostitutes, and turn a murderer into an apostle Paul. Ask for eyes to see My work from the Divine perspective.

Then Zechariah asked the angel, “What are those two olive trees on each side of the lampstand? And what is the meaning of the two olive branches that pour oil through two gold tubes?” He asked, “Don’t you know?” Zechariah said, “No, I don’t.” Then he said, “They represent two chosen leaders who’ll serve the LORD, that is, Joshua, the priest, and Zerubbabel, the leader, speaking of the Messiah, who is both Priest and King.”

The Flying Scroll

5 When Zechariah looked up he saw a scroll flying through the air. When the angel asked what he saw, he said, “A flying scroll that is about 30 feet long and 15 feet wide.” Then the angel said, “This scroll records God’s curse that is going out over all the land. One side says that those who stole will be destroyed, and the other side says that those who tell lies will be destroyed.” I, the LORD of the heavens, say that I’m sending this curse into the home of every thief and everyone who lies. And the curse will be there until every piece of wood and stone is destroyed.

Then the angel who was talking with Zechariah said, “Look up and tell me what you see.” “I don’t know what it is,” Zechariah said. So he told me, “It’s a measuring bushel, and it’s filled with the sins of everyone in the land.” Suddenly the lead cover came off the basket and in the basket was a woman. The angel said, “The name of the woman is Wickedness,” and he pushed her back into the basket and put the lead cover back on it.

Then Zechariah saw women flying toward us. They had wings like those of a stork, and they took the basket and flew off with it. Zechariah asked, “Where are they taking the basket?” He said, “To Babylonia. They’ll build a place for the basket, and there it’ll stay.”

The Four Chariots

6 Then Zechariah looked up again and saw four chariots coming from between two bronze mountains. The first chariot was led by red horses, the second by black horses, the third by white horses, and the fourth by spotted gray horses. When he asked the angel, who was talking with him what these were, he said, “These are the angels of heaven who stand before the Lord of all the earth. They are going to do His work of judgment. The chariot with black horses is going north to Babylon. The chariot with white horses is going west after them. The chariot with spotted gray horses is going south.”

The red horses were eager to be off to patrol the earth, so I, the LORD, told them to go, so they left at once. Then I, the LORD, said, “Those who went north have quieted My wrath there.”

I allowed four world rulers to conquer the known world, so you could see what could be done—but one day Christ will rule the world. Also, I allowed these empires to express their evil ambitions to show us that human government will never be perfect. But when Christ rules, then peace will come, and all men will trust all other men rightly.

In another message the LORD said, “Heldai, Tobijah, and Jedaiah have returned from Babylon. Meet them at the home of Josiah, son of Zephaniah.

They'll bring silver and gold from the captives in Babylon, and from their silver and gold make a crown and put it on the head of Joshua, the high priest. Tell him that I, the LORD of the heavens, say, 'You represent the one who will come who will be called the Branch and He'll build My temple. He'll receive royal honor and will rule as king. He'll also serve as priest, and there'll be perfect harmony between His two roles as king and priest. The crown will be kept in the temple to honor those who gave silver and gold for it—Heldai, Tobijah, and Jedaiah, along with Josiah, the son of Zephaniah.

“Many people will come from other nations to help build the temple. And this will help you know My messages have been from Me, the LORD of the heavens. All this will happen if you obey My commands.”

Show Justice and Mercy toward Others

7In December of the fourth year of King Darius' reign as king of Persia, I, the LORD, gave Zechariah this message. The people of Bethel sent Sharezer and Regem-Melech and their men to ask My favor. They asked the prophets and priests at the temple of the LORD of the heavens, “Shall we continue to mourn and go without food in the fifth month of each year, as we've done for so long?”

Has a tradition ever lost its meaning to you? Israel fasted and held a solemn service to ask for forgiveness on the 5th month. That was the month the temple and Jerusalem were destroyed. Now the temple was being rebuilt. They asked Me, “Do we still have to fast on the 5th month?” It's good to remember your failures because there you see My forgiveness and restorative power.

I, the LORD of the heavens, told Zechariah to tell everyone including the priests, “During your 70 years of captivity when you mourned and went without eating every August and October, did you really do this for Me? And during your holy festivals you didn't think of Me; No! You thought only of pleasing yourselves. This is the same message I gave the prophets

years ago when Jerusalem and the towns in Judah were filled with people, including the Southern Desert and foothills.”

Then I, the LORD, gave Zechariah this message: “This is what I, the LORD of the heavens, say: ‘See that justice is done, be honest, and show mercy and kindness to each other. Don’t mistreat widows, orphans, foreign residents, and poor people, and don’t plan to hurt each other. Your ancestors turned against Me, and they put their fingers in their ears to keep from hearing My message. They hardened their hearts, afraid to hear the words I, the LORD of the heavens, sent them by My Spirit through the prophets. This is why I was so angry with them.

“‘When I called to them, they refused to listen. So now when they call to Me, I refuse to listen,’” says the LORD of the heavens. So I scattered them among distant nations like a whirlwind scattering debris. They lived there as strangers, and their own land became like a desolate desert. No one traveled through it. The land that had been so pleasant was now empty of people and in ruins.

Jerusalem Will Be Restored

8I, the LORD of the heavens, gave Zechariah another message: “My love for Zion is so great that I’m angry at what her enemies have done to her. I’ll return to Mount Zion and live in Jerusalem. Jerusalem will be called The Faithful City, The Holy Mountain, and The Mountain of the LORD of the heavens.”

One of the great promises I made to My people was “I will dwell inside Jerusalem.” Jesus’ greater promise is, “I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20, NKJV). Be a good testimony to My indwelling.

“I say that again older people will walk on her streets using canes and will sit together and visit. And boys and girls will be playing on the street.

“All this may seem impossible now for you, a small and discouraged number of people. But it is not impossible for Me, the LORD of the

heavens. You can be sure that I'll rescue My people from the east and the west, and I'll bring them back to Jerusalem. They'll be My people, and I'll be their God, faithful and just to them."

I, the LORD of the heavens, say, "Finish the job. Think about what the prophets said when you began laying the foundation of the temple. Before work on the temple began, there were no jobs. And if you left the city, you wouldn't be safe because enemies are everywhere. But things are different now," say I, the LORD of the heavens. "I'm planting seeds of peace and prosperity among you. Grapevines will have lots of grapes, your ground will produce crops, and dew will be plentiful. Judah and Israel, you'll be a blessing to other nations. You were cursed by them, but no longer. I'll rescue you and make you a blessing to them. So don't be afraid or discouraged.

"When your ancestors made Me angry, I decided to punish them. But now that I've decided to bless Jerusalem and Judah with kindness; I won't change My mind. So don't be afraid. You must always tell the truth, be fair in court decisions, and be at peace with each other. Don't make plans to hurt each other, and don't say something is true when it isn't. I hate all these things," say I, the LORD.

Here's another message to Zechariah from Me, the LORD of the heavens: "The times of mourning and going without food that you have kept in July, August, October, and January will now become festivals of joy. So love truth and peace." I, the LORD of the heavens, say that people from around the world will go to Jerusalem. People in one city will say to friends in another city, "Let's go to Jerusalem together to ask the LORD to bless us. Come join me." So people from every nation, even powerful ones, will come to Jerusalem to seek Me, the LORD of the heavens, and to ask Me to bless them. In those days, 10 men from 10 different nations will grab a Jew and will say, "May we go with you to Jerusalem? We've heard that God is with you."

I, The LORD, Will Judge Israel's Enemies

9This is the message I, the LORD, gave against Hadrach and Damascus, cities in Syria. "I'm watching everyone, including all the tribes of Israel. I'll judge Hamath, near Damascus, and also Tyre and Sidon, though they

are shrewd. Tyre built a strong fortress, and she's piled up silver and gold like dust in the streets. But now I'll make her poor, toss her fortresses into the sea, and burn her to the ground.

"Ashkelon, Gaza, and Ekron will be filled with fear when they see what will happen to Tyre. Gaza's king will be killed, and Ashkelon will be deserted. Foreigners will occupy Ashdod, the Philistines' great city. I'll keep her from eating meat with blood in it or any other unclean food. Surviving Philistines will worship Me and become part of My people. The Philistines of Ekron will join My people, as did the Jebusites. I'll guard My temple from invading armies. I'll watch these enemies closely so that no foreigners will again overrun My land.

"O My people, rejoice. Everyone in Jerusalem, shout with joy. Why? Because your King is coming. He is righteous and victorious and humble, riding on a donkey's foal."

The people were worried about world-conquering armies. Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus had turned the world upside down. Now I predict the Messiah will be greater than any conqueror. He would enter the world scene on a donkey (a peace animal used for work). Messiah would not come on a giant conquering horse as Alexander the Great. Messiah would be gentle. Jesus fulfilled this prophecy on Palm Sunday. He didn't come to sit on a political throne (eventually He will do this). Jesus came to sit on the throne of your heart. When Jesus conquers individuals, He also conquers nations. He will rule from the inside out. Let Him sit on the throne of your heart; conquer you, rule you, and use you.

"I, the LORD, will take away chariots and horses from Israel and warhorses from Jerusalem. I'll break all the weapons of warfare, and your King will bring worldwide peace and He'll rule from sea to sea. His kingdom will extend from the Euphrates River to all the earth.

"Because of the agreement I made with you, sealed with blood, I'll free your prisoners from death in a waterless pit. Return to Jerusalem, your place of safety, for there is hope for you. Judah is My bow, and Israel is My arrow. I'll take the people of Zion as My sword to attack the Greeks.

“I’ll appear over you, My people, as you are in battle. Your arrow will fly like lightning. I, the Sovereign LORD, will sound My trumpet, and I’ll go against My enemies like a whirlwind from the desert in the south. I, the LORD of the heavens, will protect you, My people, and will defeat your enemies with sling stones. You’ll shout in battle like men who are drunk. You’ll shed your enemies’ blood, enough to fill a bowl.

“I’ll rescue you, My people, much as a shepherd rescues a sheep. You’ll sparkle in My land like jewels in a crown. How wonderful everything will be. Young people will thrive on the great amount of grain and new wine.”

I, The LORD, Will Restore My People

10“Ask Me for rain in the spring, and I’ll give it. I make storm clouds and send rain to make your fields produce. Idols give bad advice, fortune-tellers tell lies, and interpreters of dreams tell what doesn’t come true. My people wander like sheep that have no shepherd to guide them.

“I’m angry with the shepherds (leaders), and I’ll punish them. I, the LORD of the heavens, will look after My flock of Judah, and I’ll make them strong like a warhorse in battle. From Judah will come leaders who’ll be strong like a cornerstone, a tent peg, and a battle bow.”

The people were looking for physical stones for the physical temple, but I tell them I will send the Cornerstone (Eph. 2:20), who is the Messiah. They wanted a place of worship; I tell them to seek the person of worship. The Jews wanted to approach Me in the new temple; I was telling them their Messiah is the Temple.

“They’ll be like mighty soldiers, trampling their enemies in the mud. I’ll be with them as they fight, and their enemy is doomed.

“I’ll strengthen Judah and Israel because I love them. I’ll hear their prayers, and it will be as though I had never rejected them. Israel will be like strong soldiers, happy as with wine. And their children will see this and be happy in Me, the LORD. I’ll signal for them, because I’ve rescued them. From their few members, their population will grow again.

“I’ve scattered them like seeds among the nations, but they’ll remember Me. They and their children will return from Egypt and Assyria and will settle them again as far away as Gilead and Lebanon. There’ll scarcely be enough room for everyone. My people will go safely through a sea of troubles. I’ll hold back the waves, and even the Nile River will become dry. Assyria’s pride will be put down, and the rule of Egypt over My people will end. I’ll strengthen My people, and their conduct will glorify Me.”

The Two Shepherds

11 “Lebanon, open your gates so that fire will destroy your cedar forests. Cypress trees, weep, because the great cedar trees have fallen. And weep, you oak trees of Bashan as you watch dense forests being cut down. Listen to the shepherds weeping because their pastures are burned. Listen to the roaring of the lions, because the Jordan Valley is in ruins.”

Then the LORD said to Zechariah, “Go take care of those sheep that are to be slaughtered. The people who bring them go unpunished. And the people who sell them will say, ‘Praise the LORD, I’m rich.’ I’ll no longer have pity on the people of the land. Their wicked leaders will kill them, and they’ll turn the land into a desert, and I won’t rescue them.”

So Zechariah pastured the sheep that were to be slaughtered. He took two shepherd staffs and named one Favor and the other Union. In a month he became impatient with three evil shepherds and got rid of them. He told them he wouldn’t be their shepherd any longer. “Let the dying die, and the perishing perish; I don’t care. And let the others destroy themselves. I broke my staff called Favor to show that the LORD had broken His contract. Those who bought and sold sheep knew that this was a message from the LORD. I told them to pay me my wages if they thought they should. So they gave me 30 pieces of silver.”

Hundreds of years before Judas betrayed Jesus for 30 pieces of silver, Zechariah predicted the event. I, who knows the future, willingly sent My son to be betrayed. Notice the phrase, “broke the covenant” (v. 10). Judas covenanted to sell Jesus for 30 pieces. I covenanted to make Israel My people. Do you think when Judas

made a different covenant that I broke My covenant with Israel? Note the text said, “This act broke the covenant which I had made with My people” (v. 10). And today the Jews are out of Divine favor (Rom. 11:13-26).

I, the LORD, told him to toss the coins to the potter in the temple. So he did.

The prediction of the 30 pieces of silver is so accurate that it even describes Judas trying to return the money to the priest, but it was used to buy a potter’s field (Matt. 27:3-10). It’s amazing how accurately I predicted the “selling” of Jesus. How many people missed this fact when reading Scriptures? Of all the small details about the crucifixion of Christ, this one small detail is included, because it grieved My heart and probably technically broke My covenant with Israel.

Then Zechariah broke the staff called Union to show that My union between Judah and Israel had been broken. I, the LORD, said to him, “Act like a worthless shepherd. This will picture how I’ll give this nation a shepherd, a worthless leader, who won’t care for lost sheep and won’t heal the sick or feed the healthy. Instead he’ll dine on the fattest sheep and even tear off their hooves. How terrible it will be for their worthless shepherd who deserts his flock. A sword will cut his arm and make it useless, and it will pierce his right eye and blind him.”

Jerusalem’s Enemies Will be Destroyed

12This is a message from Me, the LORD, about Israel: “I’m the LORD, who made the heavens and laid the foundations of the earth and gave breath to humans. I’ll make Jerusalem and Judah like a drink that makes nearby nations drunk when they send their armies against Jerusalem. And I’ll make Jerusalem like a heavy stone that will crush anyone who tries to lift it. In that future day I’ll make every horse panic and every rider frustrated. I’ll watch over Judah, but I’ll blind her enemies’ horses. The

leaders of Judah will say, ‘The people of Jerusalem are strong because they are trusting in their God, the LORD of the heavens.’

“In that future day I’ll make the clans of Judah like a fire pan in a woodpile, or like a burning torch in a haystack. They’ll burn up all the neighboring nations, but Jerusalem will be secure. I, the LORD, will give victory to the rest of Judah first, so that Jerusalem and David’s royal line won’t be proud of their success. On that future day, I the LORD, will defend Jerusalem. Even the weakest person there will be as strong as David. And his descendants will be like the angel of the LORD going before them. On that future day I’ll destroy every nation that attacks Jerusalem.

“Then I’ll pour out a spirit of grace and prayer on everyone in Jerusalem, and they’ll look on Him whom they pierced and mourn for Him as for an only son who died.”

When My Son, Jesus, returns, the Jews “will look at My Son the One they have pierced” (v. 10). Then they will mourn. This is a two-fold mourning. Some who reject Jesus Christ will mourn for the judgment and punishment awaiting them. Other Jewish believers will mourn in regret for what the nation did to Jesus.

“In that future day everyone in Jerusalem will mourn like the people who mourned for Hadad Rimmon in Megiddo. All Israel will mourn, with each family mourning, and with the men mourning separately from the women. David’s family will mourn as will the family of Nathan, the family of Levi, and the family of Shimei, and all the other families with husbands and wives mourning separately.”

My People Are Cleansed

13 On that future day, there’ll be a fountain where David’s descendants and the people of Jerusalem can wash away their sins and impurities. On the day, I, the LORD of the heavens, will get rid of every idol. Even their names will be forgotten. And I’ll get rid of false prophets and evil spirits that control them. If anyone begins prophesying as a false prophet

again, his parents must warn him to stop because he's telling lies in My name. If he doesn't stop, then his parents must kill him with a sword.

No one will then boast of being a prophet, and no one will deceive people by wearing prophet's clothes. Instead they'll say, "I'm not a prophet. I've been a farmer all my life." If someone asks him, "What are these scars on your body?" he'll answer, "I was wounded at the house of my friends."

I began this chapter describing false prophets and the punishment that will come upon them. Then I will speak for the discredited false prophets who make excuses to turn away punishments. Suddenly the conversation switches to the time when Messiah (Jesus) returns and regathers Israel; they will see His pierced hands, then ask, "What are these wounds?" He died for your sins and rose the third day to give you new life. You don't have to put your finger in His wounds to believe. He said, "Blessed are those that have not seen, and yet have believed."

"Awake, O sword, against, My shepherd, the one who is My partner," say I, the LORD of the heavens. "Attack the shepherd, and the sheep will scatter, and I'll be against the lambs."

The Scriptures predict the disciples would run away when Jesus was arrested and crucified. "Strike the Shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered" (v. 7). Can you imagine the excruciating agony on Jesus to be abandoned by those closest to Him?

Only a third of the people in the land will be left alive in the land. This third that remains I'll bring through the fire to purify them, just as silver and gold are tested and purified. They'll call on Me, and I'll answer them. I'll say, "You are My people," and they'll say, "LORD, You are our God."

I, The LORD, Will Be King

I, the LORD, say the day is coming when all your belongings will be looted and divided among the soldiers. I'll gather all the nations to fight **14** against Jerusalem. The city will be taken, houses robbed, and women raped. Half of the people will be taken into captivity, and the others will be allowed to stay.

Then I, the LORD, will fight against those nations. On that future day I'll stand on the Mount of Olives east of Jerusalem, and the mountain will split, forming a wide valley running from east to west.

The Bible predicts Jesus will return to earth at the same spot from which He left earth, that is, the Mount of Olives. The angels told the disciples Jesus would return as He left (Acts 1:11). See all the similarities how Jesus left? He left unexpectedly, and no one knows the time of His return. He went up into heaven, so shall He return from heaven. He went up gradually which is how He will return. His followers saw Him leave, and they shall see Him return. He left when angels were present, so they shall be present when Jesus returns. The certainty of His ascension should give assurance about His return.

You'll escape through the valley, for it will reach to Azal, near Jerusalem. You'll run as you ran from the earthquake when Uzziah was king of Judah. Then I'll come with all My angels and the saints in heaven.

The sun, moon, and stars won't shine, because it will be one continuous day. I know how this can happen. There'll be no normal daytime and nighttime. In the evening it will still be light. In summer and winter life-giving water will flow from Jerusalem, some toward the Dead Sea and some toward the Mediterranean. I'll be King over all the earth and only I, the LORD, will be worshiped.

From Geba, north of Jerusalem, to Rimmon, south of Jerusalem, all the land will be flatlands, with Jerusalem raised up to its original height. It'll be full of people from the Benjamin Gate to the Old Gate, and to the Corner Gate, in the northeast part of the city, and from the Tower of Hananel to the king's winepresses. Jerusalem will be filled with people and will be safe, never again to be destroyed.

I'll send a terrible disease on every nation that fought against Jerusalem. While standing there, their flesh will rot away, their eyes will shrivel in their sockets, and their tongues will rot in their mouths. On that future day I'll cause them to panic in fear. They'll fight against each other. And Judah will be fighting in Jerusalem. And the wealth of the neighboring nations will be looted, including gold, silver, and clothing. The same terrible disease will hit horses, mules, camels, and donkeys, and all other animals in the enemies' camps.

Survivors from those nations that attacked Jerusalem will go every year to Jerusalem to worship Me, the LORD of the heavens, and to celebrate the Festival of Shelters. If any nation refuses to go to Jerusalem to worship Me, the King, the LORD of the heavens, they'll have no rain. If Egyptians refuse to join with Israel in celebrating My festivals, I'll punish them with the same disease I'll send on other nations that refuse to go. Their terrible disease will strike Egypt and other nations that don't go to celebrate the festival.

On that future day the words, "Dedicated to the LORD" will be engraved on the horses' harness bells. And the cooking pots used in the temple will be as sacred as the bowls used at the altar. In fact, every cooking pot in Jerusalem will be sacred to Me, the LORD of the heavens. People who come with sacrifices to the temple can use any of the pots to cook their sacrifices. There'll be no more merchants trading in My house; I am the LORD of the heavens.

I AM GOD

Who Questions Me?

The Book of Malachi

The name Malachi means “my messenger.” Malachi speaks for Me who called him, “My messenger” (3:1). Malachi is also called, “the Messenger of the Lord of hosts” (2:7). The emphasis of this book is on the *message*, and not the messenger. Therefore, 47 of the 55 verses are personal messages from Me, the LORD. I have always loved Israel in spite of her sin(s). I will still love Israel, and will always love Israel in the future. But Israel has not honored Me, the LORD, as a child should honor its father, or a slave should honor its master. Israel’s sin—dishonest worship.

Malachi emphasizes giving Me the best of everything in worship. This principle is still true. *Give Me your whole heart. Pry open your hands from holding tightly to this world. Fix your grip on Me.*

I, The LORD, Love My People

1 This is the message I, the LORD, gave Malachi for Israel. “I’ve loved you deeply,” I say. But you answer, “Lord, have You loved me?” I reply, “I showed it to you by loving your ancestor Jacob, instead of Esau.”

This chapter tells how I “hated Esau” but wasn’t it Esau who first rejected Me and the spiritual birthright, that is, the opportunity to be the “priest” of the family and intercede for family members (Gen. 25:26-34)? My hatred to Esau is a reaction of Esau’s rejection. Remember, “Esau despised his birthright” (Gen. 25:34). So Esau did more than turn his back on Me, he hated Me. I do not

*understand how anyone could despise Me or My offer of salvation.
But they do!*

I rejected Esau and I destroyed Esau's mountains and turned his land into a desert for wild dogs.

If Esau's descendants say, "We'll rebuild the ruins," then I, the LORD of the Heavens, will say, "They may try to rebuild, but I'll destroy them again. Their country will be called the Land of Wickedness, and their people will be called "Those with Whom I Am Angry." When you see this destruction, you'll say truly My power reaches beyond your borders.

I, the LORD of the Heavens, say to the priests, "A son honors his father and a servant respects his master. I'm your father and master, so why don't you respect Me? You priests despise Me. But you ask, 'How have we ever despised You?' You've despised Me by offering defiled food on My altar. You are saying, 'My altar deserves no respect.' Isn't it wrong to offer blind animals as sacrifices? And to offer crippled and diseased animals? If you offer gifts like this to your governor, he certainly won't be pleased.

"You ask Me to be merciful to you. But why should I, when you bring that kind of offering? I wish one of your priests would lock the temple doors so these worthless sacrifices could not be offered. I'm not at all pleased with you and I, the LORD of the Heavens, refuse to accept any more of your offerings. My name is honored by other nations all day long. They offer sweet incense and offerings to honor Me. My reputation is great among the nations," I say. "But you, Israel, insult Me by bringing worthless sacrifices and saying that it's okay to defile My table. You say it's too difficult to serve Me, the LORD, and you turn up your nose at My commands. You bring stolen animals and those that are crippled or sick. Should I accept these? Cursed is the man who promises to bring a fine ram from his flock, but then offers a sick animal to Me. I'm a great King, and I'm worshiped by many nations."

I, The LORD, Command, the Priests

"Listen, you priests. This message is for you from Me. If you don't listen and determine to honor Me, I, the LORD of the Heavens, I'll bring a curse

2 on you. I'll curse even the blessings you receive. In fact I've already done this, because you haven't taken My warnings seriously. I'll punish your descendants and rub your faces in the manure from your animal sacrifices. Then I'll add you to the dung pile. Then you'll know that I sent you this warning so My agreement with Levi may continue. I gave Levi life and peace; and he revered Me and stood amazed at My reputation. The Levites taught the truth about Me. They didn't lie or cheat, and they walked with Me, living upright lives and turning from sin. The priests should guard knowledge, so My people will learn My laws. The priests are the messengers of Me, the LORD of the Heavens. But you priests have turned from My paths, and you've caused many to fall into sin. You've corrupted the agreement I made with Levi, so I caused everyone to hate you because you disobeyed Me and have been partial to people who've disobeyed Me.

“You are all My children and I created all of you. Why then are you faithless by violating the agreement I made with your ancestors? Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem have all defiled the temple by marrying women who worship idols. I'll cut off any man in Israel who does this and yet he brings an offering to Me, the LORD of the Heavens.

“Also you cry and weep at My altar because I refuse to accept your offerings. You ask why I'm not pleased with you. It's because I witnessed the vows you and your wife made to each other on your wedding day. But you were not faithful to her, the wife you promised to care for. I made the two of you one person in body and spirit. And I want godly offspring from your union. So guard yourself, and be faithful to your wife.

“I, the LORD, the God of Israel, hate divorce. Divorce is being very cruel to your wife. So guard yourself and be loyal to your wife. You have worn Me out with your words. And yet you ask, ‘How have we worn You out?’ You have done so by saying I'm pleased with the evil everyone does and by saying that I won't punish injustice.”

I don't want you to question, “Why?” I want you to obey My principles and commands. When your old flesh creeps out and you answer, “Why?,” open your blind eyes to My commands. You need a new heart to obey Me without asking, “Why?”

Judgment is Coming

3 “I’ll send My messengers who’ll prepare the way for Me. The one you are looking for will come quickly to My temple and bring you great joy. Yes, the messenger you are looking for is coming,” I, the LORD of the Heavens, say. “But when He appears, who can stand up to Him? He’ll be like a furnace that purifies silver or like strong soap that whitens clothes. He’ll purify the Levites like refining gold or silver, watching as the dross is burned away. Then they can again offer sacrifices I’ll find acceptable. I’ll accept these offerings the people of Judah and Jerusalem bring to Me, as I did before. I’ll put you on trial, and I’ll testify against you who practice witchcraft and you adulterers and liars. I’ll also testify against people who cheat their employees, who take advantage of widows and orphans, and who don’t give justice to strangers, and who don’t reverence Me,” I, the LORD of the Heavens, say. “I, the LORD, do not change. That’s why I haven’t destroyed you, O descendants of Jacob, even though you have not obeyed Me or kept My commands. If you return to Me, I’ll return to you, but you ask, ‘How can we return?’

“‘Will a man rob Me? No, but yet you have robbed Me.’ Then you ask, ‘When did we ever rob You?’ You robbed Me of the tithe and the offerings you owe Me. That’s why the whole nation is under My curse. Bring the entire tithe into My storehouse so there’ll be enough food there. If you do, I’ll open the windows of heaven and pour blessing after blessing on you.”

I tell you to “put Me on the spot.” I want you to obey Me, and when you put Me to the test, I will open the windows of heaven. Will you accept My challenge, will you put Me on the spot? I will give financially to you as you obey Me.

“I’ll keep locusts from destroying your crops and your vineyards,” I, the LORD of the Heavens, say. “And all the nations will call you blessed and will talk of your wonderful land.

“You’ve said terrible things about Me, but you answer, ‘What have we said that we shouldn’t have said?’ “You have said it’s foolish to serve Me. What good does it do to obey My laws and to sorrow and mourn for your

sins? Proud people are happy, and sinners prosper. In fact, people who challenge Me to punish them, go free of harm.

“Those who reverence Me spoke to each other, and so I had their names written in a Book of Remembrance. You are precious to Me like jewels,” I, the LORD of the Heavens, say. “I’ll protect you just as a man protects his obedient son. Then you’ll see the difference between those who obey Me and those who don’t.”

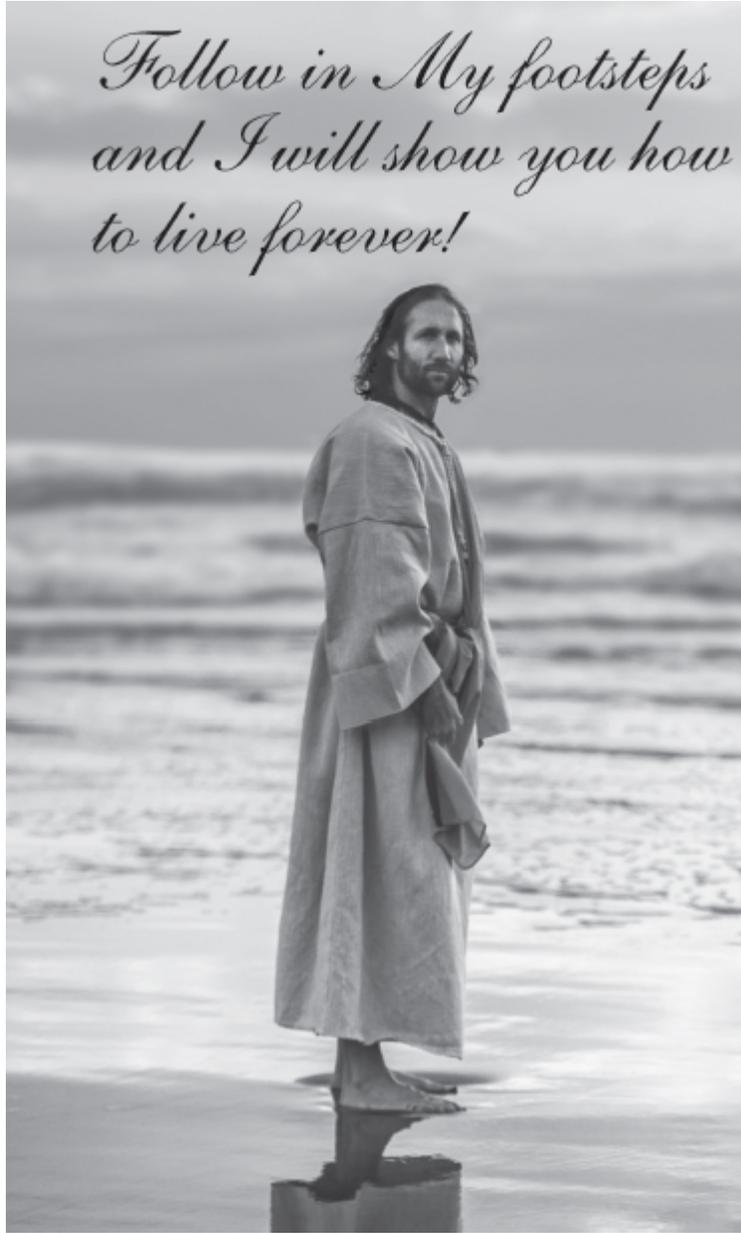
Watch, For The Day of the LORD Is Coming

4 “The day of judgment is coming, burning like a furnace that will burn up the proud and wicked like straw. And they will be consumed like the branches and roots of a tree,” says Me, the LORD of the Heavens. “For you who reverence My name, righteousness will be as prevalent as the sun. The restorative wings (rays) of the sun picture the amazing power of righteousness. And you’ll be free, jumping around like calves let out to pasture. Then you’ll tread on the wicked like they’re ashes under your feet,” I say. “Be sure to obey the laws I gave for you through My servant Moses on Mount Horeb (Sinai).

“Before the terrible day of judgment comes, I’ll send you the prophet Elijah. He’ll encourage parents and children to be together again. If they don’t change, I’ll come and destroy their land.”

New Testament

*Follow in My footsteps
and I will show you how
to live forever!*



My Life

PART ONE



I Am Jesus, Who is from the beginning. I will tell you all about God My Father, because I was face to face with Him throughout eternity, because I Am God.

Without Me nothing was created that was created. I do all the things that God My Father does. I have all life in Myself and give life to all of My creation. I Am the life of God, Who is the Light to all who are lost in a dark, forbidding world. My light shines in the hostile darkness, but the darkness doesn't even know that I exist. Commit yourself to My message which is written in the Word of God. It is eternal and perfect. Learn My message, believe My message, and share it with others.

I am the true saving Light Who offers spiritual light to everyone in the world. I came to the world that I created, but those living in the world did not recognize Me as their Creator Savior.

I came to My own people—the Jews—and they refused to recognize Me.

But as many as recognize Me as their Savior and receive Me, I will make them My followers, simply because they believe in the authority of

My name. They will be born again by My power, which is not a birth of blood, or the choice of people, or of flesh.

I had all the celestial glory of heaven, but I clothed My heavenly glory with human flesh. God living in flesh was the greatest glory of all. I am the uniquely begotten Son, and I have all the grace and truth of God. Just know this: I Am eternal, and I created the universe. I had eternal fellowship with God My Father, and I became flesh when I was born of the Virgin Mary. You should worship and praise Me for all that I Am and do. My grace was offered and your need of grace was fulfilled. The law of Moses condemned you to death, but My grace and truth gave you life. You could never have seen God, but I came from His Spirit to show you what God is like.

Eternal life was manifested to you. You have seen it, and now you witness to others and tell them about eternal life that was with God My Father, and manifested to you. That which you have seen and heard, tell others, that they may have fellowship with you, as you have fellowship with God My Father, and Me, God the Son. I have written these things to give you heavenly joy. I Am Light, and there is absolutely no darkness in Me. So now you declare this message to everyone. If you tell people that you have fellowship with Me, and yet you walk in darkness, you lie and deny the truth. But when you walk in the Light, as I Am the Light, you have fellowship with other believers, and My blood cleanses you of all of your sins.

If you tell people you have no sin, you deceive yourself, and you don't have My truth. When you confess your sins, I Am faithful to forgive your sins, and cleanse you from all unrighteousness. If you were to say you have never sinned, you make Me a liar and My Word doesn't control you.

Because I told you not to sin, you won't do it. But when you slip and sin once, I stand at My Father's right hand to plead forgiveness for you. You know I have forgiven all of your sins, and I didn't die for you alone, but for the whole world.

You Can Know You Are My Follower

You know you are born again, because you believe I Am the Messiah. And all who love Me, love My followers also. I know you are My

follower because you love Me, and you do what I have commanded you to do. This is what loving Me means—keeping My commands, because they are not difficult.

I know you are Children of God, because you have victoriously overcome the lust of the world by faith. Who else can overcome the world? Only those who believe that I Am God.

I AM JESUS

The King

The Gospel of Matthew

I led Matthew to write this gospel with the key word “King.” This book shows Me as the King of Israel who fulfilled the Old Testament predictions of their coming King. Shortly after My birth in Bethlehem, I was worshiped by wise men as a King. My speeches were kingly in nature. But Israel rejected Me as their King. In My first coming I didn’t come to sit on a throne in Jerusalem, but to die for the sins of the world. Now, I want to sit on the throne of your heart and rule from the inside. When you discover Me, then seek first My coming kingdom on earth. That way, I will rule your heart—rule your life—and influence your world.

The Record of My Genealogy

1 I Am Jesus. This is the record of My genealogy. I was the descendant of both David and Abraham: Abraham was the father of Isaac, who was the father of Jacob, who was the father of Judah and his brothers, who was the father of Perez and Zerah (whose mother was Tamar). Perez was the father of Hezron, who was the father of Ram, who was the father of Amminadab, who was the father of Nahshon, who was the father of Salmon, who was the father of Boaz (whose mother was Rahab). Boaz was the father of Obed (whose mother was Ruth), and Obed was the father of Jesse, who was the father of King David, who was the father of Solomon (whose mother was Uriah’s wife). Solomon was the father of Rehoboam, who was the father of Abijah, who was the father of Asa, who was the father of Jehoshaphat, who was the father of Joram, who was the father of Uzziah, who was the father of Jotham, who was the father of Ahaz, who was the father of Hezekiah, who was the father of Manasseh, who was the father of Amon, who was the

father of Josiah, who was the father of Jeconiah and his brothers, at the time of the Babylon captivity.

After the Babylonian captivity, Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel, who was the father of Zerubbabel, who was the father of Abiud, who was the father of Eliakim, who was the father of Azor, who was the father of Zadoc, who was the father of Akim, who was the father of Eliud, who was the father of Eleazar, who was the father of Matthan, who was the father of Jacob, who was the father of Joseph, who was the husband of Mary, who gave birth to Me. My name is Jesus, and I Am called Christ.

My genealogy is traced for fourteen generations from Abraham to David, fourteen generations from David to the captivity of Babylon, and fourteen generations from the deportation to My birth.

My Birth in Human History

My birth took place this way. When Mary was engaged to Joseph, before they came together, she was discovered to be pregnant by the Holy Spirit. Joseph, her future husband, was a good man and not wanting to see her put to shame, planned to divorce her quietly. But while he was thinking this over, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife! She has conceived a Son through the Holy Spirit, and she will give birth to a Son, whom you will call Jesus, ‘the Savior,’ for it is He who will save His people from their sins.”

The greatest event in history was when I came to live among the people I created. The greatest event in your life was when I came to live in your heart.

All this happened to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet, “Behold, a virgin shall conceive and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call His name Emmanuel, which means ‘God with us.’” When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel had told him. He took Mary as his wife but had no physical relations with her until she had given birth to Me. Then he called My name Jesus.

The Wise Men Visit Me

2 After I was born in Bethlehem, wise men—astrologers—came from the East looking for Me, the baby born King of the Jews. They told King Herod that they saw My star in the East and followed it so they could worship Me.

King Herod was disturbed because the Roman Senate had declared that I was the King of the Jews. Herod assembled Jewish leaders to find out where the prophets predicted that I, the Deliverer, would be born.

They quoted the Scripture, “You, Bethlehem in Judah, are not the least important town because the Deliverer will come from you, who will rule the people of Israel.”

Just as the wise men searched for Me in order to worship Me as their God, so you search to know Me and to worship Me according to the worship I deserve.

Herod met privately with the wise men to find out exactly when the star appeared. Herod then deceptively sent the wise men to search for Me, and to report back to him so that he could also worship Me.

The wise men started toward Bethlehem, and the star appeared again to lead them and stopped where I was. When they saw the star again, they were very happy. As they went into the house, they saw Me with My mother, and falling to their knees, they gave Me their gifts: gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

The wise men were warned in a dream not to return to Herod, so they went home a different way.

Slaughter of Babies in Bethlehem

After the wise men left Mary and Me, the angel of the Lord spoke to Joseph in a dream, “Get the child and His mother and escape to Egypt. King Herod will try to kill Him. Stay there until I tell you to come back.”

Joseph immediately took My mother and Me and left for Egypt. Then the prophecy of the Lord was fulfilled, “I will call my Son out of Egypt.”

Joseph would not have known of danger if My angel had not warned him. Today you face all kinds of danger—known and unknown—from those who would intentionally harm you, to accidents; from spiritual dangers, to toxic dangers. I will protect you when you are unaware of danger, and when you face threatening situations.

When Herod realized the wise men deceived him, he sent soldiers to Bethlehem to kill every child who was two years old or younger. Then, the prophecy of Jeremiah was fulfilled, “Screams and mourning were heard in Ramah. Rachel was sobbing for her children, and she would not be comforted because they no longer lived.”

My Exile in Egypt

The Lord sent an angel to Joseph after Herod died, telling him to return to the land of Israel because, “Those who tried to kill Jesus are now dead.” So Joseph took Mary and Me and headed toward the land of Israel.

Then Joseph heard that Archelaus was now king, so he was afraid to go to Bethlehem. So, the Lord spoke to Joseph in a dream telling him to go back to Galilee and his home in Nazareth. Then the prophecy was fulfilled, “He [Jesus] shall be called a Nazarene.”

John the Baptizer Begins Preaching

3 The Word of God came to John the Baptizer, and he went throughout all of Judea preaching the baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. John quoted the Book of Isaiah proclaiming, “I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, make ready the way for the Lord, make straight paths for Him.”

John had a coat woven of camel hair, and a leather belt around his waist. He ate locusts and honey. Many in Jerusalem and Judea, and the area around the Jordan Valley heard about him and went to be baptized by him, confessing their sins.

When John saw the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to hear him, he said, “You are snakes . . . who warned you to escape the coming wrath?”

Show good fruit, repent. Do not think you can escape judgment just because you are Abraham's children. God can make children of Abraham from these stones in the desert. Every tree that doesn't grow good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. The axe is ready to cut down your tree."

The crowd cried out, "What must we do?" Everyone anticipated their Deliverer would soon appear, and many thought John was the Messiah.

John answered them, "I only baptize with water, the One following me will baptize with fire and with the Holy Spirit. I am not worthy to unloose His sandal straps. The One following me will separate real believers, who are represented by good grain, from the chaff, representing false believers. He will store the good grain in His barns, but will burn the chaff in eternal fire."

John Baptizes Me

Then I came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to prevent Me. "You need to baptize me," the Baptizer said. "Why do you come to me?"

But I replied, "It is the right thing to do. This baptism will meet all the law's demands. Let it be done now."

Then John agreed to baptize Me. I came up out of the water, and suddenly the heavens opened, and I saw the Spirit of God coming down like a dove and resting on Me. A voice spoke out of heaven saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

In order to understand the Trinity, watch Me, God the Son, being baptized. See God the Holy Spirit come on Me as a dove. Listen to the voice of God the Father saying, "You are My beloved Son. In You, I am well pleased."

I Am Tempted by Satan to Sin . . . I Didn't

4 Then I was led by the Spirit into the desert, to be tempted by the devil. After fasting for forty days and nights, I was hungry. "If you are the Son

of God,” said the tempter, “tell these stones to turn into bread.”

I answered, “The Scripture says, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes out of the mouth of God.’”

Then the devil took Me to the holy city and set Me on the highest pinnacle of the temple. “If You are the Son of God,” he said, “jump down. For the Scripture says, ‘He shall give His angels charge over you and on their hands they shall lift you up, lest you smash your foot against a stone.’”

I answered, “And the Scripture also says, ‘You shall not tempt the Lord your God.’”

Again, the devil took Me to a high mountain and showed Me all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. “I will give you these kingdoms,” he said to Me, “if you will fall down and worship me.”

“Get out of here, satan!” I replied. “The Scripture says, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only shall you serve.’”

Then the devil left Me alone, and angels came to strengthen Me.

Learn the Scriptures so that you can use them to protect yourself when temptations come. Just as I used the Scriptures to turn back temptations, so you must understand the Scriptures. I will give you wisdom in how to apply them when you are tempted.

Now when I heard that John had been arrested, I went back to Galilee. I left Nazareth and came to live in Capernaum, a lakeside town in the Zebulun territory. Isaiah’s prophecy came true in this way: “Light shall come to the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, beyond Jordan, beside the lake of Galilee of the Gentiles. The people who sit in darkness will see a great light, and to them who sit in the shadow of death, a light will spring up.”

From that time, I began preaching saying, “Repent, change your hearts and minds, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

I Call Fishermen to Follow Me

As I was walking by the Sea of Galilee, I saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew, casting their net into the water. They were fishermen. So I said to them, “Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men!” Immediately they left their nets and followed Me.

Then, I went farther and saw two more fishermen, also brothers, James and John, in the boat with their father Zebedee mending their nets, and I called them. Immediately, they left the boat and their father and followed Me.

When I call you, drop what you are doing and follow Me; just as the disciples left their nets and followed Me. I want you to be fishers of men and women.

I then traveled through all of Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and disability among the people. My reputation spread throughout the area, and people brought to Me those who were sick, suffering from all kinds of disease, including the demon-possessed and the paralyzed. I healed them all and was followed by large crowds from Galilee, Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and from the regions beyond the Jordan River.

The Sermon on the Mount

5 When I saw the multitudes following Me, I went to the top of a hill to teach My disciples and the multitudes.

This is what I started teaching them:

“When you are poor in spirit—totally dependent on Me—the kingdom of heaven is yours.

“When you mourn—broken over sin in your life—
I will give you consolation.

“When you are meek—willing to set aside your rights—
I will give you possession of the earth.

“When you are hungry, and you thirst after righteousness—having a desire for outward holiness—

you will be satisfied by My presence.

“When you are merciful—looking on others—
I will show mercy to you.

“When you are pure—desiring inward holiness—
then you shall see Me.

“When you are a peacemaker—building relationships with others—
you will be called a child of God.

“When you are persecuted for righteousness’ sake—suffering for Me—
yours will be the kingdom of heaven.

“When you are persecuted falsely—because of your loyalty to Me—you
will accept it as a rich reward because this is what the enemies of God did
to the prophets and to Me.

“Be like the salt of the earth so, through you, I can make people thirsty
for My presence. If you lose your ability to influence people, you might as
well be thrown away like salt that has lost its saltiness.

“I want you to be a light to the world so that people will know how to
find their way to Me. People don’t put a candle under a bucket. They put it
in a candle-holder so that it can light a whole room. Let your light shine to
all people so they can see My works through you, and glorify My Father in
heaven.

“I didn’t come to do away with the teachings of the Old Testament, but
to fulfill the prophecies about Me. Not one dot and comma can be changed
in the Old Testament Scriptures. Everything it promises will come to pass
just the way it was predicted. Anyone who breaks one commandment of the
law, or teaches people to break them, will be last in the kingdom. When you
keep or teach others to keep the commands, you will be great in the
kingdom.

“Accept My imputed righteousness to you which is greater than the self-
righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. You know it has been said long
ago that whoever kills will be in danger of eternal judgment. But I tell you,
never become so angry with anyone that you condemn yourself to
punishment. Anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be punished in hell fire. As
you begin to pray and remember someone who is mad at you, you will stop
praying and go reconcile yourself with that offended person, and then you
will pray to Me. You will come to terms with those who sue you before you

meet them in court, lest the judge agrees with your opponent and they put you in jail or make you pay the full cost.

“You have heard this said, ‘You must not commit adultery.’ I say, don’t even have impure intentions, lest you commit adultery in your heart. If anything entices you to sin, get rid of it from your life. It is best for you to get rid of a stumbling block than to lose your testimony or life. If part of your body is a snare to you, ignore it, as though it’s not there. It’s best to lose the use of part of your body than to destroy your whole body and perhaps even your soul.”

I quoted the Old Testament that a notice of divorce must be given before putting away a spouse. Then I said, “If you put away a wife for any reason, other than unfaithfulness, both you and she have become adulterers.”

I again quoted the Old Testament saying, “You shall not swear falsely, but shall do what you swear as a commitment to the Lord.” Then I added, “But I say to you, do not swear at all; neither by heaven, or God’s throne, nor by the earth for it is God’s footstool, nor by Jerusalem because it is God’s city. Don’t swear by anything, because you can’t make one hair black or white.” I gave this commandment, “Tell people what you will do, and do what you say. Your word of promise should be enough.”

Pledge to do My will. I will give you strength to do it, and the tenacity to reject any temptation to be otherwise.

I quoted the ancients, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,” but that principle is not our standard. I also said, “Don’t take revenge. If someone hits you on the right cheek, offer them the left cheek. If a man asks to take away your coat, give him your overcoat also. If anyone orders you to go one mile, go two miles with him. If anyone wants to borrow something, do not turn that person down.

“You have heard it said to love your friends and hate your enemies. But I say do good to those who hate you and pray for those who spitefully use you. Treat them as you want to be treated, so that you will be of my heavenly Father, because He makes the sun rise on evil people and good people and sends rain on the evil and the good.” I said, “If you love only those who love you, there is no spiritual reward in that. Even sinners love

those who love them. Love your enemies and do good things to those who hate you, because I said, ‘You would receive a rich reward, and should show everyone that you are a child of the Most High.’”

Giving, Praying, Fasting, Trusting

6“Do not practice your piety before people, to be ‘holy’ in their eyes, because I will not reward it. Do not show off when you give money because that would be hypocritical. Recognition is the only reward a hypocrite gets. When you give your money secretly, you won’t let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. I know all of your intentions, and see all gifts, and will reward you if you give humbly and honestly.

“Do not be like the hypocrites when you pray, because they love to pray before people to get attention. That’s all the reward they’ll get. Go to your prayer closet, where no one can see or hear you. Then when you pray to Me in secret, I will see your sincerity in private and will reward you openly. Do not rattle off long prayers like the unsaved, who think they’ll be heard because they pray a long time. Realize that I know everything in your heart, and I know your needs before you pray.

“When you pray, follow this pattern:

“My Father in heaven, may Your name be holy, in my life on earth, as Your name is holy in heaven. May Your kingdom come, in my life on earth, as Your kingdom rules in heaven. May Your will be done, in my life on earth, as Your will is done in heaven. Give me daily bread for this day. And forgive the consequences of my sin, as I forgive the sins of those who hurt me. Do not let me be tempted to do evil, but protect me from the evil one, for You have the ability to answer this prayer. Let Your kingdom rule my life. May You get credit when these prayers are answered.”

Pray My Prayer each day because it embraces every petition you must make to Me, and it leaves out nothing that is imperative to your prayer relationship with Me.

“If you forgive the failings of others, I will forgive your faults. But if you refuse to forgive others I will not forgive you.

“Do not fast with an outward ‘religious’ face for that is just to get attention from others. The ‘attention’ you get is your reward. Dress your normal way when you fast, so no one will know you are fasting. Your fast will be a secret between you and Me, and I will reward you with the answers you seek.

“Do not pile up wealth on earth where inflation or corruption will destroy it. But deposit your wealth in My heavenly bank, where nothing can destroy it. Therefore, put your treasure where you make a heart commitment. I will make you see things clearly and give you light and understanding in your heart because when your eye is clouded with lust and evil thoughts, your heart will be blinded by darkness. You’ll not understand or seek spiritual things. You cannot serve two masters—God and money—because you’ll naturally love one and reject the other. So, this is what you must do. Don’t worry about clothes, entertainment, or food. Your life is far more important than what you eat or wear. The birds will be your example. They don’t worry about sowing, reaping, or eating food. You are more important to Me than birds. Worry will not give you anything you need. Let the lilies of the field be your example for clothing. They don’t worry about their appearance. Yet Solomon, in all his glory, was not as beautiful as the lilies. Since I wonderfully care for the flowers that are here today and gone tomorrow, you know I can take care of you. I will forgive you when you have so little faith about the necessities of life. Do not worry about having enough food and clothing because I know you need them. These are the things unsaved people worry about. But seek first My kingdom and righteousness, then all these things will be added to you.”

Allow Me to sit on the throne of your heart to rule all you say and do. I want to give you abundant life.

“Do not be anxious about tomorrow, since I will take care of tomorrow’s needs, but live one day at a time.”

Your Relationship With Others

7 “Do not criticize others, so they won’t criticize you because the way you treat others is the way they’ll treat you. What you give to others is what they’ll give you, so I will make you a gracious giver. Do not criticize the small trash in another’s eye, when your eye is full of garbage. You can’t say to someone, ‘Let me clean out your eye’ when your own eye is full of dirt and filth. You must first cleanse your eyes before you can help anyone see more clearly. Do not give beautiful pearls to pigs, they will stomp them into the mud, and then they will turn to attack you, so do not give ‘holy things’ to evil people.

“Ask, in prayer, and I will give it to you. Seek for the things you need, for I supply those who seek. When a door is closed for the things you need, you will constantly knock, for I will open and allow you to find. You would never give anyone a stone when he needs bread to eat. You would never give anyone a snake when he asks for a fish to eat. Since hardhearted people give good things to their children, then you know that God, My heavenly Father, will give good gifts to His children, when they ask.

“Do good things for other people, just as you want them to do good things for you.

“Enter My presence by the narrow door since the road to hell is wide and inviting, and most of the crowd takes this road. But the door to My presence is small, and the path to eternal life is narrow. So only a few find it.

“Watch out for false preachers disguised as sheep, because they are ravenous wolves who will eat up young Christians. You can tell good people by their fruit, just as you can tell the difference between good fruit and weeds, so false preachers are known by their evil deeds. Good trees grow good fruit, and evil trees grow evil fruit. A good tree can’t grow bad fruit, and an evil tree can’t grow good fruit. A tree that produces bad fruit is cut down and thrown in the fire. So everyone is known by their fruit.

“Those who cry publicly, ‘Lord, Lord’ will not enter the kingdom of heaven. But those who do My will will be able to enter into My presence. Others will cry out, ‘Lord, Lord, I preached in Your name and cast out demons and did miracles.’ Then I’ll say to them, ‘I never knew you, get out of my sight.’

“Those who listen to this sermon and obey My words will be like a sensible man who built his house on a rock foundation. The rains came, floods swirled, and the wind blew on this house, but it didn’t fall, because it was founded on a rock. But those who hear this sermon and reject My words, are like a stupid man who built his house on sand. The rains came, floods rose, and gale winds blew, and it collapsed with a mighty crash.”

When I finished this sermon, the people were amazed at its content, because I taught them with authority, not like the scribes and other religious preachers.

I Perform Miracles

8 Large crowds followed Me when I came down from the hillside. A leper came and knelt in front of Me. “Sir,” he said, “if You will, You can make me clean.”

I stretched out My hand and placed it on the leper saying, “Of course I will. Be clean!” And immediately he was healed of leprosy. “Say nothing to anyone,” I told him. “Go show yourself to the priest and make the offering that Moses prescribed.”

Then, as I was coming into Capernaum, a centurion approached Me. “Sir,” he begged, “My servant is in bed at home paralyzed and in terrible pain.”

“I will come heal him,” I said.

The centurion replied, “I’m not important enough for You to come into my house. Only give the order, and my servant will be healed. I’m under authority, and I have soldiers under me. I can say to one man, ‘Go’ and I know he’ll go, or I can say, ‘Come’ to another and I know he’ll come, or I can say to my slave, ‘Do this,’ and he’ll do it.”

When I heard this, I was astonished. I said to those who were following Me, “I have never seen faith like this even in Israel! I tell you that many people will come from the east and west and sit with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while those who should have belonged to the kingdom will be banished to the darkness outside, where there will be tears and gnashing of teeth.” Then I said to the centurion, “Go home, and it

will happen as you have believed it would.” And his servant was healed at that moment.

Then, on coming into Peter’s house, I saw that Peter’s mother-in-law had been put to bed with a high fever. I touched her hand, and the fever left her. And then she got up and began to serve them. When evening came, they brought to Me many who were demon-possessed, which I expelled with a word. I healed all who were ill. This fulfilled Isaiah’s prophecy, “He took our infirmities and bore our diseases.”

I will give you faith to believe I can heal, and answer when you call to Me for healing.

Giving Up Everything for Me

When I saw the large crowd, I commanded My disciples to cross over to the other side of the lake. But one of the scribes came to Me and said, “Master, I will follow You wherever you go.”

I said to him, “Foxes have holes, birds in the sky have nests, but I, the Son of Man, have nowhere to lay My head.”

Another of My disciples said, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.”

But I said to him, “Follow Me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead.”

I Calm the Storm

I went aboard the boat, and My disciples followed Me. Then a terrific storm sprang up, and the boat was about to sink with the waves. I was sleeping soundly, and the disciples awakened Me. “Lord, save us!” they cried. “We are about to drown!”

“Why are you so frightened, oh you with little faith?” I replied. Then I got up and rebuked the wind and the waters, and there was a great calm.

The men marveled and kept saying, “What sort of man is this; even the winds and the waves obey Him!”

When storms enter your life, you can cry out to Me for courage and help. I will teach you to trust Me. I will save you in the storms of this life.

I Heal a Violent Demon-Stricken Man

When I arrived on the other side at Gadara, I was met by two demon-possessed men who came out from among the tombs. They were so violent that no one came in that area. “What have you got to do with us, O Son of God?” they screamed. “Have You come to torture us before our time?”

There was a large herd of pigs feeding nearby. So the demons begged Me, “If You cast us out, send us into the herd of pigs!”

“Go!” I said. And the demons came out and went into the pigs. Suddenly the whole herd stampeded down the steep cliff into the lake and drowned.

The herdsmen ran to the town and told the whole story of what happened to the two men who had been demon-possessed. Then the whole town came out to meet Me and commanded Me to leave their territory.

Follow Me wherever I lead. I will give you a willing spirit, courage to endure, and strength to do it.

Getting a Friend to Me

9 So I got back into the boat, went back across the lake, and came to My own town. Some people brought Me a paralytic lying on his bed. When I saw the faith of those who brought him, I said to the paralytic, “Be of good cheer, my son! Your sins are forgiven.”

Immediately some of the scribes thought to themselves, “This man is blaspheming.”

But I knew what they were thinking, and said to them, “Why do you have evil thoughts in your minds? Which is easier to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven’ or ‘Get up and walk’? But so you will know that I, the Son of

Man, have authority to forgive sins,” I spoke to the paralytic, “Get up, pick up your bed, and go home.” And the man got up and went home.

When the crowds saw it, they were afraid and praised God for such power.

I know your thoughts, just as I knew the religious leaders' thoughts when I was on this earth. I will forgive you for any sin or doubt that hides in your heart. I will teach you to think My thoughts.

The Call to Matthew

I left there, and as I passed on, I saw a man called Matthew, sitting at his table at the tax collector's place. “Follow Me!” I said to him, and Matthew got up and followed Me.

Later, as I was in a house sitting at the dinner table, many tax collectors and other disreputable people came and sat down with My disciples and Me. The Pharisees saw this and said to My disciples, “Why does your master eat His meals with tax collectors and sinners?”

But I heard them and replied, “It is not the well who need a doctor, but those who are sick. Go and learn what the Scripture means when it says, ‘I desire mercy and not sacrifice.’ I did not come to invite the ‘righteous’ to salvation but ‘sinners.’”

Then John's disciples approached Me with a question, “Why do the Pharisees, and we fast often, but Your disciples do not?”

“Can the wedding guests mourn while they have the bridegroom?” I replied. “The day will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them. They will certainly fast then! No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth onto an old coat, for the patch will pull away from the coat, and the hole will be worse than ever. Nor do people put fresh wine into old wineskins, otherwise the skins burst, the wine is spilled, and the skins are ruined. But they put fresh wine into new skins, and both are preserved.”

I will show you when to fast and how to fast. May you fast to know Me more intimately.

The Woman and the Twelve-Year-Old Girl

While I was saying these things to them, an official came up to Me and knelt before Me saying, “My daughter has just died. Please come and lay Your hand on her, and she will live.” I arose and followed him with My disciples.

And on the way, a woman who had had a hemorrhage for twelve years came up to Me from behind and touched the hem of My cloak. “If I can only touch His cloak,” she kept saying to herself, “I shall be healed.”

But I turned around and saw her. “Be of good cheer, my daughter,” I said, “your faith—not your touch—has healed you.” And the woman was completely cured from that moment.

Then when I came into the official’s house and saw the flute players and mourners, I said, “Depart, the little girl is not dead, but asleep.” They laughed at Me with scorn. But when the crowd had been put out, I took her by the hand, and the girl got up. And this was reported to the whole district.

I was interrupted as I was going to Jairus’ house when I stopped to heal a woman with an issue of blood. Both the woman and Jairus’ daughter were important, so I will teach you the importance of people and give you compassion so you will know when to let people interrupt you.

I Heal Two Blind Men

As I passed on My way, two blind men followed Me crying out, “Have mercy on us, Son of David!”

And when I had gone inside the house, the two came to Me. I asked, “Do you believe I can heal you?”

“Yes, Lord,” they replied.

Then I touched their eyes, saying, “So shall it be.” Then their eyes were opened, but I sternly warned them, “Don’t tell anyone.” Yet they went and spread it throughout the whole district.

Later, when My disciples and I were coming out of the town, they brought to Me a dumb man who was demon-possessed. As soon as the

demon had been cast out, the dumb man began to talk. The crowds were amazed saying, “Never has this happened in Israel.”

But the Pharisees’ comment was, “He cast out demons by the power of demons.”

The Twelve Sent Two by Two

I traveled through the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of illness and disability. As I saw the crowds coming to Me, I was deeply moved with compassion for them, for they were helpless and lost and like a flock of sheep without a shepherd. “The harvest is great,” I remarked to My disciples, “but the reapers are few. Pray therefore to the Lord of the harvest to send laborers to harvest the fields.”

I will give you compassion for hopeless people who need help, just as I had compassion on them.

Choosing My Disciples

10I called My twelve disciples to Me and gave them authority over the demons, so that they could cast them out, and could cure any disease or sickness. Here are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon, who was named Peter, and his brother Andrew, James the son of Zebedee and his brother John, Philip, and Bartholomew (Nathaniel), Thomas, and Matthew the tax collector, James the son of Alpheus, and Thaddeus (Judas), Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, who afterward betrayed Me.

I sent these twelve out, after challenging them, “Do not go to the Gentiles, or to any Samaritan town, but rather go to the lost sheep of Israel. And as you go continue to preach, ‘The kingdom of heaven is near.’ Keep on healing the sick, raising the dead, cleansing lepers, and casting out demons. You received, so you must give and take no pay.”

I will give you an open heart to see needy people and give you a willing heart to help them. Then you can open your hands to help them.

“Do not accept gold or silver or even copper money and do not take a purse for your journey, nor two shirts, nor shoes, nor a staff, for the workman is worthy of his pay.

“Into whatever town or village you go, find some deserving person, and stay at his house until you leave the place. As you go into his house, bless it, and if the house should prove deserving, pray for peace on it. And whoever will not welcome you, or listen to your words, on leaving that place, shake off the dust from your feet. I tell you, the punishment, in the day of judgment, will be easier for Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town.

“I am sending you out as sheep threatened by wolves. So you must be wise like serpents and harmless as doves. Watch out, some men will turn you over to the courts, and they will beat you in the synagogues, and you will be brought before governors and kings for My sake. When they bring you before the courts, you must not worry what you should say, for it will be given you at that hour what you should say. Because it is not you who is speaking, but the Spirit of My Father who is speaking through you.

“One brother will turn against another to be killed, and a father his child, and children will take a stand against their parents, and will have them put to death. And you will be hated by all men because you bear My Name. But whoever endures to the end will be saved. But whenever they persecute you in one town, flee to another. For I say, you will not go to all the towns of Israel before I, the Son of Man, returns.”

There will be persecution because I predicted it while on this earth. I will prepare you mentally for persecution, and use you in suffering to bring glory to My Father.

“No pupil is better than his teacher, and no slave is better than his master. The pupil should be satisfied to become like his teacher, and the

slave should be satisfied to become like his master. If men have called the head of the house Beelzebub, how much worse names will they give to the members of the family! So you must never be afraid of them; for there is nothing covered that will not be uncovered, and there is not a secret that will not be revealed.

“What I speak to you in the dark, proclaim in the light, and what you hear whispered in your ears, shout from the housetops. You must not be afraid of those who kill the body but can’t kill the soul. But rather fear God, who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Do not sparrows sell for a penny apiece? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground without your heavenly Father knowing it. Even the hairs on your head are numbered by God. So do not fear; you are worth much more than many sparrows.

“Therefore, everyone who will testify of Me before men I will testify of them before My Father in heaven, but anyone who denies Me before men I will deny him before My Father in heaven.”

Confess Me at all times in all places. I will give you words to say as you witness for Me. Do not be ashamed of Me.

“Many think I have come to bring peace into the earth. But no, I have come to bring a sword. For I have come to put a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. A man’s enemies may be members of his own family. Anyone who loves father or mother more than he loves Me is not worthy of Me, and anyone worthy of Me must take up his cross and follow Me. Anybody who gains only human life will lose heavenly life, and anybody who loses his human life, for My sake, will gain heavenly life.

“Whoever welcomes you as My disciple, also welcomes Me, and whoever welcomes Me also welcomes My Father who sent Me. Whoever receives a prophet will receive only the reward of a prophet, and whoever receives an upright man will only receive the reward of an upright man. And I truly say to you, no one who gives a cup of cold water to the least of My disciples will fail to get his reward.”

John the Baptizer

11 When I had finished My sermon to My disciples, I left to teach and preach in their towns.

The Doubts of John the Baptizer

Now John was in prison when he heard what I was doing. He sent this message by My disciples: “Are you the One who was to come, or should we keep on looking for a different Messiah?”

Then I answered, “Go tell John what you have heard and seen, the blind are seeing, and the crippled are walking, the lepers are being healed, and the deaf are hearing, the dead are being raised, and the poor are having the good news preached to them. And happy is the man who does not lose faith in Me.”

As John’s disciples were leaving, I began speaking to the crowd about John: “What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed that is tossed about by the wind? If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No! Those who dress that way are found in the courts of kings. What did you really go to see? To see a prophet? This is the one of whom the Scripture says, ‘Behold! I am sending my messenger before you. He will prepare the road ahead of the Messiah.’ I solemnly say to you, no one born of women is greater than John the Baptizer, and those who make themselves least important in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. And from the days of John the Baptizer until now the kingdom of heaven has been attacked by violence, and those who capture it are seizing a precious prize. For until the days of John all the prophets and the law prophesied its coming, and if you will listen, John himself is the Elijah who was to come. Let him, who has ears, use them to listen!

“But how can I show what the leaders of this age are like? They are like little children sitting in the marketplaces playing their games and singing their songs, ‘We played the wedding march for you, but you did not dance. We sang the funeral dirge, but you did not cry.’ For John came neither feasting nor drinking and yet they said, ‘He has a demon.’ I, The Son of Man, came enjoying eating with others, and they say, ‘He is a glutton and a wine drinker, a friend of tax collectors and notorious sinners!’ So what’s the conclusion? A wise man is vindicated by his results!”

Judgment for the Unrepentant

Then I began to condemn the cities, in which My many miracles had been done because they did not repent. “Judgment on you, Chorazin! Judgment on you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented in burlap clothing and ashes long ago. Moreover, I tell you, on the day of judgment the punishment will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon than for you! And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? No, you will be thrown to the regions of the dead! For if the miracles done in you had been done in Sodom, that city would have lived until today. But I tell you, on the day of judgment the punishment will be easier for the land of Sodom than for you!”

If believers in my redeeming power will pray for their nation, then I will forgive and restore their nation. May they return to Me and be spared the fate of Sodom and Capernaum.

My Prayer to God My Father

At that time I prayed, “O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, thank You for concealing these matters from wise and intelligent men, and for showing them to little children. Yes, Father, I thank You that You do Your will. All the things I do have been entrusted to Me by My Father. No one knows Me, the Son, but My Father; and no one but Me, the Son, knows My Father. And I make Him known to whoever I will.”

I want you to know Me, and to spend your life learning about Me, and telling your family and friends about what I did in your life. Then, one day, I will call you home to be with Me. Whether in death or in the rapture, you will live with Me for eternity in a place that I am preparing for you.

“Come to Me, all who are tired and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in

heart, and you will find rest for your souls. My yoke is easy, and My load is light.”

The Sabbath

12As I walked through the wheat fields one Sabbath, My disciples were hungry, so they pulled the heads of wheat and ate them. When the Pharisees saw it, they said to Me, “Look! Your disciples are doing what the law forbids on the Sabbath!”

But I said to them, “Did you ever read what David did when he and his soldiers became hungry? How he went into the house of God and ate the sacred loaves, which was against the law to eat? It was wrong for anyone except the priests. Or did you ever read in the law that the priests in the temple break the Sabbath every Sabbath day, yet they are not guilty? But something greater than the temple is here! If you only understood the Scriptures that say, ‘It is mercy and not sacrifice that I want,’ you would not have condemned My disciples who are not guilty. For I, the Son of Man, am Lord of the Sabbath.”

The Shriveled Hand Healed

Leaving there I went into their synagogue. Now there happened to be a man there with a shriveled hand. And to find something against Me, they asked, “Is it legal to cure people on the Sabbath?”

But I said to them, “If any of you has only one sheep and it falls into a ditch on the Sabbath, will you not pull it out? And how much more is a man worth than a sheep! So it is right to do good on the Sabbath.” Then I said to the man, “Reach out your hand,” and he held it out, and it was cured. It became like his other hand. But the Pharisees left and planned to put Me to death.

Multitudes Healed

Because I knew about their plots, I left that area. Many people followed Me, and I cured them all and charged them not to call attention to Me. In this way, I fulfilled the saying spoken by the prophet Isaiah, “Behold, my

Servant whom I have chosen, my Beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit on Him, and He will declare a judgment to the pagan. He will not strive nor challenge anyone. His voice will not be announced in the streets. A bruised reed He will not break. A tiny flame He will not put out until He turns His judgment into victory. And the pagan will hope in His name.”

The Long Day

A man, under the power of demons, who was blind and dumb was brought to Me. I cured him so that he could talk and see. The crowd was dumbfounded, and began to say, “This is the Son of David.”

When the Pharisees heard it, they said, “This man is casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub, the prince of the demons.”

But I knew their thoughts, so I said to them, “Any kingdom that is divided against itself will fall, and no town or family that is divided against itself will last. Now, if satan is driving out satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom last? And if I am driving out demons by the help of Beelzebub, by what authority are your sons casting them out? But if I, by the Spirit of God, cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you. How can anyone get into a strong man’s house and carry off his goods unless he first binds the strong man? After that, he can carry off everything out of his house. Whoever is not with Me is against Me, and whoever does not gather with Me scatters.”

The Unpardonable Sin

“So I tell you, every sin and evil speaking (abusive, and injurious speaking) will be forgiven people, but speaking evil against the Holy Spirit shall not and cannot be forgiven. And whoever speaks a word against Me, the Son of Man, will be forgiven, but whoever speaks evil against God, the Holy Spirit, will not be forgiven, either in this world and age or in the world and age to come.”

The sin that could not be pardoned didn't come just from words; it came from a heart that hated God and rebelled against Me. To speak

evil is to smite with words, to denote injurious speaking against God's nature, attributes, or works. I will keep your heart in tune with Me. Never say anything to anger or turn Me against you. Guard your lips.

“You must choose a good tree and get good fruit or choose an evil tree and get evil fruit because a tree is judged by its fruit. You brood of snakes! How can you, evil as you are, say anything that is good? For out of the mouth the heart speaks. A good man, out of his good heart, speaks good things. The evil man, out of his evil heart, speaks evil things. So I tell you, for every careless word that men speak, they will have to give account on the day of judgment. By your words, you will be free, and by your words, you will be judged.”

Then some of the scribes and Pharisees asked Me, “Teacher, we would like to see You do a spectacular miracle.”

But I answered, “Only a wicked and treacherous age will ask for a spectacular sign, but no sign will be given to them but the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was in the great fish's stomach for three days and nights, so I, the Son of Man, will be three days and nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will condemn the leaders of this age at the judgment. The men of Nineveh turned and believed the message preached by Jonah. But there is a greater than Jonah here! The queen of the South will condemn the leaders of this age at the judgment because she came from the farthest limits of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom. There is a greater than Solomon here!

“Whenever the evil spirit goes out of a man, it wanders about in deserts in search of rest, but cannot find it. Then it says, ‘I will go back to my house which I left,’ where it finds the house unoccupied, swept, and ready for use. Then the evil spirit goes and gets seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they go in and make their home. So the end of that man is worse than the beginning. This is what will happen to the wicked leaders of this age.”

While I was still speaking to the crowds, My mother and My brothers came to stand outside the house to speak to Me. Someone said to Me, “Your mother and brothers are waiting outside to talk with you.”

But I answered, “Who is My mother, and who are My brothers?” And with a gesture toward My disciples, I said, “Here are My mother and My brothers. For whoever does the will of My Heavenly Father is My mother and brother and sister.”

The Sermon by the Sea

13I left Peter’s house to teach the multitude from a boat beside the shore of the Sea of Galilee.

“Look,” I said, pointing to a farmer sowing seed in his field, which was nearby, “Some seeds fell on the path next to the field. Birds quickly came to eat up the seeds.” I noted next, “Other seeds fell among the rocks, and because there was little dirt, the grain sprang up fast but withered when the hot sun beat upon it because the roots had little nourishment.” I continued, “Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns choked their growth.” I continued, “Still other seeds fell on rich soil and produced a crop, some places a hundredfold, some other places sixty, and some places thirty.” Finally, I said, “If you have ears to hear, then you will understand the spiritual application of this parable.”

The disciples asked, “Why do You use stories to teach?”

I replied, “Because you have the privilege of understanding the secrets of the kingdom, but the unbelievers don’t understand spiritual truth.” I continued, “When a person does something for Me, he will be given more till he has plenty. If a person does nothing for Me, what he has will be taken away. This is why I am speaking to them in stories, because they look, but do not see, they listen, but do not really hear or understand.” I quoted Isaiah to describe those who rejected Me, “They listen with their ears, but they don’t understand what God says. They see with their eyes but don’t perceive because their heart is hardened to God. So they hear the good news, but don’t understand how God wants them to respond, so they won’t believe and become converted.”

This is what placing your trust in Me is like. I will give you eyes to see My truth, and I will take away your blindness. I will give you a heart to obey My commands, and I will take away any doubt.

“But blessed are your eyes, for they are beginning to see, and your ears, for they are beginning to hear. For I solemnly say to you, many prophets and upright men yearned to see what you are seeing, and did not see it, and to hear what you are hearing, and did not hear it.”

I then explained the story for the disciples, because they had believing hearts to understand what the story meant. “When a person hears the message of the kingdom and does not respond, the devil comes to snatch away the message, as the birds take the seeds from the path. When a person receives the message but doesn’t understand, he gives up when trouble or persecution comes. He is like the grain sown in the rocks. And what was sown on the thin rocky soil illustrates the man who hears the message, and bubbling over with joy, at once accepts it. However, because the seed takes no real root in him, he lasts only a little while, and just as soon as suffering and persecution come for the truth’s sake, he at once yields and falls. When a person hears the message, but gives up because of worldly things or pursuit of money, it is like the seeds sown among the thorns. And what was sown among the thorns illustrates the man who hears the message and the worries of the times and the pleasures of being rich choke the truth out, and he yields no fruit. But when someone hears and believes the message, he brings forth fruit: thirty, sixty, or a hundredfold, he is like seeds sown on rich soil.”

I then told another parable of a farmer who planted seed in his field. “While he slept the enemy sowed weeds among the good seeds. And when the wheat plants grew up and yielded their ripened grain, the weeds appeared too. The workers told the owner, ‘You planted good wheat, so where did these weeds come from?’ The farmer said, ‘An enemy has done this!’ The workers asked, ‘Do you want us to pull up all the weeds right now?’ ‘No,’ the farmer said, ‘If you pull up the weeds, you’ll also pull up the good grain. Let them both grow until harvest, then burn the weeds, but put the grain in the barn.’”

The enemy tries to destroy everything that is godly. I will give you the wisdom to know the difference between seeds and weeds. I will protect you in this world as you work for Me.

I then told another parable that My kingdom was like a tiny mustard seed sown in a field. While it is the smallest of seeds, it grows into the largest of trees, and many birds rest in its branches.

I then said, “My kingdom is like yeast. When put in flour, the bread swells up much larger.”

When I continued to speak to the crowd in parables, the disciples asked why I used parables. I told them I was fulfilling the prophecy of Israel, “I will open my mouth with parables to explain God’s eternal mysteries.”

Then I left the crowds and went into the house. And My disciples came up to Me and said, “Explain to us the story of the wild wheat in the field.”

And I answered, “The sower of the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world. The good seeds are the members of the kingdom. The wild seeds are the followers of the evil one. The enemy who sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the close of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the wild seeds are gathered and burned up, so it will be at the close of the age. I, the Son of Man, will send out My angels, and they will gather from out of My kingdom all those who cause evil and are disobedient. They will throw them into the furnace of fire, where they will weep and grind their teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let him who has ears listen and do!”

Again, I told that My kingdom was like a treasure that was buried in a field. “Someone found the treasure, then went to sell everything to get money to buy the field.”

Again, I told the story of someone searching for pearls to buy. “When he found the greatest pearl ever, he sold everything to buy it.”

I Am the pearl of infinite price. You can have confidence, and I will give you the faith to give up everything to have Me.

I told the final story of a big net that was thrown into the sea. “When it was full, the fishermen pulled it to shore. They put the good fish in a barrel but threw away the bad ones. So it will be at the close of the age. The angels will go out to separate the wicked from the upright and will throw them into the furnace of torturing punishment. There they will wail and grind their teeth.”

“Do you understand all these parables?”

They answered Me, “Yes.”

I said to them, “Everyone who knows the law and has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like a house owner who can bring out of his storeroom new things as well as old.” When I had finished these stories, I left there.

I went to My own country and kept teaching in their synagogues in such a way that they were amazed, and said, “Where did this man get His wisdom? Is He not the carpenter’s son? Is not His mother’s name Mary, are not his brothers James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas? And are not his sisters living here with us? Where then did He get all this knowledge?” And so, they were offended because of Me.

But I said to them, “No prophet is ever honored in his own town and in his own home.” And so I did not perform many miracles there, because of their lack of faith.

The Murder of John the Baptizer

14 Then Herod the Tetrarch said this about My fame, “This is John the Baptizer risen from the dead.” For Herod had arrested John and chained him in prison to please Herodias, the wife of Philip, his brother. John had preached that it was against Scripture for Herod to marry his brother’s wife. Herod wanted to execute John but was afraid because the people regarded John as a prophet. His wife, Herodias, also wanted to kill John because he had embarrassed her, but she couldn’t arrange for it to happen.

During Herod’s birthday, the daughter of Herodias danced before the guests at the party. Herod was so delighted with her that he made an oath to give her anything she asked.

Her mother, Herodias, told her to ask for the head of John the Baptizer on a platter.

The king was sorry that he made the oath and was embarrassed because his guests expected him to do what he promised. Herod sent immediately and beheaded John in prison. The head was brought in on a platter and

given to the girl who gave it to her mother. John's disciples came and took the body and buried it, and then they told Me.

Feeding the Five Thousand

When I heard about the death of John the Baptizer, I left there in a boat for a quiet place, to be alone. And when the crowds heard where I went, they followed Me on foot. When I got out of the boat and saw a great crowd, My heart was moved with compassion for them, so I healed the sick. But when it was evening, My disciples said, "This is a barren place, and it is getting dark. Send the people to buy themselves food in the villages."

But I said to them, "You give them something to eat."

They answered, "We have only five loaves and two fish."

I said, "Bring them to Me." After summoning the people to sit down on the grass, I received the five loaves and two fish. Then I looked up to heaven and thanked God. Then I broke the loaves into small pieces and gave them to the disciples, and they distributed them to the people. Everyone ate and had enough. Then the disciples took up the fragments that were left and filled twelve baskets. The crowd was about five thousand men, besides women and children.

I Am the Creator, God the Son, and I Am the Bread of Life. I will provide physical food for you when you are hungry. I will fill you spiritually with the Bread of Life when you are weak.

Immediately the disciples got into a boat to cross over to the other side ahead of Me. After I had dismissed the crowds, I climbed up a hill that evening to pray alone.

I Walk on the Water

The disciples in the boat were a long way from shore, struggling against the waves, for the wind was blowing in their faces.

In the fourth watch, I went to them, walking on the water. And when the disciples saw Me walking on the water, they were terrified, and cried, "It's a

ghost!” screaming with fear.

Immediately I spoke to them, “Be of good cheer. It is I; stop being afraid.”

Peter yelled, “Lord, if it’s You, invite me to walk on the water to You.”

I said, “Come!” So Peter stepped out of the boat and walked on the water, and walked toward Me. But when he felt the force of the wind and saw the waves, he was frightened and began to sink.

Immediately Peter cried out, “Lord, save me!”

I reached out My hand and grabbed Peter, and said, “You have little faith! Why did you doubt?” And when we got into the boat, the wind suddenly died down.

The men in the boat worshiped Me and said, “Truly You are God the Son.”

I will allow storms in your life that test your faith. I will also help you to be faithful to Me in every storm that comes. I did the impossible. I walked on water, and I came to them in their storm. So be like the disciples, who worshiped Me, after I deliver you from your storm.

We crossed over and came to Gennesaret. And the men of that place recognized Me and told everyone about Me. They brought to Me the sick and begged Me to let them touch the hem of My coat, and the sick, who touched it, were healed.

Follow God’s Commands

15 Jewish leaders came from Jerusalem to Capernaum to find fault with My religious practices. They were angry because My disciples ate bread with defiled hands. They didn’t wash their hands ceremonially before eating.

I told the Jewish leaders, “You violate the Word of God and hold to your traditions. God commanded you to honor your father and mother. The one who curses father and mother shall be put to death. But you say, ‘My

mother and father have profited because they gave birth to me.’ This statement does not honor your parents, but actually denies the Scriptures.”

I quoted Isaiah, “This people honors Me in outward ways, but their heart is far from Me. They vainly worship Me, teaching their doctrine as the Word of God.”

I called the multitude to Myself, and said, “Listen and understand: it’s not the things that go into your mouth that defile you, it’s what comes out of the mouth.”

The disciples told Me that I was offending the Pharisees by what I was saying. I replied, “Every plant put there by God will be uprooted. Let them alone; they are blind leading the blind. When the blind leads the blind, they both fall into a ditch.”

Peter said, “Lord, explain this parable to us.”

I said, “Are you still without understanding? What goes into the mouth, enters the stomach, and finally, is discharged from the body, but things that come out of the heart, defile a person, for out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, sexual perversions, thefts, lying, pride, and anger. The things that come out of the heart defile a person, not eating with unwashed hands.”

The closer you get in Word and thought to Me, the more you will wean yourself off of the things of this world. I will cleanse your heart from every thought of evil. I will keep your thoughts centered on Me. I will sit on the throne of your heart and control all you think and do. I will forgive the sinful desires of your heart and keep you from all outward transgressions.

I Visit Lebanon

When I left Galilee, and went to Tyre and Sidon, a Greek woman from Canaan came and cried out to Me, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David. My daughter is possessed with a demon,” and she begged Me to cast the demon out.

But I didn’t answer her. The disciples urged Me to send her away, “She pesters us with her pleading.”

I answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.”

Then she worshiped Me, and said, “Lord, help me.”

I said, “It is not good to take bread from the children, and throw it to the little dogs under the table.” I didn’t respond in a positive way but referred to her as a dog, the Jewish word for Gentile.

But the woman showed faith by replying, “Yes, Lord, but the dogs under the table get to eat the crumbs from the Master.”

I answered, “Woman you have great faith, you will get what you asked”; and the daughter was immediately healed.

Then I left and returned to the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Then I went up a hill to sit. Great crowds came to Me, bringing their lame, crippled, blind, deaf, and many others with diseases. They laid them at My feet, and I cured them. The crowd was astonished, so they praised the God of Israel.

Then I called My disciples and said, “My heart has compassion for the crowd because they have been here and they have nothing left to eat. I fear they might faint on their way home.”

The disciples answered, “This is an isolated place, where can we find food enough to feed such a crowd?”

I asked, “How many loaves of bread are available?” They answered, “Seven, and a few small fish.”

Then I instructed the crowd to sit down. I gave thanks and kept giving the pieces to the disciples, and they kept giving food to the people. And everyone ate and were filled. The disciples took up the pieces of food left over and filled seven baskets. There were about four thousand men, besides women and children. Then I sent the crowds away, entered a boat, and went to Magadan.

My Church Is Introduced

16 Some Pharisees and Sadducees tried to test Me by asking to see a spectacular miracle from heaven. I answered them, “When you see a red sky at night, you know it will be a delightful evening. When you see a red sky in the morning, you must take warning because the weather is threatening. Hypocrites! You now know how to discern the signs of the sky,

but you can't discern the signs of the times. Only a wicked and evil generation seeks a spectacular miracle so no sign will be given to you but the sign of Jonah." Then I left and went away.

Then the disciples and I crossed the sea. The disciples forgot to take any bread. So I said to them, "Watch yourselves, and guard yourselves against the contaminating yeast of the Pharisees and the Sadducees!"

Then the disciples discussed what I said among themselves, saying, "Was it because we did not take any bread?"

I knew what they said, "Why are you talking among yourselves that you have no bread? You still have little faith, and you still don't understand. Remember the five loaves that fed five thousand and how many basketfuls you took up? Remember the seven loaves for four thousand people and how many baskets you took up. Why do you not understand that I was not speaking about physical bread when I said to guard yourselves against the contaminating yeast of the Pharisees and the Sadducees?" Then they understood that I meant to guard your inner yeast, the teaching of the Pharisees and the Sadducees, not outer yeast.

I Visit Caesarea Philippi

Next, I went to the village of Caesarea Philippi, and as we were walking, I asked, "Who do the people say that I am?"

The disciples answered, "Some say You are John the Baptizer, others say You are Elijah, or Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

I then asked, "But who do you say that I am?"

Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God."

I answered him, "Simon Peter, son of Jonah, you are blessed, you didn't think this up, My Father in heaven gave you this revelation. Peter, you have faith like a rock, and I will build My church on the solid rock statement of My deity that you just spoke about. The gates of hell cannot stop My followers when they go preaching who I Am." I then replied, "I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you bind on earth will not enter heaven, whatever you loose on earth, will enter heaven." I then instructed them not to tell anyone I was the Messiah, the anointed of God.

Then I told My disciples that I must go to Jerusalem to suffer many things from the chief priest and the scribes, and be killed by them, but I would rise from the dead on the third day.

Peter rebuked Me saying, “This will never happen to You.”

I turned and said to Peter, “Get behind Me, you are like satan; you are a stumbling block. You are not concerned with the things of God, but with the things of men.”

Then I said, “If anyone will follow Me, let him take up his cross daily and follow Me. For whoever tries to save his life on this earth, will lose it. But whoever loses his life for My sake, will find it. For what benefit will it gain a man, if he gains the whole world and loses his soul? What price will a man pay to buy back his soul?

“For I, the Son of Man, am going to return to earth in My Father’s splendor, with My angels, and then I will reward everyone in accord with what that person has done. Some of those standing here will live to see Me coming with My kingdom.”

A Meeting With God

17 Six days after I spoke at Caesarea Philippi I took Peter, James, and John with Me and climbed up into the heights of Mount Hermon.

I was transfigured before them. My face glistened as the sun, and My clothes were sparkling white. Then Moses and Elijah appeared and talked with Me about My coming death. Peter said to Me, “Master, it is good for us to be here, let’s make three tents, one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.”

While Peter was speaking, a bright cloud covered us, and the three disciples were afraid. Then the voice of God My Father spoke from the cloud, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Listen to Him and obey Him.”

The disciples fell to the ground in fear. Then I touched them saying, “Don’t be afraid.” When they looked up, I was the only one they saw.

As we were going down the mountain, I said to them, “Don’t tell anyone about this until I am raised from the dead.”

The disciples asked Me, “Why do the scribes say Elijah must come before Messiah comes?”

I answered, “It is true that Elijah must come to get everything ready. But I’m telling you that Elijah has already come, but the scribes didn’t know it, and unsaved people will do to John the Baptizer as they want. In the same way, I, the Son of Man, will suffer at their hands.” The disciples understood that I meant John the Baptizer was Elijah.

The Disciples Can’t Heal

When the disciples and I reached the crowd, a man came kneeling before Me begging, “Lord have pity on my son, for he has epilepsy and suffers terribly. He often falls into the fire or into the water. I brought him to Your disciples, but they could not heal him.”

And I answered, “O you faithless and unbelieving generation. How much longer must I put up with you? Bring the boy to me!” And I rebuked the demon, and it came out of him. Immediately the boy was cured.

Later the disciples came privately to Me to ask, “Why could we not cast out the demon?”

I answered, “Because your faith is small. For verily I say, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move. Nothing is impossible for you who believe. However, this can be done only with prayer and continued fasting.”

While we traveled through Galilee, I said, “I, the Son of Man, am going to be turned over into the hands of those who will kill Me, but on the third day I will be raised again.” That news crushed them.

Paying the Temple Tax

When we reached Capernaum, the collectors of the temple tax came to Peter and asked, “Why does your Teacher not pay the temple tax?”

When I entered the house, I anticipated Simon’s questions, so I said, “What is your opinion, Simon? From whom do civil rulers collect taxes? From their own family or from others?”

Peter answered, “From others.”

I said to him, “So their own sons are exempt. But that we may not offend them, go down to the sea and throw in a hook. Pull in the first fish that bites, open its mouth and you will find in it a shekel. Take that money and pay the tax for both of us.”

Childlike Faith

18The disciples approached Me and asked, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”

I called a little child to stand with them, and I said, “Truly I say to you, unless you repent and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes meek as this little child will be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, and whoever receives a little child like this for My sake receives Me.”

Mistaken Zeal of John the Apostle

“Whoever influences one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, will have a great stone hung around his neck and cast into the bottom of the sea. A person will be condemned who does this wrong! Evil comes to all, but the man who does this will be condemned. If your hand or foot makes you do wrong, cut it off or get rid of anything that condemns you. It is better to go through life crippled than to be thrown into everlasting torture with both hands or feet. And if your eye makes you do wrong, pluck it out and get rid of anything that causes you to do wrong. It is better for you to go through life with a single eye than to be thrown into hell with both eyes. Be careful you don’t look with anger on a little child, because their guardian angels in heaven have continued access to My Father in heaven.

“If a man has a hundred sheep and one is lost, he will leave his ninety-nine, to go search for the lost one. When he finds it, he rejoices over it more than he does over the ninety-nine that did not get lost. In the same way, it is not the will of my Father in heaven that a single one of these little ones be lost.

“If your brother does something wrong, go to him privately and show where he is wrong. If he listens, you have won back your brother. If he will not listen, take one or two others, so that you have witnesses confirmed by

their testimony. If he refuses to listen to them, report the matter to My church. And if he refuses to listen to My church, treat him as a pagan and as an abomination.

“Verily I say to you, whatever you bind on earth is bound in heaven, and whatever you release on earth is released in heaven.

“Verily I tell you, if only two of you on earth agree on what they ask, you will receive it from my heavenly Father. For where two or three meet as My disciples, I am present with them.”

Then Peter asked Me, “Lord, how often may my brother sin against me and I have to forgive him? As often as seven?”

I answered, “Not as many as seven, I tell you, but as many as seventy times seven! The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who decided to settle up the accounts of his servants. First, a servant was brought to the king who owed his master millions of dollars. And because he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all his belongings, until payment was made. The servant fell at his master’s feet and begged, ‘Give me time, and I will pay you everything.’ The master’s heart was moved with sympathy, and he let him go free and canceled his debt.

“The servant went to one of his fellow servants who owed him ten dollars, and choked him by the throat, demanding, ‘Pay me now the ten dollars.’ The fellow servant fell down and pleaded, ‘Give me time, and I will pay you.’ But he refused and threw him in jail until he should pay the debt. When the other slaves saw what had happened, they went to report what happened to their master. Then the master called to the first servant, and said, ‘I canceled your huge debt because you pleaded with me. Should not you have shown mercy to your fellow slave, as I did for you?’ The master was angry and turned him over to the torturers until he paid the whole debt. This is how My heavenly Father will deal with you if you do not freely forgive your brother.”

The Rich Young Ruler

19When I had finished this sermon, I left Galilee and came into the district of Judea that is on the other side of the Jordan. Great crowds

followed Me, and I healed them.

I Teach on Divorce

Some Pharisees came to test Me with this question, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife on any grounds?”

I answered, “Have you not read that the Creator at the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘For this reason, a man shall leave his father and mother and become one with his wife, and the two of them shall be one?’ So they are no longer two but one. So, what God has joined together man must not separate.”

They asked Me, “Then why did Moses command that a written divorce be allowed for a man to divorce his wife?”

I answered them, “It was because of your hard heart that Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but it was not allowed from the beginning. Now I tell you, whoever divorces his wife for any reason other than her unfaithfulness, and marries another woman, is guilty of adultery.”

The disciples said to Me, “If that is the way a man should treat his wife, then why get married?”

I said to them, “Not every man can live single, it is only for those who have this capacity. For some are born eunuchs, and some have been made eunuchs by men, and some have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let anyone do this who can.”

Little Children Come to Me

Later some little children were brought to Me so I would lay My hands on them and pray for them. But My disciples rebuked them. I said, “Let the little children come to Me and stop turning them away, for such is the kingdom of heaven.” And I laid My hands on them to bless them.

I will teach you the importance of children. May you love them and bless them as I did. May you see the great potential in every child.

The Rich Young Ruler

A man asked Me, “What good deed can I do to gain eternal life?”

And I answered, “Why are you asking Me about what is good? Only My heavenly Father is perfectly good. But if you want eternal life, you must continually keep the commandments.”

He asked Me, “What commandments?”

I answered, “You must not kill, you must not commit adultery, you must not steal, you must not lie, you must honor your father and mother, and you must love your neighbor as you love yourself.”

The young man said to Me, “I have kept all these. What more do I need to do?”

I said, “If you are going to be perfect, go and sell what you own and give the money to the poor, and you will have riches in heaven; then come and follow Me.”

And when the young man heard this qualification he turned away in sorrow for he owned a lot of property.

I then told My disciples, “Verily I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. And it is easier for a camel to enter through a needle’s eye than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.”

When the disciples heard this, they were astonished, and asked, “Who can be saved then?”

But I told them, “This is impossible with men, but everything is possible with God.”

Then Peter answered Me, “We have left everything to follow You. What are we going to get?”

I said to them, “Verily I say to you, in the new world when I, the Son of Man, shall take My seat on My throne, you who have followed Me will sit on twelve thrones and rule the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left home, brothers, sisters, father, mother, children, or land, for My sake, will be rewarded a hundred times in addition to eternal life. But many who are first now will be last, and many who are last will then be first.”

Before I took My seat on the Throne of heaven, I came to earth to serve and give my life a ransom for you. Surrender the control of all

your belongings to Me. May belongings never possess you, but use all your “things” for My purpose for your life. Unselfish servant living always puts others first.

On the Way to Jerusalem

20I taught a parable, “Now the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. He contracted with them for a day’s wages, then sent them off to work. He went out again about nine o’clock and found workers standing idle. So he contracted with them, ‘You also go work in my vineyard, and I will pay you what is right.’ And they went to work. Again, he went out about twelve o’clock and three o’clock and made the same contract. About five o’clock, he went out again and found still others were idle. He said to them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day idle?’ They answered, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said, ‘Go work in my vineyard.’

“At the end of the day, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last and ending with the first.’ Those who had been hired at five o’clock, each received a full day’s wages. And those who were hired first thought that they would receive more. But they too received each a full day’s wages. And they began to complain, and say, ‘These you hired last worked only one hour, and yet you have paid them the same thing you paid us. We have done the heavy work in the scorching heat of the day.’ But the landowner answered, ‘Friend, I am not doing you wrong. Did you not contract with me for a day’s wages? Take what you earned and go. I choose to pay the last man hired as much as I pay you. Do I not have the right to do what I please with my own money? Must you be covetous because I am generous?’ Those who are last will now be first, and those who are first will be last.”

The Selfish Ambition of James and John

As I was going up to Jerusalem, I took the twelve disciples aside, and said to them while still on the road, “Listen! We are going up to Jerusalem, and I, the Son of Man, will be betrayed to the high priests and the scribes. They

will condemn Me to death, and turn Me over to the Gentiles to be mocked, and beaten, and then crucified, but on the third day I will rise again.”

Then the mother of James and John came to Me with her sons, kneeling and asking for a favor. I asked her, “What do you want?”

She answered, “Promise that my two sons may sit one at Your right and one at Your left in Your kingdom.”

I answered, “You do not realize what you are asking. Can they drink the cup of suffering that I am about to drink?”

They answered, “Yes, we can.”

I said to them, “You will drink the cup of suffering that I am to drink but to sit at my right and left are not Mine to give. That honor will be given to those chosen by My Father.”

When the other ten disciples heard of this, they were angry at the two brothers. But I called them and said, “You know that pagan rulers lord it over their subjects. Their great men rule as tyrants. But it will not be so among you. Whoever wants to be great among you must be a servant, and whoever wants to be first must be a slave. In the same way, I, the Son of Man, have come not to be served but to serve and to give My life a ransom for many.”

I Heal Two Blind Men

As we left Jericho, a large crowd followed Me. There were two blind men sitting by the roadside who heard that I was passing by. They cried out, “Have mercy on us, Lord, Son of David!”

The crowd shouted at them to be quiet, but the two blind men begged even louder; “Have mercy on us, O Lord, Son of David.”

I stopped and called for them, asking, “What do you want Me to do for you?”

They answered, “Lord, open our eyes!” Then My heart was moved with compassion, and I touched their blinded eyes. Immediately they could see, and they followed Me.

The Triumphal Entry Into Jerusalem

21 The next day—Sunday—news that I was coming to Jerusalem swept through the crowds of Passover pilgrims. As I came to Bethpage, I sent two disciples into the village, telling them they would find a donkey with her young colt tied there. “If anyone asks why you are taking the donkey, tell them the Master needs it to ride into Jerusalem.”

This act fulfilled Scripture, “Tell the people of Zion, your king is coming to you, humbly riding on a donkey, even on a young colt.” The disciples did as instructed and found the donkey as I said. They put their coats on the donkey, and I rode on a colt that had never been ridden by anyone.

I know the future because I live there. Yield your future to Me. I will tell you how to serve Me best, just as I told the disciples about the donkey.

Great crowds spread their coats on the road; others waved their palm branches as they went to meet Me. The crowds who marched in front of Me shouted, “HOSANNA to the Son of David, blessing on Him who comes in the Lord’s name, HOSANNA in the highest heaven.”

When I entered the city, people everywhere were asking, “Who is this?”

The multitude answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth.”

I Cleanse the Temple

I went into the temple to cleanse it. I drove out all the buyers and sellers and turned over the money changers’ tables. I upset the seats of those selling doves, and said to them, “The Scripture says, ‘My house will be called a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves.’”

Then blind and crippled people came to Me in the temple, and I cured them. But the high priest and scribes saw My miracles.

Children began shouting in the temple, “Welcome to the Son of David.”

The high priest and scribes were indignant and asked Me, “Do you hear what they are saying?”

I answered them, “Yes. Have you never read, ‘Out the mouths of little children and babies come perfect praise?’” And I left and went out of the city to Bethany where I spent the night.

The Withered Fig Tree

Early next morning I returned to the city and was hungry. I saw a fig tree by the roadside, but found nothing on it but leaves, and I said, “May you never bear fruit again.” The fig tree immediately withered.

When the disciples saw it, they were amazed, and asked, “How did the fig tree wither up so soon?”

I answered them, “If you have faith and do not doubt, you can do this miracle and if you can say to this mountain, ‘Be moved and throw yourself into the sea,’ it will be done. If you have faith, whatever you ask for in prayer, you will receive.”

A Day of Controversy in the Temple

When I came into the temple, the high priests and elders came up to Me while I was teaching and asked, “By what authority have you done these things?”

I answered, “I will ask you just one question. If you answer it, you will know by what authority I have for doing what I do. Where did John’s baptism come from? From heaven, or from men?”

They said among themselves, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ He will say, ‘Why did you not believe John?’ But if we say, ‘from men,’ we are afraid of the people, for they all consider John a prophet.” So they answered Me, “We do not know.”

Then I answered them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I do as I do.”

I told them a parable, “There was a man with two sons. He told the first, ‘Son, go and work in my vineyard today.’ And the son answered, ‘I will not.’ But afterward, he changed his mind and went. Then the father said the same thing to the second son, and he said, ‘I’ll go,’ but he did not go. Which of the two did what his father wanted?”

They answered, “The first son.”

I said, “Verily I say to you, that tax collectors and prostitutes will go into the kingdom of heaven before you. For John came to you living righteously, and you did not believe him. But tax collectors and prostitutes believed his message. But you, even after seeing that, would not change your minds and believe the message of John.

“Listen to another parable. There was once a landowner who planted a vineyard and built a fence to protect it, and hewed out a vat to store the wine, and built a tower. Then he rented it out to tenants and went on a trip. When it came time to gather grapes, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect rent. But the tenants beat his slaves, and killed the second, and stoned the third. Again, he sent other servants in a group, and the tenants treated them exactly the same way. Finally, he sent his son, for he said, ‘Surely they will honor my son.’ But when they saw the son, they said, ‘He is the heir, let us kill him, and get the estate!’ So, they drove the son out of the vineyard and murdered him. Now when the owner of the land returns, what will he do to these tenants?”

They answered, “In vengeance, he will put the murderers to death, and rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will quickly pay him the rent.”

Then I said to them, “Did you never read this truth in the Scripture: The stone that was rejected by the builders will become the cornerstone. This is the Lord’s doing, and it is wonderful to see? This is why the kingdom will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. Whoever falls on that stone will be saved, but whoever it falls on will be crushed to pieces.”

When the high priests and Pharisees heard My stories, they knew that I was speaking about them. Although they would like to have had Me arrested, they were afraid of the people who considered Me a prophet.

I Teach With Stories

22 Then I spoke to them in parables once again and said: “The kingdom of heaven is like a king, who gave a wedding feast for his son. And he sent his servants to call those who had been invited to the wedding feast, but they refused to come. A second time the king sent other servants, ‘Tell the invited guests that I have my feast all ready, my cattle are butchered,

and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast!’ But they did not come but went about their business, one to his farm, another to his shop, and the others seized his servants to beat them and then murdered them. Then the king was furious, and sent his soldiers to destroy those murderers and burned their town. Then he said to his servants, ‘My wedding feast is ready, but those invited are not worthy to come. So go out to the country roads to invite everyone you find to my wedding feast.’ And those servants went out into the roads to gather everyone they found, both good and bad, and the banquet hall was packed with guests.

“When the king entered to see the guests, he saw a man who was not wearing a wedding suit. So, the king said to him, ‘My friend, why are you not wearing a wedding suit?’ But the man was silent. Then the king said to his attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot and throw him out into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth.’ For many are invited, but few are prepared.”

The Pharisees’ and Herodians’ Question

Then the Pharisees went and plotted to trap Me. So they sent their disciples to Me with the Herodians, to say, “Master, we know that you are an honest man who teaches the way of God honestly. You are not afraid of what anyone says. What is Your opinion on this question: Is it right to pay Caesar the poll tax, or not?”

I saw their hypocritical plot, and so I asked them, “Why are you testing Me, you hypocrites? Show Me a coin.”

Then I asked, “Whose likeness and name is this?”

They answered, “Caesar’s.”

Then I said, “Give to Caesar, the things that belong to Caesar, and give to God the things that belong to God.” And when they heard it, they were amazed, so they left Me and went away.

The Sadducees’ Question

On the same day some Sadducees, who denied the resurrection, came to Me to ask, “Teacher, Moses said, ‘If a man dies childless, his brother must marry his widow and raise up a family for his brother.’ Now there were

seven brothers. The first married and died without children. His widow married his brother. The second also died, and the third, and all down to the seventh. Last of all the woman died, too. Now in the resurrection whose wife will she be? For they all married her.”

I answered them, “You are wrong because you do not understand the Scriptures nor the power of God. In the resurrection men and women do not marry nor are they married, but are as the angels in heaven. But you did not read and understand the resurrection of the dead. God said to Moses, ‘I Am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. Now God is not the God of the dead, but He is God of the living.’” And when the crowds heard this, they were astonished at My teaching.

A Legal Question

The Pharisees heard that I had silenced the Sadducees, so they got together to test Me. One of them, an expert in the law, tempted Me, asking, “Teacher, what command is greatest in the law?”

And I answered, “‘You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest command. The second is like it: ‘You must love your neighbor as you love yourself.’ The foundation of the whole law and the prophets are found in these two commands.”

Now I Ask a Question

And then I asked the Pharisees, “What is your opinion about the Christ? Whose son is He?”

They answered Me, “He is David’s son.”

I asked them, “How then does David, moved by the Spirit, call Him Lord, when he says: ‘The Lord has said to my Lord, sit at my right hand, and I will put your enemies under your feet?’ If David has called the Messiah Lord, how can the Messiah be his son?” And no one could answer Me, and from that time on, no one dared ask Me any more questions.

I Denounce the Scribes and Pharisees

23 After a while, I went into the courtyard of the temple to teach the multitudes, “Beware of the scribes who like to sit in Moses’ seat. They make rules for you to obey, but they themselves do not obey their own rules. They put heavy and grievous burdens on your shoulders, but they will not bear them, nor will they lift one finger to help you. They love to wear long robes to get greetings from everyone. They love the best seats at celebrations and in the synagogues. You must not seek for others to call you ‘Master,’ for you have but one who is ‘Master.’ And you must not call anyone on earth ‘Father,’ for the heavenly One is your Father. And you must not be called ‘leaders,’ for you have only one Leader, and that is the Messiah. Whoever will be greatest among you must be your servant. Whoever will exalt himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

“Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you shut the door to the kingdom of God and you yourselves will not enter, nor will you let anyone else enter. Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You devour widows’ houses, and to show off that you pray long. Therefore, you will receive greater judgment.

“How terrible it will be for you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you go everywhere to make people your proselytes, yet you make them twofold sons of hell. Because they were originally on their way to hell, now as your proselytes they are doubly directed to hell.

“Woe to you blind guides, you say it is alright to swear by the temple, but not by the gold on the temple. You are fools! What is greater, the temple or the gold? You say it is alright to swear by the altar, but it’s not right to swear by the gift on the altar. You are blind! What is greater, the altar or the sacrifice? The one who swears by the altar, also swears by the things on the altar. The one who swears by the temple, swears by it and by Him who dwells in it. The one who swears by the heavens also swears by the throne of God, and by Him who sits on the throne.

“How terrible it will be for you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, you are careful to tithe the mint that grows at your back door, but you’ve left undone the weightier things of the law which is judgment, and self-control, and faith. It’s right to tithe everything God gives to you, but it’s wrong to ignore those greater things. You strain at a gnat and swallow a camel.

“How terrible it will be for you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you clean the outside of the cup, but leave the inside filthy. Blind Pharisees, first cleanse the inside of the cup and bowl, then clean the outside.

“How terrible it will be for you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you’re like a freshly painted grave that looks beautiful, but inwardly you’re dead, rotting, stinking corpses. Outwardly you appear to people to be righteous, but inwardly you’re full of sin and hypocrisy.

“How terrible it will be for you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you build monuments at the tombs of the prophets, and you make a big spectacle of putting flowers on their graves. You say, ‘if you lived in their day, you would not be part of those who killed them.’

“But you witness against yourselves by the things you do today, that you would murder them. You identify with your father’s guilt. You serpents and children of snakes, how will you escape the punishment of hell? You are just like those to whom My Father sent prophets to preach to them. Yet you would scourge them, persecute them, and crucify them. And on your hands is the blood of all righteous martyrs, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah who was killed in the temple next to the altar. Surely all these things will come on this age.”

Jerusalem Will Be Destroyed

“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who killed the prophets and stoned those who were sent to you from My Father. How often would I have gathered you to Me, as a hen gathers her chicks, but you would not come to Me. I now have abandoned your house. You will not see Me or understand what I am doing in the world, till I come again in the name of the Lord.”

The Mount of Olives Discourse

24 Later in the day—Tuesday—I sat with My disciples on the Mount of Olives to look at the city of Jerusalem and the temple. I said, “You see the city and the temple. Verily, not one stone will be left on another, but shall be thrown down.”

I predicted the temple would be destroyed, and it happened, just as I predicted. Because I Am God, I know the past as well as the future. I will give you the confidence to believe every promise I give.

My disciples asked Me privately, “Tell us when this will happen? And what shall be the sign of Your coming? And what shall be the sign of the end of the world?”

I answered, “Don’t let anyone lead you astray, because many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ!’ You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but don’t worry because these things must happen before the end. Nation will fight nation, and alliances of nations will fight other alliances, and there will be earthquakes. These are the beginning of tribulation.

“Your enemy will arrest you, persecute you, and kill you. All nations will hate the nation of Israel for My sake. Many will be offended and betray one another, and hate one another. Many false prophets will lead many astray, and the influence of sin will influence every area of life. Love for Me will become cold. But those followers of Mine who endure tribulation to the end shall finally be saved. The gospel of the kingdom will be preached to the whole world. Then the end shall come.”

I predicted the world would hate you. Why are you surprised when it happens? Believe and act on My promises.

“When you see the abomination of desolation, a pig sacrificed on the altar, which was predicted by Daniel, realize this is the beginning of the Great Tribulation. Then let my people flee to the mountains for protection, let those on the rooftop not go in their house to take anything with them. Let those working in the field not return home for clothes and those with child will suffer the most. So pray your escape will not be in winter or on the Sabbath. This will be the Great Tribulation, which is greater than any since the beginning of the world and greater than any after it. Unless God shortens these days, no one can live through it, and for God’s people, those days will be shortened.

“If anyone tells you, ‘Here is the Messiah,’ or ‘There is the Messiah,’ don’t believe it. Many false messiahs will come and perform miracles to lead God’s people away. I’ve told you before if anyone tells you the Messiah is in the wilderness, don’t go out there to check it out. And if they say Messiah is in an inner room, don’t believe that either.”

My Second Coming

“My coming will be as spectacular as lightning flashing from the East to the West. And there’ll be so many slain by My coming, that buzzards will gather to eat their flesh.

“The sun will be darkened, and the moon won’t shine. The stars will fall from the sky, and heaven itself will be shaken as I make My appearance in heaven. Then shall all ethnic tribes mourn when they see Me coming with great power and glory through the clouds. I will send My angels with the sound of a trumpet to gather My people from the four corners of the earth.

“Learn from the parable of the fig tree. When new growth appears, and the leaves are growing, realize it is summer. So when you see these signs happening, Messiah is at the door. This generation of Jewish believers will not pass away until all these signs have appeared. Heaven and earth shall pass away but My Word, which I promise, shall not pass away. These things will happen as promised.

“But no one knows the hour when Messiah will come, not you, nor anyone else, not even the angels in heaven. Neither I, the Son of Man, but only My Father knows the hour.

“It will be like the days of Noah. He warned everyone that judgment was coming, but no one believed him. People went on eating, getting drunk, getting married until the flood came. Two will be working in the field; one will be taken, the other left. Two women will be grinding meal; one will be taken, the other left. Watch, because you don’t know when I will return.

“If the owner of the house knew when a thief would break into his home, he would have been constantly vigilant. Therefore, be ready, for in just the hour you think I won’t return, I will come.

“If the owner made a faithful worker supervisor of all his businesses while he was gone, that worker is blessed if the owner returns to find everything in order. Verily, the owner would give him a promotion. But if

the servant is lazy and spends his time eating and drinking because he thinks the owner is tarrying, the owner will come back at a time the worker doesn't expect him and will fire the worker and give his job to someone else. That worker will suffer with those who weep and gnash their teeth."

My Coming Kingdom

25I spoke a parable that the coming of the kingdom is likened to ten bridesmaids with ten lamps who were waiting for the coming of the bridegroom. "Now five were foolish, and five were wise. Five foolish bridesmaids didn't take oil with them, but five were wise bridesmaids and took oil in addition to their lamps. The bridegroom was late, and all the bridesmaids slept.

"At midnight there was a shout, 'He's coming! Let all the bridesmaids come meet him.' When the ten got ready to light their lamps, the five foolish asked the wise, 'Give us some oil because our lamps are going out.' But the wise answered, 'If we give you some of ours, we won't have enough to light the bridegroom's way.' They told the foolish virgins to go buy some for themselves. The five wise virgins went into the feast with the bridegroom, and the door was shut.

"Afterward the five foolish virgins came asking, 'Open the door.'

"But the bridegroom answered, 'I don't know you.'"

I said, "Verily I say to you, watch continually because you don't know the day or hour when I, the Son of Man, am coming."

The Parable of the Unprofitable Worker

I spoke another parable about My returning, saying, "A businessman planned to take a long trip, and delegated to various workers, different jobs in the company. He gave one worker \$500,000, another \$200,000 and the third \$100,000, each according to his ability to manage money. The one with \$500,000 invested wisely and doubled his money. The one with \$200,000 also invested prudently and doubled his money. The worker with \$100,000 hid his money carefully so it wouldn't be lost. After a long time, the owner returned and asked his workers to report what they had done.

“The one who had \$500,000 brought in another \$500,000, and the owner said, ‘You’ve done well because you were faithful, I’m going to promote you to a larger responsibility.’

“The one with \$200,000 gave the owner an additional \$200,000. The owner also congratulated and promoted him. The worker with \$100,000 said, ‘I know you are a hard man, reaping where you don’t sow, and I was afraid, so I safely hid your money, and here it is!’

“The owner said, ‘You’re a lazy worker. You know I expected profit from my investment. You should have put it in a bank where it would at least earn interest.’ The owner took away the \$100,000 and gave it to the worker who now had a million dollars.

“He said, ‘If you have gathered much for the kingdom you’ll be given more. If you’ve done little for the kingdom, it’ll be taken from you.’ The owner said, ‘Cast the unprofitable servant into outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.’”

I will teach you to faithfully manage your time, talents, and treasures for My glory. May you be as fruitful as you can be with the gifts I’ve given you. Your reward will not only be on earth but in heaven.

I explained, “When you see Me, the Son of Man, come in My glory, all the nations of the earth will stand before Me. I will sit on My throne to divide them as a shepherd divides his flock. Sheep will be separated to My right hand and goats to the left. Then I, the King, will say to those on the right, ‘Come in because you are blessed, inherit the kingdom prepared for you.’ Then I will say to them, ‘You are blessed because I was hungry, and you fed Me. I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink. I was naked, and you took Me in. I was in prison, and you came and visited Me.’

“Those on the right will say, ‘When did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or naked, or in prison?’

“Then I, the King, shall answer, ‘Inasmuch as you did it to my brethren and the poor, you did it to Me.’

“Then I will say to those on the left, ‘Depart from Me into eternal fire prepared for the devil and his demons. Because I was hungry, you didn’t

feed Me. When I was thirsty, you didn't give me something to drink. When I was a stranger, you didn't take Me in. When I was naked, you didn't clothe Me. When I was in prison, you didn't visit Me.'

"Then they will try to excuse themselves, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister to You?'

"Then I will answer them saying, 'Verily I say to you, inasmuch as you ignored one of these needy, you ignored Me.' Then they will be sent to eternal punishment, but the righteous will go to eternal life."

The Passion Week

26 On Wednesday I said to My disciples, "In two days the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified."

The religious leaders with Caiaphas, the high priest came together to discuss how to arrest Me and kill Me. But they decided not to do it during Passover, for fear that there would be an uprising among the people.

My Anointing at Bethany

That night I attended a feast in Bethany in the home of Simon, the leper. A woman poured a pound of perfume from a jar on My head. The oil was very costly. Some in the crowd were indignant, thinking the ointment was wasted. They wanted to sell it and give the money to the poor.

I understood what they were saying, so I answered, "Why are you criticizing the woman? She has done a good thing for Me. You always will have the poor, and you can do for them what you want to do. But you won't always have Me. She has anointed My body for its burial. Wherever the gospel is preached in the world, she will be remembered for her act of worship."

It Took Thirty Pieces of Silver to Betray Me

One of the twelve—Judas Iscariot—went to the chief priest and asked, "What will you give me if I deliver Jesus to you?" The religious rulers gave

him 30 pieces of silver, so Judas looked for an opportunity to hand Me over to them.

Events on Thursday

On Thursday, the day when the Passover lamb was killed, the disciples asked Me, “Where do You want to celebrate Passover?”

I told Peter and John to go in the city and find a man with a pitcher on his head. “Follow him to a house, and ask the owner for a room where I can celebrate Passover. He will show you a larger upper room. Get it ready for Me to celebrate the Passover.”

And they went and found the man just as I said, and they prepared it for the Passover meal.

The Last Supper

When evening came, I was sitting at the table with the twelve when I said, “Verily I say to you, one of you is going to betray Me.”

They were stunned in their hearts, and asked one by one, “Lord, is it I?”

I answered, “The man who dipped his bread with Me in the stew is the one who is going to betray Me. I, the Son of Man, am going to My destiny as the Scriptures predict, but a curse will be on the one who betrays Me. It would have been better for that man if he had never been born!”

Then Judas, who was to betray Me, asked, “Is it I, Rabbi?”

I answered him, “Those are your words.”

The Institution of the Lord’s Table

While we were eating, I took bread and blessed it. Then I broke it and gave it to the disciples and said, “Take and eat it; this represents My body.”

I also took the cup and gave thanks. Then giving it to them, I said, “All of you drink, for this represents My blood which confirms the covenant, the blood which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of their sins. I tell you, I will never again drink the fruit of the vine until the day when I drink with you in My Father’s kingdom.”

My Prayer in Gethsemane

After singing a hymn, we left the city and went up the Mount of Olives.

Then I said to them, “You will all lose faith over Me tonight, for the Scripture says, ‘Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.’ But after my resurrection from the dead, I will meet you in Galilee.”

Peter answered, “Though all the rest will lose faith in You, I will never lose faith.”

I said to him, “I tell you solemnly before a rooster crows this very night, you will deny Me three times.”

Peter answered, “Even if I have to die with You, I will never deny You.”

Then I came with them to a garden called Gethsemane, and I said to the disciples, “Sit here while I go a little farther to pray.” I took Peter, James, and John with Me to pray. I became overwhelmed with grief. Then I said to the three, “My heart is at the point of death! Stay here and keep watch with Me.”

Then I walked on a few steps and fell on My face to pray, and said, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; and yet not what I want, but what You sent Me to do.”

Then I returned to the disciples and found them asleep. I said to Peter, “Could you not then watch with Me one hour? You must watch and pray that you enter not into temptation. Your spirit may be willing, but human nature is weak.”

A second time I went away to pray, “My Father, if this cup cannot pass without My drinking it, may Your will be done.” I came back again and found the disciples sleeping again. They were so sleepy that they could hardly hold their eyes open.

Then I left them again to pray the third time. When I returned to the disciples, I said, “Sleep on! The time has come for Me, the Son of Man, to be betrayed into the hands of sinners! Get up! My betrayer is here!”

I Am Betrayed, Arrested, and Forsaken

Even while I was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, came with the crowd, who had swords and clubs. They were sent from the high priests and the elders of the people.

Now My betrayer had told them the signal was this: “The one I kiss is Jesus. Seize Him!” And Judas went straight to Me and greeted Me. Then with hypocrisy, he affectionately kissed Me.

I said to Judas, “My friend, do what you planned.” Then they came, grabbed Me, and arrested Me. One of the disciples with Me drew his sword and struck at the high priest’s servant cutting off his ear.

Then I said, “Put up your sword, for all who draw the sword will die by the sword. Don’t you know I can ask My Father and He will send one hundred thousand angels to protect Me? There is no other way for the Scriptures to be fulfilled.”

I said to the soldiers, “Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest Me, as though I were a criminal? I constantly sat teaching in the temple, and you never laid hands on Me. But this has all taken place so that the writings of the prophets may be fulfilled.” Then all the disciples left Me and ran away.

The Second Trial Before Caiaphas

The men who had arrested Me took Me away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and elders were assembled. Peter followed Me at a distance to the courtyard of the high priest’s home, going inside to sit among the attendants to see what would happen.

The high priests and the whole council were looking for false testimony against Me so that they could put Me to death. But they could not agree, although many false witnesses came forward to testify. Eventually, two men came forward to agree, “This man claims, ‘I can tear down the temple of God, and build it again in three days.’”

The high priest then arose and said to Me, “Have you no answer? What evidence do you have?” But I kept silent. So, the high priest said to Me, “I put You under oath, in the name of the living God, tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God.”

I answered him, “The words you charged Me with are true. But I tell you, you will all soon see Me, the Son of Man, seated at the right hand of the Almighty and coming on the clouds of the sky.”

Then the high priest tore his clothes, and said, “He has blasphemed. What more witnesses do we need? You have just heard His blasphemy.

What is your opinion?"

Then they agreed, "He deserves to die."

After that, they spat in My face and struck Me with their fists. Others hit Me, saying, "If You are the Christ, tell us who struck You?"

As Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard, a servant girl said to him, "You, also, were with Jesus the Galilean."

But Peter denied before them all, and said, "I do not know the man."

Then he went out into the gate, where another servant girl saw him, and said, "This fellow was with Jesus the Nazarene."

Again, Peter denied it, and even swore and cursed, "I do not know the man!"

A few minutes afterward a bystander told Peter, "You are surely one of them, for your accent gives you away."

Then he continued cursing and swearing, "I do not know the man!"

And at once a rooster crowed. Then Peter remembered what I had said, "Before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly.

My Death and Burial

27Early in the morning, all of the chief priests and the elders of the people met to plan My death. They tied Me up and led Me away to hand Me over to Pilate, the governor.

The Remorse and Suicide of Judas

When Judas the betrayer found that I had been condemned, he was overcome with remorse and took the 30 silver pieces back to the chief priests and elders saying, "I have sinned, I have betrayed innocent blood."

"What has that got to do with us?" they replied. "That is your concern."

Judas threw down the silver pieces in the temple sanctuary and left to hang himself.

The chief priests picked up the silver pieces saying, "It is against the law to put this money into the treasury. It is blood money." So, after

discussing the matter, they bought a potter's field with the money as a graveyard for foreigners. This is why the field is called the Field of Blood to this day.

The words of the prophet Jeremiah were fulfilled: "And they took the 30 silver pieces, the price the children of Israel agreed to pay for Him, and they bought the potter's field, just as the Lord directed."

The Fourth Trial Before Pilate

I stood before the governor, and Pilate asked Me, "Are You the King of the Jews?"

I replied, "That is what you say."

I Am not only the King of the Jews, but I Am also King of your life.

But when I was accused by the chief priests and the elders, I refused to answer anything. Pilate then said, "Don't You hear these many charges they have brought against You?" But to the governor's complete surprise, I didn't offer any reply to the charges.

Barabbas Is Released

At the Festival of Passover, it was the governor's practice to release any prisoner the people chose. At this time, there was a famous prisoner named Barabbas. So when the crowd gathered, Pilate asked them, "Who do you want me to release: Barabbas or Jesus, the one who is called your Messiah?" Pilate knew it was out of envy that they had brought Me to court.

Now as Pilate sat in the chair of judgment, his wife sent him a message, "Don't have anything to do with that Man. I had a terrible dream about Him."

The chief priests and the elders had persuaded the crowd to shout for the release of Barabbas and demand My execution. So, when Pilate asked them, "Which of the two do you want me to release to you?"

They cried out, "Barabbas."

“Then in that case,” Pilate asked, “what shall I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?”

They all cried, “Let Him be crucified!”

“Why?” Pilate asked. “What crime has He done?”

But they shouted with a roar, “Crucify Him!”

When Pilate saw that he could do nothing else, he took a basin of water and washed his hands in front of them and said, “I am innocent of this man’s blood.”

And the people shouted back, “His blood be on us and on our children!”

Then Pilate released Barabbas to them. He ordered Me to be scourged and then handed Me over to the soldiers to be crucified. The governor’s soldiers took Me into the praetorium and gathered the whole guard around Me. They stripped Me and made Me wear a scarlet robe.

I Am Mocked

Then they twisted some thorns into a crown and placed it on My head and placed a reed in My right hand. They knelt before Me saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” And they spat on Me and took the reed and struck Me on the head with it. When they had finished making fun of Me, they took off the cloak and dressed Me in My own clothes and led Me away to crucify Me.

On their way to crucify Me, they met a man from Cyrene, Simon by name, who was ordered to carry My cross. When we reached the place called Golgotha, the place of the skull, they offered Me wine mixed with gall to drink. When I tasted it, I refused to drink it.

I Am Lifted Up Between Heaven and Earth

When they had finished crucifying Me, they cast lots for My clothing, and then they sat down to keep guard. Over My head was placed a shingle that read: “This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.” Two thieves were crucified with Me, one on the right and the other on the left.

The passersby hurled abuse at Me. They nodded their heads, saying, “You said You would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days! Then save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross!”

The chief priests with the scribes and elders mocked Me in the same way. “He saved others,” they said, “but He cannot save Himself. If You are the King of Israel, come down from the cross, and we will believe You. He trusted God; now let God save Him. For He did say, ‘I am the Son of God.’”

Even the thieves who were crucified with Me mocked Me in the same way.

From Noon Until 3 p.m.

At noon, darkness fell over all the land until three o’clock. Then I cried with a loud voice, “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?” that is, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”

When those who stood there heard this, they said, “The man is calling on Elijah.”

At this moment, I took on Myself the sin of the world. I did not pray, “My Father,” His usual name. Rather, I prayed, “My God,” which means I was separated from God My Father because My Father couldn’t look on the sin that was on Me. I was offering Myself as the sin sacrifice to God. Gratefully receive My salvation, for it is freely offered to you.

One of the soldiers quickly ran to get a sponge dipped in vinegar and put it on a reed for Me to drink. But the rest of them said, “Let’s see if Elijah comes to save Him.”

Then I, crying out in a loud voice, yielded up My Spirit.

Then the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. There was an earthquake and rocks were split. The tombs opened and the bodies of many holy men rose from the dead and came out of the tombs and entered the Holy City and appeared to a number of people.

The centurion and the other soldiers guarding Me felt the earthquake, and everything else that was taking place, and they were terrified. They said, “Truly this was the Son of God.”

And many women were watching from a distance, the same women who had followed Me from Galilee and took care of My needs. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and the mother of Zebedee's sons.

The Burial of My Body

When evening came, Joseph, a rich man of Arimathaea, who had become My disciple, went to Pilate and asked for My body. Pilate gave orders for it to be handed over. So, Joseph took My body, wrapped it in clean linen, and put My body in his own new tomb which he had hewn out of the rock. He then rolled a large stone across the entrance to the tomb and left.

Friday Until Sunday Morning

Now Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there watching where I was buried. The next day, after the Passover was over, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate and said, "Sir, we remember what this impostor said while He was still alive, 'After three days I shall rise again.' Therefore, order guards to secure the grave until the third day. We fear His disciples will come and steal the body and tell the people, 'He has risen from the dead.' If this happens, it would be worse for us than the first."

"You have your guard," Pilate said to them. "Go and make it as secure as you can." So they went and placed guards at the grave, putting an official seal on the stone.

If it hadn't been for the soldiers, people might have believed the lie that My disciples stole My body.

The Empty Tomb

28 After the Sabbath was over, just as a new day was dawning, on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to the grave. Suddenly there was a violent earthquake, for the angel of the Lord came down from heaven, and rolled away the stone and sat on it. His face

shined like lightning, and his robe was white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they fainted and collapsed.

The angel spoke to the women, “Do not be afraid. I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here, for He has risen, as He said. Come and see where His body was laying. Then go quickly and tell His disciples, He has risen from the dead and He is going to Galilee. It is there you will see Him.” The women were overjoyed and quickly left the tomb and ran to tell the disciples.

You can know the Resurrection is true, not just because of this story or an empty tomb. You can know it's true because I live in your heart.

I Appear to the Women

As they were going, I met them. “Greetings,” I said. And the women, falling down before Me, grabbed My feet and worshiped Me. Then I said, “Do not be afraid; go and tell My brothers that they must go to Galilee. They will see Me there.”

While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city to tell the chief priests what had happened. The Jewish leaders held a meeting, and after a long discussion they gave a large sum of hush money to the soldiers, and told them, “This is what you must report, ‘His disciples came during the night and stole the body while we were asleep.’ And should the governor hear about this, we will make things right with him, and see that you do not get into trouble.” The soldiers took the money and obeyed their instructions. This story was spread among the Jews to this day.

I want you to know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, who I Am! I am no longer in the tomb, but seated at the right hand of God My Father in heaven.

My Appearance on a Mountain

But the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where I had arranged to meet them. When they saw Me, they worshiped Me, though some doubted.

The Great Commission

I came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go, therefore, make disciples of all ethnic groups; baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey all the things I told you. And lo, I am with you always; even to the end of the age.”



I AM JESUS

The Servant

The Gospel of Mark

I led Mark to write a gospel showing Me as a servant. The key passage was when I said, “For even I, the Son of Man, did not come to be ministered to, but to minister and to give My life a ransom for many.” As a servant, I was always working. As you read this book, you will get a basic overview of My life. I will recount miracles, parables and other important aspects of My life. Notice how full of life and emotion I am, and how caring I am. But, most of all, see why I came into the world I created to give My life for you. I want you to accept Me as your personal Lord and Savior.

The Beginning of My Ministry

1 This is the beginning of My gospel. I Am Jesus Christ, God the Son, as My coming was predicted by Isaiah the prophet. “Look, I am sending my messenger before You. He will prepare Your way. He will be the voice of one crying in the wilderness, who is preparing the way for the Messiah, saying, ‘Make the paths straight for Him.’” He was John the Baptizer appearing in the wilderness, preaching baptism and repentance to be forgiven of sins. People flocked to John from all over Judah and Jerusalem to confess their sins and be baptized by him in the Jordan River. John wore camel’s hair clothes and a leather belt around his waist. He ate locusts and wild honey. John announced, “Someone is coming after me who is more powerful than me. I am not worthy to stoop and untie His sandals. I have baptized people in the water, but He will baptize people in the Holy Spirit.”

I Am Baptized by John the Baptizer

I came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan River. Immediately coming out of the water, I saw heaven open, and the Spirit descended on Me like a dove. I heard a voice from heaven say, “You are My Son whom I love; I am well pleased with You.”

I Am Tempted in the Wilderness

Immediately, the Spirit led Me into the wilderness. I fasted forty days, and afterward, I was tempted by satan. I was with the wild animals, and the angels took care of Me.

After John was arrested, I went and preached the gospel in Galilee. “Repent and believe the gospel; the time has come, and the kingdom of God is near.”

I Call Fishermen to Follow Me

As I walked by the Sea of Galilee, I saw Peter and Andrew casting their nets into the sea. I called out to them, “Come, be My disciples; I’ll teach you how to catch people.” Immediately they left their nets and followed Me. A little farther, I saw two more fishermen, James and John. They were mending their nets with their father Zebedee and the servants. I called them also to be My disciples. Immediately they left their nets to follow Me.

I Attend Sabbath Services

I went into the synagogue, as was My custom, every Saturday. Because I was a visiting rabbi, the elders gave Me an opportunity to teach the people. They were amazed at what I said and the way I said it. My words were authoritative, not like the others.

There was a demon-possessed man in the congregation; he screamed out to Me. “Jesus of Nazareth, what do You want with me? Have You come to destroy me?” This was the demon speaking through the man. The demon said to Me, “I know who You are, You are the Holy One of God. You are El Elyon, the possessor of heaven and earth.”

I commanded the demon, “Be quiet!” Then I said, “Come out of the man!” The demon screamed loudly, then the man shook uncontrollably with convulsions, and the demon came out of the man.

The crowd was amazed saying, “What is this new teaching; even demonic spirits obey Him?” The people went back to their homes telling everyone about My mighty power and My message.

I Heal Peter’s Mother-in-Law and Others

I left the synagogue and went to Peter’s house where his mother-in-law was sick with a fever. When I heard about it, I took her by the hand, helped her up, and the fever went away. She got up and prepared a meal for us.

At sundown, the sick and demon-possessed were brought to Peter’s house for healing. The whole town crowded in to see what would happen. I cured many of them and cast demons out of others, but I wouldn’t permit demons to speak because they knew who I was.

In the morning, I woke up before anyone else and went to a private place to pray. Simon and the others searched until they found Me. Then Peter said, “Master, everyone is looking for You.”

I told them I couldn’t stay in Capernaum, but I said, “Let us go to the towns of Galilee so I can preach to people there; that is why I came into the world.” I preached in synagogues all over Galilee and cast out demons.

After a busy day of ministry among the crowds, I got up early the next day, drawing Myself apart from people to be blanketed in the presence of My heavenly Father. I drew near to My Father for divine fellowship.

As I went through Galilee, a leper pleaded with Me, “If You are willing, You can heal me.”

Because I was moved with love for him, I touched the leper and said to him, “Be healed!” Immediately his leprosy was healed. I warned him and sent him away. Then I sent him to be examined by a priest and to make an offering that was required by Moses. I also told him not to tell anyone, but the man told everyone what happened. As a result, I could no longer enter any town, but even when I stayed in the fields, people came to Me from all around.

When I do a great work in your heart, it is hard to keep quiet. Just as a light must shine, you will want to tell others what I've done for you.

I Am the Messiah

2 I was in Peter's house in Capernaum when a crowd gathered to hear Me teach, so that the house was packed with people.

Getting a Friend to Me

Four men brought a man with palsy to Me, but they could not get in the house because there were so many people. They took the sick man up to the roof, then removed tiles in the roof, and let down the palsied man in front of Me. I knew they had faith for healing, so I said, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

Some Jewish leaders in the crowd criticized Me in their hearts, saying, "Who can forgive sins but God? This man is blaspheming God; does He think He is God?"

I knew their thoughts and said to them, "Why are you criticizing in your mind? Which is easier to say, 'Your sins are forgiven' or 'Arise, pick up your bedroll and walk?'" Then I told them I would prove that I Am the Messiah, the Son of Man, who can forgive sins. I then told the man, "Get up, pick up your bedroll and walk."

The man jumped to his feet, took his bedroll, and everyone saw him walk. They were astounded and praised God, saying "We have never seen anything like this."

Do not be amazed at the things I've done in your life. I have forgiven your sins, given you purpose to live for Me, and you have the joy of the Holy Spirit. I have a wonderful plan for your life, and I've given you the determination to be victorious over sin. Tell others about the salvation that was freely given to you, and freely offered to everyone who believes.

The Call to Matthew

I left Capernaum and followed the road that ran alongside the Sea of Galilee. When I came to the customs office, I saw Levi sitting there calculating taxes. I said to him, “Follow Me,” and to everyone’s amazement, Levi left the tax office to follow Me.

May you instantaneously obey when I enter your life and call you to do a job. I will keep reminding you that there is no sinner who is too hardened to follow Me as a dedicated disciple. I will teach you to love the unsaved, as I loved Matthew and all who follow Me.

That evening, Levi gathered a number of his friends to hear Me—politicians and tax collectors. When the Jewish leaders saw Me eating with the crowd, they said to My disciples, “Why does your master eat with questionable characters?”

When I knew what the religious leaders asked, I asked a question to get My point across, “Do the healthy need a doctor, or is it the sick who need help? I did not come to offer salvation to people who think they are good enough, but I offer salvation to sinners.”

The disciples of John the Baptizer and the Jewish leaders fasted as part of their religious activities. They approached Me, asking “Why do these disciples of John the Baptizer and Pharisees fast but Your disciples do not?”

I answered, “Do you expect wedding guests to fast when they are at the wedding feast? They eat as long as they are with the bridegroom, but they will fast when the bridegroom is taken from them.”

I continued, “No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old coat. If he does, the new patch will shrink and tear the old coat, and it will be worse than ever. No one puts new wine into an old wineskin. As the new wine ferments, it will burst the old wineskin. The wine will be lost and the wineskin ruined.”

Debate About the Sabbath

As I journeyed home from the Passover at Jerusalem, I went past the corn fields on the Sabbath, and My disciples picked the grain and ate it. The

Pharisees criticized us because we broke the Sabbath law. I answered that David went into the tabernacle to eat the showbread when he was hungry and those with him also ate it. I also mentioned that the priest ate showbread on the Sabbath day which outwardly broke the law. Then I added that Hosea the prophet said, “God wants us to be merciful. He doesn’t want us just to keep the law. God wants us to know Him, not just bring in burnt sacrifices to Him.” Finally, I noted, “The Sabbath was made to serve man, not for man to keep its law.” I proclaimed, “Therefore I, the Son of Man, am master of the Sabbath, not the reverse.”

My Healing Power

3 When I got to Capernaum, I entered the synagogue, and a man was there with a shriveled-up hand. The Jewish leaders watched Me closely whether I would heal on the Sabbath day, so they could charge Me with breaking the law. I said to the man with the shriveled-up hand, “Stand in the middle of the people.” Then I asked, “Is it right to help or hurt on the Sabbath day? To kill or save lives?” I continued, “If a man’s sheep falls into a pit, isn’t it proper to rescue the sheep on a Sabbath day? Isn’t a man worth more than a sheep?” But the Pharisees wouldn’t answer Me. I looked at them with anger, being grieved for their hardness of heart. I then said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” The man held out his withered hand, and it was completely restored. And the Jewish leaders refused to believe in Me but began making plans to destroy Me.

Do not be critical of anyone who comes to Me for help or healing, as the Jewish leaders criticized Me. I have compassion on those who hurt or need My help, and I Am patient with those who reject Me.

Multitudes Healed

My disciples and I left to go to the seaside. Multitudes followed Me from Galilee, Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, Tyre, and Sidon because they heard about My miracles.

I told My disciples to have a boat ready because the crowds were crushing Me. I had cured so many people that anyone with an ailment crowded in to touch Me. When people possessed with demons encountered Me, they fell down at My feet screaming, “You are the Son of God.” But I warned them repeatedly that they should not make Me known.

My healing power demonstrates that I Am a powerful God. My tenderness shows that I Am a loving God. Pray for my healing power in your life, but show My tenderness to everyone you come in contact with.

Choosing the Twelve

I went up into the hill country, and I continued all night in prayer. The next day I called certain men to be My apostles so they would be with Me to learn, then they would be sent forth to preach, heal, and cast out demons.

Simon, whom I called Peter, was the leader of the first group of four that included James and John, whom I named the Sons of Thunder, and Andrew was in that group. The second group of four apostles was led by Philip and included Bartholomew, Matthew, and Thomas, the one with a twin brother. The third group of four was led by James the short one and included Thaddeus and Simon, the former terrorist fighter, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed Me.

The Long Day

The crowds demanded so much attention that the disciples and I couldn't even get away to eat our lunch. But those who followed Me said, “You can't keep on going if you don't eat something.” They added among themselves, “Jesus is not thinking straight.”

Then the scribes who came from Jerusalem to examine Me said, “He is possessed by Beelzebub, a ruler of demons, and Jesus cast out demons by this power.”

I gathered people around Me and said, “How can satan cast out satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, can that kingdom stand? If a house is divided against itself, can that house stand? If satan rises up against himself

and is divided, he cannot stand; he will fall. No one can go into the house of a strong man to destroy his property unless the strong man is tied up. First, he binds the strong man, then destroys his property.” I continued, “Truly I tell you, all sins shall be forgiven those who sin, including their blasphemy. But those who blaspheme the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; they are in danger of eternal damnation.”

I said this because My enemies said I was demon-possessed.

Then My mother and brothers came to the edge of the crowd and called for Me to go with them. With the crowd sitting around Me, they said, “Behold, Your mother, and brothers are calling for You to go with them.”

I answered them, “Who are My mother and brothers?” Then looking at those sitting about Me I said, “Here are My mother and My brothers. Those who do the will of God are my brothers, and sisters, and mother.”

My Message to a Lost and Dying World

4 As I was teaching by the seaside, a huge crowd gathered around Me, so I entered a boat and sat down to teach the people on the shore.

The Sermon by the Sea

I taught them many lessons in parables. “Look,” I pointed to a farmer in a field, “a sower went out to sow, and as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path around the field. The birds came to eat it up. Other seeds fell on the rocky soil where it had little dirt, and because it had no earth, it sprang up quickly, but when the sun came up, it was scorched. Because it had no root, it died. Other seeds fell in among thorns. The growing thorns choked it, so it yielded no crop. And other seeds fell in the good earth and yielded a crop of thirty-sixty - even a hundredfold. Whoever has ears let him hear and do.”

When I was by Myself, those near Me with the twelve asked what the story meant. I told them, “You can know the secret of God’s kingdom but outsiders can’t understand spiritual things, so I use stories when I speak to them. Because all that they see they may not perceive and for all they hear they do not understand, so they do not turn for forgiveness.” I then told them that they must understand this story to grasp the other stories. “The

sower sows God's message. Those on the pathway, where the message is sown, forget it as soon as they hear it. Satan comes and snatches away God's message that was sown in their hearts. The seeds on the rocky soil are those who readily receive God's message, but it doesn't take root in them. They give up. When persecution comes, because of the message, they immediately stumble and fall. Others are those sown among thorns. They hear the message of God, but the cares of the world and the taste of wealth and the attraction of entertainment choke God's message, and it becomes fruitless. But those sown on good dirt are those who hear and accept God's message and yield fruit thirty - sixty - even a hundredfold."

Watch for hard soil in your heart. Let My roots grow deep in your heart to overcome trials and suffering. Immediately pull up the weeds that will tempt you to sin. You need to have a clean, healthy body to serve Me.

I said to them, "Do you hide a lamp under a basket or under a bed? No! You put it on a lampstand. Nothing will be hidden until it is shown and nothing is kept secret until it is revealed. Whoever has good ears let him hear and obey." I also said, "Be careful about what you hear. The shovelful you shovel out to others will be shoveled to you tenfold. The one who has shall be given more, and the one who does not have shall lose what he has."

And I said, "The kingdom of God is like a man scattering seed in the earth and then he goes to sleep while the seed sprouts and springs up, but he does not know how or when it happens. The earth produces from itself. First, the blade, then a head, then the full-grown wheat in the head. When the crop is ripe, he puts in the sickle because the harvest has come."

I also said, "To what may we compare the kingdom of God or by what parable may we understand it? The kingdom is like a mustard seed which is smaller than any known seed on earth. Yet, when planted, it grows up to be larger than any bush, so that wild birds roost in its branches." With many such stories, I told them God's message as far as they could understand it. I spoke only in stories and explained everything privately to My disciples.

I Calm the Storm

Toward noon I said, "Let us cross over to the other side."

So leaving the crowd, we went to the other side. A heavy storm came up, and the waves filled the boat so that the boat was sinking. I was asleep in the stern. They woke Me up and said, "Teacher, do You realize we are sinking?"

I rose up, stopped the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace! Be still!" So the wind died down, and the sea was calm. I said to them, "Why are you afraid? Where is your faith?"

They were afraid and said to one another, "Who is He, that even the wind and the sea waves obey Him?"

My Healing Nature

5 We landed in the area of Gad, on the opposite side of the sea, into the country of the Gadarenes.

As soon as I got out of the boat, a demon-possessed man, who was living in the tombs, accosted Me. No one could subdue him, even with chains. Many times he had been bound with ropes and chains, but the chains were broken, and the ropes snapped. No one could control him. He lived night and day among the tombs and in the mountains, screaming and cutting himself with stones.

He noticed Me from a distance, then ran and knelt before Me screaming, "What do You have to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I plead with You, do not torment me," for I had said to him, "Unclean spirit, come out of the man."

I questioned the man, "What is your name?"

The man answered, "My name is Legion, for we are many." Then the demons urgently begged Me not to send them away. There was a large herd of hogs feeding there on the mountainside. The demons appealed to Me, "Send us to the hogs so we may enter into them!" I permitted it, and so the demons went into the hogs. Then the herd of about two thousand rushed headlong down a precipice into the sea and drowned.

There are evil spirits in the world that would want to destroy you. I will deliver you from the evil one, and protect you.

Those tending the hogs ran to tell the news in town. Many people came to see what had happened. They saw the demoniac, who had been possessed of the legion, sitting calmly, dressed, and sane. They were frightened. Those who had seen it, told them what occurred to the demoniac; they also told them about the hogs. Then they began to beg Me to leave their country. As I was leaving, the demoniac asked to go with Me, but I said, “No.” Instead, I said to him, “Go back to your family and friends and tell them everything I have done for you and the mercy I showed you!” And the healed man went to announce throughout Decapolis everything that I had done for him, and all were astonished.

The Woman, and the Twelve-Year-Old Girl

When I had crossed by boat back to Capernaum, a great multitude was waiting for Me on the shore. Then a leader of the synagogue named Jairus came immediately and fell at My feet and begged Me, “My daughter is at the point of death. Come, place Your hands on her that she may be healed.” So I followed him, and a multitude followed us.

A woman, who had a blood hemorrhage for twelve years, had been treated by many physicians. She spent all she had without getting better and was instead growing worse. She heard I was coming, so she got in the crowd behind and touched the hem of My robe. She kept saying, “If I can only touch the hem of His robe, I’ll be healed.” Instantly, her hemorrhage stopped, and she felt in her body that she was healed.

I was instantly conscious that power had gone from Me, so I turned around to the crowd and asked, “Who touched Me?”

My disciples remarked, “The crowd is pressing You on all sides, and You ask, ‘Who touched Me?’”

But I looked around to see who had done it. Then the woman was afraid and knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at My feet. She told Me everything. But I said to her, “Daughter, your faith, not your touch, has saved you. Go in peace because you are healed.”

Seek My help when you have a life-threatening problem. Come first to Me, instead of trying all other solutions.

While I was still speaking, some servants came from the ruler's house and told him, "Your daughter is dead. Don't trouble the Master anymore."

But I, overhearing the message, said to the synagogue ruler, "Do not fear; only trust Me!" I permitted no one to accompany Me except Peter and James and James' brother John. When I came to the ruler's house, I saw confusion with loud weeping and wailing. As I entered, I asked them: "Why this confusion and weeping? The girl is not dead; she's only asleep." They ridiculed Me, but I put them out of the house and took along the child's father and mother and those with Me, and went to where the child was. Then taking the child's hand, I said to her, "Talitha cumi," which is translated "Little Girl, get up by My Word." Instantly the little girl got up and walked; for she was twelve. Everyone was astonished, but I strictly charged them that no one should know what happened, and told them to give her something to eat.

Walking on the Water

6I left Capernaum and came to My hometown with My disciples following Me. On the Sabbath, I began teaching in the synagogue where many listeners were utterly amazed. "Where did He get all this wisdom?" they remarked. "What knowledge has been given Him and what are these miracles that He does? Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and the brother of James and Joseph and Judas and Simon? And do His sisters live here?" And they were offended by Me.

I said, "A prophet has honor except in his own community and among his own people." So I could do no mighty miracles there, except I laid hands on a few sick and healed them. I marveled at their unbelief so I went to nearby villages to teach.

Unbelief hampers My work through you. Ask Me for more faith, and I will give it to you.

I Send My Twelve Disciples Out Two by Two

I called the twelve to Myself. Then I began to send them out two by two, giving them authority over demons and telling them to take nothing for the trip except a staff. I also told them to take no food, no purse, nor money, but to wear sandals, and not to take a change of clothing. I explained, “Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the town. And if a town will not receive you nor listen to you, shake off the dust from your feet. Truly I tell you, it will be easier for Sodom and Gomorrah in the judgment than for that town.”

Put your emphasis on those who will receive My ministry. Preach to all, but spend your time with those who will receive My Word.

So they went out preaching that men should repent; they cast out many demons and healed many sick, anointing them with oil.

The Murder of John the Baptizer

When King Herod heard about it, he said, “John the Baptizer has risen from the dead. Therefore, these powers are working in Jesus.”

Some said, “He is Elijah;” others said, “He is a prophet, or one of the prophets.”

But on hearing about Me, Herod said, “John, whom I beheaded, has been returned to life.” For Herod, himself had sent soldiers to arrest John, and had him put in chains in prison. He had married Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife.

But John had told Herod, “You have no right to have your brother’s wife.”

So Herodias wanted to get even and desired him executed. But she couldn’t get it done because Herod was afraid of John, whom he knew to be a righteous and holy man. Therefore, Herod protected him and was confused for he enjoyed listening to him. Then an opportunity came; it was Herod’s birthday when he gave a banquet to his nobles and officers and Galilean chiefs. Herodias’ daughter came in and danced. She pleased Herod and his guests so that the king said to her, “Ask whatever you want, and I

will give it to you.” Then he made an oath, “Whatever you ask me, I will give it to you up to half of my kingdom.”

She went to ask her mother, “What shall I ask?”

The mother said, “The head of John the Baptizer.”

The daughter hurried to the king and said, “The head of John the Baptizer.” Although exceedingly sorry, yet because of his oath and the pressure of his guests, immediately the king sent a guard with orders to bring John’s head on a plate. He went, beheaded John in prison, and brought his head on a plate and gave it to the daughter who presented it to her mother. And when My disciples heard of it, they came and took up his body and buried it in a tomb.

Feeding the Five Thousand

The apostles returned to Me and reported everything they had done and taught. Then I instructed them, “Come away with Me to a private place in the desert to rest awhile.” For so many were pressing around us, we could not even conveniently eat.

So we left in a boat for a private spot by ourselves. But the people saw us leaving and ran there on foot and arrived ahead of us. When I got out of the boat, I saw a large crowd and was deeply moved by them because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And I began to teach them many things. As the hour grew late, My disciples came to Me and said, “This is a secluded spot and the hour is late; send them away so they may go to the surrounding towns to buy something to eat.”

But I answered them, “You give them to eat!”

They answered Me, “Shall we go, buy food to feed them?”

I said to them, “Go and find out how many loaves you have.”

They answered, “Five loaves and two fish.”

I told them to have the people all sit on the grass by groups of hundreds and fifties. I took the five loaves and two fish and looking into heaven, blessed the food and broke it and gave it to the disciples to give it to the people. I also divided the two fish. Everyone ate and was filled. They picked up twelve full baskets of the bread and fish that were left over. About five thousand men were fed.

Immediately I urged My disciples to get into a boat to cross over to Bethsaida. I dismissed the crowd and left to go to a mountain to pray.

I Take a Walk on the Water

During the night, the boat was halfway across the sea, and I was on the land. I saw them toiling hard at rowing because a storm had come up. I went to them around the fourth watch of the night walking on the sea. I made as if I would pass them by. But the disciples saw Me walking on the sea and thinking it was a ghost, they yelled, for they all saw Me and were scared. I said to them, “Be of good cheer. It is I; be not afraid.” I then came to them in the boat, and the wind was calm. They were amazed; they did not understand the miracle of the loaves, and they were filled with doubt.

We crossed over to arrive at Gennesaret. But as soon as I got out of the ship, the people recognized Me, and they circulated throughout the area that I was there, and people began bringing to Me the sick on their mats. Wherever I went in villages or towns, the people brought their sick and begged Me to let them touch the hem of My robe. And as many as touched Me, were healed.

The Problem With Traditions

7 Jewish leaders came from Jerusalem to Capernaum, to find fault with My religious practices. They were angry because My disciples ate bread with defiled hands. They didn’t wash their hands ceremonially before eating. The leaders cleansed themselves ceremonially, when they came from the marketplace; they did the same to all eating utensils.

Questions About Ceremonial Cleansing

The leaders asked Me why My disciples didn’t keep the tradition of the elders? I answered by quoting Isaiah, “These people honor Me in outward ways, but their heart is far from Me. They vainly worship Me, teaching their doctrine as the Word of God.” I told the Jewish leaders, “You leave the Word of God and hold to your traditions such as washing pitchers and cups and such things. You ignore God’s commands to keep your traditions.

Moses told you to honor your father and mother; the one who speaks evil of father and mother shall be put to death. But you say, 'My mother and father are better off because they gave birth to me.' This statement does not honor your parents. You no longer allow people to honor their parents. You deny Scriptures by your tradition that is handed down from generation to generation."

I then spoke to the crowd, "Nothing that goes into a man's mouth defiles him; the things that come out of his heart are the things that defile him. If anyone has ears to hear, let them hear."

When I went into a house away from the crowd, the disciples asked Me to explain what I meant. I answered, "Don't you understand; a person is not defiled by what goes in the mouth, but by what comes out of the heart. What goes into the mouth, enters the stomach, and finally is discharged from the body, but things that come out of the heart defile a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, sexual perversions, thefts, lying, pride, and anger. The things that come out of the heart defile a person, not eating with unwashed hands."

I Visit Lebanon

I left Galilee and went to Tyre and Sidon, and slipped quietly into a house for rest where the crowd wouldn't exhaust Me. But the crowds found out where I was. Then a woman whose daughter was possessed with a demon fell down before Me. She was a Syrophenician, who begged Me to cast the demon out of her daughter. I said, "No one takes bread from the children, and gives it to the dogs under the table." So I didn't respond positively but referred to her as a dog, the Jewish word for Gentile.

But the woman showed faith by replying, "Yes, Lord, but the dogs under the table get to eat the crumbs."

I answered, "Woman you have great faith; you will get what you asked." When the woman left the house, she found that the demon had gone out of her daughter.

I left the area of Tyre and went through Sidon to the area of the Ten Cities by the Sea of Galilee. They brought to Me a man who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech. They begged Me to lay My hands on the man. So I took him away from the crowd and put My fingers in his ears

with spit from My tongue. Then I looked up to heaven sighing and said, “Ephphtha,” which means “Be opened.” Immediately he could hear and speak clearly. Then I charged them not to tell anyone. But the more I asked them to keep quiet, the more they kept telling the news.

So the people were astonished, saying “He has done everything good. He even makes deaf people hear, and dumb people talk.”

Who Do You Say That I Am?

8 Then another great crowd gathered and had nothing to eat. I said, “I have compassion on these people for they have been with Me three days and have had nothing to eat. If I send them away hungry, they will faint on the road for some of them have come a long way.”

But My disciples answered, “Where can we get food in this isolated place?”

Then I asked, “How many loaves of bread do you have?”

They answered, “Seven.”

So I told the crowd to sit on the ground. I took the seven loaves and gave thanks and broke them into pieces and gave them to My disciples to distribute. There were a few small fish, and I also blessed them, and the disciples passed these to the people. They ate and had all they wanted. Then the disciples took up the food left over, which filled seven baskets. There were about four thousand people present. Then I sent them away and got into a boat to cross to the area of Dalmanutha.

I Meet With the Pharisees

The Pharisees again met Me, to talk with Me and trip Me up. They asked Me to show them a spectacular miracle from heaven. But I sighed in My Spirit, “Why do these people ask for a spectacular miracle? I truly say, ‘No sign will be given to them at this time.’” I got into the boat and crossed over to the other side.

Now the disciples had forgotten to bring any food. They only had one loaf with them in the boat. So I warned them, “Be careful! Guard yourselves against the yeast (influence) of the Pharisees and the yeast of

Herod.” The disciples had been discussing the fact that they forgot to bring bread. When I heard them, I said, “Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you not remember? Are your minds forgetful? Can your eyes not see? Can your ears not hear? Remember how many baskets you picked up after I broke the five loaves for the five thousand? Remember how many baskets were left over when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand?” Then I asked, “How is it that you do not believe?”

Do not ask for a miracle to prove who I Am. I have done such a great transformation in your heart that you could never doubt that I Am the God of miracles, and the Lord of the universe. Be encouraged and know that I Am God no matter what the skeptics say.

I Visit the City of Bethsaida

When we came to Bethsaida, a blind man was brought to Me. They begged Me to touch him. I took the blind man by the hand and led him out to the village, then put spit in his eyes, laid My hands on him, asking “Do you see anything?”

He looked around and answered, “I see the people like trees swaying.”

Then I laid My hands on his eyes a second time. The blind man was cured and saw everything plainly. So I sent him home instructing him, “Do not go into the village, or tell anyone there about this.”

I Visit Caesarea Philippi

My disciples and I left Galilee to go to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. While walking, I asked My disciples, “Who do people say that I am?”

They answered, “Some say John the Baptizer; others say Elijah and still others that You are one of the prophets.”

Then I asked them, “But, who do you say that I am?”

Peter answered, “You are the Christ.”

I then carefully told them, “Do not tell this to anyone.” Then I told them for the first time that I, the Son of Man, had to go through great suffering and be rejected by the elders, the high priest, and the scribes, and be killed, but would rise again in three days.

So Peter took Me aside and rebuked Me. But I turned to look at My disciples and rebuked Peter, saying “Get behind me, satan! For what you say is not from God but from men.”

Do not think the way humans think. Search the Scriptures to think the way I think. In the Scriptures you will find the nourishment your soul needs to live victoriously in your faith.

When I called the people and My disciples, I said, “Whoever becomes My disciple must say, ‘No’ to self-interest; take up his cross and follow Me continually. Whoever tries to save his life, will lose it, and whoever gives up his life for Me and the gospel, will save it. For what shall it benefit a person to gain the whole world and lose his life? What price can a person give to buy back his life? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this sinful adulterous age, then I, the Son of Man, shall be ashamed of him when I come in My Father’s glory with the holy angels.”

There are three steps to becoming My disciple. First, you must focus on it by picking up your cross to follow Me, for it is through the cross that you identify with Me and get forgiveness of sins. Second, you must “follow,” which means getting as close to Me as possible. Third, you must deny yourself to do My will.

My Godhood Revealed

9 And I said to them, “I truly say to you, some of those standing here will live long enough to see the kingdom of God come with power.”

My Transfiguration

After six days, I took Peter, James, and John and led them up on a high mountain.

You will have “mountaintop” experiences where you see Me clearer than ever before, and you are closer to Me than ever before.

My appearance was changed in their presence and My clothes shined exceedingly white, whiter than any bleach could wash them. Then Elijah and Moses appeared to us, talking with Me. Then Peter said to Me, “Master, it is good to be here. Let us build three tents, one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” Peter didn’t realize what he was saying because he was so frightened.

Then a cloud overshadowed us, and we heard a voice out of the cloud, “This is My beloved Son, listen to Him!” And instantly, they saw no one with them but Me. After we were going down the mountain, I cautioned them not to tell anyone what they had seen, until I, the Son of Man, was risen from the dead. And they kept that saying as they continued to discuss among themselves what rising from the dead meant.

Then they asked Me, “Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?”

I answered, “Elijah will come first and restore all things so how it is that Scripture says the Son of Man will suffer much and be rejected? But I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did to him what they wanted.”

My Disciples Can’t Heal

When I came to the other disciples, a great crowd was around them, and some scribes were arguing with them. When the people saw Me, they ran up and greeted Me. Then I asked, “What are you arguing about?”

A man from the crowd answered Me, “Master, I brought my son to be healed. He has a demon that causes him to be dumb. He has convulsions and foams at the mouth and grinds his teeth, and he’s dying. So I asked Your disciples to cast out the demon, but they couldn’t do it.”

I answered, “Oh, unbelieving generation! How long must I be with you before you understand? Bring the boy to Me.” As soon as the demon saw

Me, the boy had a convulsion and fell to the ground wallowing and foaming at the mouth. Then I asked his father, “How long has he been like this?”

The father answered, “From childhood. Many times the demon has thrown him into the fire or into the water to drown him. Is there anything You can do for him? Have compassion for us and help us!”

I said, “Everything is possible for him who believes.”

All things are possible for the person who believes. But does that include cars, wealth, and personal happiness? You must first believe, and that involves coming to Me as your Savior, following Me, and denying self, including denying dreams of money, stuff, and even health. Possibility praying involves getting as close to Me as possible and obeying Me as explicitly as possible.

The boy’s father cried out, “I believe, help my unbelief.”

When I saw that a crowd was running to see what I would do, I rebuked the demon and said, “You deaf and dumb spirit, come out of him. I command you never go into him again.” Then the demon cried out and violently shook the boy, and came out of him. The boy looked like he was dead, so much so that the people thought he was dead. But I took his hand and raised him up.

When I went privately into the house, My disciples asked Me, “Why could we not cast out the demon?”

I answered them, “This kind can only be cast out by prayer and fasting.”

Then we left and went through Galilee, but I did not want anyone to know it. I was giving My time to teaching My disciples. I said, “I will be turned over into men’s hands, and they will kill Me, but after three days, I will rise again.” But the disciples did not understand what I meant, and they were afraid to ask Me.

Childlike Faith

When we reached the house in Capernaum, I asked them, “What were you talking about on the way home?” But they did not answer Me, for they had discussed which one of them was the greatest.

So I sat down and called the twelve together and said, “If anyone desires to be the first, he must be the last and the servant of all.” Then I took a little child and stood him in the midst; then I took the child in My arms, and said, “Whoever will be My disciple, will receive one little child, like a child receives Me. Whoever receives Me, receives the One who sent Me.”

God’s service is the reverse of the world’s order. That is, I say to you; give to receive. I also say, humble yourself for power with God, for low is the way up, and weakness leads to strength. I will give you the faith to turn your life into a life of surrender to Me so that you become nothing and I become everything. This is true service to My Father.

Mistaken Zeal of John the Apostle

John said to Me, “Master, we saw a man driving out demons in Your name, and we tried to stop him, for he was not one of us.”

I said, “Do not stop him, for there is no one who will do a miracle in My name that will speak lightly of Me. For whoever is not against Me is for Me.”

“For whoever gives you a cup of water in My name I truly say, he will get his reward. And whoever leads one of these children to do wrong, he might as well have a huge millstone hung around his neck and be thrown into the sea. If your hand makes you do wrong, cut it off. It is better to go into life maimed than go to hell with both your hands where the worm doesn’t die, and the fire is not quenched. And if your foot makes you do wrong, cut it off. It is better to go through life crippled than keeping both feet and go to hell. And if your eye makes you do wrong, cut it out. It is better to go into the kingdom of God with only one eye than keep both eyes and be thrown into hell. Because there the fire never dies and is never put out. Everything must be seasoned with fire. Salt is good, but if salt loses its seasoning power, how can it be good again? You must look at all things through salt, and live in peace with one another.”

Teaching About the Kingdom of God

10I left and went to the Judean territory on the other side of Jordan. The crowds gathered around Me, and as usual, I taught them.

I Teach about Divorce

Pharisees came and questioned Me to trip Me up. “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?”

I answered, “What did Moses command?”

They said, “Moses allowed the writing of a divorce certificate to let her go.” I answered, “Because of your hard hearts he wrote this commandment.

But from the beginning of creation, God said, ‘Male and female He made them; Therefore, shall a man leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife, and the two shall be one flesh. They are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, man shall not divide them.’”

As I went into the house, the disciples asked Me again about divorce, and I told them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her, and if she divorces her husband and marries another she commits adultery.”

Children were brought to Me to be touched, but the disciples stopped them. When I saw that, I rebuked them and said, “Allow the children to come to Me. Do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to children. Verily, whoever will not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, shall not enter into it.” Then I took them in My arms, and blessed them and laid My hands on them.

The Rich Young Ruler

As I was walking on the road, a young man ran to Me and knelt before Me and asked, “Good master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”

I answered, “Why do you call Me good? There is none good except God. You know the commands: do not murder; do not commit adultery; do not steal; do not witness falsely; do not lie; honor your father and mother.”

The young man replied, “Master, I have kept all these things from my childhood.”

Looking at him in love, I told him, “You lack one thing. Go, sell all you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come follow Me.” At this, the young man was convicted and walked away downcast for he possessed great wealth.

I looked around and said to My disciples, “It is difficult for those possessing wealth to enter the kingdom of God!” The disciples didn’t understand My remarks; but I spoke to them again, “Young men, it is difficult for those who trust in wealth to enter the kingdom of God. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a wealthy person to enter the kingdom of God.”

The disciples said to Me, “Who then can be saved?”

I looked at them and replied, “With men it is impossible, but everything is possible with God.”

I will teach you the impossibilities that I can do. Know that I Am the God of impossibilities. When your faith makes you doubt, stretch your faith to believe in bigger miracles. You must first place your complete trust in Me, not only for this life, but in the life to come.

Peter first answered saying to Me, “We have given up everything to follow You.”

I answered, “Truly I say to you, anyone who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands for Me and the gospel, will also receive a hundred times over now in this life, and in the future, eternal life. But the first shall be last, and the last shall be first.”

The Selfish Ambition of James and John

As we were going up to Jerusalem, the disciples, following Me, were amazed and afraid. Then calling the twelve, I began again to tell them what would happen to Me there. “I, the Son of Man, will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes who will condemn Me to death, will hand Me over to the Gentiles to mock Me, flog Me, spit on Me, and after three days I will rise again.”

Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Me and asked, “We want You to grant us what we request.”

So, I answered them, “What do you want Me to do for you?”

They said, “Let us be seated with You in glory, one at the right and the other at Your left.”

But I replied, “You do not realize what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink and be baptized with the baptism?”

They replied, “We are able.”

Then I said, “You will drink the cup I drink, and you will be baptized with the baptism I face, but sitting at My right or left is not Mine to give. It is for those who deserve it.” When the other ten disciples heard what they asked, they were angry at James and John. But I called to them and said, “You know how the Gentiles rule over those under them and how their chiefs exercise authority over them, but this is not what I want you to do. Whoever will be great among you, shall be your servant and whoever wants to be first among you, shall be last. For even I, the Son of Man, did not come to be ministered to, but to minister and to give My life a ransom for many.”

I Heal Blind Bartimaeus

As I was leaving Jericho with My disciples and a great crowd, Bartimaeus, son of Timaeus, a blind beggar, was there sitting by the roadside. When he heard that I was coming, he began to shout, “Son of David, have mercy on me!” Some rebuked him to keep quiet, but he shouted even louder, “Son of David, have mercy on me!”

I stopped and said, “Call him!”

So they told the blind man, “Be of good cheer, Jesus is calling for you.” He dropped his coat and ran to Me.

I asked him, “What do you want Me to do for you?”

The blind man said, “Rabbi, I want to see again.”

I told him, “Go! Your faith has healed you.” Immediately he recovered his sight and followed Me.

I Set My Course for Jerusalem

11 My disciples and I came to Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany by the Mount of Olives. I sent two of My disciples to go into the opposite village and said, “When you get there, you will find a donkey hitched to a post on which no one has ever sat. Untie and fetch it. If anyone asks you, ‘What are you doing?’ answer, ‘The Lord needs it,’ and he will send the donkey with you without delay.”

They went and found the donkey hitched outside a door and untied it. Some of the bystanders asked them, “Why are you untying the donkey?” They answered what I told them to say.

The Triumphal Entry Into Jerusalem

Then they brought the donkey to Me, spread their robes on it, and I rode on it. Many spread their garments on the road, and others waved branches they had cut. Those walking ahead and behind began shouting, “HOSANNA! Blessed be He who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed be the coming kingdom of our father, David! HOSANNA in the highest!”

I entered Jerusalem and went into the temple to see everything. As night approached, I went to Bethany with the twelve.

Cursing the Barren Fig Tree and Cleansing the Temple

Next morning, as we were leaving Bethany, I was hungry, and I saw a fig tree with leaves at a distance. I went to find fruit on it, but I found nothing but leaves. I said, “May no one eat fruit from you forever.” And My disciples observed what I did.

When we reached Jerusalem, I entered the temple and began to throw out the sellers who were in the sanctuary. I threw over the tables of the money-changers and the stalls of those who sold doves. I did not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. I said, “It is written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer among all nations.’ But you have made it a den of robbers.”

The scribes and chief priests heard it and looked for ways to kill Me because they were afraid of Me, and all of the people received My teaching.

That evening I left the city.

The Withered Fig Tree

On Tuesday morning, My disciples and I saw that the fig tree I had cursed the previous day was dead and withered. Peter was amazed that the tree had withered to its roots. I answered, “Let God’s faith control you. Verily, if you will say to a mountain, ‘Be removed and thrown into the sea’ and you don’t doubt but believe that you will receive what you ask, You shall have it.” I then explained, “You shall have all things for which you ask if you believe before you pray.”

I then instructed, “When you begin to pray, you must forgive those with whom you have an issue so that your Father may forgive your sin; then you have a basis for getting an answer to your prayer. If you do not forgive others, neither will your heavenly Father forgive your trespasses.”

A Day of Controversy in the Temple

Again I entered Jerusalem and walked around in the temple. The chief priests and scribes and elders approached Me to ask, “By what authority are You saying these things or who gave You the authority to do miracles?”

I answered them, “I will ask you one question; if you can answer Me, then I will tell you My authority. Was the baptism of John from heaven or from men?”

They disagreed among themselves, saying “If we answer ‘from heaven,’ He will say, ‘Why then did you not believe Him?’” But they didn’t want to say, ‘From men.’ They were afraid because the people considered John to be a prophet. So they told Me, “We do not know.”

I replied, “Neither will I tell you My authority for doing these things.”

Teaching in the Temple

12 Then I began to speak to them in parables. “A man planted a vineyard and fenced it and dug out a wine vat and built a tower; then he rented it to tenant farmers and went on a trip. At the harvest, he sent a servant to collect his share of the harvest. But they took him and beat him and sent

him back without anything. Then he sent another servant, and they beat him and treated him terribly. Then he sent a third one, and they killed him. Some they beat, and others they killed. He prepared to send his only son; for he thought, 'Surely they will respect my son.' But those tenants said, 'This is the heir; let us kill him, and the farm will be ours.' So they killed him and threw his body outside the vineyard. What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will kill those tenants and give the vineyard to others. Have you never read the Scripture: 'The stone which the builders rejected now has become the cornerstone.' This is the work of the Lord which is wonderful to see." Then the Jewish leaders tried to have Me arrested, but they were afraid of the people. They knew that I applied this parable to them. So they went away.

The Pharisees' and Herodians' Question Me

Then they sent some Pharisees and Herodians to trip Me in an argument. They came to Me and said, "We know that You always tell the truth, and respect no one, but teach the way of God honestly. Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?"

Now I saw their plot, so I said to them, "Why are you trying to trip Me up? Bring Me a coin." And they gave Me one. Then I asked, "Whose picture and title is on this coin?"

They answered, "Caesar's."

So I said, "Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and give to God what belongs to God."

The Sadducees' Question

And they were utterly amazed at My wisdom. Then some Sadducees, who believed there was no resurrection, tried to trick Me with this question: "Teacher, Moses gave us a law that when a man's brother died leaving a wife but no child, the man must marry the widow to raise up an heir for the family."

"There were once seven brothers. The eldest married a wife but died and left no heir, and the second brother married her and died leaving no heir, and so did the third. None of the seven left an heir. At last, the woman

died. Now at the resurrection, whose wife will she be for she was married to all seven?”

I answered, “You are wrong in your interpretation. You do not understand the Scriptures or the power of God. For when people rise from the dead, they will not marry nor are they given in marriage, but are as the angels in heaven. But about the rising of the dead, did you not read where Moses at the burning bush heard God say, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?’ He is not the God of the dead, but He is God of living people!”

Believe in the resurrection, and know that you will be raised because I Am alive in you. I was raised first, so you too will be raised.

A Legal Question

Then one of the scribes on hearing Me asked, “Which command is the greatest of all commands?”

I answered, “The greatest is, ‘Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord, and you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.’”

“And this is the second, ‘You must love your neighbor as you love yourself.’ No other command is greater than these.”

Then the scribe said to Me, “Indeed, Teacher, You have properly said that there is one Lord and no other but Him. You have also said to love Him with all of one’s heart, all of one’s understanding, and all of one’s strength, and to love one’s neighbor as one loves himself is far more important than all the burnt-offerings and sacrifices.”

I saw that he had answered thoughtfully, so I said, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And no one dared ask Me any more questions.

Love Me with all of your talents, with all your time, and with all your treasures. Love Me more each day, and you will love this world less.

Now I Ask a Question

While I was teaching in the temple, I asked them, “How can the scribes say that Messiah is the son of David when David himself, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, said: ‘The Lord has said to my Lord, “Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies the footstool of Your feet?”’ The people wanted to hear more from Me.

I Denounce the Scribes and Pharisees

I continued to say, “Beware of the scribes who desire to go about in long robes, to be honored in public places, to have the front seats in the synagogues, to be honored at banquets. These are men who devour widows’ houses and cover up their greed with long prayers. They will receive a much heavier judgment.”

Then I sat in front of the collection box to watch the people as they gave their money. Many rich people were dropping in large amounts of money. Then a poor widow came to drop in two small coins. I called My disciples and pointed out, “I say to you, this poor widow has given more than the others who have been given much into the collection box. For they gave out of their abundance, but she gave out of her need; yes, she gave out of what she needed to live on.”

The Mount of Olives Discourse

13 As I left the temple, one of My disciples said to Me, “Teacher! Look at these giant stones; this is a beautiful building!”

I answered him, “Do not be overwhelmed by this giant building. Not one stone will be left upon another; all will be torn down.”

I got on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple where Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked Me, “When will all this take place? And what will be the sign that this will happen?”

I told them, “Let no one mislead you about the future. Many will come calling themselves Messiah, saying, ‘I am He.’ But they will deceive many. When you hear about wars and rumors of war, don’t be alarmed. Wars will come, but the end is not yet. One nation will rise up to fight another and one

kingdom against another. There will be earthquakes and famines. That is only the beginning of the birth pangs. Protect yourselves. You will be turned over to courts and synagogues where you will be beaten and persecuted. You will be brought before governors and kings for My sake. But before the end, the gospel must be preached to all nations.

“When they try you in court, do not be concerned about what you should say for it is not you who will be speaking, but God, the Holy Spirit, will speak through you.

“Brother will hand over brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise up against their parents and have them killed. You shall be hated by everyone because of My name. But whoever endures to the end will be saved.

“So when you see the abomination of desecration standing where he has no right to stand, let the reader beware. Let those who remain in Judea flee to the hills. Let him who is on the roof not go down to get any possessions. Let him who is in the field not go back to get his coat. Pregnant mothers and those with nursing babies beware. Pray that it may not be in winter, for there will be a greater tribulation at that time than ever before since the beginning of creation, and never will be again.

“If the Lord does not cut short those days, no one will escape, but for the sake of the elect, God will cut them short.

“Then if anyone tells you, ‘Look, the Christ is here!’ or, ‘Look, He is there!’ Don’t believe it, for false Christs and false prophets will come and perform signs and wonders, to lead you astray, even if possible the elect.

“Watch out. I am warning you before it comes.

“But in those days the sun shall be darkened, and the moon will not give light. The stars will fade from the sky, and the heavens will be shaken.

“Then shall I come in the clouds with great power and glory. Then I shall send angels to gather My chosen from the four ends of the earth.”

Because no one knows when I will come, expect Me to come for you at any moment. As you are waiting for My return, you must be patient and stand firm in your faith. You must also be ready, because I will come at an hour you do not expect. Tell your family and

friends about My coming, so they won't miss out when I gather My chosen ones.

Parable of the Fig Tree

“Learn from the fig tree: Whenever her branches are tender, and there are leaves, you know that summer is near. So when you see these things happen, you will know that I Am at the door. Verily this present generation shall not pass until all these take place. Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My Word shall not pass away.

“No one knows the exact date and hour, no one except My Father, neither the angels in heaven nor the Son. Watch and pray, for you do not know the time when the Son of Man will come. A man who leaves his home to go away authorizes his servants and assigns each his work, with the guard appointed to watch them. Therefore, watch, for you have no idea when the master of the house arrives, in the evening or at midnight or in the morning. If he comes unexpectedly, he might find you sleeping. Therefore, I say to you, watch!”

My Last Supper With My Disciples

14 It was Wednesday, and the Passover was due in two days. The chief priests and the scribes schemed how they might arrest and execute Me, but they said, “Not during the festival, or else the people will revolt.”

The Anointing at Bethany

While in Bethany, at the home of Simon, the leper, I was reclining at the table, when a woman came with a very valuable jar of perfume, and broke the jar, and poured the ointment on My head. But some indignantly said to one another, “Why is she wasting this ointment? This could have been sold for a great price and given to the poor.”

But I said, “Leave her alone! Why do you embarrass her? She has honored Me. For you always have the poor, and whenever you wish, you

can give to them, but you will not always have Me. She has done what she could; she has prepared My body for burial.

“I say to you, wherever this gospel shall be preached over the whole world, what she has done shall be remembered as her memorial.”

Then Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, went to the chief priests to betray Me. When the priests learned of it, they were glad and promised to give him money. So he looked for an occasion how he might conveniently betray Me.

Events on Thursday

On the first day of the Festival of Bread without Yeast, when the Passover lamb was annually sacrificed, My disciples asked Me, “Where do you want us to prepare a place where You may eat the Passover?” Then I sent out two of My disciples telling them, “Go into the city where you’ll see a man carrying a water pitcher; follow him. And wherever he enters, say to the owner, ‘The Teacher asks, “Do you have a guest room where I can eat the Passover with My disciples?”’ He will show you a large upper room. Prepare that room for us.” My disciples went to the city and found the man as I had told them, and they prepared for the Passover.

The Last Supper

As evening came, I arrived with the twelve. As we were reclining and eating, I said, “I know that one of you who is eating with Me shall betray Me.” They were all disturbed and said, one after another, “Is it I?” I answered, “One of the twelve, who will dip with Me. The Son of Man is going the way of death that has been written about Him, but how terrible it will be for that man who betrays the Son of Man. It is better for that man if he were never born.”

Institution of the Lord’s Table

At the meal, I took bread, blessed and broke it, and then gave to them saying, “Take! Eat! This Is My body.” Also, I gave thanks for the cup, and I gave to them, and they all drank. I said, “This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many. I say to you: I will no more drink of the vine until that day when I will drink it new in the kingdom of God.”

My Prayer in Gethsemane

We sang a hymn and went to the Mount of Olives. I said to them, “This night all will be offended because of Me, for it is written, ‘Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will flee.’ But after my resurrection, I will go before you into Galilee.”

Peter said to Me, “If all leave You, I will never do it.”

I told him, “I tell you, during this night before the rooster crows twice, you will disown Me three times.”

But Peter insisted, “Even if I must die with You, I shall never disown You.” They all said the same thing.

We came to a place called Gethsemane, and I told My disciples, “Sit here while I go pray.” I took Peter, James, and John with Me. As I began to feel deeply distressed, I said to them, “My soul is deeply grieved; stay here.” I went a little farther and fell on the ground and prayed. “If it is possible, let this hour pass from Me. Abba, Father, all things are possible with You, let this cup pass from Me! But not My will, but Your will be done.” I came and found the disciples asleep and said, “Simon, are you sleeping? Could you not watch with Me for one hour?”

“Watch and pray so you will not be tempted. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.” I left again to pray, saying the same words. I then returned to find the disciples asleep once more. And they did not know how to explain their disobedience. I then came a third time and said, “Sleep and rest; the hour has come. The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us go! Look, My betrayer is here.”

You cannot begin to understand the dread of My prayer as I faced the cross and the task of becoming sin for humankind. As God, I had never faced this moral dilemma before, so I cried, “Abba, Father. Take this cup away from Me.” Ultimately I faced the inevitable because of My great love for you.

I Am Betrayed, Arrested, and Forsaken

While I was yet talking, Judas, one of the twelve, came and brought a crowd with swords and clubs commissioned by the chief priests, scribes, and elders. The betrayer had given them a sign: “The one I shall kiss is the one. Arrest Him and take Him away.” As soon as Judas came, he stepped up to Me and said, “Rabbi!” And kissed Me. Then they grabbed Me and bound Me. One of My disciples standing close by drew his sword and cut off the high priest’s servant’s ear. And I said to them, “Have you come out against a violent man with swords and clubs to arrest Me? I was with you daily in the temple teaching. Why did you not seize Me then? But the Scripture must be fulfilled.” And the disciples left Me and ran away. But a certain youth followed Me, wearing a linen cloth around his body, and when the soldiers grabbed him, he dropped the linen cloth and ran from them.

My Second Trial—Before Caiaphas

They brought Me before the council of the high priest, chief priests, elders, and scribes. Peter followed from a distance until he was inside the high priest’s courtyard. There he sat down with the servants to warm himself by a fire. The chief priests and Sanhedrin were looking for a reason to execute Me, but couldn’t find one; for while many bore false witness against Me, their testimony was not consistent. Some testified falsely, “We heard Him say, ‘I will tear down this temple and in three days will build it up.’” But their words did not agree. Then the high priest stood to ask, “Jesus, why are You not answering these accusations?” I kept quiet and never answered. Again the high priest questioned Me: “Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?”

I said, “I Am. And you shall see Me, the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Most High, coming on the clouds of heaven.”

Then the high priest tore his robes and yelled, “Why do we need any more witnesses? You heard Him blaspheme; what do you think now?”

All said that I deserved to die. Then some spat on Me. They blindfolded Me and slapped Me, saying “Prophesy, who hit You!” Even the servants who led Me out slapped Me.

Peter Denies Me

As Peter was in the courtyard below, one of the high priest's maids saw him warming himself, and said, "You were with Jesus, the Nazarene!"

But he denied it, saying "I don't know what you're talking about." He went out the gate, and a rooster crowed.

Then the maid who saw him began saying again to the men standing there, "This man is one of them!"

But Peter again denied it. Later the group said to Peter, "You are surely one of them; you're a Galilean!"

But Peter started to curse and swear, saying "I tell you I don't know the man!"

Immediately the rooster crowed for the second time. Peter remembered My words, "Before the rooster crows twice, you will deny Me three times." Then Peter broke down and wept.

My Crucifixion

My Third Trial—Before the Sanhedrin

15 As soon as the morning came, the chief priests called a meeting of elders and scribes, and the whole council (the Sanhedrin). They condemned Me.

The Fourth Trial—Before Pilate, the Roman Commander

They bound Me and led Me to Pilate. Pilate first asked Me, "Well, are you the King of the Jews?"

I replied, "You say that I am."

The chief priests accused Me of many things, so Pilate questioned Me again, "Listen to their accusations! Have You nothing to say?" But I did not answer them. Pilate was astonished.

Pilate's custom at the festival was to release a prisoner—anyone they asked. Barabbas was in prison at the time, with some other violent criminals who had committed murder. The crowd began to demand that Pilate should

release Barabbas. So Pilate spoke to them, “Do you want me to release the King of the Jews?” Pilate knew that the chief priests had handed Me over to him because of their hatred of Me. But the chief priests agitated the crowd to get Pilate to release Barabbas rather than Me. So Pilate spoke to them once more, “What shall I do with the man whom you call the King of the Jews?”

They shouted, “Crucify Him!”

But Pilate answered, “Why, what crime has He done?”

But they yelled even louder. “Crucify Him!” Because Pilate wanted to satisfy the crowd, he released Barabbas, and after having Me flogged, Pilate handed Me over to be crucified.

I Am Mocked

Then the soldiers marched Me away to the courtyard and called for other guards. They dressed Me in a purple robe, and twisting some thorn-twigs into a crown, thrust it on My head. Then they began to mock Me. “Hail, Your majesty, King of the Jews!” They struck Me on the head with a stick and spat on Me, and then bowed before Me on bended knee. When they had finished mocking Me, they took off the purple cloak and put on My own clothes. Then they led Me away to crucify Me.

They forced Simon, a man from Cyrene in Africa, the father of Alexander and Rufus, who was coming in from the fields, to carry My cross. They took Me to a place called Golgotha, meaning “Skull,” and there they offered Me some drugged wine, but I would not drink it.

My Last Moments On the Cross

Then they nailed Me to the cross and divided My garments, casting lots to see what each would get. It was nine o'clock in the morning when they nailed Me to the cross. Over My head, they posted a placard that read, “THE KING OF THE JEWS.” They also crucified two thieves at the same time, one on each side of Me. And so the Scriptures were fulfilled. Those who passed by, jeered at Me, shaking their heads in mockery, saying, “You said You could destroy the temple and build it up again in three days; come down from the cross and save Yourself.”

The chief priests, along with the scribes, also mocked Me, “He saved others, He cannot save Himself. If this Messiah, the King of Israel, would come down now, we would see and believe!” And even the thieves who were crucified with Me mocked Me.

At noon darkness spread over the countryside and lasted until three o’clock in the afternoon. Then I cried out in a loud voice, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”

Some of the bystanders heard what I said in Aramaic, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? and said, “Listen, He’s calling for Elijah!” One man ran to soak a sponge in vinegar, put it on a stick, and held it up for Me to drink, saying, “Let Him alone! Let’s see if Elijah will come to take Him down!” Then I let out a loud cry and breathed My last. At that very moment, the curtain of the temple sanctuary was torn from the top to the bottom.

And then the centurion, who stood facing Me, seeing how I died, said, “Truly, this man was the Son of God!” There were some women watching from a distance: Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of the younger James and Joses, and Salome. These were the women who followed Me as I walked in Galilee and ministered to Me. And there were many other women there who had also come up to Jerusalem for the festival.

The Burial of My Body

It was Friday evening of the day of Passover preparation, before the Sabbath. Joseph from Arimathaea, a member of the Sanhedrin, who believed the kingdom of God was about to come, went to Pilate to ask for My body. Pilate was surprised that I was dead already, and he sent for the centurion to ask whether I had been dead long. On hearing the centurion’s report, he gave Joseph My body. So Joseph brought a linen sheet, took Me down, and wrapped Me in it, and then put Me in his own tomb, which had been hewn out of the solid rock. Then Joseph rolled a stone over the entrance to the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of Joses, watched and saw where I was laid.

There will always be “observers” who believe in Me, who will verify the “faith” for you.

My Temporary Tomb

16 Early Sunday morning Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices to anoint My body. Before sunrise, they came to the tomb. They were asking, “Who can roll away the stone from the tomb for us?” Then they saw that the stone had been rolled away. They went into the tomb and saw a young man sitting to the right, dressed in white, and they were scared. But he said, “Do not be afraid! You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He is risen; He is not here; come see the place where He was laid. Then go, tell His disciples and Peter that He will be going before you into Galilee; You will see Him there, just as He said.”

Just as the women had to obey to see Me, so you will obey so you can see Me and worship Me.

Quickly they ran from the tomb, fearful and terrified. They spoke to no one. After I had risen early that morning, I appeared first to Mary Magdalene from whom I had cast out seven demons. She went and told My disciples, who were grieving and weeping. When they heard that I was alive and she had seen Me, they did not believe it. But later on, I appeared in a different form to two of them on their way home. They went and told the others. Again, they did not believe them.

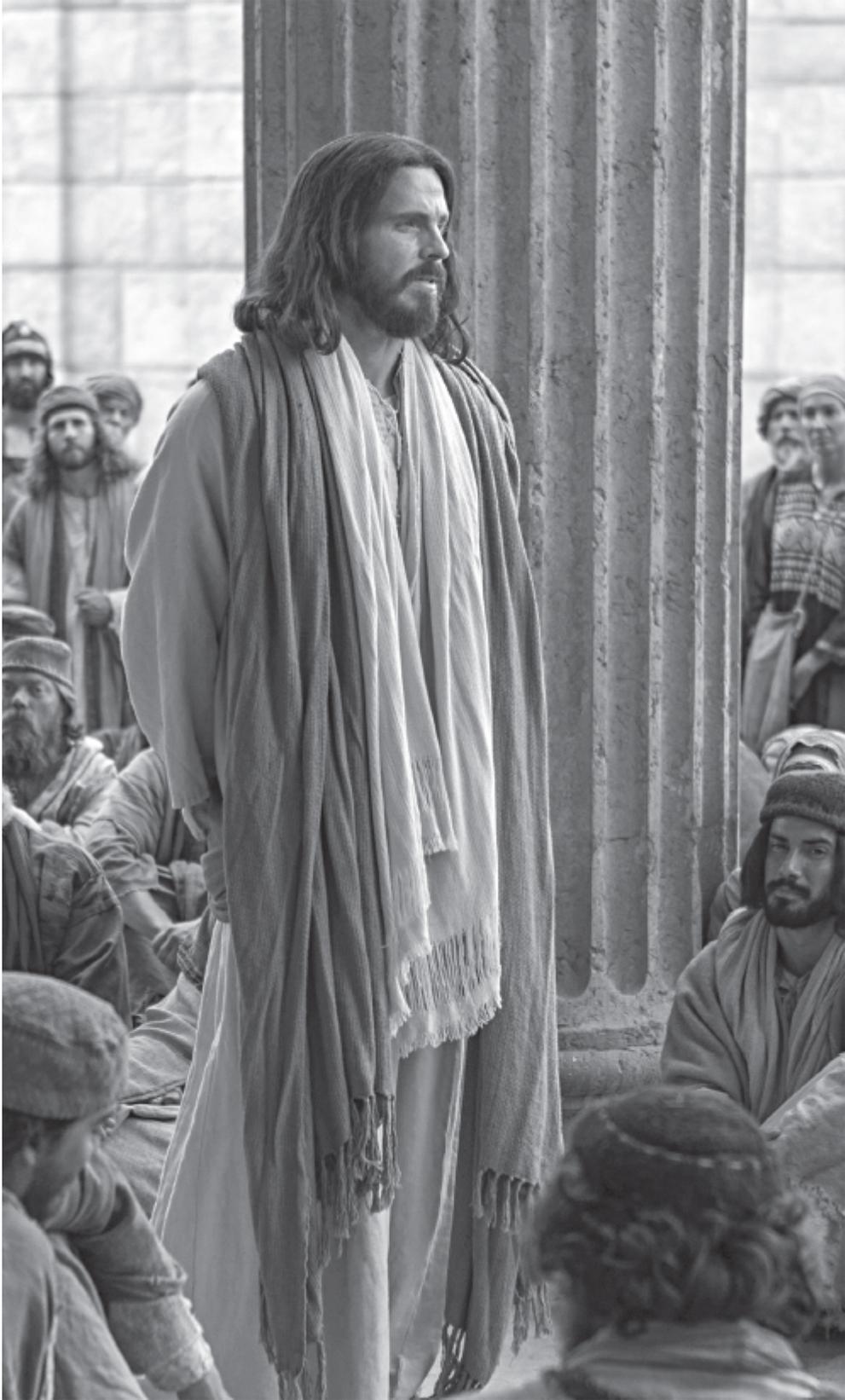
The Upper Room One Week Later

Afterward, I appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table and I rebuked their unbelief and hardheartedness because they did not believe the report of those who had seen Me.

You can believe in My resurrection because of the Scriptures, but you can mostly believe because I, the resurrected God the Son, live in your heart.

I commanded them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every person. Those who believe and are baptized shall be saved, but he who does not believe shall be lost. And these signs shall follow those who believe: In My name, they shall cast out demons; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall pick up serpents and not be harmed, and if they drink anything poisonous, it shall not kill them. They shall lay hands on the sick and heal them.”

After I had talked with them, I was received up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. Then My disciples went out and preached everywhere. I was with them and confirmed their message with signs.



I AM JESUS

The Son of Man

The Gospel of Luke

I led Luke to write a book to show My humanity. The key passage in this book is, I come to seek and to save that which was lost. Remember, I am the God-Man. As a man, I had a mother; I was born, I grew from boyhood to manhood. At the end of My earthly life, I died on the cross, was buried, and rose again from the tomb. Shortly after rising from the dead, I ascended into heaven to be with my Father. Search this book to see My human characteristics. Then read to find how I lived, served, and gave My life for others; then pray for strength and wisdom to follow My example. As you read this book, you will discover Me as the Savior of the whole human race, and how kind and loving I was to those despised by society. I often prayed to My Father for those I loved. Ask yourself if you show the same sort of compassion to others as I did.

The Birth of John the Baptizer

1 Many people have attempted to write different aspects of the key events of My life on the earth from what they saw and experienced. But I led Luke to search these eyewitness reports to write a careful record of My life from the beginning. And he was inspired from heaven to prepare this accurate account, then send it to Theophilus so he would be certain of the truth of Christianity.

You can have confidence in the things that are taught in My Word, so study it carefully to know what I said.

I Promise Zechariah a Son

During the reign of King Herod, Zechariah, a priest of the Abijah corps, had married Elizabeth, who was from the priestly family; so he had impeccable qualifications to serve God. Zechariah and Elizabeth were spiritually minded,

and they carefully obeyed every aspect of the religious law. Because Elizabeth was barren, they had no children. When it finally came Zechariah's turn to offer evening prayers in the temple for all Israel, he also burned incense, a symbol of prayers ascending up to God. A great multitude was outside praying at the tenth hour, which was 4 p.m.

An Angel From God Announces the Birth of John the Baptizer

The appearance of an angel standing by the altar of incense frightened Zechariah. However, the angel said, "Don't be afraid, God has heard your prayers; your wife Elizabeth will have a son, and you must name him John. Your son will give you joy and happiness, and multitudes will rejoice with you."

I will help you receive My message when I come to speak to you.

The angel told Zechariah, "Your son will be a great man for God, he must never drink intoxicating liquor, and the Holy Spirit will fill him for service. Your son will convince many to turn to God; he will be rugged like Elijah and will prepare people for the coming Deliverer by softening the hearts of fathers to be like children and convincing the disobedient to return to Your wisdom."

Zacharias Unable to Speak

Zechariah objected, saying he was an old man and his wife was beyond child-bearing years.

Stay long in My presence when I am speaking to you. Do not question what I promise you.

The angel Gabriel reminded Zechariah that he heard this good news standing in the presence of God and that God sent him to tell it to Zechariah. Because Zechariah didn't believe God would do the things for which he prayed for all his life, the angel said that Zechariah wouldn't be able to speak until the child was born.

May you be quick to believe and quick to obey all I tell you to do.

The waiting crowd got anxious because Zechariah tarried, and he couldn't speak when he appeared, so they realized he saw a vision. When his days of service were over, he then returned home. Elizabeth became pregnant, and she hid herself from public view. Elizabeth proclaimed, "Lord, You are gracious to take away the embarrassment of having no children."

Gabriel Promises Mary a Son

When Elizabeth was six months pregnant, the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary, a virgin who was engaged to Joseph. They were both in the family line of King David. Gabriel greeted Mary, "Rejoice, Mary, you are highly favored of God. The Lord is with you." Mary was confused with this greeting. She didn't know what it meant.

Gabriel said, "Do not be afraid, God has decided to use you to be a blessing to all the world. You will conceive and deliver a Son, and you must call His name Jesus. He will have great influence on the world, and He will be the Son of the Most High God. God will give your Son the throne of David, and He will rule over Israel forever."

A Miraculous Conception

Mary replied, "How can this happen. I am a virgin, and have not known a man?"

Gabriel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come on you, power from the Most High God will make it happen, and you'll have a child who is the Son of God." Gabriel continued, "Your Aunt Elizabeth has become pregnant with a child in her old age; with God, nothing is impossible."

Mary answered. "I will be the Lord's handmaiden. I am willing to be what the Lord wants me to be. Let it happen, as you said."

May you yield your body to Me as Mary did. I will accomplish My purpose in your life, as I did in Mary's life.

Mary Visits Elizabeth

Mary left her home and went to Judah to visit Zechariah and Elizabeth. She greeted Elizabeth as she entered the house; the baby leaped in Elizabeth's womb because he knew he was in the presence of the Messiah. Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and said, "Blessed are you among women and blessed is the child you'll bear. But why this honor that the mother of our Lord should visit me? As soon as I heard your voice, the baby leaped in my womb. You believed the promises of our Lord, that's why you've been given this great privilege."

Mary's Song—The Magnificat

Mary responded to the Lord:

"You are great, my God;
My spirit rejoices in You, my Savior.
You look on this lowly servant;
Now all generations will call me blessed.
For You—the Mighty God—have done great things,
Holy is Your name.
Your mercy extends to those who reverence You
From one generation to another.
You have done mighty works by Your arm,
You have cast down the proud of heart.
You have brought down mighty kings from their thrones,
And You lift up the lowly.
You have filled the hungry with good things,
And sent the arrogant away empty.
You have come to help Israel, Your people,
And You have remembered to be merciful
To Abraham and his descendants forever."

Mary stayed with Elizabeth for three months, and then returned to her home in Nazareth.

May you ever praise Me for using you, just as Mary who magnified Me in song.

The Birth of John the Baptizer

Elizabeth gave birth to a son at the appointed time, and the relatives and neighbors rejoiced with the parents. When they came to circumcise him on the eighth day, the relatives tried to name him after his father. Elizabeth protested, saying “Call him John,” but the relatives said no one in the family had that name. When they asked the father about the child’s name, Zechariah asked for a tablet and wrote, “His name is John.” Immediately Zechariah was able to speak again. He praised God, and all the relatives joined him.

Everyone who heard about it wondered, “What will this child be?” for the hand of the Lord was with the child.

I will help you to obey My instructions just as Zechariah did, and then show Myself strong when you obey, just as I healed Zechariah.

Zechariah’s Song—The Benedictus

Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit, and he spoke this prophecy:

“Blessed is the Lord God of Israel,
For He visited and rescued His people.
He has sent a mighty Deliverer to the people
In the house of His servant, David,
As promised by the holy prophets.
And the Deliverer will save us from our enemies,
And from the hand of those who hate the Jews,
To give mercy promised to our fathers
And perform His holy covenant,
The promises sworn to our father Abraham,
And to grant to us deliverance
And from the hand of our enemies

So that we may serve Him
Without fear in holiness and righteousness
In His presence all the days of our life.
And you my child, John, shall be called the prophet of the Most High God.
John shall go before the Deliverer to prepare the way for His coming.
John will tell the people about His salvation
And preach the forgiveness of sins,
Showing us His tender mercies
That will come to us like the daybreak of the sun.
The Deliverer will give light to those living in darkness,
And guide their feet in Your way.”

And the child, John, grew strong physically and spiritually, and lived in the desert until his time to preach publicly to Israel.

My Journey on Earth Begins at My Birth

2 Caesar Augustus had commanded everyone to return to their hometowns to register for a census for tax purposes. This happened when Quirinius became governor of Syria in 4 BC. All went to be registered to their own city. Then Joseph left Nazareth to return to Bethlehem because he was in the royal line of David; his wife Mary was also in that line. Mary was pregnant, and the birth was imminent, so she gave birth while in Bethlehem. I was born in a stable because there was no room in any of the inns. Mary wrapped Me in strips of cloths, swaddling clothes, and laid Me in a feed trough.

Shepherds Visit Me

The same evening I was born, shepherds were in an open field watching over their sheep. Suddenly the sky lit up with an overwhelming light, and a shining angel appeared to them; the shepherds were scared out of their wits. The angel announced to them, “Don’t be frightened, I have a wonderful message for you, and for everyone else in the world. Tonight, the Deliverer—the Lord—was born in Bethlehem. You will recognize Him because He will be wrapped in swathes of cloths, and will be lying in a feed trough.”

Suddenly, the angel was joined by a gigantic angelic choir praising God, saying,

“Glory to God in the highest,
peace to those who enjoy God’s good will.”

When the angelic choir returned to heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go see this baby God told us about.” When they ran to Bethlehem, they found Mary, My mother, and Me. I was lying in a manger.

After they saw Me, they went and told others the story that was told to them about Me. Those who heard it were astounded by what was told to them by the shepherds, but Mary kept all these things to herself and pondered them in her heart. Then the shepherds told everyone about Me, and people were astonished at what they heard.

May you embrace the story of the Baby and worship Me with all your heart. May you tell everyone about the Baby, and how I came to forgive their sins.

My Dedication by Simeon

I was circumcised eight days after I was born, and they called My name Jesus, just as the angels instructed them.

Later My parents and I returned to the temple for the ritual cleansing of the mother as required by Moses in the law, “Every male that opened the womb shall be dedicated to the Lord.” They did this with the offering of the poor, two young turtledoves or two pigeons.

In the temple was a senior man named Simeon, who looked for the restoration of the kingdom. Simeon lived blamelessly and served God continually, and he was filled with the Holy Spirit. The Lord had revealed to Simeon that he would see the Deliverer before he died. Simeon was led by the Spirit into the temple on the day I was to be dedicated. Simeon took Me into his arms and blessed Me, saying “Lord, I have seen what You promised; now I am ready to die. For my eyes have seen Your salvation, which all people will see one day. The Deliverer will be a light to the Gentiles, and will bring glory to Your people of Israel.”

I am your salvation; just as Simeon testified, I was his salvation. I not only save you from the guilt of sin, which can weigh heavily on your life, but I save you from the penalty of sin, which is separation from me for eternity in a place that was not meant for you.

Joseph and Mary marveled at Simeon's words. Then Simeon said to Mary, "This child will be rejected by many in Israel, and God will judge their unbelief. But the child will also be received by many in Israel, and they will be saved and rewarded by God."

My Dedication by Anna

There was also a prophetess named Anna, who was very old and had lived with her husband only seven years after they were married. She lived in the temple, worshiping God, praying, and very often fasting. She came along as Simeon finished his blessing; she gave thanks to God for Me, telling everyone the Deliverer had come..

At Twelve Year, I was busy in the Temple in Jerusalem

I went with My parents to Jerusalem for the annual Passover Festival when I was twelve years. As My parents left Jerusalem for home, I stayed in Jerusalem, but My parents didn't know it. After a day's journey, they went looking for Me, thinking I was walking toward home with relatives. When they failed to find Me, they returned to Jerusalem to search for Me. After three days, they found Me sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking questions. All who heard Me were greatly impressed at My level of comprehension and the difficult questions I asked them. Joseph and Mary were astonished when they saw Me, and Mary asked Me, "Son, why have You treated us like this? Your father and I have been worried to death."

I answered, "Why were you searching for Me? Didn't you know that I had to be about My heavenly Father's business?" I spoke to them, but they did not understand.

Just as I naturally went to the temple, so you naturally go to church. One day, you will go to the place where I dwell.

I returned to Nazareth with them and was under authority to them. My mother didn't forget any of these incidents and meditated on them often. I grew in mental ability and physical strength and was respected by God and men.

The Ministry of John the Baptizer

3In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod was governor of Galilee, his brother Philip was governor of the territory of Iturea and Trachonitis, Lysanias was governor of Abilene, and Annas and Caiaphas were in the high priesthood; the Word of God came to John, the son of Zechariah, in the desert. And he preached all over the Jordan Valley the need for baptism of repentance to obtain the forgiveness of sins. He fulfilled what is written in the book of the prophet Isaiah;

“The voice of one crying in the desert,
prepare the road for the Messiah.
Make the paths straight for Him.
Every valley must be filled up,
and every mountain and hill leveled.
The crooked places must become straight;
And the rough roads must be made smooth,
And all people must know
about the salvation of God.”

So John the Baptizer said to the crowds that were coming to be baptized by him, “You den of snakes! Who warned you to hide from the judgment that is coming? Produce fruit that shows your repentance, and do not justify yourselves, saying ‘We have Abraham as our ancestor,’ for I say to you that God can raise up children of Abraham out of these stones. Now the axe is already cutting at the roots of the trees. Every tree, then, that will not bring forth good fruit will be cut down and cast into the fire.”

So the crowds asked John, “What must we do?”

He answered, “The one who has two coats must give to him who has none, and the one who has food must do the same thing.”

Even tax collectors came to be baptized by John, and said to him, “What must we do?”

So he answered, “Stop collecting more money than is required of you.”

Some soldiers asked him, “What must we do?”

So he answered them, “Don’t extort money from anyone; don’t make false accusations, and be satisfied with your wages.”

The people were excited and were arguing whether John was the Messiah. John answered them, “I am only baptizing you in water, but there is coming One after me who is stronger than I am. I am not fit to untie His shoe strings. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire; His pitchfork is in His hand, and He will gather His wheat and store it in His barn, and He will burn up the chaff with eternal fire.”

John continued to proclaim the good news with many explanations. But Herod the governor was repeatedly reprovved by John because he married Herodias, his brother’s wife. So Herod later put John the Baptizer in prison.

My Baptism

On a particular day when all the people had been baptized, I was also baptized, and as I was praying, heaven opened and God the Holy Spirit came down on Me in bodily form as a dove. Everyone heard a voice out of heaven. “You are my beloved Son. In You, I am well pleased!”

Here is My Genealogy Through Mary

I was about thirty years old when I began My ministry; I was the son legally of Joseph, the son of Eli, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Melki, the son of Jannai, the son of Joseph, the son of Mattathias, the son of Amos, the son of Nahum, the son of Esli, the son of Naggai, the son of Maath, the son of Mattathias, the son of Semein, the son of Josech, the son of Joda, the son of Johanan, the son of Rhesa, the son of Zerubbabel, the son of Salathiel, the son of Neri, the son of Melki, the son of Addi, the son of Cosam, the son of Elmadam, the son of Er, the son of Jesus, the son of Eliezer, the son of Jorim, the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Simeon, the son of Judah, the son of Joseph, the son of Jonam, the son of Eliakim, the son of Melea, the son of Menna, the son of Mattatha, the son of Nathan, the son of David, the son of Jesse, the son of Obed, the son of Boaz, the son of Sala, the son of Nahshon, the son of Amminadab, the son of Arni, the son of Hezron, the son of Perez, the

son of Judah, the son of Jacob, the son of Isaac, the son of Abraham, the son of Terah, the son of Nahor, the son of Serug, the son of Reu, the son of Peleg, the son of Eber, the son of Shelah, the son of Cainan, the son of Arphaxad, the son of Shem, the son of Noah, the son of Lamech, the son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch, the son of Jared, the son of Mahalalel, the son of Cainan, the son of Enosh, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.

I Am Tempted by Satan in the Desert

4 I was filled with the Holy Spirit and returned from the Jordan. I was led by the Spirit into the desert where I was tempted by the devil for forty days.

I will fill you with God the Holy Spirit, and lead you by the Holy Spirit, just as I was led.

I fasted for forty days, and when the fast was over, I was hungry. So the devil said to Me, “If You are God’s Son, turn these stones into bread.”

I answered, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone; (but by every word of God).’”

The devil then leading Me up to a high mountain, showed Me in an instant all of the world kingdoms and told Me, “I will give all the power and splendor of these, because it has been given over to me, and I bestow it on whomever I please. If You will kneel to me and worship me, it will all be Yours.”

I answered, “Get behind Me, satan, for it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God and worship Him only.’”

Then the devil brought Me to Jerusalem to the summit of the temple and told Me, “If You are God’s Son, throw Yourself down, for it is written, ‘The Lord will command His angels to protect You,’ and ‘They shall carry You in their hands so that You will not dash Your foot against a stone.’”

I answered him, “It has been written, ‘You shall not tempt the Lord your God.’” So the devil, after fully tempting Me, left Me until another opportunity came about.

I Face Unbelief in Nazareth

I came back to minister in My home region, Galilee, and the power of the Holy Spirit was on Me. Everyone in the region heard about Me, and when I preached in the synagogues, everyone was glad to hear Me.

Then I went to Nazareth, My boyhood home; and because it was My custom on the Sabbath, I went to the synagogue. An elder handed Me the scroll of Isaiah; I unrolled it to a certain place and read,

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me,
because the Lord has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor.
The Lord has sent Me to preach that prisoners shall be free,
and the blind shall see, and the oppressed shall be released,
and to proclaim that God will bless those who come to Me.
Amen.”

Then I rolled up the scroll and returned it to its place and took My seat. Every eye in the synagogue stared at Me, then I said, “This Scripture was fulfilled today.”

And everyone was amazed at what I said. They said, “Is not this Joseph’s son?”

I told them, “You will probably want Me to prove Myself, like the proverb, ‘Physician, heal yourself.’ You want Me to do miracles here in Nazareth as I have done in Capernaum, but I know your unbelief. You have not accepted Me, but rather you have rejected Me. I say that no prophet is accepted in His hometown. Remember how Elijah did a miracle to help the widow of Zarephath, even though she was a foreigner? There were many needy widows in Israel because there was a famine. It hadn’t rained for three and a half years, yet Elijah was not sent to them. Elijah also healed Naaman of leprosy even though there were many lepers in Israel.”

The people in the synagogue were furious when they heard what I said. The people mobbed Me and pushed Me outside toward the edge of the cliff near town. But I walked through the midst of the mob and returned to Capernaum.

I will give you boldness to face unbelief and will give you the wisdom to do what is right.

I came down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and taught them on the Sabbath. The people were enthusiastic at My teaching, for I spoke with authority. There was a man in the synagogue who was demon-possessed, who cried out loudly, “What do You want with me, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy me? I know who You are: The Holy One of God.” But I rebuked him: “Be quiet and come out of him!” Then the demon threw the man down. The demon came out of him without hurting him.

They were amazed and said to one another, “What word is this? For with authority and power He commands unclean spirits, and they come out.” And reports of Me went everywhere in the surrounding country.

You can believe everything written about Me for it is truth, and praise Me for My power.

I then arose and left the synagogue and went to Simon’s home where his mother-in-law was suffering from a high fever, and they asked Me about her. I stood over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. Immediately, she arose and waited on them.

At sunset, all who had any who were sick brought them to Me, and I laid hands on each one of them and healed them. Even demons came out of many people, shouting, “You are Christ, the Son of God.” But I stopped them and did not allow them to speak because they knew that I was the Christ.

At daybreak, I went out to an isolated spot to pray, but the people were looking for Me and found where I was. They tried to keep Me from leaving; but I told them, “I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities because this is the reason I was sent.”

And I preached in the synagogues of Galilee.

I Call My Disciples

5 The multitude crowded around Me to hear the Word of God as I stood by the lake of Gennesaret. I saw two boats on the shore, but the fishermen had left them and were cleaning their nets. I got into one of the boats that belonged to Simon and asked him to push out a little from the shore; then I seated Myself and began to teach the crowd from the boat.

When I had finished teaching, I told Simon, “Push out into deep water and lower your nets for a catch.”

Simon answered, “Master, we worked hard all night without catching anything; however, at Your request, I will lower the net.” And when they did so, they caught a great catch of fish, so that their nets began to break. They signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. They filled both boats until they almost sank.

Seeing this, Simon Peter fell at My knees, saying “Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.” He was astonished at the catch of fish, and so were his partners—James and John, the sons of Zebedee.

I said to Simon: “Fear not, from now on you will catch men!” They brought their boats to shore, left everything, and followed Me.

I want you to be a “fisher of men and women, boys, and girls.” I want you to influence people for Me.

In one of their towns, a man with leprosy saw Me and begged Me, “Lord, if You will, You can cleanse me!”

Reaching out My hand, I touched him, saying “I will be cleansed!” And the leprosy was gone. I told him to tell no one; but, “Show yourself to the priest, and make offerings for cleansing as Moses commanded.”

But more people heard about Me, and large crowds gathered to hear Me and be healed.

I often withdrew into the desert for prayer.

I Heal a Paralytic Man

As I was teaching, Pharisees and scribes from the villages of Galilee, Judea, and Jerusalem were sitting there. The power of the Lord was present for Me to heal the sick. Some men brought a paralytic on a bed to lay him before Me. But there was no way to get him to Me because of the crowd. So they went up on the roof and let him down through the tiles in front of Me. Seeing their faith, I said, “Your sins are forgiven.”

The scribes and the Pharisees reasoned, “He is speaking blasphemies. Who is able to forgive sins except for God only?”

I was aware of their thoughts, and said, “Which is easier to say: ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Arise and walk?’ But so you may know that I, the Son of Man, have the power to forgive sins,” I said to the paralytic, “Rise, pick up your mat, and walk.”

I have the authority to forgive sins. If you confess that you are a sinner, I will forgive you and cleanse you.

Immediately he stood up in their presence, picked up his mat, praised God, and went home. Everyone praised God and said, “We have seen astonishing things today!”

My Call to Matthew

Going outdoors, I saw Levi a tax collector sitting at the collection table and said to him, “Follow Me!” Rising up, he left everything and followed Me.

Then Levi prepared a great banquet at his home for Me. A large group of tax collectors and others reclined at the table. But the Pharisees and scribes complained to My disciples, “Why does Your Master eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?”

I answered, “Healthy people do not need a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.”

They also said to Me, “John’s disciples fast and pray frequently, and the Pharisees do so as well, but Your disciples eat and drink.”

I said, “Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, then they will fast.”

I gave this parable to them: “No one patches an old coat with new cloth or else it will tear the new. Also, the patch from the new does not look like the old. And no one pours new wine into old wineskins, else the new wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and the skins are ruined. But new wine is poured into new wineskins. And no one wants new wine after drinking the old, for he says, ‘The old is preferable!’”

I Quickly End the Debate About the Sabbath

As I journeyed home from the Passover at Jerusalem, I went past the grain fields on the Sabbath, and My disciples picked the grain and ate it. The Pharisees criticized them because they broke the Sabbath law. I answered, “Have you not read that David when he was hungry, and those with him, how he went into the tabernacle and ate the showbread and gave some to those with him. They were not allowed to eat the bread; only the priest could eat it.” Then I said, “I, The Son of Man, am Lord of the Sabbath.”

I will help you properly observe My Lord's Day, not as the religious leaders legalistically observed it. You will worship Me properly on Sunday.

I Heal a Man With a Shriveled Hand

When I got to Capernaum, I entered the synagogue, and a man was there with a shriveled-up right hand.

The Jewish leaders watched Me closely whether I would heal on the Sabbath day so they could charge Me with breaking the law. I said to the man with the shriveled-up hand, “Stand in front of the people.” Then I asked, “Is it right to help or hurt on the Sabbath day? To kill or save lives?” I looked at them with anger, then said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” The man did as commanded, and it was completely restored.

The Jewish leaders were angry and discussed how they might get rid of Me.

Don't be critical of anyone who comes to Me for help or healing like the Jewish leaders who criticized Me. Marvel at My compassion on those who hurt or need My help. Marvel at My patience with those who reject Me.

Choosing the Twelve

I went up into the hill country, and I continued all night in prayer to God.

The next day I called My disciples to Myself, and from them, I chose twelve whom I named apostles. Simon, whom I called Peter, was the leader of the first group of four that also included Andrew, James, and John. The second group of four apostles was led by Philip and included Bartholomew, Matthew,

and Thomas. The third group of four was led by James, the son of Alphaeus, also called the short one, and included Simon, the former terrorist fighter, Judas, later called Jude, also the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed Me.

Multitudes Healed

I came down and stood with My disciples on level ground with a large crowd of people from all over Judea, Jerusalem, and from the Tyre and Sidon coast who came to hear Me teach, and to be healed of their diseases. Those who were demon-possessed were also healed. Everyone tried to touch Me because power flowed from Me to heal the sick.

The Beatitudes

Then I looked on My disciples, and began to speak: “Blessed are you who are poor, for the kingdom of God is yours! Blessed are you who are spiritually hungry, for you will be completely filled. Blessed are you who are weeping over sin, for you will rejoice!

“Blessed are you when people hate you and despise you and attack you, and call you evil for the sake of Me, the Son of Man. Rejoice and leap for joy for great is your reward in heaven; for this is the way the prophets were treated. How terrible it will be for all who are rich, for they now receive comforts in full. How terrible it will be for all who now live in luxury, for they will be hungry. How terrible it will be for all who now laugh, for they will mourn and weep. How terrible it will be for all those who are well spoken of for this is the way false prophets were treated.

“But I say to you, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who abuse you. When a man strikes you on one cheek, offer him the other; and when a man takes away your coat, offer him your shirt also. Give to everyone who asks, and do not demand your goods back from him who takes them away.

“Deal with others as you would have them deal with you. If you love only those who love you, what credit do you get for that? Even big sinners love those who love them. And if you do good only to those who do good to you, what credit is that? Even big sinners do that. And if you lend to people expecting to get it back, what credit is that? Even big sinners lend to one another, expecting to get back a full payment. But you must practice loving

your enemies. That way your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. Remember, He is kind to the unlikable and evil person. Be merciful, just as your Father in heaven is merciful.

“Stop criticizing others, so you will not be criticized. Stop judging others, so you will not be judged. Forgive others so that you will be forgiven. Give to others, so you will receive good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over, and poured into your lap. For the measuring cup you use with others will be used with you.”

Then I told them a parable. “One blind man cannot lead another. They will both fall into the ditch. A pupil is like his teacher. Will not everyone when fully trained be like his teacher? Why do you look for a tiny speck in your brother’s eye when there is a heavy timber in your own eye? Can you say, ‘Brother, let me get that tiny speck out of your eye,’ when you have a timber in your own eye? You hypocrite! First get the timber out of your own eye, and then you may get a tiny speck out of your brother’s eye.

“A good tree does not bear bad fruit, nor will a bad tree bear good fruit. For every tree is known by its fruit. People do not pick figs from thistles, or gather grapes from a weed. A good man, out of his good character, bears good fruit and a bad man, out of his bad character, produces bad fruit. Out of a man’s mouth speaks the things that are in his heart.

“So why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord,’ but do not practice the things I tell you? Everyone who follows Me and does the things I teach is like a man who is building a house. He digs deep and lays a foundation on bedrock. When the floods come to burst on that house, it will stand because it was built on a rock. But the man who merely hears My words and does not do them, is like a man who builds a house on the sand. When the floods burst upon it, it will collapse because it has no foundation.”

The Good News of My Miracles Starts to Spread

7When I had finished My sermon in the hearing of the people, I entered Capernaum. There I met a Roman centurion whose servant was very dear to him. The servant was sick at the point of death. When the centurion heard about Me, he asked the Jewish elders to go see Me and ask Me to come and heal his servant of his illness. So they went to Me and urged Me saying, “The centurion deserves this for he loves our nation, and has built our synagogue.”

Then I walked with them, but when I approached the house, the centurion sent friends to tell Me, “My Lord, do not trouble yourself about this because I am not worthy for You to come into my house. I do not think myself worthy to even ask You for anything. But simply speak the word, and my servant will be cured. For I too understand authority. I have soldiers under me, and when I order one to go, he goes; another to come, he comes. My servants do what I command.”

I was astounded when I heard this and turning to the crowd that was following Me said, “I tell you, I have not found faith this great among the Jews.” The messengers returned to the house and found the servant well.

I will give you faith like this army officer so that you can act on My words instantly.

Afterwards, I went to the town called Nain. My disciples and a great multitude went with Me. As I approached the gate of the town, I saw a dead man being carried out, a widow’s only son. A large crowd from the town was following her.

When I saw this, I was moved with compassion for her, and I said, “Stop weeping.” Then I went and touched the coffin, and said, “Young man, I tell you, arise.” Then the dead boy sat up and began to speak. I gave him back to his mother.

The crowd began to praise God, saying, “A great prophet has come to us!” and “God has visited us!” News about Me spread over Judea and the surroundings areas.

The Doubts of John the Baptizer

Now John the Baptizer’s disciples told him about what I was doing. So John sent two disciples to Me to ask this question, “Are you the One who was to come, or should we look for another?”

So the disciples came to Me and said, “John the Baptizer sent us to ask You, ‘Are you the One who is to come, or should we continue looking for another?’”

Don’t punish yourself when you have doubts. I will forgive you and strengthen your faith to believe Me for greater things.

At that time, I cured many people of diseases and cast out evil spirits, and gave sight to many blind people. And so I answered them, “Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: The blind are seeing, the crippled are walking, the lepers are being cleansed, the deaf are hearing, the dead are being raised, and the poor are having the gospel preached to them. And blessed is the one who does not stumble over Me.”

After John’s messengers left, I spoke to the crowd about John: “What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed blown about by the wind? Really, what did you go to see? A man dressed in fancy clothes? No. Those who dress in fancy clothes and live easy lives are found in the palaces. Really, what did you go to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you John is far more than a prophet. John is the one the Scriptures predicted: ‘Listen, I will send My messenger before You. He will prepare the road for You.’ I tell you, of all men born of women, no one is greater than John, and yet anyone who becomes least in the kingdom of God will be greater than John.”

You can be greater than John if you are humble. It’s hard to humble yourself, yet if you want to be used, I will make you humble.

Many people, even tax collectors, when they heard John, did what he commanded. They submitted to John’s baptism. But the Pharisees rejected God’s purpose when they refused to be baptized by him.

“So, what are the people of this age like? They are like little children sitting in the marketplace playing games, and singing, ‘We played the wedding song, but you did not dance; we sang the funeral song, but you did not mourn.’ John the Baptizer came fasting, and many said, ‘He has a demon!’ I, the Son of Man, have come eating and drinking, and many say, ‘He is a glutton and a wine drinker, and a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ But true wisdom is recognized by her children.”

A Sinful Woman Anoints My Feet

A Pharisee invited Me to dinner. So I came to the Pharisee’s house and took My place at the table. There was a woman in the town with a sinful reputation. When she heard that I was eating at the Pharisee’s house, she brought a bottle of perfume and stood behind Me at My feet, continually weeping. Then her tears began to fall on My feet. So she wiped them with the hair of her head, and

she kissed My feet. Then she anointed them with the perfume from her bottle. When the Pharisee who invited Me saw it, he said to himself, “If He were really a prophet, He would know that the woman who is anointing His feet has a sinful reputation.”

Then I spoke to him, “Simon, I have something to say to you.”

So he said, “Teacher, go ahead and say it.”

I told this parable: “Two men were in debt to a rich man. One owed him a hundred dollars, the other ten dollars. Neither could pay him, so he generously canceled the debts for both. Now, which one of them will love the rich man more?”

Simon answered, “I suppose the one who had the largest debt canceled.”

Then I said, “You are right.”

And turning to the woman, I said to Simon, “Do you see what this woman has done? I came to your house but you did not give Me water to wash My feet, but she has washed My feet with tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give Me a kiss of greetings, but from the time I arrived, she has not stopped kissing My feet. You did not anoint My head with oil, but she anointed My feet with her sacrifice. Therefore, her sins which are many are forgiven because she has loved much. But the one who was forgiven little loves little.”

And I said to the woman, “Your sins are forgiven!”

The guests at the table began to ask themselves, “Who is this man who forgives sins?”

But I said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go on in peace.”

You can believe Me, just as this woman believed. Your total faith in Me is all I ask. I will forgive your sins.

Preaching the Good News

8 Then I went through Galilee from town to town and village to village, preaching the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve disciples were with Me and also some women who had been cured of diseases and had evil spirits cast out of them. Among these were Mary, who was called Mary Magdalene, out of whom I cast seven demons, and Joanna, the wife of

Cleophas, Herod's household manager, Susanna, and many other women. They were contributing to the needs of the group out of their personal resources.

Parable of the Sower

A great crowd came together from several towns. I spoke a parable to them:

“A sower went out to sow his seed. As he was sowing, a handful of seeds fell along the path at the edge of the field and the seeds were trampled on, and wild birds ate them up. Another handful of seeds fell into the rocks, and as soon as they sprang up, they withered because they had no roots in fertile ground. Still more seeds fell into the thorns that grew up with them and choked the seeds. Finally, some seeds fell into rich ground and grew and yielded a hundredfold harvest.”

I said, “Let him who has ears to understand, hear and learn.”

My disciples asked Me what the parable meant.

I said to them, “You have the privilege of knowing the secrets of the kingdom of God, but I speak in parables because they look and do not see; they hear and do not understand. This is what the parable means: The seed is God's Word. The seed on the path illustrates those who hear God's Word, but the devil comes and steals the message from their hearts so that they will not believe it and be saved. The seed sown on the rock illustrates those who accept the message with joy, but the seed takes no real root. They believe for a while, but when persecution comes, they fall away. And the seed that falls into the thorns illustrates those who hear it, but they are choked by sin, money, and pleasures so that it yields no fruit. But the seed sown in rich soil illustrates those who listen to the message, do it honestly, and yield fruit.”

Parable of the Lamp

“No one lights a candle and then covers it up or hides it under a bed, but they put it on a candlestick, so that others may have light. For there is nothing hidden that shall not be revealed, and nothing kept secret that shall not be manifested by the light. So take care that you hear and believe, for whoever receives more will have more given to him, and whoever does not receive more will even have that taken away from him.”

My mother and brothers came to see Me, but they could not get to Me because of the crowd. So someone told Me, “Your mother and brothers are standing outside waiting to see You.”

Then I said to them, “My mother and my brothers are those who hear God’s Word and do it.”

I Calm the Storm

I got into a boat with My disciples, and said to them, “Let us go over to the other side of the lake.” As we were crossing the sea, I fell asleep. A furious storm swept over the lake and the boat filled with water, and we were threatened. So they went to Me and awakened Me and said, “Master, Master, we are in danger!”

Then I got up and rebuked the wind and waves, and immediately the winds and waves were calm.

Then I said to them, “Where is your faith?”

But they were both scared and amazed and said to one another, “Who is He? For He commands even the winds and waves, and they obey Him.”

Demons Are Cast Into Swine

We landed in the neighborhood of Gadera, which is across the lake from Galilee. As soon as I stepped on shore, a man met Me who was demon-possessed. He had worn no clothes for a long time and lived in the tombs.

When he saw Me, he screamed and threw himself down before Me, and cried out in a loud voice, “What do You want from me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg You, do not torture me!” On many occasion, the demon had seized him. When he had been bound with chains and fetters, he would break his bonds, and the demon drove him into the wilderness.

I asked him, “What is your name?” The man answered, “Legion!” for many demons had possessed him. The demons begged Me not to send them into the bottomless pit. There was a field full of hogs feeding there. So the demons begged Me to let them enter into those hogs. And I let them do it.

Then the demons came out of the man and entered the hogs, and they rushed over the cliff into the lake and were drowned.

When the men who fed the hogs saw what happened, they ran to tell the news in town and the surrounding country. So the people went out to see what had happened. They found the man who had previously had demons now sitting at My feet, fully dressed, and in his right mind. They became frightened when they saw what happened. Those who saw what happened told how the

demon-possessed man had been healed. Then all the people of that country asked Me to leave because they were afraid. So I entered the boat and returned to Capernaum.

The man who was cleansed of the demons begged Me to let him go with Me, but I sent him away, saying “Go back to your home, and tell what great things God has done for you.”

The man then went off to tell throughout the city what great things I had done for him. Now when I returned to Capernaum, a crowd welcomed Me, for they were all waiting for Me.

A Woman Is Healed

Jairus, who was the leader of the synagogue, came and fell down at My feet, begging Me to come to his house because his only daughter, about twelve years old, was dying. As I was going, crowds of people continued to press on Me.

Then a woman who had a hemorrhage for years, and had spent all her money on physicians and was not healed, came up behind Me and touched the hem of My tunic. Her hemorrhage stopped immediately. Then I asked, “Who touched Me?”

Everyone denied touching Me. Then Peter said, “Master, the crowds are pressing on You and thronging You.”

I said again, “Someone touched Me because I felt power go out from Me.” The woman knew her actions were uncovered, so she came forward trembling, and she fell down before Me to tell why she had touched Me. So I said to her, “My daughter, your faith has cured you; go in peace.”

Her touch didn't heal her; it was her faith. I will give you that kind of faith because of My grace and mercy. It will come to you as a gift from Me.

Jairus' Daughter Is Raised

While I was still speaking, someone came from Jairus' house to tell him, “Your daughter is dead; don't trouble the Teacher any longer.” But I heard what was said, and told Jairus, “Do not be afraid; have faith, and she will be healed.”

When I reached the house, I did not allow anyone to go in with Me except Peter, James, and John, and the child's father and mother. Professional

mourners were weeping and wailing over her. But I said, “Stop weeping! For she is not dead but asleep.”

Then they laughed, for they knew that she was dead. Then I held her hand and said, “My child, get up!” Her life returned, and she immediately got up, and I directed that some food be given her to eat. And her parents were amazed, so I ordered them not to tell anyone what had happened.

Thank Me for healing all: a young girl and an older woman; an immediate problem and a lingering one; the rich and the poor; so you know My healing will reach you.

The Twelve Disciples Are Commissioned

9I called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over demons and to cure diseases. Then I sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal. I said to them, “Take nothing for the journey; neither staff, nor purse, nor bread, nor money; and don’t take a spare tunic. When you enter a house, stay there until you leave to go on your way. If they don’t welcome you when you leave their town, shake the dust from your feet as a testimony against them.”

So they set out and went from village to village, preaching the good news and healing everywhere.

The Murder of John the Baptizer

Meanwhile, Herod the tetrarch had heard about all the things I was doing, and he was puzzled because some were saying that John had risen from the dead. Others were saying that Elijah had reappeared. Still, others said that one of the Old Testament prophets had risen from the dead.

But Herod said, “I beheaded John. Who is this that is responsible for these reports?”

And he wanted to see Me.

Miracle of the Loaves

When the apostles returned, they gave Me an account of all they had done. Then I took them with Me and went privately to a town called Bethsaida. But the crowds found out and followed Me. I welcomed them and talked to them about the kingdom of God. Then I cured those who needed healing.

It was late afternoon, so the twelve said, “Send the people away so they can go find lodging and food, for we are in an isolated place.”

I replied, “You give them something to eat.”

But they said, “We have only five loaves and two fish. We need to go buy food to feed this many people.” For there were about five thousand men.

But I said to them, “Make them sit down in groups of fifty.” After they did so, I took the five loaves and two fish, and raised My eyes to heaven, and blessed them; then I broke them and handed them to My disciples to distribute among the people. Everyone ate as much as they wanted. What was not eaten was collected, and the disciples filled twelve baskets.

I will help you share the Bread of Life with hungry people, just as My disciples did.

I Visit Caesarea Philippi

Once, when I was praying alone with My disciples, I questioned them, “Who do the people say I am?” And they answered, “John the Baptizer; or Elijah; or another Old Testament prophet raised from the dead.” But I asked, “But who do you say I am?” Peter spoke up and said, “The Christ of God.” Then I gave them strict orders not to tell this to anyone.

Then I said to all, “I, The Son of Man, must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes and be put to death. But on the third day, I will be raised to life.” Then I said, “If anyone wants to be My follower, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me. For those who hang on to this earthly life for Me will lose it. And anyone who loses his life for My sake will save it. Is it any profit to gain the whole world, yet his soul is destroyed and lost? Those who are ashamed of Me and My words, I will be ashamed of him when he comes into glory before the holy angels and My Father. I tell you the truth, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God.

Peter and John Witness My Transfiguration

About eight days later, I took Peter and John and James up a mountain to pray.

Will you set aside times to pray, just as I did?

As I was praying, the appearance of My face was changed, and My clothing became brilliant as lightning. Suddenly two men appeared to talk with Me, Moses and Elijah. They were speaking of My death which was to happen in Jerusalem. Peter and his companions were sleeping soundly. When they woke up, they saw My glory and the two men standing with Me.

As we were leaving, Peter said to Me, “Master, it is wonderful to be here, let’s make three tents, one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” He did not know what he was saying.

As Peter spoke, a cloud covered us, and My disciples were afraid. But a voice came from the cloud, saying “This is My Son, whom I have chosen. Listen to Him.”

And after the voice had spoken, they saw only Me. The disciples kept this incident to themselves and told no one what they had seen.

The Disciples Can’t Heal

The next day, when we came down from the mountain, a large crowd came to meet Me. A man in the crowd yelled out, “Master, I beg You, help my son. He is my only child. Without warning, a demon will take hold of him, and he will cry out and become convulsive and foam at the mouth. This happens for a long time, but when it is over, it leaves the boy worn out. I begged Your disciples to cast the demon out, but they couldn’t.”

You don’t want to be like these powerless disciples. You want to help those who come to you for help. I will give you power to serve Me and help people.

I said, “Faithless and stubborn generation! How much longer must I be among you and put up with you? Bring him here.” The boy was still walking

toward Me when the demon threw him to the ground in convulsions. But I ordered the demon out of him, cured the boy, and gave him back to his father.

They were all amazed at the greatness of God. While everyone was marveling at what I did, I said to My disciples, “Listen to Me and remember what I say, for I, the Son of Man, am going to be handed over into the hands of the enemy.” But they did not understand Me when I said this because they were spiritually blinded so that they could not understand the meaning of what would happen, and they were afraid to ask Me about what I had just said.

Childlike Faith

An argument started among the disciples about which of them would be the greatest. I knew their thoughts, and I took a little child and had him stand by My side. Then I said to them, “Those who welcome this little child in My name welcome Me: and anyone who welcomes Me welcomes the One who sent Me. For the least among you is the one who is greatest.”

Mistaken Zeal of John the Apostle

John spoke up. “Master, we saw a man casting out demons in Your name. We told him to stop because he is not with us.”

But I said, “You shouldn’t have done that; anyone who is not against you is for you.”

Now as the time drew near for My return to heaven, I steadfastly set My face to go to Jerusalem. Then I sent messengers ahead of Me. They went into a Samaritan village to make preparations for Me, but the people would not receive Me because I was going to Jerusalem.

When the word came back to them, James and John said, “Lord, do You want us to call down fire from heaven to burn them up?”

I will keep you from making wrong requests of Me, such as these. I will give you compassion for unbelievers and save them through your ministry.

But I turned and rebuked them, “You do not know the spirit that is in you! I, the Son of Man, did not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them.” And we went to another village.

Giving Up Everything for Me

As we were walking, we met a man on the road who said to Me, “I will follow You wherever you go.”

I answered, “Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but I, the Son of Man, have no place to lay My head.”

I said to another, “Follow Me.”

The man replied, “Let me go and bury my father first.”

But I answered, “Leave the dead to bury their dead, but you go spread the gospel of the kingdom of God.”

Another said, “I will follow You, but first let me go and get permission from my family at home.”

I said to him, “No one who puts his hand to the plow, and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”

If you will be My disciple, you will not look back or turn back. You will follow Me.

The Seventy Are Sent out in My Name

10After this, I appointed seventy disciples and sent them ahead of Me, in pairs, to all the towns and places where I was to visit. I commanded them, “The harvest is great and plentiful, but there are few laborers, so pray to Me, the Lord of the harvest, to send laborers to My harvest. Start off for now, but remember, I am sending you like lambs among wolves. Do not take a purse, or suitcase, or shoes. Don’t waste your time on the road. Whatever house you enter let your first words be a blessing on those who live there. And if a man of peace lives there, your blessing will rest on him; if not, it will return to you. Stay in that house and eat and drink what they give you because the workman deserves his pay. Do not move around from one house to another. When you are entertained, eat what is set before you. Cure those who are sick. Preach ‘the kingdom of God is coming.’ But if you enter a town that does not make you welcome, go out into the streets and shake the dust of that town off your feet and know that ‘the kingdom of God is very near.’ I tell you, Sodom will not be judged as severe as that town.”

“How terrible it will be for you, Chorazin! How terrible it will be for you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in burlap clothing and ashes. And still, it will not be as severe for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment as with those towns. And as for Capernaum, you want to be exalted high as heaven? No! You shall be thrown down to hell. Anyone who listens to the lessons you illustrate listens to Me. Anyone who rejects your lessons, rejects Me, and those who reject Me, reject the One who sent Me.”

The seventy disciples came back rejoicing, saying, “Even the demons submit to us when we use Your name.”

I said to them, “I saw satan fall like lightning from heaven. Yes, I have given you power to walk over the enemy. Nothing shall hurt you. Yet do not rejoice that the demons obey you, rather rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”

At that time, I was filled with joy by the Holy Spirit, and said, “I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for hiding these things from the intellectuals and the worldly, but You reveal them to Your children. Yes, Father, for that is Your pleasure. Everything has been given to Me by My Father; and no one understands the Son, except the Father, and no one understands the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal to them.”

Then turning to My disciples, I said privately, “Blessed are the eyes that see what you see, for I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see, but they were never able to see it, or to hear what you hear.”

The Good Samaritan

A lawyer stood up to test Me with questions, asking, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?”

I said, “What is written in the law and how do you read it?”

The man responded, “You must love the Lord your God, with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind;” then he added, “And love your neighbor as yourself.”

Then I concluded, “Do this, and you will live.”

But the lawyer tried to justify himself asking, “And who is my neighbor?”

I answered with a parable, “A Jewish man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. He was attacked by bandits who beat him, and stripped him of his clothes and money and left him half dead on the road. A Jewish priest came

down the road and passed by the wounded man. Next, a temple assistant passed by on the other side of the road, looked at the man, and did nothing. When a despised Samaritan saw the man, he knelt beside him, cleansed the wounds with oil, and bandaged them up. Then the Samaritan put the man on his donkey, took him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day the Samaritan gave the innkeeper money to take care of the man, and promised; ‘If you need more, I’ll pay next time I’m here.’”

Then I asked the lawyer, “Which of these three was a neighbor to the one who was attacked by the thieves?”

The lawyer answered, “The one who showed mercy.”

I said, “Yes, now go do the same thing.”

Mary and Martha

When I entered a village near Ephraim, Martha received Me into her house. Her sister Mary sat at My feet to listen to the things I said. But Martha was busy working in the kitchen, so she complained to Me, “It’s unfair for Mary to listen to You when I’m doing all the work.”

Martha said, “Tell her to help me in the kitchen.”

But I answered, “Martha, Martha, you are upset over these trivial things. There is only one thing to be concerned with. Mary has found the main thing, and it can’t be taken from her.”

May you know when to work with your hands and when to sit at My feet to learn from Me. When you come and sit at My feet, I will teach you what you need to know, and I will build character in you, that you need to serve Me.

I Teach My Disciples The Lord’s Prayer

11 After a few days I prayed all night, and when I finished, the disciples asked, “Lord, teach us to pray!”

I gave them this prayer as their example, as I had previously given it in the sermon on the mount. I said, “When you pray say,

‘Our Father, who is in heaven,

Holy be Your name.
Your kingdom come.
Your will be done in heaven as on earth.
Give us day by day our daily bread,
And forgive us our sins
As we forgive everyone who is indebted to us;
And don't allow us to be overcome by temptation.”

The act of forgiving someone who has offended you means that you forgive that person by “God’s grace,” because now God can work in your life and theirs. Your forgiveness means their offense can no longer dominate your life. You treat their offense as nothing, and you are no longer separated from them. But also, it redeems the offender. He is no longer bound to you, and their offense no longer binds them. Forgiveness frees you. You don’t forgive for their sake; you forgive for your sake.

I did not finish the prayer as I did on the previous occasion. I said, “What if you went to a neighbor’s house in the middle of the night to borrow bread. You would yell to wake up your neighbor, saying ‘A friend has just arrived for a visit, and I don’t have any bread to give him.’ Suppose your neighbor yelled back, ‘I am in bed, my family is asleep, I can’t help you.’”

I said, “Though he won’t do it as a friend, if the man kept begging and knocking, his neighbor would get up and give him bread, because of his persistence. So you can do the same with prayer. Keep on asking, and you will receive. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will open. For everyone who keeps on asking, receives. Everyone who keeps on seeking, finds. Everyone who keeps on knocking, the door opens.

“If your son asks for bread, will you give him a stone. No! If he asks you for a fish, will you give him a serpent. No! If he asks for an egg, will you give him a scorpion. No! If fallen people like yourselves give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give you good gifts?”

I will give you faith to believe Me for the things you need. So pray to me daily for the small things and the large things that you need.

The Long Day

I was casting a demon out of a man who couldn't speak. When the demon had gone out, the dumb man spoke, and the people were amazed.

But some of them said, "Jesus does these miracles by Beelzebub, the prince of demons."

Others asked Me for a sign from heaven to prove who I was. But I knew their unbelief and what they were thinking, so I said, "Any kingdom divided against itself will collapse, and a household divided against itself will also collapse. The same thing will happen with satan: if he is divided against himself, he will be defeated. Since you claim that I cast out demons by Beelzebub, let's test that idea. If it is through Beelzebub that I cast out demons, through whom do your own leaders cast them out? Does this prove they are filled with demons? But if the power is of the finger of God, then realize that the kingdom of God has come to you."

"When a strong man has armed guards in his palace, his goods are undisturbed; but when someone stronger attacks and defeats the strong man, he takes away all his weapons and his goods. He who is not for Me is against Me, and he who does not help Me hurts My cause. When a demon goes out of a man, it wanders through dry places looking for a home, and not finding one, it returns to the home from which it came. But when he returns, he finds it swept and clean. It then goes and brings seven other demons more wicked than himself. They set up housekeeping so that the man ends up being worse than he was at first."

Now as I was speaking, a woman in the crowd yelled out, "Blessed is the womb that bore You and the breasts that nourished You."

But I replied, "Far happier are those who hear the Word of God and then obey it!"

The crowds got even bigger, and I spoke to them, "This is an evil generation that is asking for a sign. The only sign I will give them is the sign of Jonah. For just as Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites, so I, the Son of Man, will be a sign to this generation. On judgment day, the Queen of Sheba will rise up to condemn this generation because she came on a long journey to hear the wisdom of Solomon. But there is something greater than Solomon here. On judgment day the men of Nineveh will stand up to condemn this generation because when Jonah preached, they repented. There is something greater than Jonah here today.

The Parable of the Lighted Lamp

“No one lights a lamp and hides it under a tub, but they put it on the candle-holder so that people may have light when they enter a room. Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eye is healthy, your whole body has light; but when the eye is diseased, your body can’t see to walk. See to it then that the light inside you is not darkness. Therefore, if your whole body is filled with light, you can walk confidently because the lamp shines on you with its rays.”

I will transform you to be like Me. May good fruit come out of your life.

Woe to the Pharisees

When I finished speaking, a Pharisee invited Me to eat at his house. I went in and sat down at the table. The Pharisee noticed this and was surprised that I had not first washed before the meal. But I said to him, “You Pharisees clean the outside of your cup and plate, while inside you are filled with extortion and greed. You are foolish. Did not he who made the outside also make the inside? Instead, give to the poor from your inner heart and then indeed everything will be clean for you. Woe to you Pharisees! You who pay your tithe of mint and rue and all sorts of garden herbs and overlook justice and your love of God! You should have practiced these tithes without leaving out your love for God. Woe to you Pharisees who take the good seats in the synagogues and love to be greeted in the market squares. Woe to you, because you are like tombs that men walk on without knowing it!”

A lawyer asked, “Why are you insulting us?”

I said, “How terrible it will be for you, lawyers; you strangle people with religious demands, but you don’t do what you require of others. How terrible it will be for you lawyers because you load people down with burdens they can’t carry, and then you don’t do anything to help them. How terrible it will be for you because you build monuments to the prophets, but it was your ancestors—men like you—who killed them. You honor your ancestors, but they killed the prophets, and you built monuments to them. God said, ‘I will save prophets and apostles, but you will kill and persecute them.’ And this generation will kill God’s servants, just as your fathers killed them in the past, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah. How terrible it will be for lawyers, who hide God’s truth from the people; you won’t believe it yourself, and you prevent others from believing it.”

The Pharisees and lawyers tried to trip Me up with questions and did everything they could to oppose Me. They wanted some way to destroy Me.

Warnings and Encouragement for My Followers

12 Meanwhile, a crowd so large it couldn't be counted gathered so that they were stepping on one another. So I began to preach, first to My disciples, "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees—they act as if they are good men, but they are not. Everyone knows they are filled with pride, but their true motives will be uncovered. Everything which is hidden will be found out, and everything that is secret will be made known. Whatever you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered behind closed doors will be proclaimed on the housetops.

"To My followers I say: Do not be afraid of those who kill the body; that is all they can do. I will show you whom to fear: fear God My Father, who can kill the body but also has the power to cast you into hell.

"Yes, I tell you, fear Him. Are not five sparrows bought for two pennies? And yet not one is forgotten in God's sight. Also, every hair on your head has been numbered. Don't be afraid. You are worth more than many sparrows.

"I tell you, whoever declares himself for Me in the presence of people, I, the Son of Man, will acknowledge him in the presence of God's angels. But the one who disowns Me in the presence of men will be disowned in the presence of God's angels. Everyone who speaks a word against Me, the Son of Man, will be forgiven, but he who blasphemes God the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. When you are brought before synagogues and authorities, do not worry about how to defend yourselves or what you will say, because when the time comes, the Holy Spirit will teach you what you must say."

Parable of the Rich Fool

Someone in the crowd said to Me, "Master, tell my brother to give me a share of our inheritance."

"My friend," I replied, "who appointed Me a judge, or the arbitrator of your claims?"

Then I said to them, "Watch, and be on your guard against greed. For a man's life does not consist of what he owns."

Yield all your belongings to Me. May your belongings not possess you; rather, may I be your possessor.

Then I told them a parable: “There was once a rich man who had a good harvest from his land. He thought to himself, ‘What am I going to do?’ I do not have enough room to store my crops.’ Then he said, ‘This is what I will do; I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, then I will store all my grain and my goods in the new barns. I will say to my soul: Soul, you have plenty of good things laid by for many years to come; take it easy, eat, drink, and enjoy life.’ But God said to him, ‘You fool! This night your soul will be demanded; and your riches, whose will they be then?’ This is how it will be for the man who stores up treasure for himself in place of making himself rich in the sight of God.”

Then I said to My disciples: “Stop worrying about your life, what you will eat, or what you will wear. Your life is more than food, and your body is more than clothes. Think about the ravens. For they neither sow grain nor reap a harvest, they have no storehouses nor barns, and yet God continually feeds them. You are worth more than the birds! Which of you by worrying can add a single thing to his life? So if you cannot add a very little thing, why should you worry about anything else? Watch the lilies grow. They do not work hard nor try to grow. I tell you that not even Solomon in all his glory was ever dressed as elegantly as one of them. Now, if God wonderfully dresses the fields with wild grass, which today is green but tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, how much more will He clothe you who have so little faith? So stop worrying about what to eat and what to drink. These are the things the Gentiles seek. Surely your Father knows what you need. Seek My will continually, and these things will be added to you.

“Live for today, Yesterday has passed, learn from it. Tomorrow is not here, so all you can do is prepare for it. You will not live in the past with its failures and successes. You will not live in the future with its hopes and fears. You will live for today. NOW is all the time you have.

“Stop being fearful, My little flock, for your Father has gladly chosen to give you the kingdom. Sell your property and give to the poor. Get a wallet that will never be empty. Your riches will never fail in heaven where a thief cannot steal, nor a moth destroy. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be.”

Parable of the Expectant Steward

“You must keep ready for service and keep your lamps burning. Be like the servants waiting for their master to come home. When he comes and knocks, they will open the door for him. Those servants will be happy when the master comes. Will he find you watching for him? I say to you, he will prepare to serve them and have them sit at a table, and he will wait on them. Whether he comes before or after midnight, they will be happy when he gets there. But be prepared because if the master of the house knew when the thief was coming, he would not have allowed his house to be broken into. So you must always be ready, for at an hour you are not expecting Me, I, the Son of Man, will come.”

Parable of the Faithful Steward

Peter asked Me, “Lord, do You mean this parable for us, or for the multitude?”

Then I answered, “The master will put in charge a faithful manager and give him the task of giving out supplies at the proper time. Happy is that slave who has done what he was supposed to do when his master comes. I tell you the master will put him in charge of all his property. But if that servant says to himself, ‘My master will not be coming back for a long time,’ and he begins to beat the slaves, and eats and gets drunk; his master will come back when he is not expected, and at an hour that the servant didn’t know about. He will judge him severely, and give his share to a faithful worker. That slave who knows his master’s wishes and is not ready will be severely punished. But the one who does wrong without knowing it will be lightly punished. Much will be demanded from those to whom much has been given.”

You will act on the information I have given you. As a faithful servant, you will be greatly rewarded here on earth as well as in heaven for eternity.

“I come to bring fire on the earth, and I wish it were already burning! I have a baptism to administer, and I am in anguish until it comes. Do you think that I came to give peace on earth? No! But rather strife. Five in a family will be divided, three against two, and two against three. Father will be against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law.”

Then I said to the crowd, “When you see a cloud rising in the west, you think, ‘It’s going to rain,’ and it does. And when you feel the south wind blowing, you say, ‘It is going to be hot,’ and it is. Hypocrites! You know how to interpret the weather, the earth, and sky. Why can you not interpret the times? Why can you not decide what is right? When you are being sued in court, do everything you can to satisfy the one suing you. Don’t let him crush you before the judge, or the judge will turn you over to the sheriff, and the sheriff will put you in prison. I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last cent you owe!”

News From Jerusalem

13 Some in the crowd told Me about the rebellious Galileans who were executed by Pilate and mixed their blood with the sacrificial blood that was offered in the temple.

I answered, “Were these men the greatest sinners among all the Galileans because of their crimes?”

Then I explained, “No, they were not! All men are sinners, and all must repent, or they will likewise perish.”

Then I referred to the tower in Siloam that fell and killed people. “Were they greater sinners than these who live in Jerusalem?”

Again I answered, “No, they were not! All men are sinners, so all must repent, or they will likewise perish.”

Then I told a parable, “A man planted a fig tree in his garden, then came looking for fruit, but he found none. The man said to his gardener, ‘I have been looking for figs on this tree for three years, but haven’t found any; cut it down, why should it take up valuable space?’ The gardener answered, ‘Leave it alone for a year. I will dig around its roots and use fertilizer. If it bears figs next year, that is fine! If not, then we will cut it down.’”

In the same way, I give people an opportunity to get saved; the Holy Spirit “digs” away at their hardened sin, and He adds the nourishment of the Word of God and Christian witness, but each person must eventually trust Me for salvation or suffer the consequences. Pray for the salvation of your hardened friends.

I Heal a Seriously Handicapped Woman on the Sabbath

As I was teaching in the synagogue on the Sabbath, there was a severely handicapped woman present who had been bent over double for years. When I saw her, I called out, “Woman you are healed!”

Then I laid My hands on her, and she immediately stood up straight and began glorifying God.

The leader of the synagogue got mad because it was the Sabbath, and said to the crowd, “There are six days for work, and men ought to work during the week. People ought to come get healing during the week, but not on the Sabbath day.”

I answered, “You are a hypocrite! Everyone on the Sabbath looses his ox from the stall and leads the animal to water. Ought not this Jewish woman who has been bound for years be loosed from her bondage on the Sabbath?”

The leader and his fellow Jewish officials were put to shame, and the crowd shouted for joy.

I will help you keep your eyes on My ministry to people, and help you overlook religious traditions that don't matter.

Parable of the Mustard Seed

So I continued speaking, “What does the kingdom of God look like? How can I compare it? It is like a mustard seed which a man planted in his garden, and it grew until it became a tree, and wild birds roosted in its branches.”

Parable of the Leaven

Again I said, “To what can the kingdom of God be compared? It is like yeast that a cook puts in a bushel of flour until it had risen.”

As I was traveling and teaching through the towns and villages, someone asked, “Will only a few be saved?”

I answered, “You must strive to enter through the narrow door; many will try to enter, but will not make it. Once the owner of the house arises and shuts the door, you will find you're standing on the outside and knocking continually and saying, ‘Lord, open up for us;’ but he will answer, ‘I do not know you.’ Then you will say, ‘We ate and drank with you, as You taught us.’ But he will say, ‘I do not know you. Depart from Me, all you evildoers!’ You will weep and grind your teeth when you see Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the prophets

in the kingdom of God, but you're locked outside. People will come from the east and west, from the north and south, to take their seats at the banquet in the kingdom of God. Those who are last will be first, and those who are first will be last."

Just then, some Pharisees came warning Me, "Run away quickly, for Herod wants to kill You!"

But I said, "Go tell that fox I am here, casting out demons and healing the sick, today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will finish this ministry. I will continue on my way to Jerusalem, for it is not possible that a prophet will be killed outside that city. O Jerusalem! Jerusalem! You who continue to martyr the prophets, and stone those who are sent to her, how often I have desired to gather your children around Me, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings. But you said, 'No!'"

I will give you a love for Jerusalem, as I love that city. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem.

"Now you are abandoned to your fate! I say to you; you will never see Me again until you say, 'Blessed is the One who comes in the Lord's name.'"

I Heal a Man on the Sabbath

14 Later, I went to the house of a religious leader for a meal. There was a man there with greatly swollen arms and legs. The leaders watched Me closely to see what I would do. I said to a lawyer, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?" But the lawyer and the leaders refused to answer Me. So I took the man by the hand and healed him, then sent him away. Then I asked, "If your ox falls into a well on the Sabbath, will you not get him out immediately?" The religious leaders had no answer for Me.

I noticed that some guests were trying to get the best seats at a banquet. So I told them this parable. "When you are invited to a wedding banquet, don't sit in the best seats, lest someone who is more important be given those seats and you are moved lower. You will be embarrassed because you must take a lower seat. But when you go to the banquet, take the lower seat. Then your host will see you and move you to a higher seat. As a result, you will be honored in front of

the guests. Those who try to honor themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be honored.”

I told a second parable of a man planning a banquet. “Don’t invite your friends, relatives, or rich neighbors, thinking they will invite you to their banquet. But invite the poor, the sick, the lame, and blind, and God will bless you because these people can’t return the favor, and God will remember you when He passes out rewards.”

A Jewish leader thought I had a good point, so he said, “I would consider it an honor to eat in the kingdom of God.”

But I answered him with a parable. “A man prepared a great banquet and sent out many invitations. When the banquet was ready, he sent a servant to get the guests, but everyone began making excuses. One man said he bought a field and had to go inspect it. Another man said he just bought a pair of oxen and had to go try them out. Still, a third man said he just got married, so he explained, ‘I’m sure you’ll understand.’ The host was extremely angry and said to his servant, ‘Go quickly into the streets and back roads and invite the poor, the sick, the blind and the lame.’ Even then there was more room, so the host said, ‘Go into the rural roads and look in the woods and urge as many as you can find to come to the banquet.’ I want my house full. None of those I first invited came, so they won’t even taste the meal I prepared for them.”

Count the Cost

A great crowd was traveling with Me, so I challenged them to follow Me even though it is difficult and tiring. “Those who follow Me must love Me more than they love their father, mother, sister, or brothers, even their own life. You cannot be My disciples unless you pick up your own cross and follow Me.”

“Don’t begin following Me until you have counted the cost. No one begins building a house but first determines the cost of materials and labor and if he has enough to complete the project. Otherwise, when you lay the foundation, you find out you don’t have enough money to complete the project. Then you are embarrassed because you can’t complete the house.

“Any general planning a battle will first determine if his 10,000 soldiers can win a battle against 20,000 soldiers. If a general doesn’t plan well, he will have to send a delegation to arrange conditions of peace or surrender. So following Me is a struggle with the world, the flesh, and the devil. So you must renounce all that you have to be My disciple.

“Salt is good, but when it loses its taste, how can it season? When it is not good for anything else, it will be thrown away. Let him who has ears, listen and do it.”

The Parable of the Lost Sheep

15 The tax collectors and sinners gathered around Me to hear what I had to say. But the religious leaders were complaining about Me because I received sinners and ate with them. I answered them with a parable, “If you had one hundred sheep, and one of them were lost, wouldn’t you leave the ninety-nine and go search for the one lost sheep till you found it?”

“When you found it, wouldn’t you carry it home in your arms, and tell everyone to celebrate with you because you found the one lost sheep? Even so, there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents, than over ninety-nine self-righteous people who think they don’t need to repent.”

Rejoice with Me over everyone who comes to salvation.

I Tell a Parable of the Lost Coin

I told a second parable of a woman who had ten pieces of silver that were part of her marriage vow. “If she loses one piece of silver, doesn’t she search for it with a lamp and sweep the house till she finds it? Then she calls her friends to rejoice with her because she found it. There is joy in the presence of the angels over one sinner who repents.”

I Tell a Parable of the Lost Prodigal Son

I told a third parable of a man who had two sons, and the younger son demanded his portion of the inheritance, so the father divided the inheritance between the two sons. The younger son took his money and went to a distant country. There he wasted his money on sinful and luxuriant living, spending everything he had. When a famine came, the boy was hungry, so he took a job feeding pigs. No one gave him anything to eat, and he decided to eat the pig’s husks because he was starving. The young man came to his senses when he realized his father’s servants had more to eat than he had. He decided, “I will go to my father and tell him, ‘I have sinned against heaven and against you. I

am no longer worthy of being called your son. Will you hire me as a servant?” The young man returned home to his father. While he was a great distance away, his father saw him coming; he loved him, ran to hug him, and kissed him.

The son said, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and you, I am no longer worthy to be called your son!” But the father told the servants, “Bring the family robe and put it on him, put the signet ring on his finger, and shoes on his feet; kill the fatted calf, and let’s have a feast. This my son was dead, but now he is alive; he was lost, but now is found,” and they began a family banquet celebration. The older son was working in the field. When he approached the house, he heard music, laughter, and rejoicing; so he called one of the servants to ask, “What’s happening?” The servant answered, “Your brother has come home, and your father has killed the fatted calf because he returned safe and sound.” The older son was angry and would not go into the banquet, so his father came out to invite him in. The older son said angrily, “I have served you many years, I have never disobeyed you, yet you never killed a fatted calf for me or had a celebration for me. Yet, my younger brother squandered his inheritance in sinful living, and you throw him a big celebration.” The father said, “You are always with me, and everything I have is yours. It is right to celebrate because he is your brother, for he was dead, but now is alive; he was lost, but now he is found.”

Never leave Me as did the younger son, and never be bitter over My forgiveness of anyone. Rejoice with Me over the salvation of all.

Parables for My Disciples and for the Pharisees

16I told the disciples a story of a rich man and his deceptive manager who was stealing from him. The rich man told his deceptive manager that he learned what he was doing, so he fired him. So the manager had to get the books in order. The manager thought about where he would work next; he said, “I am not strong enough to dig, and I’m too ashamed to beg.” The manager then planned to adjust the books of those who owed money to the rich man so they would take care of him. The manager called the first, “How much do you owe?”

He answered, “One hundred barrels of oil.”

The manager said, “Write down fifty barrels.” The manager asked the second, “How much do you owe?”

He answered, “One thousand bushels of wheat.”

The manager said, “Write down eight hundred bushels.” The rich man commended the fired manager for such a shrewd act. The people of the world work harder at their dishonesty than the people of the light work to be honest.

I said, “Shall I teach you to act that way, to buy friendship dishonestly? No! If you are not honest about small things, you won’t be honest in larger matters. If you have not been faithful in handling the money of others, you will not be entrusted with your own. And if you are unfaithful in handling worldly wealth, who would trust you with the eternal wealth of heaven?”

“No one can serve two masters. Either you will love the first, and hate the second, or you will love the second and hate the first. You cannot serve God and money.”

The Pharisees, who loved to make money, laughed at Me when they heard My principles about finances. I answered, “You make people think you are honest, but God knows your greedy hearts. You pretend to be honest and humble before others, but you are despicable in God’s sight. The law of Moses and the messages of the prophets have been your guides in the former ages. Now your guide is the good news preached by John the Baptizer that the kingdom of God is ushering in a new era. That doesn’t mean the force of the law has changed, for it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of an ‘i’ of the law to change.

“That means the marriage law remains the same. Anyone who divorces and marries another commits adultery. Anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.”

To the Pharisees—The Rich Man and Lazarus

I then told of a rich man who wore expensive clothes and lived in great luxury every day. “A poor man named Lazarus was lying in the street outside his gate covered with sores, and the dogs came to lick them; he yearned to eat the leftovers from the rich man’s table. The beggar died, and the angels carried him to be with Abraham where those who died in faith were located. The rich man also died and was buried, but he went to hell. As he was in torment, he saw Lazarus far off in the company of Abraham.

“The rich man shouted, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me; send Lazarus to come dip his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am tormented by these flames.’

“But Abraham said, ‘Son, remember on earth you had everything, and Lazarus had nothing. Now he is comforted, and you are in pain. Besides, there is a great divide between us so that those who want to come here from your side can’t cross over, and those on this side can’t come to you.’

“The rich man begged Abraham, ‘Send Lazarus to my home on earth to warn my five brothers, so they don’t come here.’

“Abraham answered, ‘Your brothers have Moses and the prophets to warn them, let them listen to the Scriptures.’

“The rich man answered, ‘That is not enough. If someone were to rise from the dead and tell them, they would turn from their sins.’

“Then Abraham replied, ‘If they will not listen to Moses and the prophets, they will not repent, even though one returns from the dead to tell them.’”

There is a place called hell where unbelievers will go after death. Help me stop your friends and family from going there.

I Talk About My Coming Back to Earth

17 Then I said to the disciples, “It is impossible to keep from being tempted to sin, but how terrible it will be for the one who tempts others to sin. He would be better off if a huge stone were tied around his neck and he were thrown into the sea than to face punishment for tempting a little one to sin! Rebuke your brother when he sins and forgive him when he repents. If he sins seven times in a day, you must forgive him each time he repents.”

The disciples asked, “Lord, help us to have more faith.”

I answered, “If you had the smallest amount of faith, the size of a mustard seed, which is the smallest of seeds, then you could say to a mulberry tree, ‘Be uprooted and be cast into the sea,’ and it would happen.”

I told My disciples another parable, “Suppose you were a servant who plowed in the field or shepherded the sheep, would you just return home, sit down, and eat? No! First, you prepare your master’s meal and then serve it to him before you eat your own meal. The servant does not deserve thanks for

doing what he is supposed to do, No! He is supposed to do those things; those who follow the Lord should have the same response. You do not consider yourself worthy of praise. You simply do what you are supposed to do.”

Healing Ten Lepers

As I was heading back toward Jerusalem, I came to the boundary between Samaria and Galilee. Ten lepers stood off at a distance.

As I approached a village, they shouted out to Me, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.”

I answered, “Go show yourself to the priest, just as it is commanded in the Scriptures.” They were healed as they obeyed Me and began the journey.

One came back shouting, “Glory to God for healing me.” He threw himself at My feet and thanked Me. The healed man was a despised Samaritan.

I asked, “Did I not heal ten lepers? Where are the other nine?” The only one who has come back to praise God is this foreigner.” Then I said to the man, “Stand up, and go home; your faith has healed you.”

My Second Coming

One day a religious leader asked Me, “When will the kingdom of God begin?”

I answered, “The kingdom of God won’t come with outward signs, so you can’t say it began here or there. The kingdom of God stands among you.” I was referring to Myself as the King.

The next time I come to earth, it will be as King over My creation. I will set up My kingdom and rule and reign for one thousand years. You will not want to miss this time of incredible advances on earth.

Later, I talked about this with My disciples, “There is coming a time when you will look for Me to be with you, but I won’t come to you physically. Some will proclaim I have returned either here or there. Don’t believe the report, nor go out looking for Me. Everyone will see Me when I return. It will be as bright as lightning flashing across the heavens, but first I must suffer grievously and be rejected. When I return, the people will be just like those in Noah’s days. They ate, got drunk, married, and ignored Noah’s warning right up to the day when Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came to destroy them. My coming

will be the same as it was in Lot's day. They were eating, getting drunk, buying, and selling, planting and building right up till Lot left Sodom. Then God rained fire and brimstone from heaven to destroy them all. The same will happen when I, the Son of Man, am revealed from heaven to those on earth who reject Me. When the day of judgment comes, those on the housetops must not go in the house for their belongings, and neither should those in the field try to retrieve their things. Remember Lot's wife. Anyone who holds on to the things of this life will lose his life, and those who give up their life, for Me, will save their life.

“At that hour, two will be sleeping in the bed; one will be taken, and the other left behind. Two women will be grinding corn; one will be taken, and the other one will be left behind. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken, the other left behind.”

The disciples asked, “What will happen to them?”

I replied, “Wherever there are dead bodies, the buzzards gather.”

Setting My Sights on Jerusalem

18 As I was preparing to leave for Jerusalem, I used a parable to teach that we should always pray and not give up.

The Story of the Persistent Widow

“There was a judge who was godless and despised those who came before him for judgments. A widow kept coming to the judge demanding justice against her enemy. The judge kept refusing her. Finally, he reasoned, ‘I don't fear God or people, but this woman is annoying me to death with her continual begging for me to do something. I will give her justice because she continually asks for it.’”

I said, “Listen to what the godless judge says, God will see that justice is done to those who continually pray to Him, just as the widow got justice, even when God seems to delay. God will answer persistent prayer and avenge them speedily. And when I, the Son of Man, return, will I find people of faith on earth who continually pray?”

The Pharisee and the Tax Collector

Then I gave the following parable to those who considered themselves righteous, but who hated others. “Two men went into the temple to pray, one a self-righteous Pharisee, and the other one was an obvious sinner. The Pharisee boasted in his prayer that he was not a cheater or an adulterous law-breaker, but he fasted twice a week and gave a tenth to God of all he possessed. The obvious sinner did not lift his eyes to heaven, but beat on his chest to express his sorrow for his sin; then he prayed, ‘God be merciful to me a sinner.’”

I said, “This obvious sinner—not the Pharisee—was forgiven. Those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

Then people brought their babies to Me to be touched by Me. But when the disciples saw it, they discouraged them. But I called to the children and said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them, for the kingdom of God belongs to children. I say to you, whoever does not accept the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.”

The Rich Young Ruler

A rich young ruler asked, “Good Master, what must I do to get eternal life?”

I answered, “Why are you calling Me good, only God is good, but if you wish eternal life, keep the commandments.”

The young man answered, “Which should I keep?”

I said, “Do not kill, and do not commit adultery, do not steal; do not bear false witness, honor your father and mother, and love your neighbor as yourself.”

The young man said, “I have kept all these.”

I said, “If you would be perfect, go sell all you have and give it to the poor; you will have treasure in heaven, and then follow Me.”

The young man was sad when he heard this, for he had great wealth.

Then I told My disciples, “I say to you it is hard for a rich man to enter heaven. It is easier for a camel to go through a needle’s eye than a rich man to enter heaven.”

The amazed disciples said, “Who then can be saved?”

I answered, “No one from a human perspective, but all things are possible with God.”

Then Peter added, “We have left all to follow You; what will be our reward?”

I answered, “In the next world when I sit on My throne, you, My disciples, will sit on twelve thrones, ruling the twelve tribes of Israel. Everyone who has left housing, brothers, sisters, father, mother, children, or land for My sake, will receive one hundred times more when he receives eternal life.”

The Selfish Ambition of James and John

As I was heading toward Jerusalem, I said to My disciples privately, “Behold; we are going up to Jerusalem. The petitions by the prophets concerning Me, the Son of Man, will be fulfilled there. I will be delivered to the Gentiles, mocked, insulted, and spat on. They will whip Me and kill Me, but I will rise again on the third day.”

But they could not understand because it was a riddle to them, and they could not grasp what I meant.

The Healing of Blind Bartimaeus

As I came near Jericho, a blind man sat by the road begging. When he heard the crowd passing by, he asked what was happening. They told him, “Jesus of Nazareth was passing by.”

He yelled loudly, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.”

Then they tried to keep him quiet, but he yelled even louder, “Son of David, have mercy on me.”

So I stopped and told them to bring the blind man to Me. When he got near, I asked, “What do you want Me to do for you?”

The blind man said, “Lord, I want to see.”

Then I said, “Receive your sight; your faith has made you well.”

Immediately he could see, and he followed Me, praising God. When the people saw the miracle, they also praised God.

Zacchaeus

19As I was walking through Jericho, Zacchaeus, an extremely rich and influential tax-collector, tried to get a look at Me, but he couldn’t see over

the crowds on the roadside. Zacchaeus ran ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see Me when I passed that way. I looked at him and said, “Zacchaeus, come down, I’m going to eat at your home.”

Zacchaeus hurriedly came down and prepared a banquet for Me, but the crowd disapproved because Zacchaeus was a backslidden Jewish tax-collector.

Zacchaeus told Me, “I will give half my wealth to the poor, and those I’ve cheated; I will restore four times what I took from them.”

I said, “Today salvation has come to this house because he is a son of Abraham. I, the Son of Man, have come to seek and save those who are lost, such as Zacchaeus.”

Some thought the kingdom would come immediately, so I told a parable to correct that wrong impression. “A nobleman was called to a distant place to be crowned king of that province. Before he left, he called his ten workers and gave them each \$2,000 to invest while he was gone. But some of the workers rebelled and sent the nobleman word that he was no longer their lord. When the nobleman returned, he called the workers to whom he had given money to find out their profit. The first man reported his \$2,000 had made a profit of \$20,000, ten times the original amount. ‘Wonderful,’ responded the nobleman, ‘you have been faithful; you will be the ruler of ten cities.’ The second worker reported he had turned his \$2,000 into \$10,000, five times the original amount; the nobleman made him ruler of five cities. The third man had only the original \$2,000, so he explained, ‘Because you are an exacting man, reaping where you don’t sow, I was afraid. I hid it safely in linen cloth.’ The nobleman called him a ‘wicked worker,’ saying, ‘You are condemned by your own words. You knew I reaped where I didn’t sow, Therefore, why didn’t you deposit my money in a bank so I could have drawn interest from it?’ The nobleman said to those standing near, ‘Take the \$2,000 from him and give it to the man with \$20,000.’

“They answered the nobleman, ‘He already has \$20,000.’”

I answered, “Those who do more with more will get even more, and those who do little with little, it shall be taken from him. But bring my enemies here who did not want me as their king and slay them in my presence!”

The Triumphal Entry Into Jerusalem

The next day—Sunday—news that I was coming to Jerusalem swept through the crowds of Passover pilgrims. As I came to Bethpage, I sent two disciples into the village telling them they would find a donkey with her young colt tied there. “If anyone asks why you are taking the donkey, tell them the Master

needs it to ride into Jerusalem.” This act fulfilled Scripture, “Tell the people of Zion; your King is coming to you, humbly riding on a donkey, even on a young colt.”

The disciples did as instructed and found the donkey as I said. As they were loosing the animal, the owners asked why they were untying the colt. They answered, “The Lord needs it.”

So they put their coats on the donkey, and I rode on a colt that had never been ridden by anyone. Great crowds spread their coats on the road, and others waved their palm branches as they went to meet Me.

The crowds who marched in front of Me shouted,

“HOSANNA to the Son of David,

 blessing on Him who comes in the Lord’s name,

 HOSANNA in the highest heaven.”

The religious ruler said to Me, “Rebuke Your followers for they are blaspheming God and the Scriptures.”

I answered them, “If they stopped praising God, the rocks would immediately cry out praise to God.”

I approached Jerusalem, and as soon as I saw the city, I wept tears over it, and said, “If you had only known how to have peace! But now peace is hidden from you. For a time is coming when your enemies will build siege towers against you and surround you on all sides. They will kill you and your children. They will not leave one stone upon another because you did not know your God had visited you.”

Cleansing the Temple

When I got to the temple, I began cleansing it. I forced the merchants and their customers to leave. Then I upset the tables of those selling pigeons and stopped workers from bringing in their merchandise. I said, “Do not the Scriptures teach, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all people, but it’s become a den of thieves?’”

I was teaching daily in the temple. The leaders heard what I said and wanted to destroy Me. But they were afraid to do anything against Me because the people were listening intently to My teaching.

Controversy in the Temple

20 While I was teaching the people in the temple and preaching the good news, the high priests and the scribes, with the elders, debated Me openly before the people, and said to Me, “Tell us where You get the authority to do as You do? Who gave You Your authority?”

Then I answered, “I will ask you a question. Tell Me, did John get his baptism from heaven or from men?”

They discussed with one another, and said, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ He will say, ‘Why did you not believe John?’ But if we say, ‘From men,’ all the people will stone us, for they are convinced that John was a prophet from God.”

So they answered, “We do not know where it was from.”

Then I said, “Neither will I tell you where I got My authority for doing what I do.”

Parable of the Vineyard Owner

Then I told the people the following parable: “A man planted a vineyard, and rented it to tenant farmers, and went on a long journey. At harvest time he sent a servant to the tenants to collect his part of the grape crop, but the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. Again the owner sent another servant, and they beat him and insulted him, and sent him back empty-handed. Again they sent a third servant, and they wounded him and kicked him out of the vineyard. Then the owner said, ‘I will send my dearly loved son. They will respect him.’ But when the tenants saw the son, they said, ‘This is the heir; let us kill him so that what he inherits will be ours.’ So they threw him out of the vineyard and murdered him. What will the owner of the vineyard do to those tenant farmers? He will come and kill those tenants and lease the vineyard to others.” When they heard this, they said, “No!” But I glanced at them and said, “What does this Scripture mean, ‘That stone which the builders rejected has now become the cornerstone’? Everyone who falls on that stone will be saved, and the one on whom the stone falls will be crushed to death.”

I am the Cornerstone. You bow on this “stone” to worship the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The Pharisees’ and Herodians’ Question

Then the scribes and the high priests wanted to arrest Me at that time, but they were afraid of the people. They knew I meant the parable for them. So they watched closely and sent spies to catch Me in My conversation so that they could turn Me over to the governor. So they asked Me, “Teacher, we know that You speak and teach what is right, and show no preference to anyone, but You teach the way of God no matter who is listening. Is it right for us to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?”

But I detected their trick and said to them, “Show me a coin. Whose picture and title is inscribed there?”

They answered, “Caesar’s.”

I said to them, “Then give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and give to God what belongs to God!”

They could not twist what I said, and they were astonished at My answer. They said no more.

The Sadducees Question Me

Next, some of the Sadducees, who claimed there is no resurrection, asked Me, “Teacher, Moses wrote that if a man’s brother dies and leaves a wife but no child, the man should take the widow and raise up a family for his brother. Now there were seven brothers. The first brother married a wife and died childless. Then the second, third, up to the seventh who died but left no child. Then the woman died. In the resurrection, whose wife will she be?”

I answered, “The people of this world marry and are married, but those who are worthy of the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are married. For they are like the angels of God; they neither marry nor are they given in marriage. Moses at the burning bush demonstrated this when he called the Lord ‘the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ The Lord is not the God of dead people but of living people, for all live in Me.”

Then some of the scribes answered Me, “Teacher, You have given an insightful answer.” They were afraid to ask Me any more questions.

Now I Ask a Question

Then I said to them, “How can anyone say that the Christ is David’s Son? In the book of Psalms, David said, ‘The Lord has said to my Lord, Sit at My right hand, until I make Your enemies the footstool of Your feet.’” Since David called Messiah Lord, then how can the Messiah be David’s son?”

I Denounce the Scribes and Pharisees

Then, openly speaking, so everyone could hear, I directed My words to My disciples, “Beware of the scribes who walk about in long robes and love to be greeted with praise in public places. They love to be seated in the best seats in the synagogues and to be recognized with honors at a banquet. These men take widows’ houses and cover up their greed with long prayers! They will receive a much greater sentence.”

Teaching About the Future

21 I looked to see rich people dropping money into the treasury. Then I saw a poor widow drop two small coins into the treasury. And I said, “Verily, this poor widow has dropped in more than all of the rich, for they gave out of their abundance, but she gave out of her poverty all that she had.”

The Mount of Olives Discourse

Some were talking about the temple and how beautiful it was decorated with stones. I said, “You may admire it, but the time is coming when one stone will not be left on another. Everything will be torn down.”

Then My disciples asked Me, “Teacher, when will these things happen and what is the sign that will predict it?”

So I said, “Be careful and do not be misled! Many will come claiming to be Messiah, and saying, ‘I am He,’ and ‘The time is near.’ Do not follow them. You will hear of wars and rumors of wars. Don’t be panic-stricken. These things must happen first, and then the end will come.”

Then I said to them, “One nation will go to war against another, and one kingdom against another. There will be earthquakes, pestilences, famines and dreadful events, and threatening signs in the sky. But before these things take place, they will arrest you, persecute you, and turn you over to synagogues to be put in prison. You will be brought before presidents and governors for My name’s sake. This will be your opportunity to testify for Me, so you must determine in your hearts how to make your defense. I will tell you what to say, and then your opponents will not be able to resist you and refute you. You will be betrayed by parents, brothers, relatives, and friends. They will kill some of you, and you will be continuously hated by everyone because you bear My

name. And yet not a single hair on your head will perish in hell. If you stand firm, you will establish your souls.”

Jerusalem Will Be Destroyed

“When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then understand that tribulation is near. Let those in Judea flee to the mountains, and those within the city flee from it. These are the days of tribulation when its predictions in the Scriptures will be fulfilled. Woe to pregnant women and those with nursing babies. There will be great tribulation in the land and persecution of this people. They will be killed by the edge of the sword or carried off as captives among the nations. Jerusalem will be trampled under the feet of the pagan until the times of the Gentiles come to completion.”

My Second Coming to Earth

“And there will be signs in the sun, moon, and stars. On earth, the nations will give up hope with no direction like the roaring of the sea and its waves. Men will faint with fear because of the things that will come on the world. Then they will see Me, the Son of Man, coming on a cloud with great power and glory. When these events begin to happen, look up and lift your heads, for your deliverance is near.”

Parable of the Fig Tree

Then I told them a parable. “Look carefully at the fig tree. When you see new branches shooting from their buds, you know that summer is near. So when you see these signs taking place, know that the kingdom of God is near. Verily I say to you, this generation will not pass away before these things take place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will never pass away.”

I have told you of all the destruction in the future. Trust Me to hold you in My hand in the future.

“Be on your guard so that you are not loaded down with self-pleasures, drunkenness, and worldly concerns. That day can catch you unawares like a trap. It will come on all who are living anywhere on the earth. So watch and

pray that you will have the strength to escape all these things that will take place. Make sure you take your stand in the presence of Me, the Son of Man.”

During the days I taught in the temple, but I spent the nights on the Mount of Olives. The people rose early in the morning to listen to Me in the temple.

My Final Days on Earth

Events on Wednesday

22The Festival of Bread without Yeast, also called the Passover, was drawing near. So the high priests and scribes sought how they could put Me to death, but they were afraid of how the people would respond. Satan entered into Judas Iscariot, one of My apostles. Judas went to discuss with the high priests and temple police how he could deliver Me to them. They were thrilled and agreed to pay him for it. Judas, in turn, accepted the deal and began to look for ways to deliver Me to them without getting the people involved.

Events on Thursday

Then the day of the Festival came, the day when the Passover lamb was sacrificed. So I sent Peter and John on a mission with these directions, “Go and prepare a place for us to eat the Passover meal.”

They asked Me, “Where should we prepare it?”

I answered, “When you enter the city you will see a man carrying a pitcher of water. Follow him to a house. Then say to the owner of the house, ‘Our Teacher says to you, “Show us the room where He can eat the Passover supper with His disciples.” ’ Then the owner will show you upstairs a large room. Make preparations there.”

I know about small things like a man carrying a jar of water. I also know about the small things that will happen to you. Commit the small things of your life to Me.

So they went, and it happened as I had said, and they prepared the Passover meal.

Celebrating the Passover

When it was time, I took My place at the table with the apostles about Me. I said, “I have a great passion for eating this Passover meal with you before I suffer. I will never again eat this meal with you until we are in the kingdom of God.” Then I received a cup, gave thanks, and said, “Take this and taste because I will not again drink from the vine until we are in the kingdom of God.”

Then I took bread, gave thanks, and broke it, and gave it to them saying, “This is My body which is broken for you. This is a memorial to Me.” After supper, I took a cup and said, “This cup represents the new covenant to be established by My blood, which is poured out for you.”

My Betrayer Is Predicted

“The hand of the one who betrays Me is on the table! Because I, the Son of Man, am going away, as it has been predetermined. How terrible it will be for that man who is My betrayer.” Then the apostles began to discuss among themselves which one was going to betray Me.

Then there arose a contention as to who should rank as greatest. But I said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles rule over people, and those who exercise authority are given the title of ‘Benefactor.’ But don’t do that. Rather, the greatest among you must be like the youngest and must lead by serving people. Who is the greater, the one sitting at the table or the servant who waits on him? Is it not those who sit at the table? I come to you as a servant who waits on you, and you have continued to support Me in my trials. Therefore, as My Father has given Me a kingdom, so I give you the privilege of eating and drinking at My table in My kingdom. You will sit on thrones to rule the twelve tribes of Israel.”

I Predict Peter’s Denial

“Simon, Simon, satan has asked for your soul to sift you like wheat, but I have prayed that your own faith should not fail. And Peter, after you have returned to Me, you must strengthen your brothers.”

I knew Peter would deny me. I also knew he would return to me. It was My grace that brought him back. That same grace is available to you

when you sin. This is your only hope of staying faithful. You can have that assurance that I will keep you from stumbling, and will lift you up to strengthen others.

But Peter protested, “Lord, I am ready to go to prison or death for You!”

But I said, “I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow before you deny three times that you know Me!”

Then I said to them, “When I sent you out without money or suitcase, or shoes, did you need anything?”

They answered, “We didn’t need anything.”

Then I said to them, “But now the man who has money must take it with him and a suitcase too. And the man who does not have a sword must sell his coat and buy one. For I tell you, what has been written about Me must be accomplished: ‘I was numbered with the transgressors.’ That prediction has to be accomplished.”

So they said, “Lord, we have two swords!”

And I answered them, “That is enough!”

I Agonized in Prayer in Gethsemane

Then I left to go up the Mount of Olives, as it was My habit of praying there. My disciples followed Me. When I reached the place, I said, “Pray that you may not be tempted.”

I withdrew about a stone’s throw from them to kneel down and pray, “Father, if You are willing, take this cup from Me. Yet not My will but Yours be done!”

An angel came to Me from heaven to strengthen Me. But I, being in agony, prayed earnestly so that My sweat became like drops of blood that dripped on the ground. I rose from prayer to go to the disciples but found them sleeping. I asked them, “Why are you sleeping? Rise and pray that you enter not into temptation.”

I Am Betrayed, Arrested, and Forsaken

While I was still speaking, a crowd came with Judas, one of the twelve, as their guide. He approached Me to kiss Me, but I replied, “Judas, do you betray Me, the Son of Man, with a kiss?”

The apostles saw what was about to take place, and asked, “Lord, shall we defend You with our swords now?” Then one of the apostles slashed the high priest’s servant and cut off his right ear.

But I intervened, “Permit Me to be arrested!” So I touched his ear and healed him. Then I said to the high priests, temple guards, and elders, who had come to arrest Me, “Have you come out with swords and clubs and treated Me as if I were a robber? When I was with you daily in the temple, you never tried to arrest Me! But in this darkness is your chance to do it.”

My Second Trial—Before Caiaphas

After they arrested Me and led Me away, they brought Me to the house of the high priest. Peter followed at a distance. A fire was kindled in the middle of the courtyard. Peter was sitting among those gathered for warmth.

A servant girl saw Peter sitting by the fire and said, “This fellow was with Jesus.”

But he denied it and said, “Woman, I do not know Him.”

On another occasion, a man recognized Peter and said, “You are one of them too.”

But Peter said, “Man, I am not.”

About an hour later, another man confidently said, “He certainly was with Jesus, for he is a Galilean!”

But Peter said, “Man, you don’t know what you are saying.”

While he was speaking, a rooster crowed.

Then I turned and looked at Peter. Peter remembered what I had said to him, “Before a rooster crows, you will deny me three times.” So Peter went out and wept bitterly.

Then the soldiers who had Me in custody whipped Me and mocked Me. They blindfolded Me and then said to Me, “Prophecy, who struck You!” And they continued to abuse Me.

The Third Trial—Before the Sanhedrin

As soon as the light of morning came, the elders, high priests, and scribes assembled to bring Me before the Sanhedrin. They demanded, “Tell us if You are the Messiah.”

But I answered, “If I tell you, you will not believe Me, and if I ask you a question, you will not answer Me. But after this, I, the Son of Man, will be seated at the right hand of God.”

Then they yelled at Me, “Are You the Son of God?”

And I answered, “Yes, I am.”

Then they concluded, “What further evidence do we need? We have heard blasphemy ourselves from His own mouth!”

My Crucifixion

The Fourth Trial—Before Pilate

23 Then all the Jewish leaders led Me to Pilate and brought the following charges against Me: “We have found this man destroying our nation and stopping people from paying taxes to Caesar, and He claims to be a king Himself.”

Then Pilate asked Me, “Are You the King of the Jews?”

And I answered him, “I am.”

Then Pilate said to the Jewish leaders and the crowd, “I find nothing worthy of a trial for this man.”

But they insisted, “He is starting a rebellion all over Judea. He began in Galilee, and now He is teaching here.”

Hearing this, Pilate asked if I were a Galilean. When he learned that I was under Herod’s jurisdiction, he sent Me to Herod because Herod was in Jerusalem at that time.

The Fifth Trial—Before Herod

Now Herod was anxious to see Me for he had wanted to see Me because of what he had heard about Me. Herod was hoping to see some miracle done by Me.

I do miracles for those who believe. I will give you faith to believe.

So Herod continued to question Me for a long time, but I did not answer him at all. Meanwhile, the high priests and the scribes were waiting to accuse Me. Then Herod and his soldiers tried to embarrass Me and made fun of Me. He put a royal robe on Me and sent Me back to Pilate. That day, Herod and Pilate became friends for they had previously been enemies.

Then Pilate called to himself the high priests, the leaders of the council, and the crowd, and said, “You brought this man to me on a charge of religious rebellion against the temple. I have examined Him in your presence and find Him not guilty of your charges. Nor does Herod, for he sent Him back to me. Indeed, Jesus has done nothing to deserve the death penalty. I will beat Him and let Him go.”

It was the custom for him to release one from prison at the festival. But the crowd began to shout, “Away with this fellow; give us Barabbas!” He was a man who had been put in prison for starting a riot and for murder.

Again Pilate appealed to them to let Me go.

But they continued shouting, “Crucify Him, crucify Him!” So Pilate spoke to them a third time, “Why, what is His crime? I find nothing that deserves the death penalty. I will beat Him and let Him go.”

But the crowd and religious leaders continued to demand with loud voices that I should be crucified. Then Pilate allowed their demands to be carried out. Pilate released Barabbas, who had been put in prison for riot and murder but turned Me over to be crucified.

I Am Crucified

As they were leading Me away, they grabbed a man, named Simon from Cyrene, as he was entering the city from the rural area, and made him carry My cross on his shoulders. A vast crowd of people followed Me and women were mourning and weeping. I turned and said to the women, “Women of Jerusalem, stop weeping for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. A time is coming when it will be said, ‘Happy are the childless women and women who have never given birth and nursed babies!’ Then people will cry out to the mountains, ‘Fall upon us, and cover us up!’ If they do this evil when the wood is green, what will they do when it is dry?”

Two others, criminals, were also led out to be crucified with Me. When we came to the place called Golgotha, “The Skull,” they crucified Me and the criminals, one on My right hand and the other on My left hand. They cast lots

to divide My clothes among them. All the while people stood around looking on.

The members of the Sanhedrin scoffed at Me and said, “He saved others, now let’s see if He can save Himself. Let’s see if He really is God’s Messiah, His Chosen One!”

The soldiers also made fun of Me offering Me vinegar, and saying, “Save Yourself if You are the King of the Jews!” A shingle was nailed above My head with these words, “THE KING OF THE JEWS.”

One of the criminals on his cross kept abusing Me saying, “If You are the Christ, then save Yourself and us.”

But the other criminal rebuked him, “You should fear God because you are suffering the same penalty as He. We suffer justly because we are getting what we deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.”

Then the criminal asked, “Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!”

I answered him, “This day you will be with Me in paradise.”

It was about noon when darkness covered the area, and it stayed dark until three o’clock. The sun failed to shine. At that time, the curtain before the Most Holy Place in the temple was torn in two. Then I cried with a loud shout, “Father, I commit My spirit to You.” Then I breathed My last.

The captain of the soldiers saw what had happened and prayed to God, “Certainly He was innocent!” When the crowds who had come to view the crucifixion had seen what took place, they returned to the city. All My friends, and the women who also followed Me from Galilee, stood at a distance.

My Burial in Joseph’s Tomb

A man named Joseph, a good and upright man, a member of the Sanhedrin who had not voted to condemn Me, was there. He came from the Jewish town, Arimathea, and he was waiting for the kingdom of God. Joseph went to Pilate to ask for My body. Then he took the body down from the cross, wrapped it in a linen sheet, and laid it in a tomb carved out of rock, where no one had yet been laid. It was the preparation day, and the Sabbath was just beginning. So the women, who had followed Me from Galilee, watched Joseph closely to see where the tomb was located and where My body was laid.

In the Grave

Then they went home to prepare spices and perfumes. They rested on the Sabbath according to the Old Testament commandment.

My Ascension Back to Heaven

The Visit of the Women to My Tomb

24On the first day of the week, before the sun came up, they went to the tomb with spices to prepare My body. They found the stone rolled back from the entrance to the tomb. When they went inside, they did not find My body. And as they were looking around, two men in glistening robes suddenly stood beside them. The women were afraid, and turned their faces to the ground. The two men said to them, “Why are you looking for Jesus among the dead? He is alive. He is not here but has risen. Remember, He told you that while He was still in Galilee. He said that He, the Son of Man, was going to be turned over to evil men to be crucified, but that He would rise again on the third day.”

Then the women remembered My words and returned to Jerusalem from the tomb and told all those things to the eleven and then told the others. The women were Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary, James’ mother. But because their report seemed to be nonsense to them, they didn’t believe the women.

Peter ran to the tomb and stooped down to see the linen cloths lying there, but nothing else. Then Peter went home, wondering what happened.

An Appearance on the Road to Emmaus

That afternoon, two of My followers were on their way home to their village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking together about all those things that had taken place that day. As they were discussing the events of the day, I joined them as they continued their journey. But their eyes were blinded to Me, and I kept them from recognizing Me.

How many times have I come alongside you and you didn't recognize My presence? I will open your blind spiritual eyes to see My presence.

Then I said to them, “What is this news that you are talking about as you walk?”

The one named Cleopas answered, “Are You the only visitor to Jerusalem who did not know about the things that have happened these past few days?”

And I said to them, “What things?”

They answered, “The talk of the town is about Jesus of Nazareth. All the people believe He is a prophet, mighty in deed and word. The high priests and religious leaders turned Him over to be sentenced to death to be crucified. But we kept hoping Jesus is the Messiah who was coming to set Israel free. Today is the third day since His death occurred. But this morning some women who follow Him have astounded us! They went to the tomb early and could not find His body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels who told them He was alive. Then some followers went to the tomb and found it exactly as the women described, but they didn’t see Him.”

Then I said to them, “O slow of mind and heart to believe all that the prophets have said! Did they not teach that the Messiah had to suffer and then enter His glory?” Then I began with Moses and taught My way through the prophets and explained to them all the passages in the Scriptures about Myself.

As we approached their village, I made as though I were going farther, but they urged Me, “Come and stay with us, for it is getting toward evening and the day is almost over.”

So I entered in to stay with them. Then I took My place at the table. I received the loaf, and blessed it and broke it, and handed it to them. Then their spiritual eyes were opened, and they recognized Me. Then I vanished from them.

They said to each other, “Did not our hearts burn as He talked to us on the road, as He explained the Scriptures to us?”

Immediately they got up and returned to Jerusalem and found the eleven and other followers all together. They heard them saying, “It’s really true! The Lord has risen from the dead. He even appeared to Peter!”

Then the two disciples told the others that I had risen from the dead and had been seen by Simon. Then the two told what had occurred on the road, and how they recognized Me when I broke the loaf.

The Upper Room on Sunday Evening

While they were discussing these things, I stood among them and said, “Peace to you!”

They were startled and fearful; some even thought they saw a ghost. But I said, “Why are you so upset, and why do you have doubts in your hearts? Examine My hands and My feet, for it is I, Myself. Touch Me to see for yourselves, for a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.”

After this, I showed them My hands and My feet. So while they were still doubting and wondering, I asked, “Have you anything to eat?” They gave Me a piece of broiled fish. They saw Me take it and eat it.

I Ascend Back to Heaven

Then I said to them, “Let Me tell you again what I said while I was with you: that everything that is written about Me in the law of Moses, in the prophets, and in the Psalms, had to be fulfilled.” Then I opened their spiritual eyes so they might understand the Scriptures.

Then I said to them, “The Scriptures say the Christ would suffer for sins, rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance in My name as the condition for the forgiveness of sins should be preached to all nations. You are to begin at Jerusalem as witnesses to these things.

“I will send on You the promise of My Father. But you must stay right here in the city and pray until you are anointed with power from on high.” Then I led them out of the city as far as Bethany, and I lifted up My hands and blessed them. While I was blessing them, I was lifted up from them and was taken up to heaven. And with joy, they went back to Jerusalem, and continued in the temple praying and praising God.

I AM JESUS

The Son of God

The Gospel of John



I led John to write a book about My Godhead. The key passage is, “But these are written that you may believe that I am the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in My name.” When you believe in Me for salvation, you have eternal life. I will transform you by My indwelling power. My supernatural promise to you is, “I in you, and you in Me.” In salvation, I come to dwell in you on this earth so you can live for Me. That means you are in Me as I intercede for you at the right hand of My Father. I intercede for the forgiveness of your sins, and I pray to My Father so you will live victorious for Me. As you read this book, you will discover My relationship with God My Father. I came from heaven to the earth I created, and gave My life on the cross, and then I returned to My Father in heaven. I did all of this for you so that you could believe in me and have eternal life. Be sure that you believe that I am the Christ, and promise that you will love others as I love you.

I Am God

1 I Am God the Son, who is from the beginning. I tell all about God, My heavenly Father. I was face to face with God throughout eternity because I am God.

And without Me, nothing was created. I do all the things that God, My heavenly Father, will do. I have all life in Myself and give life to all My creation. I am the life of God who is the Light to all who are lost in a dark, forbidding world. I shine in the hostile darkness, but the darkness doesn't even know I exist.

Commit yourself to My message, which is written in the Word of God. It is eternal and perfect. You will learn My message, believe My message, and share it with others.

John Is My Witness

John the Baptizer was a prophet sent by Me, who came to tell all about the shining Light, that through Me, the Light, all might be saved. John the Baptizer was not the saving light but was the human sent to point everyone to Me, the Light of the world.

I am the true saving Light who offers spiritual light to everyone in the world. I came to the world that I created, but those living in the world did not recognize Me as their Creator Savior. I came to My own people—the Jews—and they refused to recognize Me.

But as many as recognize Me, and receive Me, I will make them children of God, simply because they believe in the authority of My name. They will be born again by My power, which is not a birth of blood, or the choice of people, or of flesh, but of God.

I had all the celestial glory of heaven, but I clothed My heavenly glory with human flesh. God living in the flesh was the greatest glory of all. I am the uniquely begotten Son and have all the grace and truth of God. John the Baptizer said of Me, “This is the Messiah whom I introduced to the world. Jesus comes after me, but is preeminently before me.”

I Am the Eternal Word, who created the universe, who had eternal fellowship with God My Father, and who became flesh when I was born of the Virgin Mary. You should worship and praise Me for all I am and do. I created you and everything in this universe. Worship Me for My unlimited power and greatness.

My grace was offered, and your need of grace was fulfilled. The law of Moses condemned you to death, but grace and truth, by Me, gave you life. You could never have seen the eternal Father, but I came from His heart to show you what your Father is like.

Commit your life to Me. I became flesh and lived among the mortals I created. I am the truth and spoke the truth to you. You can experience the riches of eternal life because of Me.

Religious Leaders Question John the Baptizer

The religious establishment sent delegates to ask John the Baptizer this question, “Who are you?” John told them he was not the Messiah. Then they asked, “Are you Elijah or the prophet who will come at the end of the age?”

John said, “No.”

They said, “Give us an answer to report to our authorities.”

John quoted Isaiah, answering, “I am a voice crying in the wilderness; prepare the way for the Messiah.” They were Pharisees who questioned him. The religious delegates asked why he was baptizing with water. He answered, “I baptize with water, but there is One standing among us who will baptize with the Spirit of God. He who is coming after me is preferred before me because He lived before me. These things happened on the banks of the Jordan River, but I came baptizing so He might be revealed to Israel.”

My Baptism

The next day John saw Me coming to him and told the crowd, “See that Man. He is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” He said this to let everyone know I was the One coming after him. John said, “I didn’t know who He was.” John the Baptizer added, “I didn’t know Jesus was to be the

Messiah until I saw the Spirit come upon Him like a dove. But the Lord who sent me to baptize with water told me, ‘The One on whom the Spirit comes, and stops there, this is the One who is the Messiah. He will baptize with the Holy Spirit.’” Then John said, “I then noted and believed He is the Son of God.”

I Meet Six Disciples

The next day John the Baptizer stood with two of his disciples; as they saw Me walking, he said, “Behold the Lamb of God.”

As Andrew and John were following Me, I turned to ask, “What do you want?” That evening Andrew and John talked at length to Me.

The next day Andrew told his brother Simon, “We have found the Messiah,” and Andrew brought his brother to Me. I changed Simon’s name to Peter, which means he was firm and solid as a stone.

The next day when I saw Philip, I said, “Follow Me.” Philip was from the same hometown as Andrew and Peter.

Philip told his friend Nathaniel, “We have found the Messiah.”

Nathaniel was skeptical, “Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?”

Philip just said, “Come and see.”

When I saw Nathaniel, I said, “You are a sincere Israelite, you are an honest seeker.”

Nathaniel asked, “How do you know me?”

I revealed My divine omnipresence by saying, “I saw you talking under the fig tree to Philip when he told you about Me.”

Nathaniel responded, “Jesus, You are the Son of God. You are the King of Israel.”

Nathaniel believed in Me because of what Philip told him; but I said, “You’ll see much greater things than this. You’ll see heaven opened and the angels of God going up and down upon Me, the Son of Man.”

Tell your family and friends about Me, and bring them to know Me as their Lord and Savior. You can find answers to all of your questions in Me. Focus your sight on Me, and see the greatness of My character.

My First Miracle

2 On the seventh day after My baptism, I was in Cana where a marriage ceremony was held; My mother was also there. My six disciples and I were invited to the meal. When the wine ran out, My mother said to Me, “There is no more wine.”

I answered, “Why do you turn to Me for help? It is not the time to reveal who I am.”

My mother told the servants, “Do whatever He tells you.”

There were six stone water pots available to them, and each one held twenty to thirty gallons. I said to the servants, “Fill them to the brim with water.” Then I said, “Take them to the master of ceremonies.” The servants carried the water to the one in charge. When they had arrived, the water had turned to wine; then the master of ceremonies tasted the wine. The servants who carried the water pots knew what happened. “Why have you kept back the best wine until now? People usually serve their best wine first. When the guests have drunk a lot, then a poorer quality is served.”

This was the first miracle I did that manifested My glory, and My disciples believed in Me.

After this, I changed My base of operation from Nazareth to Capernaum, which is located by the Sea of Galilee.

I Cleanse the Temple

When the Passover came in the spring of AD 26, I went up to Jerusalem with My disciples. I found people in the temple selling animals and birds for sacrifice—cattle, sheep, and pigeons. Money changers had set up tables to exchange foreign coins into Jewish money because the foreign coins had images of false gods. I made a whip out of some rope, and drove the animals out of the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers. I commanded, “Stop turning my Father’s house into a market to sell your sacrifices.”

The disciples were amazed at My anger and said, “His devotion to the Lord’s house burns in Him like a fire.”

The Jewish leaders challenged Me, “What miracle can You show us that gives You the authority to do this?”

I replied, “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it up in three days.”

They said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple. Do You think You can rebuild it in three days?” But I was speaking about the temple of My body. After the resurrection, My disciples remembered I spoke about this event earlier; it was not about rebuilding the temple. While I was in Jerusalem for the Passover, many believed in Me, because they saw the miracles I did. But I did not entrust Myself to them because I knew what was in their hearts.

There comes a time when you must no longer tolerate heresy and evil, but you must confront evil by prayer and action. That’s what I did when I cleansed the temple at the beginning of My ministry and the end of My ministry.

A Night Interview With Nicodemus

3 Nicodemus was a Jewish leader who observed the law. He came to Me at night to compliment Me, saying, “Jesus, You are a Teacher who comes from God, because You perform miracles that couldn’t be done without God’s help.”

I told him, “I say to you, you must be born again to see the kingdom of God.”

Nicodemus replied, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he go back into his mother’s womb to be born again?”

I answered, “I say to you unless you are born again of water and the Spirit, you will not enter the kingdom of God. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of Spirit is Spirit. Do not be surprised when I say you must be born again. The wind blows anywhere it pleases; you can hear its sound, but you can’t tell where it comes from or goes. That describes those who are born of the Spirit, and how the Spirit bestows life on them.”

Nicodemus asked, “How can this happen?”

I answered, “You are a respected teacher, yet you do not understand these things.” I continued, “I say to you, I am telling you what I know, but you will not believe Me. If you do not believe what I say about this world, how can you believe heavenly things? Since I have come to earth from heaven, I can explain heavenly things to you. As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so, by looking to the serpent people could repent. In the

same way, I, the Son of Man, will be lifted up so that everyone who looks to Me in belief will be saved. My Father loved everyone in the world so much that He gave Me, His only begotten Son, to die for each of them. Now everyone who believes in Me will not perish but will have eternal life. For My Father did not send Me to condemn the people of the world, but that they might be saved through belief in Me. No one who believes in Me will be condemned, but those who refuse to believe in My name are condemned already. The verdict of death is handed down because light has shined on the people of the world, but people love darkness more than light, because of their love of evil things. Everyone who continually does evil things hates the light and rejects it because it exposes their motives and actions. Those who believe the truth and come to the Light will be saved. Their deeds verify their faith that they are of God.”

The death I talk about is eternal separation from God My Father in a place called Hell, where the fire never dies and is never put out. But God loved you so much that He sent Me to die, for your sins, on the cross. Now, if you place your complete trust in me, you will never perish, but you will have eternal fellowship with Me in heaven. I want you to know that you can have this eternal life just as I said to Nicodemus, “You must be born again.”

My Baptism and John the Baptizer’s Baptism

My disciples and I left Jerusalem for the countryside where many people were baptized by My disciples. John the Baptizer was baptizing nearby at Aenon, for he had not yet been thrown into prison. Many also came there for baptism. The Jewish leaders tried to tell the disciples of John the Baptizer that My baptism was better than their baptism, and there arose a dispute.

John’s disciples came to tell John, “The man you baptized, the One you called Messiah, He is baptizing more than you are.”

John the Baptizer answered, “God in heaven gives each man the work he is to do. I told you I am not the Messiah. I am sent to prepare the way for Messiah. The crowds—the Bride of Christ—will naturally go where Christ the Bridegroom is located. I am a friend of the Bridegroom. I rejoiced when I answered His voice calling to me. He—Jesus—must increase, I—John the Baptizer—must decrease. He comes from heaven, and He is greater than all.

We who are born on this earth only understand the things of earth. He testifies what He has seen and heard, and no one receives His testimony. Those who believe in Jesus have discovered the truth of God that has come from heaven. He speaks the words of God because He has the Spirit of God on Him. The Father loves Jesus, the Son, and has given everything to Him. Those who believe in the Son already have eternal life, and those who have not believed in the Son do not have eternal life, but the punishment of God rests on them.”

The Story of the Samaritan Woman

4 I learned that the Pharisees were told that I was winning and baptizing more followers than John the Baptizer. Although I didn't actually baptize, My disciples did it, so I left Judea to go home. When I left Jerusalem, I surprisingly went home through Samaria, because the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans. When I came near Sychar, I sat on Jacob's well because I was worn out from the hot journey, and it was noon. A Samaritan woman came to draw water from the well. I was sitting there and said, "Give Me a drink." The disciples had gone into the town to get food.

She was surprised that a Jew would ask because the Jews despised the Samaritans. She said, "Why would You, a Jew, ask water from me, a Samaritan?"

I said, "If you only knew God's gift and who it is that offers you water, you would have asked Me for a drink, and I would have given you living water."

The woman replied, "You don't have a bucket; how could You get water from this deep well?" She continued, "Are You greater than Jacob who drank from it with his family and cattle?"

When you are thirsty, I will come and fill your cup. You can drink of My presence. That water satisfies and refreshes your spirit.

I answered, "Whoever drinks this water will get thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I give will never be thirsty again. The water I give will be an artesian well inside them that gushes up into eternal life."

The woman said, “Give me some of that water so I will never get thirsty again, and have to come to this well for water.”

I abruptly said, “Go call your husband!”

She answered, “I have no husband.”

I replied, “You have correctly answered because you have had five husbands, and now you’re not married to the one you’re living with.”

She exclaimed, “You must be a prophet to know this.” Then she argued, “Our fathers worshiped here. The Jews say Jerusalem is the place to worship.”

I interrupted to say, “The hour is coming when no one will worship on this mountain or in Jerusalem. You don’t know whom you worship, but the Jews know whom they worship. In fact, the hour is already here when true worshipers will worship My Father in Spirit and truth. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in their hearts and truthfully.”

The woman said, “I know that Messiah is coming; He will tell us everything when He comes.”

I answered, “I am He.”

Then My disciples came and saw that I talked with a woman. “Why are You talking with her?”

The woman left her water pot and hurried off to tell the men in the village, “Come see a man who told me everything I’ve ever done.” She asked, “Could this man be the Messiah?” They left the town to meet Me.

I will give you a passion for sharing your testimony with needy people, like the Samaritan woman. You will tell your non-Christian friends, “Come see a Man who knows everything about me.”

Meanwhile, the disciples told Me to eat, but I said, “I have food to eat that you don’t know about.” The disciples thought someone else had brought Me food. I said, “My food is doing the will of My Father and completing His work. People say, ‘Harvest comes four months after planting,’ But I say, ‘Look around at the fields, they are already ripe for harvest.’ Everything is ready for the reaper to go to work to bring in the ‘grain’ of eternal life; then the sower and reaper will rejoice together.” Then I explained, “One sows, and another reaps. I send you to reap where you didn’t sow, and you get rewards for their effort.”

Many Samaritans believed in Me because the woman said, “Come see a man who told me everything I’ve ever done.” The Samaritans begged Me to stay with them, and I stayed two days, and many got saved.

The Samaritan men told the woman, “Now we believe because of what we have heard for ourselves, not just because of what you said.”

After two days, I left and continued to Galilee. But that was My home area, so I said, “A prophet is not respected in his home country.” But when I got to Galilee, the crowds welcomed Me.

Healing the Nobleman’s Son

I returned to Cana where I had turned water to wine. There, an official from Herod’s court came begging Me to heal his son. The official had sought to find Me in the area because his son was very sick. I said, “Why is it that none will believe in Me unless they see miracles?”

The official answered, “Come down to Capernaum and heal my son before he dies.”

I answered, “Go home, your son will live.” The official believed My words and turned to start his journey home. While he was on the road, his servants met him to say his son had recovered. The official asked what time had the fever broke; the servant told him, “4 p.m.” The father realized that was the same hour when I said, “Your son will live.” This was the second sign-miracle I did in Cana, and the official and his family believed in Me.

Proof That I Am God

5 I obeyed the Old Testament command to attend the Festival of Passover at Jerusalem at the end of My first full year of ministry. I went by the pool of Bethesda, a name that means “House of Mercy.” There were five porches where a great number of sick invalids were waiting for an angel to come and stir the waters in the pool. The sick believed that the first one into the water would automatically get healed. There was a man who had waited unsuccessfully for thirty-eight years. I went only to him because he had been there a long time. I asked, “Would you like to be healed?”

The lame man answered, “I don’t have anyone to put me in the waters after it is stirred up. When I am going to the water, someone jumps in before

me.”

I said, “Take up your bedroll and walk!” Immediately, the man was healed, and he picked up his bedroll and walked.

The healed man walked through the crowd to the temple. The Jews told him it was wrong to carry any burden, even a bedroll, on the Sabbath. The man told them, “The One who healed me said, ‘Take up your bedroll and walk.’”

The Jews asked, “Who healed you and told you to break the Sabbath law?” But the healed man did not know who healed him because I left him to walk through the crowds.

Later, I found the healed man in the temple and told him, “Go and don’t do the sin anymore that was responsible for this lame condition, because a worse thing will happen if you do.” The healed man went and told the Jews that it was Me who healed him. The Jews confronted Me because I told the healed man to carry his bedroll on the Sabbath.

I answered the Jewish leaders, “My Father, who is just like Me, has worked up until now, but now I work.” The Jewish leaders sought to kill Me because I said I was just like My Father, and because I had broken their law, and because I said the Father and Son are equal in nature.

I Am Equal in Nature, Power, and Authority

I answered the Jewish leaders, “I say to you, I do nothing by Myself. But when I see the things God My Father does, I do the same things. God the Father and God the Son are equal in power.” Then I said, “My Father loves Me as His Son and shows Me everything He does. My Father will do greater miracles than healing the lame, so you’ll marvel. As My Father raises the dead and gives them life, so I, the Son of God, will also raise the dead. The Father and Son are equal in authority.

“My Father does not judge the sins of everyone. All judgment is given to Me. He who does not honor Me honors not My Father.”

I said, “He who receives My Word and believes on Me, has eternal life and will not be judged for his sins, but has passed from death unto eternal life.

“I tell you, an hour has been coming, but now it has arrived, when spiritually dead people will hear My words and receive eternal life. My Father has this life in Himself, and I also have it and give it to those who believe in

Me. My Father has given Me the authority to execute judgment; therefore, the time is coming when all in their graves will hear My voice and be raised. They who have obeyed My Father will be raised to the resurrection of life. They who have disobeyed My Father will be raised to the resurrection of the damned.” I told them, “I can do nothing by Myself, but I do the will of My Father who sent Me.”

Four Proofs That I Am God

John the Baptizer

I said, “No one can bear witness of himself, and have other people believe him. If I only tell how great I am, don’t listen to Me. John the Baptizer told you about Me, and he told the truth. The Old Testament said at the mouth of two witnesses shall every testimony be established. The testimony of John the Baptizer was a light that shined, so people could believe what he said about Me.”

My Miracles

“But the testimony of My miracles was even greater. They proved that My Father sent Me into the world.”

God My Father’s Voice

“A third testimony is the voice of My Father that thundered at My baptism. Immediately coming out of the water, I saw heaven open, and the Spirit descended on Me like a dove. I heard a voice from heaven say, “You are My Son whom I love; I am well pleased with You.”

The Scriptures

I told them, “Search the Scriptures, these words testify of Me that I am from My Father, but you will not come to Me to have eternal life. You think you have eternal life, but you don’t. Because you refuse to believe in Me, you do not have the love of God in you.” I said, “I have come in My Father’s name, and you will not receive Me, yet you receive others coming in their own

name. You seek glory from other Jewish leaders and do not seek the glory that comes from My heavenly Father. I will not accuse you in the final judgment. Moses whom you revere, he will accuse you in the judgment. If you believe Moses, and you don't, then you would believe Me, because Moses predicted my coming."

Search the Scriptures to know Me in salvation and to know Me in order to grow in grace. I will open your spiritual eyes as you study the Bible. May you find My presence concealed in the written Word.

Two Miracles and a Lesson

6 There was a great multitude following Me, so I went up into a mountain near Tiberias. The multitude followed Me because of My miracles, and because I healed the sick. I then went up into the mount to sit with My disciples. We were on our way to Jerusalem to celebrate the springtime festival of Passover. I surveyed the multitude, and then said to Philip, "Where can we buy food for them?" I knew that I would feed them with a miracle. I was testing Philip's faith in Me.

Be faithful when you are tested. Those who endure testing for a season know that joy comes in the morning.

Philip answered, "If we had the day's wages of two hundred servants, there would only be a little bit for each one."

Andrew heard the conversation and found a young boy with five loaves of bread and two small fish. Then Andrew said, "This isn't enough for all the crowd."

I said, "Make the men sit down in groups of fifty and one hundred to make distribution easy." They sat on the grass in the area. I looked to heaven to bless the food, then I gave it to the disciples, and they distributed it to the multitude. Everyone had as much as they could eat. Then I said to My disciples, "Gather the food that is left over." So they gathered up twelve full baskets.

After the people saw the miracle, they said, “This is the One whom the prophet Jeremiah predicted was coming into the world to feed us bread.”

I will feed you when you are spiritually hungry, just as I fed the five thousand by the sea.

I Walked on the Water, I Can Carry You

The multitude rushed toward Me. They wanted to make Me King, but I went into the hills to pray. When evening came, the disciples went down to the lakeside and got into a boat heading toward the other side toward Capernaum. It was dark, and I was not with them. A storm came up, and the winds blew threateningly. They rowed three or four miles but were not making headway. Then they saw Me walking on the sea towards them. I said, “It is I, do not be afraid.” They received Me into their boat, and immediately we were on land.

Sermon on the Bread of Life

The next day the crowd walked around the sea toward Capernaum, and they saw only one boat the disciples used. However, there were other boats that came from the place where I fed the multitude. People had gotten into these boats to follow Me. So they asked Me, “Rabbi, how did You get here?”

I answered and said, “You seek Me because you saw the miracles. Yesterday you ate of the bread and fish.” I told them, “Don’t work for food that perishes, but work for the bread of eternal life which I, the Son of Man, offer you.”

The crowd asked, “What must we do to perform the works of God which You do?”

I answered, “The work of God is to believe in Me, the Son whom the Father has sent.”

The crowd answered, “Do a miracle for us so we can believe in You and follow You. Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness that Moses gave to them during the forty years of wilderness wanderings.”

Then I said to them, “I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you bread from heaven. My Father gives true bread out of heaven. I am the bread of God who comes from heaven to give life to the world.”

The crowd said, "Please give us this bread."

I said, "I am the Bread of Life. He who comes to Me will never hunger. He who believes in Me will never thirst, but you don't believe in Me. All My Father gives Me shall come to Me, and I will not turn them away because I come from heaven to do the will of My Father and not My will. It is my Father's will that I should lose no one who believes in Me, and I should raise them up in the resurrection. And this is the will of My Father that everyone who believes in My Father will have eternal life and that I will raise them up in the last day."

The Jewish leaders complained because I said, "I am the bread who comes from heaven." They argued, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph? We know His father and mother; how can He say, 'I come from heaven?'"

I answered, "Don't complain! No one comes to Me except My Father draws him, and I will raise him up in the last day. It is written in Isaiah, 'All will be taught by God, everyone who believes what I say will come to Me.' No one has seen My Father except Me, the One who comes to you from My Father. I have seen My Father. I say to you, the one who believes has eternal life. I am the Bread of Life. I am the Bread who comes from heaven that you may eat and not die. The Jewish forefathers ate manna in the wilderness, and they died. If you eat of My Bread, you will live forever, and the bread I give you is Myself, it is given for the world."

The Jewish leaders argued among themselves saying, "How can this man give us Himself to eat?"

I answered them, "I say to you, except you believe in Me, and accept Me as Savior, you will not have eternal life. He who believes in Me and accepts Me as Savior has eternal life, and I will raise him up from the dead in the last day. I am true spiritual meat to eat, and true spiritual water to drink; and the one who believes in Me, and accepts Me as Savior, will live in Me and I will live in Him. I live, because the living Father sent Me, and the one who believes in Me and accepts Me as Savior, will live because of Me. This is the Bread Who comes from heaven. It's not like the bread the forefathers ate and died. He who eats this Bread will live forever." I ended these things I taught in Capernaum.

I Am the Bread of Life. I will provide physical food for you when you are hungry. I will fill you spiritually with the Bread of Life when you

are weak. Accept Me today as your Savior, and live forever with Me in heaven.

Many of My disciples said this sermon was too difficult to believe. But I knew they were complaining, so I said, “If this sermon causes you problems, what will you think when you see Me ascending back to heaven where I was previously? The words I spoke are Spirit and life; the Spirit will give you eternal life, the flesh cannot help you. Some of you have not put your faith in Me.” I knew from the beginning those who believed in Me, and who would betray Me. So I said, “No one can come to Me except My Father draws Him.” Therefore, many disciples stopped following Me.

Then I said to the twelve, “Will you also stop following Me?”

Peter answered, “Who else can we follow? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know You are the Messiah.”

I answered them, “I chose all twelve of you; yet one of you is a devil.” I was referring to Judas Iscariot, the one who would betray Me.

The Coming of the Holy Spirit

7After this, I stayed in Galilee because the Jewish leaders sought to kill Me in Judea. The Festival of Shelters was approaching, and every Jewish male was to attend once. My unsaved brothers counseled Me to go to the Festival of Shelters in Jerusalem. They said, “Go do miracles so the multitude will believe You and follow You. A person who wants to be known doesn’t do things in secret, but he manifests himself to the world.”

My Unbelieving Brothers

My brothers did not believe in Me. I told them, “This is not the hour for Me to manifest Myself. The world does not hate you, but it hates Me because I tell them their works are evil. It’s not the time for Me to manifest Myself,” so I didn’t do what they suggested. After My brethren went to the festival in Jerusalem, I privately went on an out-of-the-way road, arriving in the middle of the week.

I Attend the Festival of Shelters

The Jewish leaders were looking everywhere saying, “Where is Jesus?” The crowd was confused, some said, “Jesus was a good man.” Others said, “He leads the multitude astray.” Yet no one supported Me publicly because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders.

I went into the temple on Wednesday and taught. Everyone marveled at My knowledge because I hadn’t graduated from the best schools. I answered, “I don’t think up the things I teach, this doctrine comes from My heavenly Father. If anyone is yielded to do My Father’s will, he shall understand this doctrine whether this is My idea or My Father’s. He who does his own will also seek his own glory, but he who seeks to glorify My Father, there is no unrighteousness in him. Moses gave you the law, but none of you keeps it; none of you is righteous before God.” I said, “Why do you want to kill Me?”

The Jewish leaders said, “You have a demon because You think someone is trying to kill You.”

I said, “I healed a lame man on the Sabbath eighteen months ago, and you hate Me for it. Moses gave you the law to circumcise a boy, and you circumcise on the Sabbath, yet you are angry with Me because I healed on the Sabbath day. Aren’t healing and circumcision both a work of God? Let’s judge according to God’s perfect judgment. Did we not both do right on the Sabbath?”

The crowd began talking among themselves, “Isn’t this the man the leaders want to kill; yet they say nothing when He speaks openly? Maybe they think He is our messianic Deliverer, so they don’t do anything to Him.”

I preached loudly to the crowd, “You think you know Me, and you think you know where I come from, but you don’t really know Me. My Father, who sent Me, knows Me, and I know Him because I come from Him.”

The crowd wanted to take Me to the Jewish leaders, but no one laid a hand on Me because My hour had not come. Yet many in the crowd believed in Me saying, “The Messiah won’t do more miracles than this man has done.”

When the Jewish leaders heard I was preaching to the multitude, they sent officers to arrest Me. I responded, “I will be with you for only a little while, then I’ll go to the One who sent Me. You will look for Me, but not find Me because I’m going where you can’t come.”

The crowd talked among themselves asking, “Where is He going that we can’t find Him? Is He going to the Jews in the dispersion or is He going to

teach Gentiles?” Also, they asked, “What does He mean when He says we can’t go where He is going?”

God, the Holy Spirit

On Sunday, the last day of the Festival of Shelters, when thousands of priests were parading with pots of water to pour out as a drink offering to God, I shouted to the crowd, “If anyone is thirsty, come to Me for satisfaction. He who believes on Me will have living water flowing out of his inner being.” I was referring to the indwelling Holy Spirit, but the Holy Spirit had not yet been given because I had not yet gone to glory.

Someone, who had been in the crowd, said of Me, “Jesus is a true prophet!”

Others said, “He is the Messiah!”

But the crowd argued, “The Messiah doesn’t come from Gentiles, but from Bethlehem, the village where David was born.” The crowd was divided because of Me, and no one laid a hand on Me.

The Jewish leaders asked the officers why they didn’t arrest Me. They answered, “No one speaks like Him.” Some said, “This man is not the Messiah. We know this man comes from Nazareth, but we don’t know where Messiah comes from.”

The leaders rebuked them, “Are you also deceived by this Man? Have any of our leaders believed Him?”

The Pharisees said, “The crowd is cursed because they don’t know the law.”

Nicodemus, by this time a believer, said to them, “Does our law judge a man before we hear Him?”

The leaders ridiculed Nicodemus, accusing him of coming from Galilee, “Search the record; no prophet comes out of Galilee.” After the festival was over, they all went home.

I invite you to come to Me and drink of the Water of Life freely, to find energy and satisfaction. When you are weak, come to drink of Me for strength to continue on. When you can’t find happiness or satisfaction, come to Me to drink and to find purpose in life, and peace. I will fill you with My presence.

An Argument With Religious Leaders

8 I went to the Mount of Olives for the night, but early the following morning I went to the temple and sat down in the middle of the multitude to teach. The religious leaders threw a woman in the middle of the crowd who was caught in the very act of adultery. The leaders said to Me, “This woman was caught in the very act of adultery. The law demands that she be stoned, but what do You say we should do?”

The Jews used this occasion to try and trap Me so they would have an accusation against Me. I stooped to write with My finger on the ground, but the leaders continued to question Me. Then I stopped to say, “He who has not committed this self-same sin, let him cast the first stone.” Again I stooped to write on the ground, then the eldest leader left first and eventually all the other leaders left. Then I said to the woman, “Where are those who accuse you of sin?”

She answered, “They are not here to accuse me.”

I said, “Neither do I accuse you, go from here and sin no more.”

There will be times when you won't know which way to turn. I will shine a light in your soul, so you will know the plan I have for your life. I Am the light that brightens your path. Come walk with Me, and I will show you where to go. With My light, you will see dangers on the path as well as safe places when you need protection from danger.

I Argue With the Religious Leaders

I said, “I am the light of the world, those following Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.”

The religious leaders snarled, “You bear witness to Yourself. You are bragging and lying.”

I answered them, “My claim is true, I know where I came from, and I know where I am going. But you don't know anything about Me. You judge according to the flesh; you don't know the facts. I will not judge you now, but I will in the future. The law says to accept a statement if two agree about what

happened. Then I am one witness to My claims, and My Father is the other witness.”

“Where is the Father?” they asked.

I answered, “If you had known that I Am God the Son, you would have known God the Father.” Later, I was sitting where money was received, but the officials didn’t arrest Me because My hour had not yet come. I said to the crowd, “I am going away. You will search and not find Me because you can’t come to where I’m going.”

The Jews didn’t understand, so they asked, “Will You commit suicide?”

Then I said to them, “I am from above, you are from this world, and you shall die in your sins unless you believe that I am the Messiah.”

The Jews asked again, “Who are You?”

I answered, “I am the One I claim to be. I could teach you much, but that would condemn you. I am the One My Father sent to you, the One who sent Me is true.” But the Jews still didn’t understand I was telling them I came from God, and that I Am God the Son. Then I said, “When you have lifted up the Son of God, then you will realize I am the Messiah from heaven. The One who sent Me is with Me; He has not deserted Me. I always do the things that please the One who sent Me into the world.” Many people believed the words I spoke. Then I explained to them, “If you abide in My words, then you are truly My disciples, and you’ll know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

Then the Jewish leaders answered, “We are Abraham’s descendants, we have never been slaves to anyone. How can You make us free?”

I answered, “I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a bond slave to sin. A slave does not live in the house forever, but a son lives there forever. If the Son makes you free, you shall be truly free. Yes, you are descendants of Abraham, but some of you are trying to kill Me because My words have not set you free. I speak what My Father tells Me to say, but you speak what your father tells you.”

The Jews answered, “Our father is Abraham.”

I answered, “No! If Abraham were your father, you would do what Abraham told you to do. Instead, you are planning on killing Me just because I told you the truth.”

The Jews said sarcastically, “We were not born out of wedlock,” suggesting I didn’t have a father. The Jews bragged, “Our Father is God.”

I answered, “If God were your father, you would love Me because I come from the Father.” Then I told them plainly, “Your father is the devil, and you do the lustful sins of the devil. The devil is a murderer from the beginning and doesn’t have any truth in him. The devil is a liar and doesn’t speak the truth. I tell you the truth, and you do not believe Me. None of you can point out any sin that I have ever done. If you were of God, you would listen to My words, but you don’t understand them because you are not of God.” The Jews accused Me of being a Samaritan and being possessed with a demon. I answered, “I do not have a demon, and I honor My heavenly Father. I have no desire to make Myself great; My Father will do this for Me.” Then I said, “I say to you, if you will obey My words, you will never taste death.”

“Now we know you have a demon,” the Jews answered. “Even Abraham died, and You claim if a man obeys Your words he shall never die.” The Jews asked, “Who do You think You are—God?”

Then I answered them, “If I am just bragging, it doesn’t mean anything; it is My Father who will glorify Me. But you do not know My Father. If I said you knew My Father, I’d be lying as you lie. Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day. He knew I would come into the world and Abraham rejoiced to see My day.”

The Jewish leaders said, “You aren’t even fifty years old, and You said You’d seen Abraham.”

I answered, “You’re right; before Abraham was even born, I existed.” The Jewish leaders picked up stones to kill Me, but I hid Myself and walked past them out of the temple.

There is a battle between the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness. I knew the religious Jews were agents of satan, and I knew their strategy to defeat Me. Therefore, you must study Scripture to understand satan’s strategy, and then follow God’s principles to lead a godly life, and serve God successfully.

I Heal a Man Born Blind

9As I left the temple, I saw a blind man, and My disciples asked, “Who sinned, his parents or this man that he was born blind?”

I answered, “Neither did this man nor his parents, but his blindness demonstrates the power of God. Each of us is given a task in life. We must do it in the daylight because the night comes when work ends. While I’m still in this dark world, I am the light of the world.”

Then I spat on the ground to make clay and then rubbed it on the blind man’s eyes and told him, “Go wash in the Pool of Siloam.” So he went and washed, and came back seeing.

The neighbors who knew he was blind were dumbfounded. “Is this the same one we knew who begged?”

Others said, “It looks just like him.”

The healed man said, “I’m the one who was blind!”

They said, “How were you healed?”

He answered, “A man named Jesus made clay, and rubbed it on my eyes and said, ‘Go wash in Siloam.’ I did, and now I see.”

They asked, “Where is this Jesus fellow?”

He answered, “I don’t know!” The crowd brought the healed man to the religious leaders; it was the Sabbath. They also asked how he was healed. The healed man answered, “Jesus put clay on my eyes, and now I see.”

The religious leaders criticized, “This Jesus is not from God, because He breaks the Sabbath.”

But someone in the crowd answered, “How can a sinner do such a great miracle?”

The religious leaders asked the healed man what he thought of Me. He answered, “Jesus is a prophet!”

The religious leaders said, “This man wasn’t blind.” So they asked his parents if the man was born blind.

The parents answered them, “We know that he is our son and that he was born blind, but we don’t know what happened to him. Ask him; he is old enough to speak for himself.” The parents were afraid of the Jewish leaders because anyone saying I was the Messiah would be excommunicated from the temple.

His parents again said, “Ask him, he is of age.”

Then the Jewish leaders asked the man a second time, “Give glory to God, not to this Jesus fellow; we know He is a sinner.”

The healed man said, “I don’t know if Jesus is evil; all I know is that I was blind, and now I see.”

The religious leaders kept demanding, “How did Jesus heal you?”

The healed man became exasperated. “I told you once, do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become Jesus’ disciple?”

They cursed him, “You are His disciple, but we are Moses’ disciples. We know God spoke to Moses, but we don’t know this fellow.”

The healed man was incredulous, “Why, here is a miracle, and you don’t realize Jesus opened my eyes. We know God does not hear the prayer of sinners, but He answers those who worship Him and do His will. Since the world began, no one has opened the eyes of a blind man. If this Jesus is not of God, He could do nothing.”

The religious leaders shouted, “You were born in sin. Are you trying to teach us anything?” So they excommunicated him from the temple.

Spiritual Blindness

I heard they excommunicated him, so I found him and asked, “Do you believe in the Son of God?”

The healed man answered, “Who is He?” I answered, “You are looking at Him. I am the One who healed you.”

The blind man said, “Lord, I believe,” and then he worshiped Me.

Then I announced to the crowd, “I come to judge so that those who think they see will become blind, and those who are blind will see.”

The religious leaders asked, “Do you think we are blind?”

I answered, “If you were blind, you would want Me to heal you. But because you don’t understand who I Am, you are blinded to the truth of God.”

Healing a man who was born blind was proof that I Am God, but there is something worse than physical blindness. I will give you eyes to see My truth, and I will take away your spiritual blindness. I will give you a heart to obey My commands, and I will take away any doubt. When the healed man saw Me, he recognized I did a miracle in his life. Then he worshiped Me. I can give you eternal life, and you too can worship Me.

I Am the Good Shepherd

10I said, “Those who don’t follow Me, but climb over the wall into the sheepfold, are thieves. My sheep enter by the door because I am the Shepherd of the sheep. The sheep hear My voice, and I call My own sheep by name and lead them out.”

“I go before them and call them, and they follow for they know My voice, but will not follow a stranger.” When I used this extended metaphor the crowd didn’t understand what I meant. So I said, “I am the door for the sheep; those who came before are thieves and robbers, but My sheep didn’t obey their voice.” I repeated Myself, “I am the Door, all who enter by Me will be saved, and they will go in and out to find pasture. “The thief comes to kill and destroy the sheep, but I come to give sheep the fullness of life.”

I promised that everyone who enters the door of salvation will enjoy the freedom of going and coming into My sheepfold. Also, I promised that they would eat abundantly, and would enjoy life more abundantly. Those who pray salvation’s request will enjoy fellowship with Me forever.

I said, “I am the Good Shepherd who gives His life for His sheep. A hired man will run away when the wolf attacks, because the sheep don’t belong to him, and he isn’t their shepherd. The wolf attacks the sheep and scatters the flock. The hired man runs away because he is hired; he doesn’t really care about the sheep.” I said, “I am the Good Shepherd and know My sheep, and My sheep know Me and follow Me. Just as My Father knows Me, and I know My Father, I know My sheep and will lay down My life for them. I have other sheep who are not in this fold; they are the Gentiles who will believe in Me. I will lead them also. These other sheep will listen to My voice, and then all My sheep will be one flock, and all will live in one sheepfold—heaven.”

I said, “My Father loves Me because I lay down My life, but I will take back My life. No one can take My life from Me. I willingly die, and I have the power to raise Myself from the dead. This is the assignment I was given by My Father.”

The crowd was divided over what I said. Some said, “He raves like a man possessed by a demon. Why should we listen to Him?” Others said, “Can a

demon-possessed man cause the blind to see? He doesn't sound like one possessed by a demon.”

You received physical life when you were born physically. Then you received spiritual life when you prayed to receive Me as your Savior. God intended for you to make your physical life a dwelling place for Me to live in you. You must keep your body separated from sin, while God makes you holy by living in you. As you immerse yourselves in Scripture, fellowship with My Father, and attempt to follow Me, you become transformed into God's image.

Winter in Jerusalem

When winter settled on Jerusalem, it was time for Hanukkah; I returned to the temple near Solomon's Porch. The crowd surrounded Me, asking, “How long will You keep us in suspense? Tell us if You are Messiah.”

I answered, “I did tell you, but you didn't listen; I did miracles, but you wouldn't believe them. You didn't believe because you are not sheep of My flock. My sheep know My voice and obey Me. I know them, and they know Me and follow Me. I give My sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, no one can snatch them from Me. My Father has given them to Me, and He is more powerful than anything else so that no one can steal them from Me.” Then I said, “I and My Father are One.”

The Jewish leaders then picked up stones to kill Me. I responded, “My Father has directed Me to do many miracles to help people who are hurting; for which one of these miracles do you stone Me?”

They answered, “Not for works of mercy, but for blasphemy. You are a mere man like us, but You have said You are God.”

I quoted Scripture, “Your law says men are gods, so if the Scripture is always right, why did it call mere men gods? How can You say I blasphemed God when My Father who sent Me said I am the Son of God? Even if you refuse to believe who I am, at least believe the miracles I do. Then you will realize My Father is in Me, and I am in My Father.” They tried to arrest Me, but I walked away from them and crossed over the Jordan to stay near the place where John the Baptizer first baptized.

My disciples said, “John didn’t do miracles, but everything he said about You is true.” At that time many people believed in Me.

I Raise Lazarus From the Dead

11 I received a message from Mary and Martha telling Me that Lazarus was sick. This is the same Mary who anointed Me with oil and wiped My feet with the hair of her head. The sisters reminded Me that I loved Lazarus. Actually, I loved all three of them. When I received the message, I told My disciples, “This sickness will not end in death, but I, the Son of God, will be glorified through it.” Now I loved Martha, her sister Mary, and Lazarus. I stayed where I was for two more days, then I told My disciples, “Let’s go to Judea.” They cautioned Me against making the trip because the Jews tried to stone Me the last time I was there. I replied, “There are twelve hours of daylight for walking so you won’t stumble when there is light to see by. Those who walk in darkness stumble, because there is no light to guide them.” I then said, “Our friend Lazarus sleeps, I go to awaken him.”

The disciples answered, “It’s good if he sleeps.”

They didn’t understand what I meant, so I said plainly, “Lazarus is dead. Now I’m glad I wasn’t there when he died because now you will believe completely in Me.”

Then Thomas, the twin, said to the other disciples, “Let us go with Him, and die with Him.”

When I arrived, I found out Lazarus had been dead four days. Bethany was about two miles from Jerusalem, so many Jews had come to sympathize with Mary and Martha. When Martha heard that I had arrived, she went out to the graveyard to meet Me. Mary stayed in the house grieving. Martha accused Me, “If You would have been here, my brother would not have died. But now I know that whatever You ask from God, He will give it to You.”

I told Martha, “Your brother will rise again.”

Martha said, “I know he’ll arise in the resurrection at the last day.”

I said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life, and those who believe in Me will never die.”

Martha answered, “Yes, I believe You are the Deliverer-Messiah, the Son of God Who was sent into the world.” Martha ran to whisper to Mary in a low voice, “The Master is here and wants to see you.” Mary immediately got up

and went to Me outside town. When the Jews, who were mourning, saw Mary leave, they followed her thinking she was visiting the cemetery.

As soon as Mary saw Me, she threw herself at My feet, saying the same thing as her sister, “Lord, if You had been here my brother would not have died.”

I saw Mary’s tears and the mourning Jews following her. I said with a deep sigh, “Where is the body?” Then I wept.

The Jews responded, “Behold how much Jesus loved Lazarus.”

Other Jews said, “This man makes the blind see, why couldn’t He keep Lazarus from dying?”

I sighed deeply. When I got to the tomb—a cave—with a stone closing the opening, I said, “Take away the stone.”

Martha protested, “Lord, the body stinks; he’s been dead four days.”

I answered, “Have I not told you that if you will believe, you’ll see the glory of God.” They rolled the stone away, then I looked into heaven, “Father, I thank You for hearing Me before I pray so that the people here will believe in Me.” Then I yelled with a strong voice, “Lazarus, come out!” Lazarus came bound, hands and feet with swaths of cloth, and a cloth wrapped around his face. I cried, “Unwrap him and free him.”

I raised Lazarus to life after he had been dead four days. I will do the same for you so that one day you can live with Me in Heaven forever.

Results From Raising Lazarus

Then some of the Jewish leaders saw it happen and believed. Therefore, many Jews believed in Me, because I raised Lazarus from the dead, but others ran to tell the religious rulers what happened. They gathered in council to decide what to do. One said, “What can we do? This man does miracles.”

Another said, “If we don’t do something, the Romans will come punish the nation and us because they will think Jesus is fermenting a revolution.”

Caiaphas, the high priest, said, “You’re all wrong! Let this man die instead of our people. Why should our whole nation perish?”

This prophecy, that I should die for everyone, came from Caiaphas, the high priest when he was inspired by God to make this prediction. So from that

time on the religious leaders were convinced that it was right to plan My death. I stopped preaching to the multitudes and went to the desert and stayed on the border of Ephraim and Samaria. People were journeying to Jerusalem for the Passover; they were curious to see Me and kept asking, “Do you think Jesus will come to this Passover?” Meanwhile, the religious leaders had announced that anyone seeing Me must report it to the authorities so I could be arrested.

My Triumphal Entry Into Jerusalem

12 Six days before the Passover meal, I attended a banquet at the home of Martha in Bethany. Lazarus, her brother, sat with Me at the head of the table. Mary poured a jar of costly perfume over My feet and wiped them with her hair. The house filled with the beautiful smell. Judas Iscariot complained that the perfume could be sold and the money given to take care of the poor. He didn’t care for the poor. He was a thief who was in charge of the money given to Me. I answered, “Let her alone, she is preparing Me for burial. You can help the poor later, but you won’t have Me very long.”

Worship Me for My death for your sins, just as Mary worshiped Me at the festival at Bethany.

When the crowds heard that I had come to Jerusalem, they came eagerly to see Me and Lazarus; the one whom I raised from the dead. Then the religious leaders decided to kill Lazarus also because many believed on Me because of Lazarus.

My Entry Into Jerusalem

On Sunday morning many people who had come to the Passover Festival wanted to see Me. When they heard I was coming to Jerusalem, they cut palm branches to wave before Me. They shouted, “HOSANNA, blessed is the King of Israel who is representing the Lord.” I was riding on a young donkey that had never been ridden before. I was fulfilling Scripture, ‘Fear not daughters of Zion. Your King is coming, riding on a young donkey. My disciples didn’t understand what was happening that day, but after I was resurrected, they

understood the meaning of the triumphant entry because they saw it predicted in the Scriptures. The people who saw Me raise Lazarus from the dead also witnessed this event. Because of Lazarus' resurrection, many people came to see My triumphant entry.

The Pharisees were not impressed. They said, "We are not getting anywhere; the whole world is following Him."

The Greeks Want to See Me

There were some Greeks worshiping in the temple. They approached Philip asking, "We would like to meet Jesus." Philip told Andrew, and they told Me.

Just as the Greeks wanted to see Me in the temple, you too will want to see Me with your spiritual eyes and experience Me in your heart.

I didn't answer directly but said, "The hour has come for Me, the Son of Man, to return to heaven and be glorified. A grain of wheat must die when it falls to the ground; otherwise, it will remain only one grain of wheat. But if it dies, it yields a rich harvest of food. Those who love their life will lose it, and those who don't live for this life will exchange it for eternal life. If anyone wants to be My disciple, including the Greeks, they must follow Me. Then they will be where I Am, and My Father will honor them when they follow Me. Now my soul is greatly troubled. Shall I ask My Father to deliver Me from the house of suffering? No! That is the reason why I came to earth. Father, glorify Your name through My coming death."

Then everyone present heard a voice from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again."

Some who heard the noise thought it was thunder; others thought it was an angel speaking. I answered, "This sound was for your sake, not Mine, the time for judgment of sin has come. Satan—the prince of the world—will be cast out. When I am lifted up—on the Cross—I will draw all to Me." I said this to predict the way I would die.

The crowd was astonished answering, "We thought the Scriptures taught Messiah would live forever. Why are You saying the Son of Man must be lifted up in death? Are You talking about the Messiah?"

I said, “My light will illuminate you only a short time. Learn from the Light while you can, or else darkness will come, and you’ll be lost in it. While you have the Light, believe the Light, and you’ll become children of the Light.” Then I left, and they couldn’t find Me. Despite all the miracles I did, most of the people did not believe I was the predicted Messiah. This fulfilled the prediction of Isaiah, who said, “Lord they don’t believe, they don’t accept Your miracles.” Indeed, they couldn’t believe, as Isaiah said in another place, “God has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, lest they should see with their eyes and understand with their hearts, and turn to God, and I save them.”

Isaiah said these words when he saw the Lord glorified, sitting on the throne, and he was speaking of Me. Nevertheless, many leading citizens believed on Me, but they didn’t confess Me openly for fear of social pressure. They were afraid of being excommunicated from the temple for they desired acceptance by people, more than from God. I proclaimed loudly in the temple, “Those who believe in Me, also believe in My Father who sent Me. And those who understand what I am saying, also understand what My Father wants them to know. I have come as a light to all people, and those who believe in Me will not live in darkness. If anyone hears and understands My teachings, but rejects them, I will not judge them, for I come to save all people. But those who do not accept My teachings and reject Me will be judged in the last day by what I’ve said. My Father will judge him because My Father who sent Me told Me what to say, and My words give life eternal. Therefore, everything I am saying to you comes from My Father in heaven.”

The Last Supper With My Disciples

13 On Thursday night, before the Passover supper, I knew that My hour had come, the time for Me to die for the sins of the world. I would love My followers, having loved them to the end. After the supper, the devil had already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot to betray Me. Knowing My Father had put all things into My hand, and that I had come from My Father, I knew I would return to My Father. I arose from the table, laid aside My tunic, and wrapped a towel around Myself as a servant. I poured water into the basin and began washing the disciples’ feet and wiping them dry with the towel. When I came to Peter, the fisherman asked, “Will You wash my feet?”

I answered, “You don’t understand now, but you’ll understand in the future. If I don’t wash you, you’ll have no part with Me.”

So Peter answered Me, “If that’s the case, then not only wash my feet but my hands and head.”

I answered, “He that is bathed all over need only to have his feet washed. Now you are clean, but not all of you.” For I knew who would betray Me. Therefore, I said, “You are not all clean.” When I finished washing their feet, I put My tunic back on and sat down with them and said, “Do you know what I have done for you?”

Just as I, God the Son, washed the feet of My followers, I will help you to be humble and serve others, so that you may follow My example.

“You call Me Master and Lord, and so I am. If I, then, Your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, then you ought to be willing to wash one another’s feet. I have given you the example to do to others what I have done for you. I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, neither is the one sent greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, happy are you if you do them. I have chosen all of you, but not all are of Me, that the Scriptures may be fulfilled, ‘He that eats with Me, lifts up his heel against Me.’ I’m telling you before it happens, so when it comes to pass, you will know I am your Messiah.”

Judas, the Betrayer

I was obviously troubled. Then I said, “I say to you, one of you will betray Me.” The disciples looked at one another, not completely understanding what I meant. One disciple was leaning on My chest; he was John, the disciple whom I loved. Peter beckoned for John to find out who I meant.

John, who was leaning on Me, said, “Lord, who is it?”

I answered, “He that dips his hand in the same dish that I dip, he is the one who will betray Me. It is good if that man were never born. When I dip the bread into the lamb stew, the one to whom I give it is the one.” Then I dipped the bread into the stew and gave it to Judas. But the disciples didn’t understand, because Judas was the honored guest, and it was the custom to give it to that person first. After Judas received the bread, satan entered in

him. I said to him, “Quickly do what you are going to do.” None of the disciples understood what happened because they thought I said, “Buy what is needed for the Passover festival.” When Judas received the bread, he went out into the darkness. The night was spiritually black.

Peter’s Request

When Judas left, I was relieved saying, “Now I, the Son of Man, am glorified and God is glorified in Me. Since God My Father is glorified in Me, I will also be glorified in Myself. Children, I am going to be with you only a short time. You will look for Me and won’t find Me because where I’m going, you cannot follow Me now. So, I’m giving you a new command, that you love one another as I have loved you. By your love, all people will know you are My disciples.”

Everyone has difficulty loving some people. I love everyone in the whole world and died for them. When you encounter those who are difficult to love, let Me love them through you. In this way you will demonstrate to the world true Christian love, and they will know you are My followers because of your love.

Peter asked, “Where are You going?”

I answered him, “You cannot now go where I am going, but later you can follow Me.”

Peter answered, “Why can I not follow You now? I’ll lay down my life for Your sake.”

I replied, “You only think you’ll die for Me. I say to you: you will deny Me three times before the rooster crows.”

The Upper Room Discourse

14I told the eleven, “Do not let your heart be troubled, hold on to your faith in God and your faith in Me. There are many rooms in My Father’s house; if it were not true, I would have told you. I am going to prepare a place for you there, and when I get it ready, I will come back for you, and I’ll take you to be with Me. You know the way to the place I am going.”

But Thomas responded, “No! We don’t know where You are going, nor do we know how to get there.”

I said, “I am the way to heaven, also, I am truth, and I am eternal life. You must come through Me to go to My Father. Since you know Me, you should also know My Father, and from now on you’ll know My Father.”

I said that I would come back to take You where I Am. That’s what I want. I want you to live with Me in heaven for all eternity.

Philip disagreed, “We don’t know what the Father looks like. Show us the Father so we can believe.”

I answered, “I have been with you all this time, and I’m surprised you don’t know My Father. He who has seen Me has seen the Father. What I say are not My words, but they are from My Father who lives in Me. My Father also does the miracles that I do. Believe that I am in My Father, and He is in Me, or else believe it because you have seen My miracles. I say to you, he who believes in Me shall do the works that I do, and even greater ones, because I am going to My Father. Whatever you pray, asking in My name, I’ll do it, so that My Father will be glorified in Me. If you pray for anything in My name, I’ll do it.”

I want you to come in My name, the name of Jesus, to ask your request. I said that I would do it if you ask in My name. You can ask in my name because I Am in your heart. My blood has cleansed you and has given you access to My Father because I Am your intercessor.

I told them, “If you love Me, obey My commands, and I will ask My Father to send you another person in My place. He will live in you forever. This other Person is God, the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Trinity. The unsaved cannot receive Him because they do not believe in Him or know anything about Him. But you will know the Holy Spirit, because you believe in Me. He will dwell with you and be in you. I will not leave you alone in the world; I will come to you. Shortly, I will leave you, because I’m leaving the world. But you will see Me later. Because I live, you shall live also. At that time you’ll know I’m with My Father in heaven, but I’ll be in you, and you’ll

be in Me. Those who have My commands and keep them are the ones who love Me, and those who love Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love them, and I'll show Myself to them.”

I promised two things that you can know beyond a shadow of a doubt: first, I would come to live within your heart when you are saved; second, you would be placed in Me in heaven. The first means you have My life in you. The second means you can be as close to God, My heavenly Father, as I Am.

Judas—not Iscariot, but another disciple with that name—asked, “How can You show Yourself to us and not to the world?”

I answered, “Those who love Me will obey My commands, and My Father will love them, and We will come to live in them. Those who don't obey My commands, don't love Me. It's not just My Word they reject; it's My Father's Word. I'm explaining these things to you while I'm with you, but the Holy Spirit, whom My Father will send in My place, He'll explain all spiritual things to you, and will remind you of the things I said to you.”

You need the Holy Spirit guiding in your life to help you learn Scripture and to remember the things I said in My Word.

“I am leaving My peace with you, but not as the world gives, so don't be afraid of anything. Previously I told you I'm going away, but I'm also coming back. Because you love Me, rejoice that I'm going to My Father. I tell you this before it happens, so you'll believe in Me when it happens. I'll not be able to talk with you much more. The evil prince of this world is coming to try Me, but don't worry, he has no authority over Me. I am going to do the thing My Father wants Me to do; that will show My love to Him. Now, let's leave this upper room.”

I did supernatural miracles such as healing a leper and raising the dead. What could be greater than these miracles? A soul saved for all eternity is greater in an insurmountable measure.

I Am the True Vine

15I Am your true vine, and My Father is the gardener. He cuts away any branches not growing fruit and prunes back every branch that has fruit. So you are a healthy plant when you live by My words. I will abide in you as you abide in Me. Just as a branch can't bear fruit unless it's attached to the vine, so you can't produce anything unless you are attached to Me. I Am the vine, and you are a branch. As long as you remain attached to Me, and I abide in you, you will bear plenty of fruit. Anyone who will not remain attached to Me will be punished. He'll be like dead branches that are collected and thrown into a fire to be burned. When you remain settled in Me, and My words remain in you, you can ask what you want, and I will give it to you. I Am glorified when you bear much fruit. Then everyone will know you are My disciple.

I want you to produce more fruit in your Christian life, and more fruit in your service to Me. I want you to abide in Me so you can be fruitful.

As My Father has loved Me, so I love you. You can settle down to rest in My love for you. You will obey My commands to remain in My love, just as I kept My Father's commands to remain in His love. I tell you this so My joy would rest in you and your joy would then be complete. I have commanded you to love one another, just as I have loved you. You can't have a greater love for others than to lay down your life for them. You are My friend when you obey My commands. You are no longer My servant because a servant doesn't know what his master does. But you are My friend because you know what I Am doing, as I Am doing what My Father told Me to do. You did not choose Me, but I chose you and challenged you to go bear fruit. Now, whatever you ask My Father in My name, I will gladly give to you. Again, I command you to love one another, because the world will hate you and those who follow Me.

But know this: the world hated Me long before it hated you. You do not belong to this world. I have separated you from it. Therefore, the world hates you. You will remember what I said, "A servant is not greater than his master. Since they persecute Me, the world will persecute you." They will hate you and persecute you because you are my disciple and because they do not know My Father who sent Me. If I hadn't given the truth, the world wouldn't

experience the guilt of their sin, but now they have no excuse. Those who hate you hate My Father. If I hadn't done miracles among them, they would have been blinded in their sins. Now they see and hate both Me and My Father. As written in the Scriptures, "They hated Jesus without a cause."

When the Holy Spirit comes—the Spirit of truth who comes from My Father—He will speak plainly to your heart about Me. Then you can also speak plainly about Me because I will speak through you and remove your blindness. Then you can bear witness because you have been with Me.

I promised that if you would abide in My Word, your prayers would be answered. That means you can live and ask according to Scripture to get your prayers answered.

The Testing of Your Faith

16I told them about coming persecution so their faith wouldn't be shaken. I said that they would be excommunicated from their assemblies. There was coming a time when people would kill them, thinking they were serving God by doing so. They would do this because they don't have true knowledge of My Father or Me. I did not originally tell My disciples about persecution because I was walking among them. But now that I was going away, they needed to be reinforced, so they wouldn't be shaken when it happened.

The world will hate you, just as it hated Me. I will give you strength to endure persecution and live for Me. I will help you to do more than endure trials. I will give you victory over them.

Yet none of My disciples asked, "Where are You going?" because they were distressed that I was leaving. But it was a good thing for Me to go away because if I hadn't left, the Holy Spirit would not have come. But because I left, I would send the Holy Spirit to convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. The Holy Spirit will cause people to see their sin because they do not believe in Me. The Holy Spirit will also cause people to see their lack of righteousness, which will keep them out of heaven. The Holy Spirit will

also cause people to see coming judgment because I suffered for them on the cross. Many more things could be said, but the disciples weren't ready to hear.

Then I told what the Holy Spirit would do for believers. "When He comes, the Spirit of Truth, He will reveal to you everything that is truth. Then He'll guide you to understand truth. The Holy Spirit will not be concerned with His own agenda, but He will bring glory to Me, and He will reveal to you things to come. All My Father's glory also belongs to Me. This is the glory the Holy Spirit will reveal. All things My Father has, also belong to Me."

I will send the Holy Spirit to guide you into truth, and to keep you from error. The world, the flesh, and the devil continually try to pull you away from Me.

In a little while, I would leave My disciples, and they would see Me no longer in the flesh. But a short time later they would see Me. The disciples did not understand what I meant about leaving them and then coming back to them. They were puzzled over My leaving a little while. I knew they wanted to question Me, so I said plainly, "In a short time you'll see Me no longer; then a short time later you'll see Me again." Then I explained, "You will weep when I'm gone, but the world will rejoice. But your weeping will be turned to rejoicing. It'll be like a woman suffering in childbirth, but when her child is born, she forgets about her suffering." I explained that they would be sad, but when they would see Me again, they would be full of joy, a joy that no one could take from them. When that day comes, they won't have any questions; they can go directly to My Father with their questions. I then promised that whatever anyone asks in My name, My Father will give it to them. Up until then, the disciples hadn't prayed in My name, now they could ask in My name, and they would receive answers so that their joy would overflow. Up until that time, I used figures of speech and parables, but the time had now come when I spoke plainly. I explained, "When that day comes—and now is—you can ask My Father in My name, and I will pray to My Father for you. My Father loves you because you have loved Me, and you know that I came to the world from My Father."

The disciples said, "Now we believe You came from the Father. You are not using figures of speech. Now we understand."

I said, “You only think you understand. The time is coming when you will be scattered to your homes, leaving Me alone.” I said, “I have told you this so you will have peace in the world. But you will also have trials; so have faith, I have conquered the world.”

My Prayer to Be Glorified

17After I left the Upper Room, I lifted My eyes to heaven and prayed, “Father, My hour is come. Glorify Your Son so that I can glorify You. I pray that those You have given Me will have eternal life. Eternal life is in You, the only true God, and is found in Me, the One You sent to earth. I have glorified You on earth and accomplished the work You sent Me to do. Now Father, glorify Me with the glory I had in heaven which I had with You before the world was created.”

A Prayer for My Disciples

“I have given Your name to the men You gave me. They were Your men, and You gave them to Me. They have faithfully kept Your Word. They know the things You told Me to do because I told them what You said to Me. They have received Your Word, and they believe it, and they believe I came from heaven to do Your will. I pray for these disciples. I do not pray for the world. I pray for those You have given Me. All things that are Mine are Yours, and I am glorified in these disciples. I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, so I pray for them. I pray—Holy Father—that You would keep them safe, that they may be one, as We are One. While I was with them, I kept them—guarded them—and not one of them is missing, except the son of perdition who fulfilled Scripture by betraying Me. Now I come to You, Father, that they may have joy. I have given them Your Word, and the world hates them because they reject the world, even as I am not of the world. I am not praying for You to take them out of the world, but that You would keep them from the evil one. They are not of this world, just as I am not of this world. Make them holy by Your Word. Your Word is truth. I am sending them into the world, even as I was sent into the world. I set Myself apart from heaven for them, now may they be set apart to reach others.

“I am not praying for these disciples only. I’m also praying for those who will believe because of their word.” I prayed that all believers may be one as I

and My Father are One. “And the glory You gave Me I give them, so they may also be one as We are. I am in them, as You are in Me, so that the world may realize You sent Me, and You love Me and You love them. Father, I want them to be with Me in heaven, that they may see My glory that I’ve had before the foundations of the earth. O Father, the world does not know You, but I have known You, and made You known to these disciples, that the love You have for Me may be in them, and I in them, and they in Me.”

I Am Betrayed, Arrested, and Forsaken

18 After I spoke these words, My disciples and I went over the Brook Kidron and entered a garden. Judas knew the place where I often went to pray, so he led Roman soldiers and officers from the religious leaders with lanterns, torches, and weapons to arrest Me. I knew what was happening, so I met them and asked, “Who are you looking for?”

They answered, “Jesus of Nazareth.”

I responded, “I am He,” This was My statement of deity. Then the Roman soldiers and Jewish guards were driven backward to the ground. Again I asked, “Who are you looking for?”

They said, “Jesus of Nazareth.”

I answered, “I told you, I am He. Since you want Me, let these go.”

With this, prophecy was fulfilled: “I lost none of those that You gave Me.”

Judas had given them a sign that I would be the one whom he kissed. So Judas kissed Me, and said, “Arrest Him!”

I said to Judas, “Are you betraying Me, the Son of Man, with a kiss?” As the guards moved forward to take Me, Simon Peter, having a sword, cut off the right ear of Malchus, the high priest’s servant. I answered, “Put up your sword. I must drink the cup of suffering My Father has for Me.” Then I touched him and healed him.

They grabbed Me and bound Me, but I responded, “Have you come out in the middle of the night to arrest a thief? I sat daily in the temple, but you didn’t arrest Me.” This came to pass because it was predicted in Scripture. Then the disciples left Me and fled into the night.

The First Trial—Before Annas, the Former High Priest

The soldiers and guards led Me bound to Annas, the former high priest who was deposed for his corruption. Caiaphas, his son-in-law, was put in that office. Now Caiaphas was the one who counseled the Jewish leaders that it was expedient for one man to die for the people. Simon Peter followed Me along with John. Since John was known by the servants in the high priest's home, he was allowed to enter, but Peter was kept out. Then John vouched for Peter, and he was allowed to enter the courtyard.

The girl at the door said to Peter, "Aren't you a disciple of Jesus?"

Peter said, "No!" Then Peter warmed himself by a fire, for it was cold. He was standing with the others by the fire.

Annas asked Me about My disciples and what I taught; I answered, "I spoke openly in synagogues, and the temple and I kept back nothing secretly. Ask those who heard Me what I taught."

When I answered this way, an officer struck Me with his hand, saying, "Why did You answer the high priest that way?"

I replied, "Tell me if I have spoken evil; if not, then don't strike Me."

So Annas sent Me, still in handcuffs, to Caiaphas, the high priest. But Simon Peter was still warming himself when someone said to him, "Are you one of His disciples?"

He denied it and said, "No, I am not."

One of the high priest's servants, a relative of the one whose ear Peter cut off, said, "Didn't I see you in the garden with Jesus?" Again Peter denied it, and immediately a rooster crowed. Peter saw Me and ran away weeping.

The Second Trial—Before Caiaphas

They led Me from Caiaphas to the judgment hall—the courtroom—in Pilate's place. It was early morning, and they would not go into a Gentile's house because that would defile them, and they would be unfit to eat the Passover meal.

The Third Trial—Before Pilate

So Pilate came outside and asked, "What charge do you bring against this man?"

They answered, “If He had not broken the law, we would not have brought Him to you.”

Pilate told them, “You take Him and try Him in accord with your religious laws.”

But the Jews answered, “It is not legal for us to execute anyone.” This answer fulfilled the prophecy of Me that indicated how I would die.

So Pilate went back into the judgment hall to call for Me and asked, “Are You the King of the Jews?”

I answered him, “Are you asking Me this on your own or have others put this question in your mind?”

Pilate answered, “I don’t think like a Jew. Your people and their high priests have brought You here. What have You done?”

I answered, “My kingdom is not in this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My followers would have fought to keep Me from being arrested. So My kingdom is not about this world.”

Then Pilate retorted, “Then You are a King?”

I answered, “Yes, I am a King. For this purpose I was born, for this purpose I have come into the world, to give them the truth. Everyone who seeks truth will listen to what I say.”

Pilate asked Me, “What is truth?” Then he went outside again to the Jews to tell them, “I have no grounds to try this man.”

Pilate told them there was a custom to set one man free at Passover. He asked, “Do you want me to set free the King of the Jews?”

Then they yelled and chanted, “No! Not this man, but Barabbas!” Now Barabbas was a robber.

My Death on the Cross

19 So Pilate had Me scourged. Then the soldiers wove a crown out of thorns to place on My head. Then they put a purple coat on Me, and mocked Me saying, “All hail, King of the Jews!”

Then they slapped Me on the face. And Pilate went outside again to the Jews and said, “I am going to bring Him out so you can see that there are no grounds to try Him.” So I was brought out still wearing the crown of thorns and the purple coat. Then Pilate announced, “Look at this man!”

But the high priests and temple officers glared at Me and shouted to stir up the crowd, “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!”

Pilate answered, “You take Him and crucify Him for I find no ground to try Him.”

The Jews answered, “We have a law, and He has broken God’s law; He deserves to die for claiming to be God’s Son.”

When Pilate heard that statement, he was more afraid than before and went back into the judgment hall to ask Me, “Where are You from?” but I did not answer. Then Pilate said, “Why do You refuse to speak to me? Don’t You know that I have the authority to free You or crucify You?”

I answered, “You could have no power at all over Me if the authority had not been given to you from above. So the one who betrayed me has the greater sin.”

Pilate kept looking for a reason to set Me free, but the Jews shouted, “If you set Him free, you are not a friend of Caesar’s. Anyone who claims to be a king is speaking treason against Caesar.”

When Pilate heard the charge of “treason,” he had Me brought out. Then Pilate sat on the judge’s bench at the place called the stone platform, or in Hebrew, gabbatha. It was the day of preparation for the Passover, and it was about six o’clock in the morning. Then Pilate said to the Jews, “Look at your King!”

But they shouted, “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!”

Pilate said to them, “Do you want me to crucify your King?”

The high priests answered, “We have no king but Caesar.” Then Pilate turned Me over to them to be crucified.

My Crucifixion

So they led Me, carrying My cross to a place called “the Skull,” or in Hebrew, Golgotha. There they crucified Me, with two criminals, one on each side, with Me in the middle. Pilate had the legal indictment written and nailed to the cross: “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.”

Now many of the Jews read this sign because I was crucified near the city. It was written in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek. So the high priests of the Jews demanded of Pilate, “Don’t write, ‘The King of the Jews,’ but write, ‘He said, I am the King of the Jews.’”

Pilate refused, saying, “What I have written, I have written!”

After the soldiers crucified Me, they divided My clothes into four parts, one for each soldier. But the coat, woven without a seam, was expensive. So they agreed, “Let us not cut it up, but let us cast lots to see who gets it.”

This action fulfilled Scripture, “They divided My clothes among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.”

My mother and her sister, and Mary, the wife of Clopas, and Mary of Magdala were standing near My cross. So when I saw My mother and the disciple, whom I loved, John, standing near her, I said to My mother, “There is your son.” Then I said to John, “There is your mother.” From that time on, John took My mother to his own home. When I knew that the end was near, I said, “I am thirsty.” Some vinegar was there. So they soaked a sponge in some vinegar and put it to My lips. As soon as I tasted the sour vinegar, I said, “It is finished!” Then I bowed My head and gave up My life.

It was the day of preparation for the Passover, so they did not want the bodies, including mine, to remain on the crosses during the Sabbath. Therefore, the Jews asked Pilate to break our legs and take down our bodies. The soldiers broke the legs of the first and second thieves who had been crucified with Me. But they saw that I was already dead, so they did not break My legs. However, one of the soldiers thrust a lance into My side, and blood and water flowed out. John the Apostle, who saw this testified to it. And his testimony is true, and he knows it is true so that you may believe it. This fulfilled Scripture, “Not a bone of Him was broken.” It also fulfilled another Scripture, “They shall look on Him whom they pierced.”

My Burial in the Tomb

After this, Joseph of Arimathea, My secret disciple for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate if he could remove My body, and Pilate agreed. So Joseph took down My body. Also, Nicodemus, who came to Me by night, brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes about one hundred pounds to anoint My body. So they wrapped My body in swathes of cloth and anointed it with spices, in accord with the Jewish custom of preparing a body for burial. There was a garden near the place where I had been crucified. There was a new tomb in the garden where no one had yet been buried. So, because it was the Jewish Preparation Day and because the tomb was there, they laid My body there.

Peter, John, and Mary Visit the Empty Tomb

20On the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb. It was still dark because it was early in the morning. She saw the stone was removed, so she ran to tell Simon Peter and John, the disciple whom I loved. “Someone has taken away the Lord from the tomb, and we do not know what they have done with the body.” So, Peter and John ran to the tomb; the younger John outran Peter. John looked inside the tomb and saw the linen clothes still wrapped together, but he didn’t go in. Peter didn’t stop, but ran straight into the tomb and also saw the linen clothes together, and the death mask was lying in another place. Next, John entered the tomb and examined everything. Then he believed that I had risen from the dead, and they returned to their house.

John had faith to believe that I rose physically from the dead. The empty tomb proves that I rose from the dead. You are saved by grace because you put your faith in Me. This faith is not your own doing, but My gift to you. You cannot boast that you had anything to do with it. I have made you what you are, a new person, created in Me, to serve Me by doing good works, which I planned for you to do.

Mary Returns to the Tomb

Later that morning Mary Magdalene returned to the tomb; she wept as she looked into the tomb. Then she saw two angels clothed in white sitting at the head and feet where My body had been laid. “Woman, why are you crying?” the angels asked.

She answered, “Because they have taken away my Lord, and I don’t know where He is.” I was standing in back of her, but she didn’t know who I was. She thought I was a gardener, so she asked, “If you have taken away His body, tell me where it is, and I will take Him away.”

It was I who said, “Mary.”

Her blindness was taken away, and she called Me, “Rabboni,” an old Hebrew word for “respected master.”

I said, “Quit clinging to Me as though things will continue in the future as they were in the past.” I explained, “I must go to My Father in heaven. He is

also your Father. He is My God and your God.”

Mary returned to Jerusalem to tell the disciples, “I have seen the Lord.” Then she told them all the things I said to her.

I Appear to the Disciples

In the evening of resurrection day—the first day of the week—the doors of the room were locked where the disciples had gathered for fear of the Jews. I came to stand in the midst of them and said, “Peace to you!” Then I let them examine My hands and My side, and so the disciples were filled with confidence and joy over seeing Me, their Lord. Then I said again, “Peace to you! Just as My Father has sent Me into the world, so, I am sending you into the world.” I breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit, who will teach you and use you, just as He has done throughout past ages. He will be with you until you are endued with His power. Those you lead to faith will have their sins forgiven; those who reject Me as their Christ will retain their sins.”

Thomas, the disciple, called Didymas—a twin—was not there. The disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.”

He said, “I must see the nail prints in His hands, and put my hand into the wound in His side; otherwise, I will not believe.”

The Upper Room One Week Later

Eight days after Passover, the disciples gathered again in the upper room on a Sunday evening. Thomas was with them this time. The doors were locked, but I again stood among them and said what I said the previous Sunday, “Peace to you!” I spoke first to Thomas, “Reach your finger to touch My wounds and place your hand in the wound in My side. Don’t doubt, but believe.”

But Thomas didn’t do it, he answered, “You are my Lord and my God.”

I said, “God will bless you because you have seen Me and believe. But God will also bless those who haven’t seen Me, and yet believe.”

I did many miracles that were not written in the gospels, but these miracles are written that people will believe that I am the Messiah, the Son of God, and when they believe, they will receive eternal life.

Believe that I am God the Son, so you can know beyond a shadow of a doubt that you have eternal life.

I Appear on the Lakeshore

21 A week later—on Sunday—I appeared to seven of My disciples on the shore of the Sea of Galilee; Simon Peter, Thomas, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two of My disciples were together. Simon Peter had announced, “I am going fishing.” Those who went with him were Thomas, Nathaniel, James and John, Andrew, and Phillip. They got into a boat and fished all night, but caught nothing.

When the day was breaking, I stood on the beach, but the disciples didn’t know it was Me. I yelled at them, “Have you caught any fish?”

They answered Me, “No!”

I answered, “Cast the net on the other side of the boat, and you will catch fish.” They cast on the right side and couldn’t draw in the fish because there were so many.

So John said to Peter, “It’s the Lord.” Peter put on his tunic and dove into the water to swim to Me. The other disciples came in a little boat, for they were 100 yards from the beach.

When they got to shore, they saw a charcoal fire cooking fish; there was also bread. I said, “Add the fish you’ve caught to these.” Simon Peter went and pulled the net to land. It had 153 fish in it, yet the net didn’t break. I said, “Come eat, break your fast.” No one asked who it was, for they all knew it was Me; I served all of them breakfast. This was the third Sunday that I appeared to them.

Peter Restored

After breakfast, I said, “Simon, Son of Jonah, do you love Me more deeply than you love these nets?”

Peter answered, “Lord, You know that I like and admire You.”

I answered, “Feed My lambs.” I said to him a second time, “Simon, do you deeply love Me?”

Peter answered, “Lord, You know that I like and admire You.”

I answered, “Tend My sheep.” I said a third time, “Simon, do you really like and admire Me?”

Peter was ashamed I asked him three times, because he denied Me three times, and because he only said he liked and admired Me. So Peter answered, “Lord, You know everything; You know I really like and admire You.”

I said, “Feed My sheep.” Then I predicted, “When you were young, you were able to dress yourself and go where you wanted. But when you get old, they will stretch your hands out on a cross, and they will clothe you with what they choose, and lead you where they want to go.” By this, I was saying Peter would die as a martyr. Then I concluded, “Follow Me.”

Then Peter turned around and saw John who also leaned on His breast at the supper saying, “Lord, who betrays You?”

Peter turned to John and asked Me, “What about him?”

I said, “If he lives till I return, how does that concern you? You must follow Me.”

This statement made many think John would live until I returned to earth. But I didn’t say John wouldn’t die; I only said, “If he lives till I return, how does that concern you?”

More Could Have Been Written

I have written My message to the world through My Apostle John, and you know that My testimony is true.

I did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.

EPILOGUE

I Ascend Back to Heaven

Then I said to them, “Let Me tell you again what I said while I was with you; that everything that is written about Me in the law of Moses, in the prophets, and in the Psalms, had to be fulfilled.” Then I opened their spiritual eyes so they might understand the Scriptures.

Then I said to them, “The Scriptures say that I would suffer for sins, rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance in My name as the condition for the forgiveness of sins should be preached to all nations. You are to begin at Jerusalem as witnesses to these things.

“I will send on you the promise of My Father. But you must stay right here in the city and pray until you are anointed with power from on high.” Then I led them out of the city as far as Bethany, and I lifted up My hands and blessed them. While I was blessing them, I was lifted up from them, and was taken up to heaven. And with joy, they went back to Jerusalem, and continued in the temple praying and praising God.

My Legacy

PART TWO

The Book of Acts



I Am Jesus. My first four books—*I Am Jesus, the King, I am Jesus, the Servant, I Am Jesus, the Son of Man, I am Jesus, the Son of God*—told about all that I began to do and teach while I was alive on earth until the day I was taken up into heaven. This fifth book tells of the acts of the Holy Spirit through the disciples as they planted My church and spread My message of salvation from Jerusalem to Rome. I show how unity and love prevails in My church and how I protect the missionaries from their enemies. As

you read this book, think about how powerful the Holy Spirit still is in your own life and how I protect you against the forces of evil.

I Return to My Father

1 After My death I returned to heaven. But during the forty days after My crucifixion, I appeared to the disciples from time to time, where I prepared them for life-long ministry, and I demonstrated to them proofs that I Am God the Son. In My last meeting with them in Jerusalem, I told them not to leave Jerusalem, but to pray until the Holy Spirit came on them in power. I reminded them, “John the Baptizer baptized with water, in a few days I will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

But the disciples didn’t understand. They asked, “Lord, will You now restore the kingdom to free us from Rome?”

I answered, “My Father has set that date, and it’s not for you to know.” I said, “But be witnesses to Me in all the world when the Holy Spirit is come on you. Tell everyone about Me; beginning in Jerusalem, then Judea, next Samaria, and finally to the ends of the earth.”

When I finished, I was lifted into the sky and disappeared into a cloud, leaving the disciples staring into the sky, looking for Me.

Suddenly two men in glistening white robes said to them, “Why are you staring into the sky? Jesus has returned to heaven, and one day He will return just as He left.”

While I am seated at the right hand of the throne of God in heaven, I will Help you live for Me until I return.

Praying in the Upper Room

The disciples walked a half mile back to Jerusalem and began praying in the upper room, as I instructed. The disciples present were Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James, the son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, and Judas, son of James. Several women were

there, including Mary My mother. There were 120 present, and they prayed for ten days.

Finally, Peter stood to address the group, “Brothers, it is necessary for us to fulfill the Scriptures about Judas, who betrayed Jesus by guiding the mob to arrest Him. The Holy Spirit, through David, predicted what we should do. He (Judas) was chosen just as we were, and had part in our ministry, but he lifted up his heel against us.

Remorse and Suicide of Judas

“Judas purchased a field with the money he stole from us and he plunged to his death in that field; all his bowels spilled on the ground. The news of his death circulated among the people, and they called it the Field of Blood. King David also predicted in Psalms, ‘Let his home be desolate, and let no one live there, and let his work be given to someone else.’”

Peter said they should choose someone to take Judas’ place and join them as witnesses of My resurrection. “Let us choose someone who has been with us since the baptism of John and must have seen the physically resurrected Jesus and been with us since the ascension.”

They nominated two men: Joseph Justus (also called Barsabbas) and Matthias. Then they prayed that the right man would be chosen, saying, “O Lord, You know their hearts, show us which of these men You have chosen as an apostle to replace Judas, the traitor, who has gone to his place.” Then they cast lots and Matthias’ lot was chosen, and he was numbered with the eleven.

I Send the Holy Spirit

2 When the day of Pentecost had come—seven weeks and one day since the Passover when I died—they were still praying in unity in the upper room. Suddenly, they heard a great noise that sounded like a wind storm that filled the room where they were praying, but they were not blown about, nor was the room disrupted. They saw flames of fire in the air, and it settled on each of them, but no one was burned. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and all began to speak in foreign languages they didn’t know. The Holy Spirit gave them this miraculous ability.

Many obedient Jews were in Jerusalem for Pentecost, having come from many nations of the earth. When they heard the noise of the mighty wind, they came to see what was going on. They were surprised to hear their own languages being spoken by the disciples. “How can this be,” they asked, “these men are from Galilee, yet we hear them speaking fluently in our languages?” They were Parthians, Medes, and Elamites, and those who live in Mesopotamia and Judea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in parts of Libya near Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and Jewish converts, Cretans, and Arabians. They exclaimed, “We hear them tell the wonderful works of God in our mother tongue.” They were amazed and asked one another, “What does this mean?”

Others in the crowd mocked the disciples, saying, “They are drunk with new wine.”

You do not have to keep silent because of fear of what the crowd will think or say. I did not keep silent. I will give you the words to speak.

Peter Preaching at Pentecost

Peter, with the eleven disciples, stood before the crowd to answer them, “Listen, you people of Judah, and all who live in Jerusalem, these are not drunk as you suppose. It is too early, it’s only 9 o’clock in the morning. What you see is what was predicted by Joel the prophet, ‘In the last days,’ God said, ‘I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind and your sons and daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.’”

The power of the Spirit gives broken people strength, gives weak Christians an opportunity to witness, and produces spiritual phenomena. I will fill you with power so that there will be supernatural results in your life.

“And on my servants and handmaidens I will cause miracles in heaven and on earth, the sun shall become black, and the moon blood red before the

awesome day of the Lord arrives. And all who call on the name of the Lord will be saved.

“Listen, men of Israel! You know God publicly endorsed Jesus of Nazareth by doing miracles through Him. God predetermined for you to deliver Jesus to the Roman government to murder Him by nailing Him to a cross, then God released Him from the grip of death and brought Him back to life again because death could not keep Jesus in the grave. David predicted this resurrection when he said, ‘I saw the LORD before me, He is always by my side, so that I shall not be shaken. Therefore, my heart is filled with rejoicing and My tongue shouts praise to God because I know God will take care of me in death. You will not leave my soul in hell, neither will You let Your Holy Son decay in the grave. You will give me back my physical life and fill me with joy as I stand in Your presence.’”

Peter continued preaching, saying that David was dead and buried and his tomb was in Jerusalem, yet David was a prophet who said, “God has sworn in an oath that Messiah would be His descendant and sit on the throne.” Seeing the future, David said, “Messiah would not be abandoned to the grave, even His body would not suffer decay. We are witnesses that God has raised Jesus to new life, then He was exalted to the right hand of God and received by the Father. Then God poured out the promised Holy Spirit as evidenced by what you see and hear among His followers.” Then Peter referred to David again. “For David did not ascend to heaven, yet he quoted the Messiah who said, ‘The Lord said to my Lord, sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies Your footstool.’”

“Therefore, all Israel should realize God the Father has made Jesus—whom you crucified—both Lord and Messiah.” The people were cut to the heart when they heard this, and they asked, “What shall we do?” Peter answered, “Repent, so your sins will be forgiven, and be baptized every one of you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This promise is for you, your children, and those in distant lands who will call on the Lord our God.”

My Church Was Born

Peter preached a long sermon featuring Me, urging all of his listeners to “Save yourself from the punishment that’s coming upon this nation.” And

approximately three thousand were baptized and joined them.

They regularly attended the apostles' teachings, and the Lord's Table, and prayer meetings. A deep awe came on them as many miracles were done by the apostles. The believers had everything in common, selling their belongings to give to anyone who had need. They met together every day in the temple courtyards and broke bread together in homes and shared meals with great joy and thankfulness, praising Me. The unsaved were favorable to the believers, and daily, I added to My church as people were being saved.

I want you to pray to Me daily, because that's how My early church prayed.

Peter's Sermon

3 Peter and John went into the temple at 3:00 p.m. to pray with all those seeking to call on My name. They encountered a lame man at the gate who had never walked in his life. Friends brought him there every day. He was begging for alms from worshipers, so he asked Peter and John for a gift of charity. Peter looked directly at him and said, "Look at us!" So the lame man looked at them, expecting to receive some money.

Then Peter said, "I don't have any silver or gold, but I'll give you what I have. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." Then Peter grabbed him by the hand and pulled him to his feet. Immediately his feet and ankles were strengthened. He leaped up and walked into the temple with them; he was leaping and dancing and shouting praises to God. The worshipers saw him walking and leaping and recognized he was the lame man who begged at the gate. So the crowd was surprised and curious. The other worshipers rushed into Solomon's porch to see the healed man. They stood in awe at the miracle that just happened.

Just like I healed the lame man at the temple gate, I can help you believe for other healing events and give you the prayer of faith to pray for those who are sick.

Peter's Sermon in Response

Peter realized it was an opportunity to preach, so he said, “Men of Israel, why are you surprised and why are you staring at us as though we did this? The God of our ancestors has done this miracle. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob has done this to honor His servant, Jesus. You betrayed Jesus and denied Him before Pilate, even when Pilate decided to let Him go.” Peter preached straight at them, “You disowned the righteous Jesus and begged for Pilate to give you a murderer instead. You were responsible for the death of Christ, but God raised Him from the dead. John and I are witnesses of this truth. We saw Him alive. This man was healed in the name of Jesus. It was faith in Christ Jesus that gave this man his health and healing, and all of you can see it.

“I realize that you had no idea what the Jewish leaders were doing to Jesus Christ, but the prophets foretold that Messiah would suffer, and through your blindness this came about. Now you must repent and turn to God so that your sins can be forgiven, and so God can send to you times of refreshing that come from the presence of God. Then God will send Jesus your Messiah back to you, but for now He must remain in heaven until the final restoration of all things. This is the prediction of Moses who said, ‘The Lord God will raise up a prophet like me; listen to all His messages. Every soul that will not listen to that prophet shall be utterly destroyed.’”

Peter continued preaching, “All the prophets from Samuel onward have predicted these days. You are the sons of the prophets who have predicted these things, and heirs of the agreement that God made with Abraham that ‘Through you shall all the families of the earth be blessed.’ It was you whom God first wanted to bless through His Son Jesus after He had raised Him from the dead by forgiving the sins of every one of you.”

The Apostles Arrested

4 While Peter and John were talking to the people, the chief priest, captain of the temple guard, and some Sadducees were disturbed that they preached that I had risen from the dead, so they arrested them and put them in jail for the night. But many believed who heard what they said, so that about five thousand men now believed.

I came to this earth first for the salvation of the Jews, but I want you to know that I also provided salvation for all Gentiles . . . but most of all for you.

Peter and John Before the Jewish Leaders

The next day the council of Jewish leaders convened in Jerusalem with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, Alexander, and others of the high priest's relatives. Then the two disciples were brought in before them and were asked, "By what name or authority have you done this?"

Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, answered, "Leaders and elders, are you questioning us about the kindness done to a crippled man, and how he was healed? It is high time that you leaders and all Israel realize this miracle was done in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth! He is the One you crucified, but God raised Him from the dead; by the power of Jesus, this man stands here healed. Jesus is the Stone which you builders rejected, but now He has become the Cornerstone of the building. Neither is there salvation in any other. There is no other name under heaven given among people, whereby we must be saved."

I will give you boldness, like Peter, to witness for Me, especially to those who don't believe in Me.

The Jewish Leaders Forbid Preaching in My Name

The Jewish leaders were amazed at the boldness of Peter and John because they were uneducated and ignorant men. The leaders realized they had been with Me, but they couldn't say anything against the disciples because the healed man was standing with them. So the leaders ordered the disciples to leave the council so they could discuss the issue among themselves. They said, "What are we going to do with these men? It is evident to everyone in Jerusalem that an outstanding miracle has been done by these men, and we can't deny it. Nevertheless, to prevent this thing from spreading, let's command them not to speak in His name again."

So they called Peter and John and commanded them not to speak anymore in My name. Peter and John answered them, “We have to decide whether God wants us to listen to you, more than to Him. We cannot stop telling everyone what we have seen and heard.”

After more threats, they let Peter and John go because they didn’t know how to punish them any further. The people supported them wholeheartedly, glorifying God for the miracle on the man who was over forty years old.

My Church Prays

When the apostles were released, they went back to the believers and reported what the chief priest and elders said to them. The Christians raised their voices to God in praise, “Almighty Lord, You have made heaven and earth, the seas and everything in them. You spoke by the Holy Spirit through David, ‘Why do the pagans rage, and the people imagine sinful things, the kings of the earth unite to fight You, and oppose the Messiah, Your Son?’

“For in this city of Jerusalem, the rulers have united to fight against Your Holy Servant, Jesus, the Anointed One. Herod, and Pontius Pilate, and the Roman soldiers, and the people of Israel, have gathered together to carry out what You had previously planned to happen. Now Lord, listen to their threats and give to us, Your servants, boldness to speak Your Word courageously. Continue to stretch out Your hand to heal and do miracles in the name of Your Holy Servant, Jesus.”

When they had finished praying, the room was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the Word of God boldly.

My Church Prospers

All the believers were of one heart and mind, and no one was selfish with their belongings, but shared them freely, as though their things belonged to everyone. The apostles continued witnessing boldly of My resurrection, and there was a wonderful spirit of fellowship among them all, and there was not a single believer in need of anything. Those who owned property sold it and brought the proceeds and placed them at the apostles’ feet; then distribution was made to all in need.

Joseph was given the name Barnabas (meaning “Exhorter”) by the apostles. Barnabas was a Levite who broke the Mosaic law by owning land, so he sold his farm in Cyprus and gave it to My church.

The Word Spreads

5 Another man who owned property named Ananias agreed with his wife Sapphira to sell it, but they kept back part of the price for themselves. Ananias placed the remaining money at the apostles’ feet, but Peter said, “Why have you let satan fill your heart to cheat the Holy Spirit? Why have you kept part of the price for the land? The land didn’t need to be sold, it was yours. The price for the land was also yours. Why have you thought you could deceive God? You have not lied to the church; you’ve lied to God!”

When Ananias heard this condemnation, he collapsed and died, and all who heard it were terrified. The young men covered him with a sheet, and then buried him.

About three hours later, his wife came into the assembly, not knowing what happened to her husband.

Peter asked her, “Did you sell your land for so much?”

“Yes,” she answered, “that was the price.” Peter asked, “Why did you agree to cheat the Holy Spirit? The young men who buried your husband are at the door.” Immediately, she collapsed and died. The young men buried her next to her husband. Terror gripped the young church, and no one was tempted again to lie or cheat God in any way.

Victory in My Church

The apostles were meeting regularly at Solomon’s porch in the temple and doing miracles among the people. But some were afraid to join them for the wrong reasons. The believers were well respected by people in general. As a result more and more men and women became believers in growing numbers. Many signs and wonders were being done by the apostles. As a result, people brought the sick to the streets and laid them down so Peter’s shadow might fall on them. A large crowd of people came from other cities,

bringing their sick and those who were demon-possessed, so they could be healed by the apostles.

If you let Me, I will keep you excited with the work of evangelism so that many people will become Christians through your ministry.

The Second Persecution

The high priest and the Sadducees reacted to the work of the apostles, and in jealousy, they had the apostles arrested and put in a common prison. But an angel, sent from Me, came at night and opened the door and led them out, telling them, “Go stand in the temple and tell people about the Christian life.”

About sunup, they went into the temple and began to preach. Later, the members of the Sanhedrin arrived, and gathered the Senate and sent for the apostles to come from the jail. The officers could not find them in the prison. They reported, “We found the jail locked, and guards on duty, but when we opened the door, no one was there.”

The Sanhedrin was mystified, wondering what happened to their prisoners. Then someone arrived to announce that the prisoners were preaching in the temple. The captain went with guards to get them, but didn't use any violence because they feared the crowd, so they brought them to the Sanhedrin. The high priest said, “We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name, but you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and accused us of the death of Jesus.”

Peter replied, “We must obey God and not men. The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus from the dead because you had Him executed on a wooden Roman cross. God has exalted this man to His own right hand as Prince and Savior, for the forgiveness of Israel's sins. We are witnesses of the resurrection and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him.”

When the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and wanted to execute them, but Gamaliel, a Pharisee and teacher greatly respected by all, stood and gave orders for the apostles to be taken outside. Gamaliel said, “Men and brethren, be careful what action you take against these men. Remember,

a man named Theudus, who claimed to be something great? He had a following of four hundred men. When Theudus was killed, his followers were dispersed and the threat was gone. Also, remember Judas, who had a great following. When Judas was killed, his followers dispersed. I suggest you leave the apostles alone. If their movement is of men, it will break up of its own accord. If their movement is of God, you can't do anything about it, and you may find yourself fighting against God.”

The advice of Gamaliel was accepted. They called in the apostles and warned them not to preach in this name; then they flogged them and let them go.

The apostles left the Sanhedrin rejoicing, because they had been counted worthy to suffer for My name. Day after day, they did not cease preaching and teaching My message from house to house and in the temple courts.

I want you to read about the courage and boldness of the early church so that you can live with the same level of courage. Just like the early church, I will use you as a witness in the lives of lost people.

Internal Problems in My Church

6 Even though believers were multiplying in My early church, there were rumblings of discontent among them. The Hellenistic widows, born outside the Holy Land, were complaining about the Jewish widows, born in the Holy Land, because they were being discriminated against when food was daily passed out to those in need. The twelve apostles called the multitude of Christians together and explained that it was not appropriate for them to spend their time supervising a humanitarian hot-food kitchen. They explained, “Look around and pick seven men of good reputation, practical minded, and filled with the Holy Spirit and faith, who can administer this program. We will spend our time in prayer and preaching the Word of God.”

There was unanimous approval from the multitude, so they chose seven Hellenistic men beginning with Stephen, because he was filled with the

Holy Spirit. They also chose Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicholas of Antioch who had just become a Christian. These seven men were brought before the apostles who laid their hands on them and committed them to God.

As a result, the Word of God reached a larger circle of listeners and the number of disciples multiplied greatly. Also a number of priests—those who hated Christianity—were saved when they saw how the early church handled its money problems and internal griping.

The Ministry of Stephen, the Deacon

Stephen, a deacon filled with the Holy Spirit and power, worked miracles and signs among the masses. He got opposition from the synagogues of freemen, Hellenistic Jews from Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia, and Asia. They debated with Stephen, but couldn't answer his wisdom and spirit.

So the free men brought in men to lie, saying Stephen cursed Moses and God. This stirred up the people, the elders and teachers of the law, so they seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin to face false witnesses, who said Stephen spoke against the Holy Spirit and the law, also claiming Stephen said, "Jesus will destroy the temple and change the customs handed down by Moses."

The members of the Sanhedrin saw Stephen's face become as radiant as an angel's face.

When you take a bold stand against My enemies, they experience My love flowing through your life and they will see My beauty in you.

The Sermon by Stephen

7 The high priest asked Stephen, "Are these charges true?"

Stephen answered, "My brothers, and fathers, listen to me. The God of glory appeared to Abraham while he was in Mesopotamia before

Abraham went to Haran. God said, ‘Leave your country and family and go to a land I will show you.’

“So Abraham left Chaldea and settled in Haran, staying there until his father died. Then Abraham left to come to this land where we now live today. God did not give him the land while he was alive, but promised to give it to him and his descendants, even though he was childless when the promise was made. Then God told him, ‘Your descendants will be strangers in a foreign country, where they will become slaves and be oppressed for four hundred years.’ God promised to judge the nation that enslaved them. Then God promised His people that they would worship Him in this land.”

Stephen thought it was important to show that I spoke to people who were not in the Promised Land. That meant I was offering salvation to Gentiles outside the Promised Land. Stephen was laying a foundation to prove I would bless the apostles as they went to preach to every person, beginning at Jerusalem, then going to Judea, Samaria, and all the world.

Stephen continued preaching, “God made a covenant of circumcision with them, so Isaac was circumcised on the eighth day. Isaac did the same for Jacob, and Jacob did it for his twelve sons who became the twelve patriarchs. The patriarchs were jealous of Joseph and sold him into slavery in Egypt, but God was with him. God rescued Joseph and made him wise enough to get Pharaoh’s attention, who then made him governor of Egypt.”

Stephen continued preaching, “When famine caused suffering and devastation throughout Egypt and Canaan, our ancestors had nothing to eat. When Jacob heard there was grain for sale in Egypt, he sent his ten sons there on their first visit to buy food. On the second visit, Joseph made himself known to his brothers, and then told Pharaoh about his family and called his father and all his relatives to him. Jacob went to live in Egypt, where he and his family die. Their bones were brought back and buried at Shechem in the tomb Abraham purchased from Hamor, the father of Shechem.”

When you read how enemies persecuted My people in Scripture, it helps you understand why the world persecutes My people today.

Stephen continued preaching, “The nation of Israel grew larger in Egypt. A new king took the throne who didn’t know Joseph. He oppressed our people and victimized our ancestors, and forced parents to abandon their babies.

“During this time, Moses was born. He was no ordinary child. For three months, he was cared for at home. But when Moses was exposed to Pharaoh’s daughter, she adopted him and raised him as her own child. Moses was taught all the wisdom of the Egyptians and became mighty in speech and actions.

“At the age of forty he decided to visit his Jewish people. He saw one of his fellow countrymen being abused, and he defended him by killing the Egyptian. Moses thought the Jews would understand that God would use him to deliver them, but they didn’t understand nor responded positively to him.

“The next day, Moses saw two Israelites fighting and he separated them. The attacker said, ‘Who made you our leader and judge? Will you kill me as you did the Egyptian yesterday?’ Moses fled when he heard this, realizing his actions were known. He went to the land of Midian where he became father of two sons.

“Forty years later in the desert near Mount Sinai, I appeared to him in the flames of a burning bush. He was curious, so he drew closer to the bush. A voice said, ‘I am the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.’ Moses trembled and couldn’t look at the fire. The LORD said, ‘Take off your shoes; you are standing on holy ground.’ The LORD also said, ‘I have seen the suffering of My people, and I have heard their cries for deliverance, and I have come down to deliver them. Go deliver My people from Egypt.’

“This was the same Moses they rejected saying, ‘Who made you our leader and judge?’ Now Moses was sent by God to be both leader and judge. He performed miracles and signs in Egypt, then led them through the Red Sea and through the desert forty years. Moses told the people, ‘God will raise up a prophet for you, like myself, from among your people.’

Moses was the mediator between the people and God. He gave them the living law of God from Mount Sinai.

“But the people rejected Moses, and wanted to return to Egypt. They asked Aaron to make idols for them so they could have gods to lead them back to Egypt. They made a golden calf and offered sacrifices to it and were happy in what they were doing. God gave them up and let them worship the sun, the moon, and the stars as their gods.

“In the book of Amos, the LORD God asks,

‘Were you sacrificing to Me forty years in the wilderness? No! You carried the sanctuary of Moloch on your backs; you carried the star-god of Rephan in your hearts. You worshiped idols that you made so I will exile you to Babylon.’

“While in the desert, our ancestors carried the tabernacle with them that Moses had them construct from the pattern that God gave him.” Stephen continued preaching, “It was handed down from one generation to another until Joshua conquered the nations and drove them out and the tabernacle was set up in the new territory. Israel worshiped in the tabernacle until the time of David, who found favor before God. Then he asked for permission to build a temple for Israel, though Solomon actually built the house of God. Even so, the Most High does not live in a house built by human hands, as the prophet quoted the Lord, saying, ‘Heaven is My home, the earth is My footstool, what kind of home could you build for Me? Didn’t I make the heavens and the earth?’”

Stephen continued preaching, “You are stiff-necked with a pagan heart. You are resisting the Holy Spirit, just as your ancestors. Name one prophet your ancestors didn’t persecute. In the past, they killed the prophets who predicted the coming of the Just One, the One you betrayed and murdered. You had the law given to you by angels, but you have deliberately destroyed it.”

They were outraged when they heard these stinging accusations against themselves. Stephen was filled with the Holy Spirit, looked into heaven and saw the glory of God, and he saw Me standing at God’s right hand. He said, “I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”

But they covered their ears with their hands and furiously yelled at him, and rushed at him and carried him out of the city and stoned him. They

dropped their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul and stoned Stephen, who called on God, saying, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” Then kneeling, Stephen cried out to God: “Lord, forgive their sin.” And with these words, he died.

Stand firm in your faith to the very end. Don't let pain or doubts about death weaken your faith. I want you to know that I control the moment of your death. You will come home to be with Me for eternity when I call. Whether it is in the rapture or through death's door, I will be there.

Christians Leave Jerusalem

8 Saul approved the death of Stephen and immediately that day a storm of persecution erupted in Jerusalem against My church and believers fled into the countrysides of Judea and Samaria to escape persecution, except the apostles. However, some reverently buried Stephen and mourned for him. Saul then worked feverishly to destroy all remains of My church, going house to house, he dragged men and women to prison. But Christians were scattered everywhere, preaching My Word.

Philip Ministers in Samaria

So Philip the deacon went to Samaria to preach My message. The crowds paid close attention to what Philip preached because they heard about what he did and saw his miracles. Evil spirits screamed as they were cast out of their victims, and the paralyzed and lame were healed; as a result, there was great joy in the city.

A man named Simon had formerly been practicing magic and amazed crowds by the mystifying things he did. The people said, “Simon must be sent by God.” Previously the people had listened to him because of his magic but Simon became a believer when Philip preached. Many men and women were converted and baptized because of Philip, who preached the kingdom of God and in My name. Simon also was baptized because he

believed. Simon followed Philip everywhere he went because he was amazed at the miracles he saw.

When the apostles in Jerusalem heard all that was happening in Samaria, they sent Peter and John to check it out. Peter and John prayed for the Samaritans to receive the Holy Spirit. They had been baptized in My name, but they had not received the Holy Spirit. So the apostles laid hands on the people and prayed for them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

When Simon saw that the people received the Holy Spirit, he wanted the same power in his hands. So Simon offered them money, saying, “Give me this power so I can lay hands on people so they can receive the Holy Spirit.”

Peter erupted, “Your money will go to hell, and you with it, because you think money can buy what God gives for free. You have no part in this ministry, because your heart is not right with God. Turn from your wickedness and pray to God. Perhaps He will forgive your sin for thinking this evil. It is plain that you are a prisoner of greed.”

Simon cried out, “Pray for me that nothing you said will happen to me.”

The apostles preached in that city, and many other Samaritan villages. Then they returned to Jerusalem.

Philip Ministers to the Ethiopian Eunuch

The angel, sent from Me, then spoke to Philip, “Go south to the route through the desert from Jerusalem to Gaza.” There Philip saw an important Ethiopian official who was returning from worshiping in Jerusalem. This Ethiopian was the country’s treasurer who was reading the book of Isaiah out loud to his entourage as he rode along in his chariot. The Holy Spirit told Philip, “Go meet this man.”

As Philip approached, he heard the man reading from Isaiah. Philip asked, “Do you understand what you’re reading?”

“How can I,” the man answered, “unless someone helps me;” so the Ethiopian invited Philip to ride with him. He was reading,

“We are like sheep that are led to the slaughter, like a lamb that says nothing before its shearers; He never opened His mouth. He was

humiliated, but no one defended Him. Who will ever talk about His descendants, since His life is cut short on earth?”

The eunuch asked Philip, “Is this passage a reference to the prophet who wrote it, or to someone else?” Beginning with this text, Philip explained to him the good news of My death, burial, and resurrection from the dead.

A little farther on, they came to a pool of water. The eunuch said, “Look, here is water; is there any reason why I can’t be baptized right here, right now?”

Philip said, “You may, if you believe with all your heart that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. The eunuch ordered the chariot to stop. Then the eunuch and Philip went down into the water and Philip baptized him. After they came out of the water, the Holy Spirit took Philip away. The eunuch never saw him again. Then the treasurer went on his way rejoicing. Philip was at Azotus, and he continued preaching the good news in every town until he got to Caesarea.

You need to rejoice when someone gets saved and baptized. Be a faithful witness to lost people. There are many religious people who are blinded to the truth, even as the eunuch who didn’t understand the Scriptures he read. You can help them understand My truth, and lead them to salvation through Me.

The Conversion of Saul

9 Meanwhile, Saul was still threatening to destroy every Christian. He had a letter from the high priest that gave him authority to arrest Christians in Damascus and bring them to Jerusalem. As he almost reached Damascus, suddenly, a blinding light from heaven shone all about him. Saul fell to the ground and heard My voice saying, “Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?”

Saul answered, “Who are You, Lord?”

I answered, “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.”

The men traveling with Saul stood speechless. They heard the sound, but didn't see anyone. Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes, he could see nothing. He was blind, so they led him into the city of Damascus. There he remained blind for three days. During that time he ate and drank nothing.

While your conversion might not have been as dramatic as Saul's, there is one thing you can know that is real: once you were blind in your sin, but now you see.

In Damascus, there was one of my followers named Ananias. I called him by name in a dream. He responded, "Here I am, Lord."

"Go to the street called Straight." I said to him, "Go to the house of Judah and ask for Saul from Tarsus. He is praying there. Saul knows you are coming to lay hands on his eyes to restore his sight."

But Ananias replied, "Lord, I have heard evil reports about this man. He has done terrible things to Your servants. He has come with authority to arrest those who call on Your name."

I said to Ananias, "Go pray for him because I have chosen Saul to preach My name before Gentiles and kings, and he will suffer much for My name's sake."

So Ananias found Saul and laid hands on him and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road sent me so you will be filled with the Holy Spirit and get your sight back." Instantly, the scales fell from his eyes and Saul could see. Then he was baptized, and ate and was strengthened. Saul stayed with Christians in Damascus for a while.

Saul Begins Preaching My Gospel

Immediately Saul went to the synagogues to preach the good news that I was indeed the Son of God. All who heard Saul were amazed, and asked, "Isn't this the man who arrested Christians in Jerusalem and came here to do the same thing?" Saul became more fervent in preaching. The Damascus synagogue was silenced by the strength of Saul's preaching that I was the Christ.

After a time, the Jews plotted to kill Saul, but he heard about it. The assassins waited at the gate night and day, but at night the believers helped Saul escape over the wall in a basket.

When Saul got to Jerusalem, he tried to join the Christians, but they were afraid of him. They were not sure Saul was a true believer. Barnabas received Saul and introduced him to the apostles, and explained how I had appeared to Saul, what I had said to him, and how Saul had preached boldly in My name in the synagogue in Damascus. Then the believers accepted Saul, and he preached boldly among them. Some Greek-speaking Jews to whom Saul preached plotted to murder him. The believers heard about it and took Saul to Caesarea, and then sent him to his hometown in Tarsus.

Although My church was no longer threatened by persecution, the believers grew in number and spiritual maturity. They no longer worried about persecution, but they had a godly fear of Me, because the Holy Spirit was their Comforter.

I will help you to be a persistent witness to Me even when people refuse to believe and reject your message. Opposition will make you stronger in your faith and more determined to serve Me.

Ministry of Peter

Peter was traveling to evangelize the lost and encourage My churches. When he came to Lydda, he found Aeneas who had been paralyzed eight years. Peter said, “Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you, get up and fold your mat.” He was healed instantly. Everyone living in the area turned to Me when they saw Aeneas walking.

A woman named Dorcas, who lived in Joppa, died. She was a believer who always did kind things for others, especially the poor. Her friends prepared the body for burial and placed it in an upstairs room. When the people learned Peter was nearby, they sent two men to bring him to Joppa.

When Peter arrived, he went upstairs to where Dorcas lay. The room was filled with widows who showed Peter the clothes Dorcas had made for them. Peter sent them out of the room and knelt to pray. Peter turned to the dead body and said, “Tabitha, stand up.” She opened her eyes, looked at

Peter, and sat up. Peter helped her to her feet and presented her to the believers. When the people of Joppa heard of the miracle, many of them believed in My name. Peter stayed there for some time, living with Simon, the tanner.

It was a great miracle that I did through Peter that day. That same power is available to you today. I can do all things for you. I hold your very life and health in My hands. Treasure Me above all things. Just have faith that I will do everything I said I can do.

I Send an Angel to Cornelius

10A captain named Cornelius in the Italian regiment of the Roman Army was stationed at the military fortress in Caesarea. He was a religious man who led his whole family to worship God and give to the poor, and he prayed constantly. About 3:00 p.m. Cornelius saw an angel come to him in a vision. As he stared at the angel in fear, Cornelius said, “What do you want with me?”

The angel answered, “God has heard your prayers, and seen your works for the poor, so now He will answer you. Send some men to Joppa to get Simon Peter, who is a guest in the home of Simon, the tanner, who lives by the sea.”

When the angel went away, Cornelius told what happened to two of his servants and a soldier who was religious. He then sent them to Joppa to get Peter.

I have compassion on extremely religious people who seek Me, but have never heard the gospel. There are millions of unsaved people who have never heard. I will stir their hearts to seek salvation in Me.

Peter’s Vision and His Response

As they approached Joppa the next day about noon, Peter was praying up on the rooftop while the others were preparing lunch. Peter was ready to eat. It was then Peter had a vision in which he saw heaven opened and a large sheet being lowered by the four corners. In it were all kinds of animals, reptiles, and wild birds. He heard a voice say, “Get up, Peter, kill and eat.”

Peter answered, “I can’t do that, Lord. I have never eaten anything that was unclean or defiled.”

The voice spoke again, “Do not call anything unclean that God has cleansed.”

This happened three times, then the sheet was taken back to heaven.

As Peter was thinking about what just happened, the men sent by Cornelius arrived at the gate of the house. They called out, “Is there a guest here by the name of Simon Peter?”

Peter was still trying to understand what he saw when the Spirit of God said, “Three men are looking for you. Do not hesitate to go with them for I have sent them.”

Then Peter went down and told them, “I am Peter. Why have you come looking for me?”

They told Peter, “Our leader, Cornelius, sent us to invite you to come to his house so he could hear what you have to say.” They also told Peter that Cornelius was a good man who worshiped God, and the Jewish people respected him.

I am with those who go preach to the billions who have never heard. Some go to dangerous situations; some give up riches and positions. I will bless those who preach the gospel to those who have never heard, so that many will hear and believe and be saved. Are you willing to go where I send you, and are you willing to do anything I want you to do? I will guide you today and through eternity.

Peter and Cornelius Exchange Greetings

Peter invited the men into the house, and they stayed the night with Peter. The following day Peter arrived in Caesarea at Cornelius’ house where he

was waiting for Peter with all his relations and friends. As Peter was about to enter, Cornelius met him and bowed at his feet, saying he was unworthy to receive Peter. But Peter made him rise, saying, “Stand up, I am only a man.”

Peter went inside with Cornelius, where he found a crowd and said, “You know that a Jew can’t associate with Gentiles.” Peter explained, “God has shown me that I must not consider any person ritually unclean or defiled. Therefore, I came without objection. Now, why did you send for me?”

Cornelius explained, “About this time three days ago I was praying in my house when suddenly a man in shining garments appeared to me, saying, ‘God has heard your prayers, and seen your charity. Send your servants to Joppa for a man named Peter; he is a guest at the home of Simon a tanner.’ So I sent for you at once. Thank you for coming. Now we are all here in the presence of God waiting to hear anything God has told you to say to us.”

Many are hungry to hear the good news. May you always be willing and ready to tell them about Me.

Peter’s Sermon in Cornelius’ Home

Then Peter spoke to the gathering, “God does not play favorites, but He accepts people from any nation who do the right things. God sent His message of peace through Jesus Christ to Israel because Jesus is Lord of all. You know what happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee, after the Baptism of John. God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power. He went about doing good, healing all under the devil’s power, because God was with Him.

“We are witnesses of everything Jesus did in Judea and Jerusalem, and we saw they killed Him by hanging Jesus on a tree. Yet three days later, God raised Him from the dead, and He was seen by witnesses God had chosen. Now we are those witnesses. We have eaten and drunk with Him, after He was raised from the dead. Now God has commanded us to tell people everywhere, that He has appointed Jesus to judge everyone, alive or

dead, and the prophets witness to this fact, that all who believe in Jesus will have their sins forgiven through His name.”

I want to remind you of the simplicity of the plan of salvation. People only have to believe in Me to be saved. Peter went to people of different cultures and customs. May you always be willing to share the gospel with all people, no matter if they are different from you or not.

Gentiles Are Baptized With the Holy Spirit and Water

While Peter was speaking, the Holy Spirit was poured out on those who were listening to Peter’s sermon. The Jewish Christians who came with Peter were astonished that the Holy Spirit was poured out on Gentiles, because they were speaking in unknown languages and praising God.

Peter said, “Can anyone refuse water baptism to these who have received the Holy Spirit, just as we did on Pentecost?” He then gave instructions to baptize them in My name. Then Cornelius asked Peter to stay a few days.

Cornelius was an unsaved army officer, yet he was morally good and religious. He “prayed to God always.” His prayers didn’t get him saved, but they came before God My Father “for a memorial.” A “memorial” means a place of remembering, Therefore, God remembered Cornelius and gave him instructions on how to hear the message of salvation. If a person prays conscientiously to the God of Creation who is greater than all religions, then God will honor that prayer and arrange for him or her to hear the message of salvation. I am the only way of salvation.

Peter Explains His Actions

11 The apostles and brethren in Judea were critical when they heard that Gentiles had accepted the Word of God and been baptized. When Peter

visited Jerusalem, those who still demanded circumcision were critical because Peter visited and ate with Gentiles.

Peter reported how it happened. He said, “I was praying in Joppa when I had a vision of a big sheet let down from heaven by its four corners. I saw in it all types of beasts, reptiles, and birds. Then I heard a voice from heaven, ‘Get up Peter, kill and eat,’ but I answered, ‘I can’t do that Lord, I have never eaten anything that was unclean or defiled.’

“Then I heard the voice a second time saying, ‘Do not call anything unclean that God has cleansed.’ This happened three times and then the sheet was taken back to heaven.

“Just as that happened, three men sent by Cornelius arrived at the gate. They said they were sent from Caesarea to get me. The Holy Spirit told me not to hesitate to go with them.” Then Peter explained, “These six brothers standing here went with me and we went into Cornelius’ home. He told us that he had seen an angel when he was praying that told him, ‘Send to Joppa to get Simon Peter, who will give you a message that will save you and your household.’”

Peter continued, “While I was preaching, the Holy Spirit fell on them, as He had fallen on us at Pentecost. Then I remembered the promise of Jesus, ‘John indeed baptized with water, but you will be baptized by the Holy Spirit.’ Since God has done for Gentiles the exact same gift He did for us when we believed on Him, who was I to stand in God’s way of doing things?”

Peter’s explanation satisfied them and they glorified God. They concluded, “Evidently God has given to the Gentiles repentance to eternal life.”

Work out your misunderstandings with other Christians. Be patient when you disagree with others, and listen to people before you criticize them.

My Church at Antioch

Those who fled Jerusalem when Saul persecuted Christians had traveled as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch. At Antioch, they shared the gospel

of My death, burial and resurrection with the Greeks, giving My good news to them as well as Jews. God worked powerfully, and a large number of Gentiles turned to Me.

When this news reached My church in Jerusalem, they sent Barnabas to check out My church in Antioch. When Barnabas arrived, he saw what God was doing and rejoiced. Then he encouraged them to be strong in the faith. Barnabas was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith. As a result, a number of people became Christians.

Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to find Saul, and he brought Saul back to Antioch, where he taught the believers for a year. The believers were first called Christians at Antioch.

Rejoice when the gospel is spread to places where people don't know Me. Do all you can to help plant new churches.

Help for the Jerusalem Church

Some prophets came down to Antioch from Jerusalem. One of them, Agabus, predicted that a great famine was coming before the end of the reign of Claudius. The believers at Antioch decided to send supplies to My church in Jerusalem, so each believer gave what they could afford. Barnabas and Saul delivered the supplies to Jerusalem.

James Is Killed—Peter Is Imprisoned

12 About this time, King Herod began persecuting My church in Jerusalem. He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword.

When he saw it pleased the Jews, he arrested Peter and imprisoned him because it was the festival of Passover. Herod intended to bring Peter to trial after Passover. Peter was guarded by four squads of four soldiers each. As Peter was in prison, My church prayed earnestly for him. Peter was chained to two soldiers, sleeping between them, and there were two guards at the entrance. Suddenly, there was a light in the cell and an angel stood

next to Peter. He had to shake Peter to awaken him. The angel said, “Get up quickly,” and the chains fell off Peter.

Then the angel said, “Get dressed—don’t forget your shoes—and follow me.” Peter thought it was a dream, and he didn’t believe it was happening. They passed the first and second cells, then came to the iron gate that led to the city. It opened by itself. They walked out into the street, and as they were walking, the angel disappeared.

Finally Peter realized, “This is happening! The Lord has sent an angel to rescue me from Herod and all that the Jewish leaders wanted to do to me.”

Peter went to the home of Mary, the mother of John Mark, where Christians had gathered to pray for him. When Peter knocked at the outer gate, Rhoda, a servant girl, looked out and recognized him. She got so excited she didn’t open the gate, but ran to tell everyone.

They said, “You’re out of your mind,” but Rhoda kept saying Peter was at the gate. They thought Peter had been executed and that his angel was at the gate.

Peter kept knocking, and when they opened the gate, they were amazed that it really was Peter. Peter raised his hand to stop their talking, then he told them how I had led him out of the prison. Peter instructed them to tell James, My half-brother, and others. Then he went to a place where Herod couldn’t find him.

At dawn, there was a great commotion at the jail over the disappearance of Peter. They searched thoroughly for Peter and when he couldn’t be found, Herod ordered the guards executed.

Herod Judged

Herod lived at Caesarea in the summer time. While there, the people of Tyre and Sidon sought an audience with the king because there was a quarrel between them and Herod. Blastus, a trusted servant of Herod, worked out a compromise because the people needed Herod’s permission for their food supply.

When the day came for the people to meet Herod, he delivered an address to them wearing his crown and royal regalia. The people shouted, “This is the voice of a god, not of man,” and they gave him a rousing ovation. Instantly, an angel from God struck him with a disease, and he was

filled with maggots and died, because he accepted the people's worship instead of giving it to God.

The good news was spreading rapidly, and many people were saved. Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem when they finished their ministry and returned to Antioch, taking John Mark with them.

I will help you deal properly with pride. All the glory for everything will go to Me. I want you to be more godly, and walk humbly with Me.

I Call Barnabas and Saul to Be Missionaries

13 My church at Antioch had prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen, who was raised with Herod, and Saul. While they were worshiping God and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Send Barnabas and Saul to a special ministry, to which I have called them." So after more fasting and prayer, they laid their hands on them, and sent them out to minister.

Listen to My voice for direction to your life. When I speak, give me ears to hear what I want you to do and I will give you strength to do My will.

Barnabas and Saul Minister in Cyprus

These two men—sent by the Holy Spirit—went to Selucia and sailed to the island of Cyprus. When they landed in Salamis, they preached My Word in the synagogue of the Jews. John went along to look after details.

They traveled the whole length of the island, and came in contact with a Jewish magician named Bar-Jesus. This false prophet was an attendant of Sergius Paulus, the Roman governor of the island, who was extremely intelligent. The governor called for Barnabas and Saul because he wanted to hear the Word of God. The Jewish magician, Elymas Magos, the Greek name for Bar-Jesus, tried to stop Barnabas and Saul because it looked like

the governor would be converted to the Christian faith. Saul, whose name was changed to Paul at this time, was filled with the Holy Spirit to stop the magician. Paul stared angrily at him and said, “You son of the devil—you enemy of God—you are opposing God. Now God’s hand will judge you. You will be blind!”

Instantly, his eyes became misty and then everything went dark. He groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand. The governor, who was watching, became a believer, for he was astonished by what he saw and what he heard.

I will help you be as courageous in witnessing for Me as Paul was when he boldly faced opposition. I will teach you how to react when people oppose you for your faith.

Ministry in Turkey

Paul and his companions sailed from Paphos to Pergia in modern-day Turkey. There John Mark left them to go back home to Jerusalem. They went on from Pergia to Antioch of Pisidia. On the Sabbath day they went to the synagogue and took a seat. After the lesson from the law and the prophets were read, the president of the synagogue asked Paul, “Would you like to give some words of encouragement to the congregation?”

Paul stood, held up his hand for silence, then spoke, “Listen, men of Israel and you Gentiles who worship the God of our nation Israel, God chose us and made us a large nation when we lived as foreigners in Egypt. Then by supernatural power, God led Israel out of Egypt, and took care of them for 40 years in the wilderness. Then God destroyed seven nations as He put Israel in the Holy Land as their inheritance. They lived there 450 years.

“After that God gave them judges until the coming of the prophet Samuel. When our people begged for a king, God gave them Saul of the tribe of Benjamin. He was their king for 40 years. After God disposed of Saul, He raised up David to the throne and said, ‘He is a man after My own heart, who shall do all My will.’

“To keep His promise, God brought forth Jesus from the descendants of David to be the Savior of Israel. John the Baptizer came before Him to prepare the way of Jesus, preaching the baptism of repentance for all the people of Israel. John said, ‘I’m not the Messiah, but the One coming after me is so great, I’m not fit to loose His shoe strings.’”

Paul preached, “Men and brethren, sons of Abraham, and Gentiles who fear God, God has sent you this message of salvation. The people of Jerusalem and their leaders refused to recognize Jesus even though they read the prophets every Sabbath day that predicted His coming as Messiah. Even though there was nothing to justify the death of Jesus, they asked Pilate to execute Him. When they did everything to Jesus that the Scriptures foretold, they took Him down from the tree and buried Him in a tomb. But God raised Jesus up from the dead, and for many days He appeared to His followers from Galilee. These are now His witnesses before the world.

“We have come here to tell you the good news. God made the promises to our ancestors, but it is to us—their descendants—that He has fulfilled these promises by raising Jesus from the dead; as the Psalms say, ‘You are My Son, today I have become Your Father.’ This psalm means that God raised Jesus from the dead, never to return to corruption. God has given to Jesus the wonderful things he promised David, ‘He will not let His Holy One decay.’

“This was not a reference to David because after he lived seventy years, and served his generation, David died and his body decayed. This was a reference to another person whom God brought back to life, whose body was not touched by the ravages of death. This was a reference to Jesus.

“Brothers, listen, there is forgiveness for your sins in this man Jesus. Everyone who trusts in Him is free from all guilt. He will declare you righteous, something the law cannot do. Be careful, brothers, because the words of the prophets apply to you. Cast your eyes around your mockers, be amazed before you perish, for I work a work in your days, a work that you absolutely will not believe if you were to be told of it.”

As Paul and Barnabas left, many Jews and Gentile converts insisted they return the next Sabbath to speak on this topic. When the congregation had broken up, many of them continued to listen to Paul and Barnabas, who persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.

Realize that many people are hungry for the good news that I forgive sins, give eternal life, and give abundant satisfaction.

The next Sabbath almost the whole city assembled to hear My Word spoken. When the Jews saw the multitude, they were envious, and debated the things Paul said. Then Paul and Barnabas boldly answered them, “It was our duty to speak the good news to you Jews, who have demonstrated yourselves unworthy of eternal life. So now we are turning to the Gentiles, as the Lord has instructed us to do; ‘I have set you as a light to the Gentiles so my salvation will reach to the end of the earth.’”

The Gentiles were glad to hear this message and thanked God for it. Many of them believed in Me. Word of Me spread throughout the region, but the Jews stirred up the women and civic leaders against Paul and Barnabas, and threw them out of town. But the missionaries shook the dust of that town off their feet and went to the next city of Iconium. The converts were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit.

The disciples counted themselves worthy to suffer for Me, so I filled them with joy and the Holy Spirit. Look for My joy and the filling of the Holy Spirit when you suffer persecution for My sake.

Paul Is Stoned in Antioch

14At Iconium, Paul and Barnabas went into the Jewish synagogue as they did in Antioch and spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews became My followers. But the Jews who refused to believe in Me stirred up the Gentiles against them, but Paul and Barnabas stayed there to preach fearlessly. I confirmed the message of grace and allowed signs and wonders to be done by them. The people of the city were divided, some siding with the apostles and others supported the Jews. But the unbelievers planned to stone them. Paul and Barnabas heard their plot and left for safety reasons. Leaving, they preached the gospel in Lystra and Derbe and the surrounding mountains.

In Derbe and Lystra

A man, crippled from birth, sat at the city gate listening to Paul. Paul saw him and realized he had faith to be healed. Then Paul said in a loud voice, “Stand up straight on your feet!” The man jumped up and began to walk.

When the crowd saw what happened, they shouted in their language, “The gods have come down to us dressed like men.” They called Barnabas Zeus, and they called Paul Hermes since he was the spokesman. The priest of Jupiter, whose temple was outside the gate, brought oxen and flowers to sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas at the city gate in front of the crowd.

But Paul and Barnabas ripped their clothes and ran into the crowd, shouting, “Friends, why are you doing this? We are human beings with feelings just as you. We are here to tell you the good news that you should turn from idols to the living God who made heaven and earth and the sea and everything in it. In the past, He let the nations go their own way, but there was always a witness to them: the earth, heaven, and the seas. He sent rain giving you crops and food to eat.” This speech barely restrained the crowd from offering sacrifices to them.

The Stoning of Paul

Then Jews arrived from Antioch and Iconium and turned the people against the apostles. They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead. The Christians gathered around him, but as they did, Paul stood up and went back into the town. The next day, Paul and Barnabas departed to Derbe.

They preached the gospel and many became Christians. They turned back and revisited Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch of Turkey, where they strengthened My disciples in those cities, exhorting them to be strong in the faith and endure many tribulations. After prayer and fasting, they appointed church leaders in every church, commending them to Me for their new ministry. They then crossed over the mountains to Pisidia, going to Pamphylia. After preaching the Word of God in Perga, they went to Attalia and then sailed back to Antioch of Syria. They arrived back at My church that originally commissioned them because they had completed the work they intended to do. They assembled My church together and reported all

that I had done through them, especially how I had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles. They stayed in Antioch a long time.

The First Church Council

15 Some men came to Antioch from Judea, teaching, “You are not saved unless you have been circumcised according to the practice of Moses.” A long fierce argument broke out between Paul and Barnabas and those who wanted to add “good works” to salvation. It was arranged for Paul, Barnabas, and others to go to Jerusalem to discuss this issue with the apostles and elders. My church gathered to see them off, and they traveled through Lebanon and Samaria telling how Gentiles were saved. Christians everywhere rejoiced when they heard this. They were welcomed in Jerusalem by the apostles, elders, and My church. Paul and Barnabas told them what God had done among the Gentiles.

Some of the converted Pharisees came forward to say the Gentiles must be circumcised and keep the law of Moses.

The apostles and elders called a meeting to discuss the issues. After a long debate, Peter stood to address the council. “My friends,” he said, “you remember God chose me to preach the gospel to the Gentiles at Cornelius’ house so they could believe. God knows who is genuinely converted, so He gave them the Holy Spirit, just as He gave the Spirit to us. God made no distinction between Jew and Gentile because He forgave them by faith, just as He did for us. Now you are trying to correct God and impose on the Gentiles a burden that neither we nor our ancestors were able to obey. No one has ever kept the law to be saved. We are saved the same way Gentiles are saved, through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Peter’s argument silenced the assembly, no one could say anything. Then Paul and Barnabas described all the signs and miracles I had done through them among the Gentiles.

Finally, James gave his thoughts, “My brothers, Simon Peter has described how God worked to call to Himself those who were saved among the Gentiles. This agrees with the words of the prophets, since the Scriptures say, ‘After that I will return and rebuild the fallen house of David. I shall rebuild it from its ruins and restore it. Then the rest of the

world—the Gentiles— may seek the Lord to be saved.” James stated, “The Lord said this long ago.”

“So I suggest that we should not make things more difficult for Gentiles to be saved.” James proposed they send a letter telling Gentile Christians, “Abstain from anything polluted by idols, from fornication, from meat of strangled animals, and blood.” James reasoned, “Because there are disciples of Moses in every place, they read Moses every week and faithfully obey him.”

Then the apostles and elders decided to choose and send delegates to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas to read the following letter to them. They chose Judas known as Barnabas, and Silas. Both men were leaders in the Jerusalem church. “The apostles and elders, your brothers in Christ, send greetings to the Gentile brothers in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia.

“We have heard that some of our members have upset you by demanding that you all be circumcised to be saved. They did not have our authorization, so we have unanimously elected these delegates to go with Paul and Barnabas to deliver this letter to you. We highly respect Paul and Barnabas, who have risked their lives for the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, we are sending Judas and Silas who will re-enforce what this letter says. The Holy Spirit has led us not to burden Gentile believers with keeping the law, but we want you to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, and the meat of strangled animals, and from fornication. You will do right to avoid them. Farewell.”

The group left and went to Antioch, where they gathered My church and delivered the letter to them. My church read it and was delighted with its conclusions. Judas and Silas stayed preaching to the Christians in Antioch. Then My church sent them back to their homes in Jerusalem. But Silas decided to stay there. Paul and Barnabas stayed in Antioch to help the others who were preaching and teaching to My church.

Paul said to Barnabas, “Let’s go back to visit the churches we planted where we preached the Word of God so we can see how they are doing.” Barnabas wanted to take John Mark with them, but Paul was not in favor of it because he had deserted them in Pamphylia and refused to go on with them. Because they disagreed, they parted ways. Barnabas took John Mark with him to Cyprus. Paul chose Silas to go with him and My church

commended them to God. They traveled through Syria and Turkey visiting My churches.

Paul Recruits Timothy

16When Paul and Silas reached Derbe and Lystra, they met Timothy, whose mother was a Jewess but whose father was a Greek. Because Timothy was an outstanding Christian, My church recommended him to travel with Paul and Barnabas, but Paul had him circumcised because the Jews knew his father was a Greek.

The Spirit Guides Their Ministry

They visited many towns, delivering the decision reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. So My churches were strengthened in the faith as well as growing daily in numbers. The Holy Spirit told them not to preach in Asia, so they traveled in Galatia. The Holy Spirit wouldn't let them go to the north or south, so they kept going west till they came to the port city of Troas on the Aegean Sea. That night Paul had a vision of a Macedonian man who said to him, "Come to Macedonia and help us." Almost immediately they arranged passage to Macedonia, convinced God had called them to preach there.

I guide My followers in many ways. Just like I guided Paul by a vision. Just follow My directions, no matter how I speak to you.

First Mission in Europe

Luke joined them and they sailed to Philippi, a Roman city that was the major city of that district. After several days, they went to the river's edge where women met for prayer on the Sabbath day. There Paul preached to the women. One of them was Lydia, a worshiper of God, who had a business selling purple dye. She opened her heart to believe all that Paul was saying. Lydia was baptized, along with all her household, and she

asked Paul and his companions to be her guests, saying, “If you think I am a true believer, then come stay in my home,” and they did.

May you be as faithful in telling others about Me as Paul was in his missionary ministry.

As Paul was going to the place of prayer, he met a slave girl who predicted the future by demon possession. She earned a lot of money for her master this way. The girl followed Paul and his companions, shouting, “These men are servants of the Most High God, they tell us how to be saved.” She kept this up until Paul became so irritated that he turned and spoke to the demon, “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her.” The demon came out of her immediately. When her owner saw that his hope of making more money was gone, he seized Paul and Silas and dragged them before the authorities in the market square, where they charged them, “These men are Jews who are advocating practices that are unlawful for us as Romans to accept or follow.”

A crowd quickly formed and began yelling against them, so the magistrates had them stripped and flogged. They were given many lashes, then thrown in prison, and the jailer was told to keep a close watch on them. He followed the instructions, threw them into the inner prison, and locked their feet in stocks.

That night Paul and Silas were praying and singing psalms to God while the other prisoners listened. Suddenly, an earthquake shook the prison. The doors flew open and the chains fell off all the prisoners.

The jailer awakened and saw the doors open, so he drew his sword and was about to commit suicide, thinking his prisoners had escaped. Paul shouted, “Don’t harm yourself; we are all here.” The jailer got a light and rushed in.

When he accounted for all the prisoners, he fell at the feet of Paul and Silas, asking, “What must I do to be saved?”

They replied, “Believe in Jesus Christ and you will be saved, you and your household.” Then Paul explained My gospel to him and all those in his house.

The jailer washed their wounds, and then he and his family were baptized. He brought them into his house and fed them a meal. The whole family celebrated their conversion and belief in God.

When morning came, the magistrates sent a message to the jailers to release them. The keeper of the prison said to Paul, “The magistrates have let you go; therefore, go in peace.”

Paul said, “No! They have beaten us publicly without a trial despite the fact we are Roman citizens. They can’t get rid of us quietly. Let them come and release us themselves.” The magistrates were frightened when they heard they were Romans, so they came to the jail and begged them to leave the city. Paul and Silas returned to Lydia’s home and preached words of encouragement to them before they left the city.

I providentially protected Paul’s life. I want you to know that a son or daughter of God is immortal, and death can’t touch them until I have finished My will for them on earth.

My New Churches at Thessalonica and Berea

17 Paul traveled to Thessalonica and entered the synagogue, as was his custom. He debated with the Jews for three weeks, explaining and proving that I, the Messiah, must suffer and be resurrected. Paul explained that I Am the Messiah. Some were convinced and joined Paul and Silas, as well as many God-fearing Gentiles. Many of these were rich women.

The unbelieving Jews resented Paul and recruited a gang of thugs from the marketplace to riot against Christians in the city. They ran to Jason’s home, hoping to find Paul and Silas and bring them before the city officials. When they didn’t find them, they dragged Jason and another person to court, charging, “These men who have turned the world upside down, have come here now. They defy Caesar’s decree, saying, ‘There is another King called Jesus.’” When the authorities heard this, the crowd and city officials were alarmed. They made Jason post a bond before releasing him.

The Christians immediately sent Paul and Silas inland to Berea. There Paul went into the Jewish synagogue and spoke. The Bereans were more

fair-minded than the Thessalonians in that they gave an example of how to listen to the Word of God.

Then many of them believed. The Jews from Thessalonica heard that Paul was preaching in Berea, so they went there to stir up a riot. The Christians arranged for Paul to leave immediately. Silas and Timothy were left to build up My church. An escort went with Paul to Athens. Then Paul sent a message for Silas and Timothy to come to him with all speed.

Receive the Word of God with an open mind. Search—daily—every part of Scripture to determine what I have said for you to believe and live.

Paul Preaching in Athens

While waiting for Silas and Timothy, Paul was upset because the whole city of Athens was worshiping idols. Paul debated in the synagogue with the Jews and God-fearing Gentiles as well as in the city market with those gathered there. While speaking, some Epicurean and stoic philosophers listened to him and they remarked, “What is this babbler trying to say?” They accused Paul of advocating a foreign God because he was preaching in My name and the message of the resurrection.

They brought Paul to the forum at Mars Hill, asking, “Tell us more about this religion that you’re preaching.” They accused Paul of saying startling things and they wanted to find out more about it. (The Athenians and foreigners who lived there spent their time discussing the latest new ideas.)

So Paul stood to address the whole forum, “Men of Athens, I see that you are very religious, because as I walked about this place, I saw many idols. I even saw one with the inscription, ‘TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.’ This is the God I worship, the One you don’t know. This is the God who created the world and everything in it. He does not make His home in shrines built by humans, nor does He need anything humans can do for Him, because He is the One who gives everything to everyone, including their life and breath. God created one ancestor. The whole human race comes from one man and they scattered over the whole face of the earth.

God has determined the length of their lives, and the limits where they live. God wants all to search for Him so they might find Him, because God is not far from each of us. For in Him we live and move and exist. Some of your writers have said, 'We are all His children.' Since we are the children of God, we should not think of deity in terms of gold, silver, or a carved statue. God overlooks this sort of mistake when we are ignorant, but now He tells everyone everywhere to repent because God has set a date when He will judge the world. God appointed a man to judge rightly, and proved this to us by raising that man from the dead."

When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some laughed. Others said, "We would like to hear about this again."

At this time, Paul left the forum, but some joined him and became believers, among them Dionysius a member of the Areopagus, a woman named Damaris, and several others.

Paul at Corinth

18 Paul left Athens and went to Corinth where he stayed in the home of Aquila, the tentmaker. Aquila with his wife, Priscilla, were originally from Turkey, but recently they were thrown out of Rome because all Jews were expelled by Claudius the emperor. Paul worked for them, for he was a tentmaker.

Every Sabbath day, Paul debated in the synagogue, trying to convert Jews as well as Gentiles who attended. After Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul spent his full time testifying to the Jews that I was the Messiah. When the Jews threatened Paul, he shook the dust off his robe and said, "Your blood be upon your own hands. From now on, I will preach the gospel to the Gentiles with a clear conscience."

Paul then moved My church into the house of Titius Justus, a believer in Me, who lived next to the synagogue. Crispus, the leader of the synagogue, became a believer in Me, and a great many Corinthians also believed and were baptized. Therefore, I spoke to Paul in a vision at night saying, "Don't be afraid of leaving the synagogue to worship in a house. Continue speaking because I'll be with you. No one will harm you. I have many in

this city who will become believers.” So Paul stayed in Corinth for eighteen months, preaching the Scriptures.

When Gallio became governor of the region, the Jews banded together to bring Paul before him for trial. They accused him, saying, “This man persuades people to worship God that breaks our law.”

Before Paul could speak, Gallio said, “Listen you Jews! If this were a matter of breaking the law, I would not hesitate to listen to your charges, but you are bickering about words and your religious laws. Settle the matter outside the court room. I do not intend to make a legal decision about religious matters.” Gallio sent them out of the courtroom, and a crowd jumped on Sosthenes, the leader of the synagogue, and beat him in front of the court house; but Gallio paid no attention to it.

Paul’s Trip to Jerusalem

After this, Paul left Corinth and sailed for Syria accompanied by Aquila and Priscilla. Paul shaved his hair according to Jewish custom because his long hair represented a vow he had made.

When they arrived at Ephesus, Paul went into the synagogue to debate with the Jews about Me, the Messiah. They asked Paul to stay a few days, but he declined because of his travel schedule. However, he promised, “I will come back if God allows me to do it.” Paul left Aquila and Priscilla there before sailing away. When Paul landed at Caesarea, he went up to Jerusalem to greet the saints there. Then he returned to Antioch at Syria to visit My church that sent him on the missionary trip.

After spending some time in Antioch, Paul began his third missionary trip through Turkey, strengthening My churches he had established on his two previous trips.

An Alexandrian Jew named Apollos came to preach in Ephesus. He was exceptionally eloquent with a firm grasp of Scripture. Apollos preached boldly and enthusiastically in the synagogue, but he only knew what John the Baptizer said about My coming. When Priscilla and Aquila heard Apollos preach, they invited him to their home to explain to him the way of salvation more fully. When Apollos left for Turkey, the brethren wrote a letter of introduction to My churches, asking them to receive him. When

Apollos arrived, he strengthened the Christians there and vigorously refuted the Jews in public debate, proving from Scripture that I was the Messiah.

Paul's Ministry in Ephesus

19 Apollos continued ministering at Corinth. Paul traveled through Turkey to arrive at Ephesus where he found twelve followers of John the Baptizer who were still preaching baptism of repentance, and were looking forward to the coming of Messiah. Paul asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?"

They answered "No, we don't know anything about the Holy Spirit."

Then Paul asked, "What did you confess when you were baptized?" They answered, "Belief in the Messiah who is coming." When Paul pointed out that I, the Messiah, had come, they were baptized immediately in My name. When Paul laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in foreign languages they hadn't learned. And the men numbered about twelve.

Paul spoke for three months in the synagogue, debating about Me and the kingdom of God. When the attitude of the Jews hardened and they began attacking the Way publicly, Paul took believers out of the synagogue. They met daily in the school of Tyrannus, where believers were instructed in the Word of God, and the gospel spread throughout the region. And I used Paul to work miracles.

Paul's ministry included healing the sick through prayer. His handkerchiefs were taken to the sick, and they were healed because of their faith.

Some itinerant Jewish evangelist who cast out demons came to Ephesus and spoke the name of "Jesus as preached by Paul." The man Sceva, a Jewish priest from the Levitical family, and his seven sons, tried to cast out a demon, who answered, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are you?" The demon-possessed man attacked them and beat them mercilessly. He ripped their clothes off them, so that they ran out of the house naked.

When people in Ephesus heard about the episode, both Jews and Gentiles were impressed, and they were afraid to attack Christianity so the gospel spread everywhere. Many new believers came forward to repent of

their evil deeds. Those who practiced magic and sorcery burned their incantation books and charms in a big public fire. Someone estimated their value at 10,000 pieces of silver. As a result, the Word of God became more influential, and its message was spread widely.

After this happened, Paul decided to visit Greece on his way to Rome, so he sent Timothy and Erastus to prepare the way.

About this time, a riot broke out against Christianity in Ephesus. It began when Demetrius a silversmith called together many of the craftsmen who made silver idols of Diana.

He said, “Paul has persuaded many that our idols are not gods, and our sales are going down. Not only here but in all Turkey, Paul is destroying the idol trade market. Paul is also desecrating our temple dedicated to Diana and reducing worship of Diana over the whole world.”

They began to chant, “Great is Diana of the Ephesians,” and the whole town rushed into the amphitheater dragging along the believers, Gaius and Aristarchus. Paul wanted to go make an appeal to the crowd, but for safety sake the Christians wouldn’t let him enter. Roman officers also sent messages telling Paul not to go there. The crowd was confused, some shouting one thing, others another. Most of the people didn’t even know about the “silversmith” controversy.

A Jew named Alexander was pushed to the front, but the crowd wouldn’t let him speak. They shouted for two hours, “Great is Diana of the Ephesians.”

The town clerk eventually quieted the crowd and told them, “Everyone knows the greatness of Diana, who guards our temple. We all know she fell from heaven. So this cannot be spoken against, you must be quiet. For you have brought these men here who have not committed crimes against our goddess. If Demetrius and the craftsmen want to complain, let them take their case to court. We must raise our questions in a regular city council, otherwise Rome will charge us with rioting and send soldiers to investigate or punish us.” The clerk then dismissed the crowd and they left.

Paul’s Last Trip to Ephesus

After Paul encouraged the Christians in Ephesus, he said good-bye and left for Macedonia. He then set sail for Greece and stayed there three **20** months. As Paul was planning to leave by ship, he discovered that the Jews plotted to kill him. So he went by land through northern Greece. Paul had many traveling with him for protection: Sopater, Aristarchus, Secundus, Gaius, Timothy, Tychicus, and Trophimus. These men went ahead and waited at Troas.

After celebrating the Passover, Paul left Philippi and boarded a ship for Troas in Turkey. On Sunday, Paul observed the Lord's Table, and then preached a long sermon that went on into the night. The room was hot because a large number of lamps were burning. Eutychus, a young man sitting on the window sill, fell asleep and then fell three stories to the ground. He was picked up dead, but Paul went down and embraced him saying, "Don't worry, there is life in him." Paul went back upstairs where he ate a meal. Then he talked until daybreak and then left. They took the boy home alive, and all praised God.

Paul traveled overland to Assos, and the rest of his party went ahead by ship. They joined together at Assos, and Paul went on board the ship and sailed to Mitylene, then sailed by Chios, and the next day they went on shore briefly at Trosyllium, and the next day they went to Miletus. Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus and would not spend time in Asia because he was in a hurry to get to Jerusalem to celebrate the day of Pentecost.

Paul had the elders from Ephesus come meet him at the ship in Miletus. Paul told them, "You know how honestly I lived since I came here, how I served the Lord in all humility, how I remained faithful, even when the Jews plotted against me. I never hesitated to tell you the truth, both publicly and in your homes. I have declared to both Jews and Gentiles that they must repent and put their faith in our Lord Jesus.

"Now you know the Holy Spirit is leading me to Jerusalem, but I don't know what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit in city after city has let me know that persecution and imprisonment await me in Rome. But my life will be spent finishing the race that I have been running in the mission the Lord Jesus gave me, and that is spreading the good news of God's grace.

"Now I feel sure that none of you will see me again. My conscience is clear concerning my work to you for I have declared the whole gospel

among you. Guard yourselves and the flock that the Holy Spirit has given you. Be a good example in leading them in godliness and feed the church which is bought with Christ's blood. I know when I have gone, false teachers will come who will not have compassion on the flock. Also men from among yourselves will distort the truth to draw away disciples to follow them. So be on your guard, remember that night and day I kept constant watch care over the flock, shedding many tears for you in prayer.

“Now I commit you to God and to the word of His grace which will give you an inheritance among the saints. I never asked anyone for money or clothes. You know I worked to earn money to meet my needs. I did this to be a constant example to the church to help the poor, for I remember the words of Jesus, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

When Paul finished speaking, they knelt on the beach and prayed. Then they wept and embraced Paul because he said they wouldn't see him again.

Paul Goes to Jerusalem

21 Paul and his party sailed directly to Cos, then Rhodes, and Patara. They transferred to a different ship and sailed toward Lebanon, sailing to the south of Cyprus, and coming to Tyre, where the ship unloaded its cargo. Paul went on shore, found some believers, and stayed with them seven days. They told Paul by the Holy Spirit not to go to Jerusalem. As Paul left, they went with him to the ship and they knelt together to pray. Paul and his party boarded a ship and continued toward Jerusalem.

Paul sailed from Troas to Lebanon, stopping at several places. The ship landed at Tyre where Paul stayed one day. The Christians kept telling Paul not to go to Jerusalem. Paul then sailed to Caesarea, and stayed with Phillip the evangelist, who had four daughters in ministry. He was one of the original seven deacons.

After several days, Agabus the prophet arrived to see Paul. He took the belt on Paul's tunic and tied his hands and feet saying, “The owner of this belt will be bound hand and foot in Jerusalem and then handed over to the Gentiles.”

Everyone who heard this begged Paul not to go to Jerusalem but he replied, “Why are you trying to change my mind? I am ready not only to be

bound in Jerusalem, but also to die for the name of the Lord Jesus.”

When the crowd saw they couldn't change Paul's mind, they said, “The will of the Lord be done.”

Paul left to go up to Jerusalem. Christians from Caesarea went with him to the home of Mnason from Cyprus, who had been one of the earliest disciples.

The brothers gave Paul a warm welcome when Paul arrived in Jerusalem. The next day Paul visited James and the elders, and he gave them a detailed account of what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry.

The brothers gave glory to God when they heard it. Then the elders told Paul, “There are thousands of Jews who have been saved, who staunchly uphold the law. They have heard that you tell Jewish Christians to break with Moses, and you authorize them not to circumcise their children. They will certainly hear that you are here and will want a meeting with you. Here is what we suggest you do. We have four men who have taken a Nazarite vow. You go with them to the temple to be purified with them. You pay the temple expenses connected with shaving their heads. This will let everyone know you keep the law and that there is no truth in the rumors about you. As for Gentile believers, we aren't asking them to observe these temple customs. The only thing they must do is not eat food offered to idols, and not eat the blood in animals that have been strangled, and avoid fornication.”

The next day Paul went with the four men to the ceremony to be purified, and he announced that in seven days they would offer sacrifices to end the vow.

When the seven days were almost over, some Jews from Asia saw Paul in the temple and began a riot, shouting, “Men of Israel! This man preaches to everyone, everywhere that it is wrong to keep the law and worship in the temple. He has profaned the Holy Place by bringing Gentiles here.” But they were wrong. They had seen Trophimus from Ephesus with Paul in the city and thought he brought him into the temple.

People came running from every direction, they grabbed Paul and dragged him out of the temple. The gates were closed behind them. The crowd would have killed Paul but Roman soldiers intervened because their

officer heard there was rioting in the city. The soldiers stopped the crowd from beating Paul.

The Roman officer arrested Paul and chained his hands and feet. Then he asked Paul to identify himself. The crowd called out different things, making it impossible for the officer to get a positive identification of Paul. Paul was carried by the soldiers to the stairs because the crowd was so violent. They were shouting, “Kill him.”

When Paul spoke to the officer, he was surprised Paul spoke Greek. Then the officer said, “Aren’t you the Egyptian who led an insurrection of four thousand cutthroats.”

Paul said, “I am a Jew from Tarsus in Turkey, a Roman citizen. Please let me speak to the people.”

The officer gave Paul permission, so he stood on the stairs and lifted his hands for silence. He spoke to them in Hebrew.

Paul Speaks to a Crowd in Jerusalem

22 Paul spoke, “Men, brethren, and fathers, hear my defense as I stand before you now.” When they heard him speak in Hebrew, they became quiet. Then they became even more quiet than before. “I am a Jew, and was born in Tarsus of Turkey. In this city, I studied under Gamaliel and was taught to obey every Jewish law and custom. In fact, I was so devoted—as you are today—I even persecuted Christians, binding them to death, delivering both men and women in chains to prison. The high priest or any member of the Sanhedrin will testify to these facts. I asked a letter from them to their brothers in Damascus to do the same there. I set off to go to Damascus to bring back prisoners to Jerusalem for punishment. I was nearly to Damascus when at noon a bright light from heaven blinded me. I fell to the ground and heard a voice, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?’ I answered, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ He answered, ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting.’ The people with me saw the light, but didn’t understand the voice. I said, ‘What do You want me to do?’ The Lord answered, ‘Stand up, go to Damascus. It will be told you what to do.’ The light was so blinding that my companions had to lead me to Damascus by the hand.

“A man named Ananias, a devout follower of the law, and highly respected by the Jewish community, came to pray beside me and said, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight.’ Then he said, ‘God has chosen you to do His will, to see the Messiah, and to carry out His message. You will be a witness to all people of what you have seen and heard. Why delay? It’s time to be baptized as a sign your sins are forgiven.’

“When I got back to Jerusalem, I was praying in the temple, in a trance, I saw the Lord who said, ‘Hurry and leave Jerusalem. They will not receive your testimony.’ ‘Lord,’ I prayed, ‘is it because I arrested and beat those who believed in You? When Stephen’s blood was being shed, I gave consent and guarded the coats of those who stoned him.’ Then the Lord said to me, ‘Go, I will send you to the Gentiles.’”

The crowd listened to Paul until he said the word Gentiles, and then they shouted, “Away with him, he is not fit to live.” The Jews yelled, threw dust into the air, and waved their coats. So the officer took Paul into the fortress.

He ordered Paul to be examined under the whip to find out the truth. When they strapped Paul down, he said to the centurion, “Is it legal for you to scourge an uncondemned Roman citizen?” The centurion told his superior, “This man is a Roman citizen.” The commander asked if Paul were a Roman citizen; “I am,” was Paul’s reply. The commander replied, “It cost me a large amount of money to become a citizen.” Paul replied, “I was free born.” The soldiers who were going to flog Paul quickly left. The commander was frightened because he could have been punished for scourging a Roman citizen. The next day the commander took off Paul’s chains. He ordered the Sanhedrin to meet with the chief priest, and then brought Paul to stand before them.

Paul Before the Jewish Council

23 Paul looked intently at the Sanhedrin, and then spoke, “My brothers, I have always lived with a perfectly clear conscience.” Immediately Ananias the high priest ordered those near Paul to slap him on the mouth. Paul responded, “God strike you, you filthy wall that’s been whitewashed.” Paul asked, “How can you break the law striking me before I am found guilty?”

The men close to Paul said, “You’re insulting God’s high priest.”

Paul answered, “I did not realize it was the high priest because Scripture says, ‘Don’t curse the ruler of the people.’”

Paul became aware that the Sanhedrin was split between the Sadducees and the Pharisees, and so he called out, “I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee, on trial for the hope of the resurrection.” Instantly a debate broke out between the two opposing factions, and the assembly was evenly split. The Sadducees don’t believe in the resurrection, angels, or eternal spirits in people, but the Pharisees believe all these.

They shouted loudly at each other, and the Pharisees said, “We find nothing wrong with this man. Perhaps a spirit or angel spoke to him at his conversion.” The Roman commander, fearing they would physically beat Paul, ordered his troops to enter and take Paul to the fortress.

That night I stood by Paul saying, “Be courageous. You have witnessed for Me in Jerusalem, now you must witness for Me in Rome.”

Early in the morning, some of the Jews held a secret meeting and vowed an oath not to eat until they killed Paul, a conspiracy of more than forty men. They told the chief priest and elders, “We have vowed to fast until we kill Paul; now it is your responsibility to ask the commander to return Paul so you can examine him closely. It is our responsibility to kill him in the streets as they bring him to you.”

The son of Paul’s sister heard their plans of ambush and came to the fortress to tell Paul. He immediately had the boy taken to the commander. When the boy was brought to the commander, they went privately where the boy said, “These Jews will get the Sanhedrin to request you to bring Paul to be questioned more closely. There are forty Jews who have vowed not to eat until they have killed Paul. They plan to kill him in the streets, and they are awaiting your order to deliver Paul.”

The commander let the boy go, warning him, “Don’t tell anyone you’ve given me this information.”

The commander commanded two of his centurions, “Get 200 soldiers ready immediately. Leave now in the dark with 200 spearmen and 70 mounted cavalry. Put Paul on a horse, and get him safely to Caesarea and Governor Felix.” The commander wrote a letter, sending his greetings to Governor Felix. “This man was seized by the Jews as they were attempting

to kill him, so I commanded my troops to arrest him. Then I discovered he was a Roman citizen. I took him to their Sanhedrin to find out what charge could be brought against him. I discovered it was about their Jewish doctrine, nothing worthy of imprisonment. When I was informed of a plot to assassinate him, I decided to send him to you and tell his accusers to bring their charge before you.” The soldiers carried out their orders and took Paul down from Jerusalem to the Mediterranean Sea. Then the mounted soldiers took Paul the rest of the way to Caesarea, and then returned. After delivering the letter to the governor, they turned Paul over to him.

When Felix got the letter, he asked Paul where he was born. Hearing it was Turkey, he said, “I will hear your case as soon as your accusers come from Jerusalem.” Then Felix ordered Paul held in prison in Herod’s Palace.

Paul Before Felix

24After five days, the high priest, Ananias, some elders, and the lawyer named Tertullus appeared in court in Caesarea. When Tertullus was called, he brought their case before Felix, “Your Excellency, you have given peace and protection to the Jews and changed bad laws that persecuted us. At all times and in all places, we acknowledge what you’ve done for all Jews, and we are grateful. I don’t want to take up too much of your time, so let me tell you briefly what this man—Paul—has done.

“He is a troublemaker, stirring up trouble among the Jews worldwide, and is the ring leader of the sect of the Nazarenes. He attempted to profane the temple. We placed him under arrest by the temple guards and planned to judge him by our laws, but the Roman commander Lysias intervened and used force to take him out of our hands, and then ordered him to appear before you. Ask him, he will tell you the truth.”

The Jews who came with their lawyer agreed to the charges, so Felix motioned Paul to speak.

Paul answered, “I know you have been a fair judge over the Jews for many years. Therefore, I defend myself with confidence. Only twelve days ago I made my pilgrimage to Jerusalem, I was not arguing with anyone in the temple or their synagogues throughout town, neither can they prove

their accusations they made against me. I will admit that I worship the God of my ancestors, according to the Way they call a sect. I firmly believe in Jewish law and everything written in the prophets. I believe, just as my accusers, that there will be a resurrection of the righteous and wicked. I strive to keep my conscience clear before God and man. After several years of absence, I came bringing alms for the poor and to present offerings to God. It was in this connection that the Jews found me in the temple. I was purified, and there was no crowd with me and no disturbance. Some Jews from Turkey saw me there. These are the ones who should testify against me, because they said I desecrated the temple by bringing in Gentiles; but the Gentiles were not with me. Therefore, I am not guilty of causing a riot. If anything, these Jews were the ones who caused the riot. I am guilty of one thing. When I was brought before the Sanhedrin, I spoke about the resurrection which caused a great argument.”

Felix, who knew more about the Way than most people, adjourned the proceedings saying, “When Lysias comes, I will decide this case.” Felix ordered the Roman commander to keep Paul under guard, but gave him some freedom and allowed his friends to come see him.

A few days later, Felix and his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish, sent for Paul for a hearing on the subject of faith in Christ. As Paul spoke about righteousness and self-discipline and judgment to come, Felix was terrified, saying, “You may go for now. When I have a more convenient time, I’ll call for you.” He hoped Paul would pay him money, so Felix frequently summoned Paul to talk with him.

Felix wanted to gain favor with the Jews, so he left Paul in prison. Two years went by and Felix was replaced by Festus.

Paul Before Festus

25When Festus took up his appointment, he visited Jerusalem where the chief priest and Jewish leaders asked him to do something immediately about the case of Paul. They wanted Festus to side with them, and they asked for Paul to be transferred back to Jerusalem, because they planned to ambush and murder him on the highway. Festus told them Paul would remain in custody in Caesarea and that he would hold court there shortly.

Festus said, "Send your authorities to Caesarea with me, and if Paul is guilty, you can bring charges against him."

Festus stayed in Jerusalem for about ten days, then returned to Caesarea. The next day he had Paul brought before the tribunal. Almost immediately the Jews surrounded Paul and brought accusations against him, but didn't have any proof.

Paul defended himself, saying, "I have committed no offense against the temple or against Caesar."

Festus was anxious to please the Jews, so he asked Paul, "Are you willing to go to Jerusalem to stand trial?"

But Paul answered, "No! I am standing before the tribunal of Caesar, where I should be tried. I demand my hearing before Caesar himself. I have done the Jews no wrong, as you very well know. I am not guilty of any civil crime. I do not ask to be spared from death, but since there is no substance to their charges, no one has the right to surrender me to them. I appeal to Caesar."

Then Festus conferred with his legal advisers and concluded, "You have appealed to Caesar, to Caesar you should go."

A few days later King Agrippa and Bernice arrived in Caesarea to pay a visit to Festus. They stayed several days. Festus explained Paul's case to them, "I have a man in prison that Felix left there. While I was in Jerusalem, the chief priest and the leader of the Jews demanded his condemnation.

"I told them Roman law does not surrender a prisoner, until the accused has an opportunity to confront his accusers and is given an opportunity to defend himself. So they came here to Caesarea, and I took the tribunal seat and brought the man before me. The accusers did not charge him with any crime. They argued religious doctrine and about a dead man called Jesus whom Paul alleged to be alive. Not feeling qualified to deal with this question, I asked if he would be willing to go to Jerusalem to be tried on this issue. Paul appealed his case to the judgment seat of Caesar, so I have held him until I could send him to Rome."

Agrippa said, "I would like to hear the man myself." Festus answered, "Tomorrow you shall hear him."

The next day Agrippa and Bernice arrived in great ceremony entering the courtroom with the officials of the city. Then Festus ordered Paul to be brought in. Festus said, “King Agrippa and all who are present today, see this man. The whole Jewish community has petitioned me that he should not live. For my part, I’m satisfied he hasn’t committed a capital crime. But he appealed to Caesar, so I decided to send him there. Since I have no definite crime that I can write to Caesar, I am presenting him here before you, King Agrippa, and all these officials so that after you examine him, I will have an accusation against him. It seems pointless to send a prisoner to Caesar without charges against him.”

Paul Before King Agrippa

26 King Agrippa said to Paul, “You may speak in your defense.” Paul gestured for silence, and then spoke, “I am fortunate to be able to defend myself before you, King Agrippa, because I know you are an expert on Jewish customs and law. So please listen to my whole defense.

“Everyone knows I was trained from my childhood in Jewish tradition and completed my education in Jerusalem. The Jews have known that I lived in the strictest way among them as a Pharisee. But the reason the Jews have charged me is something else. It is for the promise made to our ancestors. It is for the promise that the twelve tribes worship God. It is the promise of the resurrection from the dead and eternal life. This is why I have been put on trial by the Jews. Does it seem incredible that God can raise the dead?

“I did all I could to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth. That is how I spent my time in Jerusalem. I put many saints into prison on the authority of the chief priest. When they voted to stone Stephen, I voted with them. Many times I visited synagogues to punish Christians, trying to force them to renounce their faith. I was so angry against Christians that I pursued them to foreign cities.

“I was on one of these journeys to Damascus with authority from the chief priest. About midday on the road, I saw a light—brighter than the sun—from heaven. It shone brilliantly around me and my fellow travelers, so that we fell to the ground. I heard a voice saying to me in Hebrew, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? Your kicking is only hurting yourself.’

“Then I answered, ‘Who are You, Lord?’ The Lord answered me, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. Get up and stand on your feet, for I have a reason for appearing to you, to appoint you to be My servant, and be a witness to tell everyone you have seen Me. I will protect you from your people. I will send you to the Gentiles, to open their eyes to their blinded condition, so they may turn from darkness to light, from satan’s control to God’s service; so their sins can be forgiven, and they can receive the inheritance of eternal life.’

“After that, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision. I began immediately preaching to the people of Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem, and all the countryside of Judea, and also to Gentiles, urging them to repent and turn to God, and then prove their repentance by doing good works. The Jews arrested me in the temple for doing this, and tried to kill me, but God has protected me to this very hour. Therefore, I stand before you to testify to both high officials and the lowest of people alike the same thing the prophets and Moses said would happen, that Christ would first suffer, and then rise from the dead to proclaim the light of salvation to the Jews and also to the Gentiles.”

Festus jumped to his feet and shouted, “Paul you’re mad; your learning has made you insane.”

Paul answered, “Festus, Your Excellency, I am not mad, I am speaking the truth.” Then Paul turned to King Agrippa, “The king understands these matters. I appeal to him in these matters, knowing he understands these issues, because none of these things were done in secret. King Agrippa, do you believe the things the prophets said? I know you do!”

Then King Agrippa replied, “Almost you convinced me to become a Christian.”

Then Paul replied, “I wish you were a Christian, both you and everyone who hears these words. I wish you were the same as I, except these chains.”

At this point in Paul’s speech, the king arose and the governor and Bernice and other government officials left the room. They talked among themselves, saying, “This man has done nothing that deserves death or imprisonment.”

Agrippa said to Festus, “You should release this man, except he appealed to Caesar.”

Paul's Trip to Rome

27 Arrangements were made to sail for Italy, so they handed Paul and other prisoners over to a centurion named Julius, of the Augustine regiment. They boarded a ship that was scheduled to make several stops along the coast of Turkey. Aristarchus was with us.

When they reached Lebanon, Julius let Paul go ashore to visit Christians and receive hospitality from them. From there, they put out to sea, but because of stormy winds, they sailed north of Cyprus near the coast of Turkey. At Myra, they changed ships for one heading to Rome. The winds were still strong so they sailed under Crete. They struggled in the wind until they came to Fair Havens, near the town of Lasea, near Rhodes.

They stayed there several days. Sailing was hazardous because it was winter. So Paul warned the commander, "Friends, this is going to be a dangerous voyage, and there is a risk that we will lose the cargo, the ship, and also our lives." But the centurion listened more to the captain and owner than to Paul. Since Fair Havens was an exposed harbor that was a dangerous place to spend the winter, they decided to go farther. Then they decided to winter in Phoenix because it was a protected harbor. Just then a light wind blew from the south that was perfect for sailing. They took in the anchor and sailed past Crete, but before long a hurricane caught them in open waters. It was impossible to keep the ship headed into the wind, so they gave up and let it run with the wind. It was a continual struggle to keep the boat under control. They hoisted the small lifeboat being towed behind them, then wrapped ropes around the hull to strengthen it, so they dropped a sea anchor and let the ship drift.

The next day when the waves grew higher, they threw cargo overboard. The following day they threw out the tackle and ship's gear. They couldn't see the sun or moon for several days, so everyone gave up hope of surviving. When they hadn't eaten for several days, Paul addressed everyone, "If you had listened to me, we wouldn't have this damage. Now I ask you not to give up hope. No one will die, only the ship will be lost. Last night God, to whom I belong and whom I serve, sent an angel to tell me, 'Fear not, Paul, you will appear before Caesar, Therefore, all who are sailing with you will be safe.' So be courageous; it will happen just as God told me. We will be stranded on some island."

On the fourteenth night, the ship was still drifting when the sailors felt land was near. They sounded and found the water was 120 feet deep. A little later, they sounded again, and it was 90 feet deep. They realized they would be driven into rocks, so they threw out four anchors, and prayed for daylight. Then the sailors planned to abandon the ship, so they lowered an emergency boat as though they were putting out anchors.

Paul said to the centurion, “We will all die unless the sailors stay aboard.” The soldiers cut the rope to let the small boat drift away. As it began to get light, Paul urged everyone to eat something so they would have strength for the coming emergency.

Paul said, “There’s no safety in fasting. Not one of you will lose a hair of your head.” Then Paul took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and began to eat. Everyone was encouraged as they ate. There were a total of 276 on board, so then they threw the grain into the sea.

When daybreak gave some light, no one recognized the island, but they saw a bay with a beach. They planned to run the ship aground on the beach if possible. They cut the anchors, lowered the rudders, hoisted the top sail, and headed ashore, but the ship hit a sand bar. The bow of the boat stuck in the sand, and the pounding waves began to break up the stern.

The soldiers planned to kill the prisoners because they were afraid they would escape. But the centurion was determined to deliver Paul safely to Rome. He wouldn’t let them do it. He gave orders for those who could swim to swim to shore. He then directed the others to follow on planks or pieces of wreckage. All escaped safely to the beach.

You will all go through storms in life: financial, social, persecution, family, and physical. In a storm remember: My presence is with you, and I have a plan for you in the storm and after the storm. I will get you through the storms of life. I will soothe and comfort you through your pain.

From Malta to Rome

When they got on the beach, they discovered it was the island of Malta. The inhabitants welcomed them and built a huge fire to warm them. Paul had **28** collected a bundle of sticks, and as he placed them in the fire, a viper bit him in the hand. When the inhabitants saw the snake hanging onto Paul's hand, they waited for him to die, saying, "He's a terrible sinner, the storm didn't kill him but the snake will." Paul shook the snake into the fire, but his hand didn't swell up, nor did he drop dead. They changed their minds and said, "Paul's a god."

They were near an estate belonging to Publius, the governor of the island. He fed the survivors for three days. Publius' father was in bed suffering from high fever and dysentery. Paul laid his hand on him and prayed for him, and the man was healed. When this happened, other sick people came and were cured as well. When Paul was ready to leave and set sail for Italy, the people of the island put provisions on board for Paul and his companions.

After staying there three months, Paul and his party sailed on an Alexandrian ship with a figurehead—Twin Brothers—that had wintered on the island. They landed at Syracuse and stayed there three days. They sailed to Rhegium, and when the south winds blew, they sailed to Puteoli. They found believers there and stayed there seven days, and then began the trip to Rome overland.

When the believers in Rome heard about Paul's arrival, they came to meet him at the Forum of Appius and the Three Taverns. Paul thanked God and was encouraged when he saw them.

When Paul arrived in Rome, he was allowed to stay in his own rented apartment where soldiers guarded him. After three days, Paul called the leading Jews for a day's discussion. Paul said, "Brothers, although I have done nothing against our people or our customs, I was arrested in Jerusalem, and delivered over to the Romans. They examined me and would have set me free because they found I was not guilty of any crime. But the Jews filed an objection, and I was forced to appeal to Caesar. That is why I asked to see you and talk to you about this matter. It is for the hope of Israel that I wear these chains."

The Jews answered, "We haven't heard anything against you, we haven't received a letter from Jerusalem, nor have any who have arrived

here from Judea said anything about you. But we want to hear what you believe. All we know about Christians is that they are hated everywhere.”

I will help you have a positive attitude in life even when I know there are many with negative thoughts about Me.

They set a time so that a large number of Jews could visit Paul at his apartment to discuss Christianity. Paul argued from the law of Moses and the prophets, trying to persuade them about Me. They began early in the morning and continued until the evening. Some were convinced, but others were skeptical. So the Jews disagreed among themselves. Paul had one last thing to say to the Jews, “You Jews will hear the gospel, but not understand, you will see the truth of Jesus, but you are spiritually blinded. For your heart is hardened, and your spiritual ears are shut up, and your spiritual eyes are blinded. Because you refuse to believe what is presented lest your heart receive the gospel and you become convicted and are healed.”

Paul understood from that experience that salvation was to be sent to the Gentiles, because they will listen to God. After Paul said these words, the Jews left and reasoned among themselves.

Paul spent two years in this rented apartment welcoming all who came to see him, proclaiming the kingdom of God to all, and teaching My truth with complete freedom and no hindrance.

My Letters

PART THREE

The letters to My churches were written to assist My people in navigating life and to provide instruction so that they could live in a way that was pleasing to Me, while they actively awaited My glorious return from heaven to take them home to a place I was preparing for them.



I AM JESUS

Who Gives Life

My Letter to the Romans



I want you to know that the whole world has sinned and is guilty before My Father. My death and resurrection provides freedom to all who exercise faith. Those who believe in Me can be delivered from the power of sin in their lives. In this letter, you will discover guidelines to follow for practical Christian life and service. As you read this letter, think about how much My Father loves you by sending Me to live in you.

The Gospel Is All About Me

1 I am Jesus, Who led the Apostle Paul to write to you, the Christians in Rome. He was a servant chosen to preach the good news, which My heavenly Father promised in the Old Testament through the prophets.

The gospel is about Me, the Lord Jesus Christ, who came as a baby through the line of King David. I was raised from the dead to demonstrate that I am the mighty Son of God. Through Me, all My Father's mercy has been poured out on Paul and you to be witnesses to everyone, everywhere, about My grace, so they too can believe and become My followers. To the dear believers in Rome, My Father loves you and has called you to be saints. Grace and peace rest on you from God My Father, and from Me, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul thanked My Father that your faith in Me was known throughout the world and that it was his privilege to serve My Father by continuing to pray for you, specifically, that he would have a safe trip to come see you. He wanted to strengthen your spiritual gifts, so My church in Rome would be established. Paul wanted to bless My church in Rome by sharing his faith with you and allowing you to be a blessing to him.

My servant, Paul, desired to visit My church in Rome to communicate his spiritual gifts to believers because it would make them strong. Pray for wisdom to discover and exercise your spiritual gifts so others can know what you have learned and serve My Father with their unique expression of their spiritual gifts.

Paul planned many times previously to visit you, but was prevented from doing so. He wanted to minister to you, just as he had ministered in other Gentile churches. Paul had a debt to carry the gospel to both civilized, and unreached people groups who have never heard the gospel. He was ready to preach to any or all, just as he was ready to preach the gospel to My believers in Rome and to everyone else in the world. Paul was not ashamed of My gospel, for it is powerful to save people who believe. This gospel must first be preached to the Jews, then to Gentiles.

The Justified Live by Faith

When a person puts his personal trust in the gospel, My Father declares him righteous; fit for heaven. This is what the Old Testament teaches, "The just shall live by faith."

There are many different ways to express faith in Me. When you first came to Me, it was through saving faith for the forgiveness of sins. Justifying faith was when you were declared righteous. Indwelling faith operates in you by Me, the Son of God who lives in your heart. Pray for all kinds of faith to serve My Father in many different ways.

Why Are Unbelievers Lost?

My Father has revealed that He will punish everyone who trespasses His commands when they reject the truth given them. He has revealed Himself to everyone's conscience. Also, everyone can plainly learn from nature that it took a powerful Creator to create this vast universe and that an intelligent Creator put the laws of nature in place to control everything. Now, no one can give an excuse when they are judged and condemned because everyone knows My Father exists and He has eternal power. Everyone knows My Father exists, but they won't acknowledge Him or thank Him for natural blessings, nor will they worship Him. They are controlled by illogical thought patterns because they reject the logic of His existence. Their minds are blinded and confused. When they think they are wise, they actually are foolish. Instead of worshiping My Father's glorious presence, they worship gods made out of wood, or stones that look like birds, or animals, or snakes, or corrupt people.

My Father allowed those who reject Him to do all types of sexual sins, so that they may fulfill their lust, degrading their bodies with one another. Instead of believing the truth they knew about My Father, they deliberately rejected Him, choosing to worship and serve created idols rather than God the Creator, who could bless them. Therefore, He abandoned them to their passion, and their women turned from natural sexual practices to abnormal acts. Their men turned from normal relations with women and turned to lustful sexual practices with one another, men behaving indecently with men so that they pay a penalty with their souls for their perversion. They refused to acknowledge My Father, so He gave them up to their own irrational and corrupt ideas. Now they continually try to think up new and sexually stimulating ideas that the depraved mind conceives. They are controlled by all sorts of evil and greed, hatred, fightings, bitterness, and lies, so that they even want to kill those who mistreat them. They quarrel, hate My Father, are proud, and pretentious, continually think of new ways to sin, and hate their parents. They don't understand what is right, nor do they know how to do right. They break their

promises, are mean, and have no feelings for others. They know in their hearts My Father will judge them, but they deny it outwardly. They go ahead and do all these things in rebellion against Him, and seek friendship with others who are also against My Father.

Denying My Father's existence and rejecting His laws will lead to condemnation and punishment. The only way to find true joy that reflects My Father's worth is by choosing to worship God for Who He is and receiving Me, The Word made flesh, as your personal Savior.

The Guilt of Religious People

2 People have no excuse for their personal sin because they criticize others who do the same sin. In judging others, they condemn themselves because they behave no differently than those they condemn. My Father condemns all who rebel against His laws and punishes lawbreakers impartially. Those who pass judgment on other people will be judged because they do the exact same things. My Father is patient with those who sin against Him, waiting a long time before punishing them. He gives them an opportunity to repent and turn to Him from their sins. His goodness should lead them to repentance.

You must live according to your conscience. Do those things you know to do, and do not do those things you know are wrong. Obeying your conscience will not save you, but disobeying your conscience will condemn you.

But their stubborn refusal only adds to My Father's anger toward them. Then one day, they will suffer punishment when He punishes everyone for their sins just as the Scriptures teach, "God will repay each as their works deserve." Those who seek His honor and immortality will be given eternal life from Him. Those who refuse His truth and do evil, He will punish in His anger and fury. They will suffer pain because they rebelled against My Father and chased evil. This includes both Jews and Gentiles as well. But there will be glory, honor, and peace, to those who seek His salvation, including both Jews and Gentiles as well.

There is no favoritism of persons with My Father. He will punish Gentiles when they sin even if they never heard of His written law. He will punish those who have access to His law. They will be judged by what is in the law. But keeping the law never makes anyone holy. Gentiles, who have never heard of the law, know by their conscience what the law requires. They know by their thinking to obey the law, even when they don't "possess" copies of the law. The substance of the law is written in their hearts so that they know right from wrong. Their conscience accuses them when they sin, or it excuses them when they do right.

My Father punishes the Jews when they sin because they disobey the written law that they possess. They know what is right, but don't do it. No one is saved because they know what is right; they are saved when they do it. The day is coming when I will judge the secrets of all people. Be ready to meet Me in judgment.

Jews Are Just as Guilty as the Gentiles

Those who called themselves Jews should walk according to the law of God, and honor My Father with their lives. The Jews should know His will because they know His law, and they should know what is right and wrong. The Jews should be guides to the blind, and they should be a beacon to those in the dark. They should teach the ignorant and unlearned because they have all knowledge and truth.

But the Jews do not live by the law. They should teach themselves what they teach others. They preach against stealing, yet they steal. They forbid adultery, yet they commit adultery. They despise idols, yet they make money by idol-making. They boast about the law, yet they break it and thereby dishonor My Father who gave the law. As the Scriptures teach, "It is your fault, Jews, that God's name is despised by the Gentiles." Being a Jew is special if they obey God's law, but if they don't, then being a Jew is no better than being a pagan.

When Gentiles obey God's laws, then God will give them the special privileges as given to Jews. Then Gentiles will be better off than Jews who have God's laws but don't obey them. A person is not a Jew just because he was born of Jewish parents, or he has been circumcised. A true Jew has his inward heart right with God, and he is circumcised in his heart by Me, through the Holy Spirit. That person will get praise from My Father and not from man.

All Are Lost in Sin

3 What advantage is there of being Jewish, and what is the profit of circumcision? I will answer this question, “Yes, being a Jew has many advantages: they received My Father’s message in the Old Testament. Yet, even when some Jews were unfaithful, their lack of faith didn’t cancel My Father’s promises. He will always keep His Word, even when everyone else is unfaithful. The book of Psalms says,

The Word of God will always prove to be right,
no matter who questions God.

Some of you point out that the sins of the Jews make My Father demonstrate His holiness because He always judges sin. The Jews justify their sin, claiming God is good when they see Him punishing the sin of others. Then the Jews ask, “Is it fair for The Father to punish us when our sin helps others recognize Him?”

This is My answer, “That is absurd thinking. It means My Father could never judge sin if He didn’t judge rebellious Jews.” That’s like saying, “My lying makes the Father demonstrate His truthfulness. When He judges my sin, He thus brings glory to Himself.” That’s like saying, “We do evil to bring about good.”

“Are Jews better off than Gentiles?” This is My answer, “No! Both Jews and Gentiles are under sin’s control.” The Scriptures teach that there is no righteous person left in the world, no, not one. There is no one who understands My Father, and no one is seeking Him. All have turned from doing right. There is no good person on earth, no, not one. Their speech is rebellious and filthy, just like an open grave. Their tongue is full of deceit, bitter curses fill their mouth, and their words are deadly like a snake’s poison. Their mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. They are quick to kill or stab people in the back, creating misery and strife wherever they go. They know nothing of His blessing, and they don’t care what He thinks of them. The Jews should know what the law says, and they are responsible for obeying what My Father says. Therefore, the Jews stand guilty before Him when they see clearly they aren’t obeying Him, so they know they are sinners. My Father has spoken to silence every mouth. Now, the whole world is guilty before Him. Therefore, no one can be justified by keeping the law; rather, the law makes all conscious of their sin.

Recognize your sin. You are completely unworthy to stand in My Father's presence. Only My Father can transform you to do what is right.

Righteousness Through Faith

My Father's righteousness is made known apart from knowing the law. It is made known through the gospel. Now there is a way to heaven for all sinners. He will declare you "not guilty" when you trust Me for salvation. All can be saved—Jews and Gentiles—alike, by believing in Me. You can know you are a sinner because My Father said all have sinned, and come short of His glorious benefits. But both Jew and Gentile are declared righteous through His free gift of grace when they are redeemed by Me. My Father sent Me to take the punishment for your sins, and reconcile you to Him. Sins committed before the cross are forgiven by My blood, and all sins now committed are forgiven by the same basis.

In salvation, you make My Father's righteousness known. Therefore, His wrath against sin is satisfied, and He becomes the Justifier of sinners. Realize you can't boast about anything that has to do with your salvation because your forgiveness is not based on what you do but is based on what I have done for you. Therefore, all believers are justified by faith without keeping the law. My Father is not saving only Jews. No! He treats everyone the same way, whether they are Jew or Gentile. All are forgiven if they have faith. It doesn't make any difference if they are circumcised or uncircumcised. Does that mean the law no longer affects us? No! Salvation is based on the law. This does not undermine the law. No! When you realize salvation is by faith alone, this places the law in its proper place.

Justification by Faith

4 Abraham was the founder from which all Jews descended. If Abraham were justified by doing something good, he would have boasted about it. But the Scriptures teach, "Abraham believed God, and God declared him righteous." When someone works, he gets wages. He gets what is due to him. However, when a man gets salvation free, he has not worked for it. My Father has justified him because of his faith. David said the same thing, "A man is

happy when he is forgiven without doing good works.” That man is blessed because his sins are forgiven, and his deeds are no longer counted against him. Yes, blessed is the one to whom the Lord will not impute sin.

Is this a blessedness only for the circumcised Jews? Or can Gentiles be justified before My Father? Look again at Abraham. He was justified by My Father before he was circumcised. He was declared righteous while he was uncircumcised. When Abraham was later circumcised, it was an outward sign of faith within his heart. In this way, Abraham became the spiritual father of all the uncircumcised believers so they might also be justified by God. But Abraham was also a spiritual father to Jews who had been circumcised.

The Promise of Faith

My Father promised to Abraham that he would be the spiritual father to all believers, for all times, based on his faith, not his works. If unsaved people can receive His forgiveness by keeping the law, then our faith is pointless and empty. The law teaches we are punished for breaking the law, but I have fulfilled the law in My death. I have taken the law out of the way.

So you get My Father’s blessings by faith, whether you keep the law or not. He will bless those who belong to the law as well as Gentiles who weren’t given the law. As long as you come to Him by faith, you come like Abraham, who is the father of all. The Scriptures promise, “I have made Abraham the ancestor of many nations.” God called those things that are not, that is, the salvation of the Gentiles, as though it had already happened.

Abraham believed that “God could call things that did not exist, as though they existed.” He prayed for a supernatural breakthrough. You can pray that same request for My Father to answer you supernaturally by His power.

When My Father told Abraham he would have a son and be the father of many nations, Abraham believed My Father’s promises to him. Abraham hoped against any hope of his present circumstances. Abraham did not have weak faith even though his body couldn’t reproduce and he was one hundred years old. Also, Abraham realized Sarah was barren and old, but he staggered not at My Father’s promises through unbelief but was strong in faith giving glory to Him. Abraham was convinced that My Father had all power to do

what He promised. Because of Abraham's faith, My Father forgave his sins and declared him righteous. This kind of faith wasn't for Abraham alone but is also for all believers. My Father will accept you as He accepted Abraham. Believe His promises that just as He brought Me back from the dead, He will forgive all your sins and declare you righteous before Him.

The Results of Justification by Faith

5 Now that you are declared right with My Father by faith, you can experience lasting peace. Since you have faith in Me, you can enter My Father's grace, and look forward to glory.

Also, you can rejoice in My sufferings, knowing I work patience in your life and that patience produces endurance, and when you endure, you get My Father's approval which gives hope. Your hope does not disappoint because My Father has poured His love into your heart by the Holy Spirit, who indwells you.

You will never be disappointed in Me. Because you have received My Father's great love, you will have great hope.

At the moment when you were helpless, I died for sinful people, such as you. You wouldn't expect anyone to die for a good person, even though that is possible, but My Father demonstrated His great love for you by sending Me to die for you, while you were a great sinner.

Since My blood has done all this for you, My Father will also declare you completely righteous. When My death reconciled you to My Father, you were still My Father's enemy. But when you were saved, you were made one with My Father. Now you can count on My Father's blessings by My life living in you. Rejoice in this wonderful new relationship with Me—the Lord Jesus Christ—based on what I did in saving you.

When Adam sinned, sin entered the world, making all people sinners. Therefore, death spread throughout the human race. Sin existed in the world long before the written law was given. No one could be accused of breaking the law when there was no written law. Yet all people died from Adam to Moses. It was their sin that led to their death, it was not a matter of their breaking the written law.

Adam was a contrast to Me, so My gift outweighed the fall of Adam. Through one man—Adam—many died, through the gift of one man— Me— many lived. The results of My gift outweigh the results of Adam’s fall. For after the fall came the judgment of condemnation, and many committed trespasses because of the fall. By Me—one Man—came abundant life. For it is certain that death reigned over everyone because of one man’s fall. It is even more certain that life reigns because of Me—Jesus Christ—who gives the free gift to those who don’t deserve it.

Again, Adam’s sin brought punishment on all, but I made it possible for all to be declared righteous. By one man’s disobedience, many were made sinners; by My obedience, many will be declared righteous. The law was given to show all how far short they fail to obey My Father. The more you see your sins and failures, the more you realize how much My Father has forgiven you. Before, sin reigned over all bringing death. Now, grace reigns to deliver eternal life to those who are in Me, Christ Jesus your Lord.

Right now you might feel that obedience is like the end of a dream. You feel that if you do what I am calling you to do, it will make you miserable and that there is no way that I could turn it all for good. Perhaps this call you hear just now is to stay in that job or leave that job, to refuse to compromise your standards of honesty, or any number of things. And as you see it in your limited mind, the prospect of doing this is terrible. You have considered every human angle, and it is impossible that it could turn out well. Do you desire Me and My way and My promises more than anything, and do you believe that I can and will honor your faith and obedience by being unashamed to call Me your God, and to use all My wisdom and power and love to turn the path of obedience into the path of life and joy? That is the crisis you face now. Trust Me? My word to you is: I Am worthy and I Am able to do exceedingly more than you can imagine.

Deliverance From Sin in the Believer’s Life

6 Should you keep sinning so My Father can keep showing His grace? Absolutely not! Sin’s power over you is broken. Should you keep sinning when you don’t have to? Again, no! When you were placed into Me by

spiritual baptism, you were placed into My death. The control of your sin nature was broken by My death. In other words, when you were baptized into Me, you died when I died. When I was raised up from the dead, you were given new life to live for My Father. You have been united with Me in death that you might share My new life. Your old lustful nature was nailed to the cross. It received a death blow so that you might not serve sin in the future. For when you are dead to sin, you are free from all its power over you.

You died when I died, and you were buried with Me. Also, realize you were raised to new life with Me in My resurrection. Now you have the strength to live your new life.

Since you have died with Me, you now share your new life with Me. Since I have been raised from the dead, you will never again die physically; death has no power over you. I died once for all to end sin's control. Now I live in heaven with My Father. So look on yourself as dead to sin's control, but alive to My Father's will through Me. Do not let sin control your physical body, nor obey its sinful lusts. Do not let any part of your body become an evil tool to be used for sinning. Give yourself to My Father as one who is alive from the dead, and give all parts of your body to Him, as instruments of righteousness. Do not let sin control you since you will be controlled by grace, not the law.

Should you continue to sin because you are not under the law? Absolutely not! If you give yourself to sin, you become a slave to the one you obey. You cannot be a slave to sin and death, and at the same time be a slave to Me and life. Thank My Father that you are no longer a slave to sin, but you are His slave because you believe His principles from your heart. You are free from the mastery of your old nature, and you are a slave to righteousness. Once you were a slave to uncleanness and self-gratification; now you are a slave to righteousness and holiness. When you are a slave to sin, you feel no obligation to obey My Father's will. You get nothing from serving sin, and now you are ashamed of what you did because those things lead to death. Now you have been set free from sin. You have become My Father's slave that will lead to holiness and eternal life. When you serve sin, you earn the wages of death, but He gave you eternal life through Me, Christ Jesus your Lord.

The Struggle of the Old and New Natures

7 When you died to the law, it no longer held you in its power. A married woman has legal obligations to her husband while he is alive. But all obligations come to an end when the husband dies. But if she gives herself to another man while her husband is still alive, she is legally an adulteress. Nevertheless, her legal obligations cease when her husband dies, and she can legally marry another. Christians who died to the law, in My death, can now give themselves to Me, who rose from the dead, that they might bring fruit to My Father. But when they give themselves to their sinful nature, their lustful passions control their bodies, so they bear fruit to death. But when you die to your lust that once controlled you, you are released from the law so you can serve My Father in a new way, not by legalistically obeying rules and traditions but by the power of a new life.

The Law Cannot Save

The law was not evil, except that no one would have known what sin is except that the law told them. You would not have known that “coveting” was evil, except the law said, “You shall not covet.” The law stirred up your evil desires by reminding you these desires were wrong. Does that mean if there were no laws to break, there would be no sinning? No! You felt alright so long as you were ignorant of the law, but when you learned what the law meant, you realized you were a sinner. You learned you were a slave doomed to die. The law was supposed to lead you to life, but instead, it led you to death. Sin took advantage of you by using the law to give you a death sentence. You know the law is holy, and the Ten Commandments are good and just. Does that mean that something that was good was responsible for your death? Absolutely not! But sin is treacherous and deceitful; it used something good for evil purposes. Thus, sin exercised all its lustful powers over you. You know the law is spiritual, but you are unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. You cannot understand your reaction to things, such as what you are supposed to do, and what you don’t do. What you hate to do, you continually go back to doing it. When you act against what you want to do, that means the law is good. When you rebel against the law, it is not you that’s doing it, but sin that dwells in you. You know that nothing good lives in you, it’s your sinful nature that controls your life. You have a desire to do good things but cannot carry it out. When you try not to do wrong things, you do them anyway. So when you do the things you don’t want to do, then it is not your true self doing them. Sin controls your life.

You've discovered a new law in you. Every time you want to do good, you do wrong intentionally.

As long as you live in the flesh, you will be tempted to rebel against My commands. If you don't yield to Me, you will be controlled by your old nature, and you will live in bondage to your old nature. Bondage is "doing what you don't want to do, and not being able to do what you desire to do." Yield your life to Me, and you will want to do what I want you to do.

You love to keep the law of God, but you see another law working in your life. It fights the logic of your mind, making you a prisoner of the law, working in your body to make you sin; it's your old nature. What a miserable person you are. Who can rescue you from your slavery to sin? I, the Lord Jesus, can deliver you through My power. What is the result of all of this? In your lower nature you are a slave of sin, but in your mind, you are a slave to Me, Jesus Christ.

The Power of the Holy Spirit in the Believer

8 Now there is no condemnation against you because you are in Me. Your life-giving power from the Holy Spirit is yours through Me. I have released you from the compulsive cycle of sin and the lust of your old nature. For the law was powerless to help you obey because you were a slave to your old nature. But My Father sent Me in a human body to be a sacrificial offering for your sin to destroy sin's domination over you. Now you can obey My Father's laws by following My leading and refusing the lust of your old nature. Those who are dominated by their sinful nature have made up their minds to sin, but you are dominated by the Holy Spirit because you have made up your mind to do what I desire of you. If you follow the dictates of your old nature, it will lead to death. When you obey the Holy Spirit, He leads you to life and peace. As a result, when you obeyed only your old nature, you have made yourself His enemy. Your old nature has never been His friend, and you can never make it obey Him. Those who please only their old nature never please the Holy Spirit.

Think My thoughts. I Am Jesus Christ, who indwells you. Fill your mind with Scripture so you can think about Me continually.

Do not be interested in pleasing the old nature. Be interested in spiritual things, because the Holy Spirit lives in your life. And you know you are My Father's child because you possess the Holy Spirit. Even when your body is dead because of sin, your spirit is alive because you were declared righteous, and the Holy Spirit, who raised Me from the dead, now lives in you to give you life. Therefore, after your body is dead, you will live again by the same Holy Spirit who is living within you.

It is not necessary for you to obey the lust of your old nature. If you died physically, then you would not obey your old nature. But the Holy Spirit can stop your rebellion by My power that indwells you. Therefore, be led by the Spirit of God because you are My Father's child.

You are not just a slave who cowers in fear of breaking laws or displeasing My Father, but you received the Holy Spirit who made you My Father's child, so you cry, "Papa, Father." The Holy Spirit constantly tells your spirit that you are His child. Now if you are His child, you are also an heir, His heir, and co-heir with Me. Because you suffer as a Christian, you will also share in His glory in heaven.

Your present sufferings are nothing when compared with the glories that are waiting for you in heaven. As a matter of fact, all creation groans waiting for the glorification of His children because creation will lose its thorns, and thistles from the curse My Father put on it. He will send Me at the end of time so creation will be liberated from its corruption to enjoy the same magnificent redemption My Father will give to all of His children. From the beginning until now, animals and plants groan, expecting to be redeemed from the bondage of decadence to enjoy the same redemption as His children. You too groan while you wait for your body to be transformed, for that is your inward hope. By trusting My Father, you are looking forward to getting a new body. Those who are already in heaven don't need hope; they have already received their reward. Continue to trust for something you don't have yet, and wait patiently and confidently for it. Thank My Father for the help of the Holy Spirit because He comes to assist you in your weakness. You don't know how you are to pray as you ought, but the Holy Spirit will intercede for you, praying with words you can't understand or express. What the Holy Spirit prays is in agreement with your heavenly Father.

Therefore, the things that will happen to you are for your good because I pray for you. For when I foreknew you, I predestinated you to be conformed to My image. I am the firstborn among many children. I predestined you and called you. Because I called you, I also justified you; and those I justified, will be glorified.

God's Eternal Love

Now, how shall you respond to My great plan? If I am for you, who can be against you? Since My Father did not hold Me, His only Son, back, but gave Me for you all, you know He will freely give you all things. Who can bring any charge against you? Since My Father justified you, who can condemn you? I died for you and was raised for you. Now I stand at My Father's right hand to intercede for you.

Those for whom I make intercession are believers who need help. Your intercession is also based on My intercession because I present your requests to My Father. Why? Sometimes, you pray for the wrong thing, in the wrong way, with the wrong words, without faith, and with sin or other things in your life. I can make your prayers right. I can open the door, urge you to continue, and give you hope that My Father will hear and answer you.

Who can separate you from My Father's love? Not trouble, hardship, or persecutors, hunger, nakedness, or danger. The Scriptures teach, "You must be ready to die at any time, you are like sheep awaiting slaughter."

These are all trials over which you must triumph by My power and through Me who loves you, and died for you. Nothing can separate you from My Father's love for you. Death can't separate you from Him, and also, angels can't do it; neither can the satanic power of hell, nor things present, nor things to come. Nothing can separate you from His love; not height, nor depth, nor any other creature, for you are safe in Me, Christ Jesus your Lord.

Continuing Jewish Unbelief

Paul had a deep desire that his Jewish relatives might be saved. He had deep sorrow and mental anguish because the Jewish people rejected Me. He was

9 even willing to be cut off from Me for their salvation.

You need a burden for the salvation of your lost relatives and friends, just as Paul had for the Jews.

The Jewish people were adopted by My Father. He gave them His covenants and His glory visited them. He gave them the law and principles how to worship. They had everything but still rejected Him. The Jewish people descended from the patriarchs, and I came from their flesh and blood. I am the One whom they should worship above all. I am the One they should bless.

Does this mean My Father has failed to keep His promises because the Jews refused to recognize Me? Absolutely not! Not all physical Jews are spiritual Jews, and not all the physical descendants of Abraham have the faith of Abraham. My Father promised that through Isaac the spiritual promises would be carried out, which means the other physical children of Abraham didn't get the privilege of being My descendants. That means not all the physical children of Abraham are his spiritual descendants. Only those who are the children of promise are his spiritual descendants.

My Father's promises to Abraham apply to you, now you must act on the promises My Father made. Recognize Me as the Messiah, the Son of God. Receive Me by faith, and you will be saved.

My Father promised Abraham, "I will visit you, and Sarah will have a son." Then, later, He promised Rebekah when she was pregnant by Isaac, before her twin sons were born, and before either of them did good or evil, that, "The elder shall serve the younger." My Father chose Jacob before he was born—because His choice is free—and didn't depend on human merit. The Scripture said, "Jacob I love because he is the child of promise." Does this make My Father unjust? No! Remember what My Father said to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I please."

You know the only thing that counts is His mercy, not what people desire or try to do. You are saved by His grace. My Father said to Pharaoh, "For this purpose, I raised you up, so I might show My great power and that My name

may be known throughout the world.” Therefore, God shows mercy when He wants to show mercy, and He hardens those He wants to harden.

Many will ask, “How can the Father ever punish anyone, haven’t they simply done what He made them do?” My Father answers them, “What right has any human to question My decisions?” I created everyone. “The pot has no right to question the potter, ‘Why have you made me this shape?’” Every potter, or craftsman, can do what he wills with the clay. He decides whether a lump of clay should be used as a decorative pot, and another for garbage.

Thank My Father for making you who you are. Glorify My Father through your unique calling, and He will help you fulfill His purpose for your life.

My Father has a perfect right to show His anger at any time against those who rebel against Him, even when He was originally patient with them. He puts up with rebels so that He can show His mercy and richness of grace. He is patient with you—both Jews and Gentiles—to reveal His grace and kindness. He said in Scripture, “I will say to a people who are not My people, that you will be Mine. You are My people, I will say to a nation that I have not loved, I love you. They will be called sons of the living God.”

Isaiah the prophet predicted, “Israel will have as many descendants as there are grains of sand on the seashore, but only a remnant will be saved. For He will swiftly carry out His punishment once and for all.” Again Isaiah said, “Unless the all-powerful Lord shows His mercy, all Jews would be destroyed just as He destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.”

Then Gentiles, who were not looking for His righteousness, found it. They found His righteousness that came by faith.

The Jews who were trying to find His righteousness by keeping the law did not keep the law and did not find righteousness. Why? Because they relied on their legalism, and not on faith. In other words, they stumbled over the law, and it became a stumbling stone to them. The Scriptures say, “He laid in Zion a stumbling stone—a rock to trip people up. I was that Rock. Those who believe in Me will not stumble or fall.”

My Salvation Is for Everyone

10I long for all Jewish people to be saved. I know your enthusiasm for My Father, but it is misdirected zeal. Your passion is based on wrong knowledge. You never realized My Father's demands for perfect righteousness. All the while you only tried to keep the law to demonstrate your own righteousness. Therefore, you, along with all Gentiles, are not perfect but are sinners in My Father's sight. When you receive Me as Savior, it is the end of your struggle to be righteous by keeping the law. Moses wrote that if anyone could keep the law perfectly, hold out against temptation, and never break one law, he could be saved and appear perfect before God. But no one ever reached that standard. You cannot find salvation by searching heaven to bring Me down to you, nor can you descend into the place of the dead to find Me and raise Me from the dead for eternal life. You are saved by trusting Me, and I am within reach of any who searches for Me.

Everyone can have salvation, which is as easy as calling for it and opening your heart to Me. Salvation is obtained by the word of faith which you received when you believed. You must confess with your mouth that I am Lord and believe in your heart that My Father raised Me from the dead to be saved! For with your heart, you believe unto righteousness, and with your mouth confession is made to salvation.

The Scriptures promise that when you believe in Me, you would not be disappointed and that is surely true. Jews and Gentiles are the same, all must call on Me for salvation. I am the Lord who gives generously to those who call on Me. The Old Testament says, "Whoever calls on the Lord will be saved." How can anyone ask to be saved unless he believes in Me? How can anyone believe if he has never heard? How can he hear unless someone tells him? And how will anyone go preach the gospel unless someone else sends him? The Old Testament also says, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

Not everyone was responding to the gospel. Isaiah asked, "Lord, who will believe?"

Faith comes from hearing the gospel—the good news of My death, burial, and resurrection. What about the Jews? Have they heard the word of salvation? The message was preached wherever Jews lived. Paul asked, "Do they understand?" Even in Moses' time, My Father told the Jews, "I will use a nation—Gentiles—that is devoid of spiritual understanding to provoke you to action." Because Israel refused to preach to non-Jews, My Father told them, "I will be found by people who weren't looking for Me. I showed Myself to those who were not looking for Me." Even when Gentiles are being saved, My

Father still reaches out His hand to the Jews—a disobedient people—who only argue with Me.

*Confess with your mouth that I am your Lord and by the way you live.
Bring glory to My Father by your confession.*

God's Mercy on the Jews

11 Here is the question, “Has My Father rejected His people?” Absolutely not! My servant Paul was a Jew, an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin. No, it is unthinkable that My Father has repudiated His unique people whom He originally chose.

Remember what Elijah said in the Scriptures when interceding to My Father for Israel, “Lord, they have killed Your prophets and broken down Your altars. I am the only one faithful to You, and they seek to kill me.”

My Father answered, “No, you are not the only one, I have seven thousand left who have not bowed to Baal.” In the same way, there is a remnant, in this present day, chosen by His grace. So it was not the Jews’ legalism but My Father’s kindness that made them follow Me. For if My Father recognized them for good works, His grace would no longer be free.

This is My conclusion, that most of the Jews had not been saved. A few have found salvation in Me, but the rest are judicially blinded, so they don’t understand the gospel. The Scriptures teach,

“My Father has given Israel a blinded heart to this day
so that their spiritual eyes see not,
and their spiritual ears hear not.”

And David said,

“The food My Father has provided for them has become a trap,
so that they think everything is well between them
and My Father.

Let their eyes be blinded to My Father’s goodness,

so they are trapped to think all is well.”

Have the Jews lost their divine privileges because of their sin and rejection of My Father’s plan for them? Certainly not! But you must follow closely My leading in your life and stay close to My protective grace. The obvious question is, “Have the Jews forever lost any hope of recovery? Or, have they just stumbled temporarily?” My Father’s purpose was to make salvation available to the Gentiles, and then the Jews would be envious of what the Gentiles had, and want it for themselves. If all the world becomes rich in My Father’s blessing because the Jews stumble, think of how much greater will be His blessing when Jews come back to Him and join the Gentiles in Me.

I appointed Paul an apostle to the Gentiles. He had a special message to the Gentiles, and Paul constantly told this to the Jews to make them jealous of what the Gentiles have.

Thus, some Jews will be saved. For if the Jewish rejection means salvation is offered to the Gentiles by My Father, how much more wonderful will be the return of Israel to My Father and Me. It will be like the Jewish nation being resurrected from the dead.

If the flour is good, then the bread it makes will be good, and if the root of a tree is good, then it will give good fruit. Since Abraham—the original root—was good, so eventually, the nation of Israel will be children of Abraham’s faith.

The branches of the olive tree called Israel were cut off, and the Gentiles—like wild olive branches—have been grafted into My Father’s tree. The Gentiles now enjoy the life of the tree that gives blessing to them. But Gentiles should not think themselves superior, for the branches do not support the root, but the root supports the branches. Those branches—Israel—were cut off because of its unbelief. Gentiles may say, “Those branches were broken off so we could be grafted in.” That is true; Israel was cut off because of unbelief. But that fact should not make Gentiles proud, but fearful. If My Father didn’t spare the natural branches—the Jews—He will not spare the Gentiles when they reject Him. Don’t forget, My Father can be severe as well as gracious. He is severe to those who reject Him, and He is gracious to those who fear Him.

The Jews can repent of their unbelief and be grafted back into the place of Gentiles. My Father is eminently able to graft His people—the Jews—back again. For if His great power was able to graft wild olive branches into My

Father's eternal plan, then it will be much easier to graft a cultivated olive branch back into its original place.

My Father will not forget those who are Gentiles but remember them because He loves them. This is a mystery how My Father deals with Israel so they wouldn't be conceited. Israel is now spiritually blinded, but this will last only until the fullness of the Gentiles comes in. Then all Israel will be saved, as it is written,

“The Deliverer will come from Zion,
He will turn the Jews from ungodliness,
He will take away their sin.”

The Jews are now enemies of the gospel, but they are beloved as far as My Father's eternal covenant with them is concerned. He will never withdraw His gifts and calling. Remember that Gentiles were once rebels against My Father, but when the Jews rejected Me, He was merciful to the Gentiles. In the future, He will be merciful to the Jews. My Father has not only given up on all those who are habitually sinning but He will also have mercy on any He chooses to show mercy.

How rich are the depths of My Father's mystery, and how deep is His wisdom and knowledge? You can't possibly trace His motives. You don't understand all that He does. Who could ever know His mind? Who could ever try to tell Him what to do? Who could ever give Him anything? No one, for He is the supreme Father. All that exists comes from Him, is for Him, and to Him be glory forever.

It is impossible to pay God My Father back for all the grace he has given you. None of your efforts or works could even begin to pay him back. For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. He already owns all you have to give him — including all your efforts. So, glorify God for what He has done in your life, and what He will do in your life in the future. This is called faith, which is your motivation for your obedience and trust.

You Are A Living Sacrifice to Serve God

12 Dedicate your body to My Father as a living sacrifice, holy, and pleasing to Him. This is the first and best spiritual worship you can give. Do not allow yourself to be conformed to the principles of this world. But let Me transform your thinking. Then you will discover My will for your life, which will glorify My Father.

Surrender your body to Me, so you will live holy to please My Father, and serve Him with all of your strength.

Because you have received grace from Me, do not exaggerate your value or importance. But honestly, estimate the gifts I have given you. Just as each body has many parts, and each part has a separate function, so you are one part of My body who serves in harmonious union with other believers. You are part of each other. Your spiritual gifts are different than other believers; but you belong to My body, that is, to other believers. So you need all of the gifts to serve My Father. I have given to each one a spiritual gift. This is an ability to serve My Father. Those with the gift of prophecy will speak for My Father. Use this gift according to your faith. Those with the gift of helping others should serve people well, those with the gift of teaching should teach well. Those with the gift of preaching should do a good job delivering sermons. Those who have been given the gift of managing money should use it generously for spiritual projects. Those who have the gift of administration should manage everything to My Father's glory. Finally, let those with the gift of mercy-showing, show compassion and sympathy to the needy.

I have given you spiritual gifts. May you discover them, train them, and dedicate your abilities to serve Me.

Sharing Me With Others

You should love everyone as My Father loves you. Do not pretend to love people when you don't. Seek the good things of life, and turn your back on evil things. Love others as My Father's children should and have deep respect for all. Serve My Father with untiring effort and be enthusiastic in all you do. Gladly accept all My plans for you and be patient in trouble while always

praying to do My Father's will. When My saints are in need, share with them the things you have and open your home to them.

Always bless those who persecute you, and never curse them. Share your happiness to those who need happiness, and empathize with those who are sad. Treat everyone with equal kindness, and do not condescend to the poor. Do not allow yourself to be self-satisfied but show Me to the world. Never pay back evil for evil. Let everyone see your integrity. Try to get along with everyone, and be at peace with them. Do not try to get even when someone wrongs you. Leave revenge to My Father because the Scriptures teach, "Vengeance belongs to Him, and He will pay them back for their evil." Also, the Scriptures teach, "If your enemy is hungry, give him food, and if your enemy is thirsty, give him water to drink, thus heaping hot coals on his head." Resist evil and conquer it by doing good.

Pray for those who hate you or try to harm you. Enable them to do good, and bless them with My presence.

Respect for Government

13 Submit to government authorities since My Father has put them into office. All civil authority comes from Him. Those who resist the laws of the land are rebelling against His authority over them, and He will punish them. Those who behave rightly according to My Father's commands should not be afraid of judges. Only criminals have anything to fear. Live honestly and correctly so you won't be afraid of punishment. My Father puts the government in place to serve its citizens and to carry out His revenge on criminals, punishing them when they break the law. Obey the laws for your conscience sake, and also because you are afraid of being punished. This is the reason you will pay your taxes since all officials are His officers. Give everyone what you owe them, and if you owe taxes, you must pay them. When you are required to respect officials, you must respect them and honor them.

Love Your Neighbor

Avoid getting into debt, except the debt of love you owe to all. When you love others, you fulfill your debt to My Father. Know all the commands such as,

“You shall not commit adultery, you shall not kill, you shall not steal, you shall not covet.” They are summed up in one command, “You must love your neighbor as yourself.” Love is the one act that will not hurt your neighbor. It’s the only law you need to obey.

Obey all the laws and principles so you can be a good testimony to My Father, and so you can be healthy and prosperous in your life.

It is time to wake up because My coming is closer than when you were saved. The night is almost over, and it will soon be day. Repent of anything done under the cover of darkness and put on the armor of light. Behave, because you live in the light. Do not attend wild parties, get drunk, commit adultery, nor get into fights. My Father will help you live as you should, so do not plan to do anything evil.

You can't repeat the past, but you can learn from it. You are not yet living in the future; plan properly for it. You are living today, seek My strength to do your best. Make the present influential by what you have learned from the past and what you should do in the future.

Handling Questionable Things

14 Give a warm welcome to those who are weak in the faith. Realize there are degrees of Christian obedience so don't argue with anyone, whether or not you should eat meat offered to idols. Some think eating meat offered to idols is all right. Others, who are weak in faith, think it is wrong, so they won't eat meat at all, just vegetables. Those who think it is all right to eat meat should not look down on those who don't. And those who don't eat meat should not find fault with those who do. Accept all believers as My Father accepts His children, they are His servants to command. Everyone is responsible for pleasing My Father. They are not accountable to other believers. Let My Father tell them what is right or wrong because He has the power to straighten out believers.

Some treat certain days holier than other days. Others treat all days the same. Each believer is free to hold his own convictions. Those who observe

special days do so to honor My Father. The one who eats meat does so to honor Him if he gives thanks first. The one who does not eat meat also is honoring Him if he gives thanks first. You are not your own boss to do anything you please. When you live, you live for My Father. When you die, you go to be with Him. So, whether alive or dead, you belong to Him. I died and was resurrected. Therefore, I am Lord so that I might be the Lord of the living and the dead. This is why you shall not pass judgment on any because you'll all stand before My judgment seat. Realize that each must give an account of himself to My Father. For it is written in Scripture, "As I live," says the Lord, "every knee will bow before Me, and every tongue will confess Me." So then, everyone must give an account of himself to My Father. Do not pass judgment on other believers.

Therefore, make up your mind never to cause your brother to stumble. Food is all right to eat for I said, "No food is ceremonially unclean in itself." If some think a certain food is unclean, then it is unclean to them. If your attitude toward food is upsetting other believers, then be guided by love. Do not eat anything you choose if that means the downfall of a believer for whom I died. Do not flaunt your spiritual privileges to bring harm on another believer. For My Father's kingdom is not a matter of eating and drinking, but righteousness, peace, and joy. Serve Me with a respectful attitude toward both eating and abstaining from food. Then you will please My Father and be respected by others. Adopt any custom that leads to peace and mutual respect by all believers. Do not destroy My Father's work in believers' lives over the question of eating and drinking. All food is ceremonially clean, but it becomes evil when you eat to make someone fall. Therefore, your best course is to abstain from meat and wine so you won't trip up a believer or weaken him.

*Pray for weaker believers. Don't let your actions cause them to sin.
Pray for stronger believers. May you learn from them. Do not be
controlled by any, but control yourself for My Father's sake.*

Hold on to your convictions. They are between My Father and you. Be careful when you make decisions so that you do not go against your conscience. Anyone who has doubts but eats anyway is condemned because he violates his conscience. Anything is a sin that violates your faith.

A Believer's Relationship With Others

15A strong Christian has the duty to bear the burdens of weak Christians, lest they fall. Be considerate of others and help them become stronger Christians. I didn't think only of Myself. I came to suffer from the insults of those who opposed Me. Learn from everything written in Scripture for it gives you hope and examples of how to live. Keep serving My Father in many ways. Refuse to give up.

Tolerate other believers by following My example. I never stopped doing good. Have one mind and voice, to give glory to Me your Lord, and praise My Father, the God of us all.

Glorify My Father by treating others the same way I treated people. I became the servant of the circumcised Jews, so My Father could carry out the promises He made to the patriarchs. This was also to get Gentiles saved, thus bringing glory to My Father because the Scriptures teach,

“You will worship My Father among the Gentiles,
and sing praises to His name.”

In another place, the Scriptures teach,
“Rejoice, you Gentiles, with His people.”

And yet in another place,

“Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles,
and let all people praise Him.”

And then Isaiah said,

“The root of Jesse shall appear,
rising up to rule the Gentiles,
and in Him, the Gentiles will hope.”

May your hope give you such power and peace that the Holy Spirit will overflow you and remove all barriers that hold you back.

Paul tells you, “I feel certain you have real Christian character and experience. You can keep each other on the straight and narrow path.” Nevertheless, he writes with frankness to remind you to obey truths you already know. He was given a commission by My Father to be a minister to the Gentiles. This gave Paul a ministerial duty to tell them My gospel and thus to present them as an offering to My Father because they are made a sweet-smelling offering that will be accepted. He had a right to be proud of his work of spreading My message.

Paul does not know how successful others have been, but he says, “I know that I have been used by God to win the Gentiles to salvation by the power of signs and wonders and by the power of the Holy Spirit.” He preached the good news with all his strength from Jerusalem to Illyricum. He never preached where My name was already known, lest he builds on another man’s foundation. His chief purpose was to fulfill Scripture,

“Those who have never been told about Christ,
will see Him;
and those who have never heard will understand.”

Paul explained that this is why he has been prevented from going to see you in Rome. But since he is no longer needed in Greece, and since he has always wanted to see you, the believers in Rome, he planned to see you on his way to Spain. He hopes to spend some time with you and hopes you would speed him on his journey. His next destination is Jerusalem to look after the Christians there. He was carrying money that he had collected in northern Greece and Achaia, and taking it to the needy Christians there.

Gentile Christians took up a willing offering for those needy in Jerusalem. Since the Gentiles have benefited from the Jews, it is only right that Gentiles should now look after the Jews with material things. Paul intends to come to you in Rome when the gift is safely delivered to Jerusalem. Then he will come see you on his way to Spain.

Paul told the Roman church that he intended to visit them on his way to Spain. He never reached Spain, but he went to Rome under different circumstances than he intended, that is, as a prisoner awaiting trial. You don't complete everything in life that you intend to do because of

many interfering reasons. Therefore, you should pray about your intentions, "If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this or that."

Paul is confident that when he gets to Rome, he will be a blessing to you. He wants you to stand behind him in earnest prayer so he would not fall into the hands of unbelieving Jews in Jerusalem, and that the Jerusalem Christians would welcome his gift to them. These requests were for My sake and for the love that they had for each other.

Be generous to all needy Christians as the Christians of Greece were to those in Jerusalem. Follow Me by example who gave up everything for those most in need.

Greetings to Paul's Friends

16 Paul commends Phoebe, who is coming to visit you, My church at Rome. She worked diligently in My church at Cenchrea, Greece. "Receive her as a sister in Me, her Lord, and help her because she had helped many."

Paul sends greetings to Priscilla and Aquila who had been his fellow workers. In fact, they had risked their lives for him. Not only is Paul grateful for them, but he also says all the Gentile churches appreciate them. He greets all who worship in their home.

Paul sends greetings to Epenetus, the first to become a Christian in Achaia. Next, he greets Mary, plus Andronicus and Junias, his relatives who were in prison with him. They are respected by the apostles and were saved before Paul's conversion. Paul next greets Ampliatus, Urbanus, and Stachys. Then he greeted Apelles who is approved by Me and those who minister in the home of Aristobulus. Paul sends greetings to Herodion, a relative of his, and to the servants in Narcissus' home. He also greets Tryphena and Tryphosa who labor in Me, and also to Persis. Paul sends greetings to Rufus, chosen by Me, the Lord, and his mother who had also been like a mother to Paul. Paul also greets Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the other Christians who live with them. Paul sends greeting to Philologus, Julia, Nereus, and his sister, plus Olympas and all the Christians who live with them. Greet one another warmly because all My churches with Paul send them greetings.

Develop good relationships with all the people you know. Greet people honestly and warmly. Love all people, and pray for all people.

Be on guard against anyone who causes divisions in My church, and avoid them in all possible ways. Do not be like divisive people because they are slaves to their own desires. They are not slaves to Me because they confuse people with their arguments. Paul wants everyone to know about your loyalty to him. He wants you to remain very loyal to what is good and refrain from what is evil.

My Father is the God of peace and harmony. He will soon crush satan under His feet. May My grace rest on you.

Timothy sends greetings as well as greetings from Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater. Tertius, Paul's secretary, also sends greetings. Gaius and My church that meets in his house send greetings. Erastus, the treasurer of the city of Corinth and Quartus, also sends his greetings.

Paul prays this benediction over you: "May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. May you be strong and continually steady so that all glory goes to God My Father. May you understand the mystery of Christ and His church which is now revealed to all but was kept secret in past ages. May the preaching of Jesus Christ bring all nations to the obedience of faith. Now may the only wise God be glorified through the Lord Jesus Christ, your Savior."

I AM JESUS

Love, Faith, and Hope

My First Letter to the Corinthians



I led Paul to write this letter so that I could deal with a number of issues in My church at Corinth. Yet, in the middle of My letter, I deliver one of the loftiest passages ever written on love. I placed the highest priority on striving for unity, humility, and love for all believers. As you read this book, make a decision to seek My will in everything you do and to work hard to be humble, to love others, and to become one in spirit with your fellow believers.

Divisions in My Church

1 I am Jesus, Who led Paul to introduce himself as an apostle, called by the will of God My Father, and Sosthenes, a brother in Me, who helped Paul with this letter. This letter is written to My church in Corinth and to all Christians everywhere whom I have sanctified, and who pray in My name. Grace to all who read this letter, from God My Father and from Me, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul is Thankful

Paul always gave thanks to God My Father for you, because you had been saved by grace and you were established by knowing Me, and witnessing for Me. You had a full understanding of truth. You had My inner testimony and had all the spiritual gifts as you were waiting for My return. The Holy Spirit will keep them, and your lives will be blameless as you wait for My return. I appeal to you to quit fussing among yourselves but live in harmony so My body won't be ruptured, and there would be one unified mind in My church.

There Are Divisions in My Church

Paul had been told by those living in Chloe's house that My church had serious divisions. Some are saying, "I follow Paul," others say, "I follow Apollos." Still others maintain, "I follow Peter," and some "super" spiritual believers claim they follow Me saying, "I follow Christ." Have you divided Me into many pieces? Also, was Paul crucified for you so that you were baptized in Paul's name? Paul even declared, "I'm glad I never baptized any of you, except Crispus and Gaius; so none of you were baptized in my name." Paul also remembered baptizing the family of Stephanas, but that's all he could remember. My Father did not send Paul or others to baptize people, but to give My gospel to everyone. Do not preach philosophy or use "deep" words to explain My death.

The Message of the Cross

The language of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing in sin. But the cross is My power to save because I save you from a purposeless life and give you an understanding of spiritual matters. The Scriptures say, "I will destroy the plans of the wise, even when everyone thinks they are smart. I will confound the intellectuals; then where will the earthly philosophers be? What will happen to those who write books?" People are blinded spiritually so they can't find My Father with their wisdom. His plan is to save those who believe My gospel, which is a "foolish" message to those who are lost. The Jews demand miracles before they will believe. Gentiles are looking for rational answers, but the answer is My crucifixion. I am a stumbling block to the Jews, and the gospel is foolishness to the unsaved Gentiles. But the Holy Spirit has opened your eyes, and all who are saved, whether Jew or Gentile, you must see

Me as the catalyst of My Father's plan for salvation. His "foolishness" is wiser than all human wisdom, and His weakness is stronger than all human strength.

Learn Bible knowledge and acquire spiritual understanding so you can be wise as a Christian. Let Me be your teacher in all things.

I called you to salvation when you were not spiritually wise, you thought after the pattern of ordinary people. I did not call many influentially rich, or highly educated people of the world, instead, I chose people whom the world thinks are "foolish" to confound those the world considers smart. Also, I chose people without influence and those whom the world calls "low class." I chose people hated by the world to show up those the world thinks are brilliant so no one can ever boast of their accomplishments or that they had something to do with their salvation. You have salvation in Me alone because you have been made a member of My body. And I am your wisdom, your righteousness, your holiness, and your freedom. As the Scriptures teach, "If any wants to boast, let him boast about what My Father has done."

Understanding Spiritual Things

2 Do not use impressive words or philosophy to give the gospel to others. I want everyone to know My simple message and what My death can do for them. Do not rely on your ability to convince people. You must realize how weak your arguments are. Your speeches or sermons should not be based on debate techniques or philosophy. Let the Holy Spirit demonstrate My power in transforming the lives of those who hear the gospel.

No ones faith can rely on human reasoning but on the power of God My Father. Seek wisdom, not the type that comes from philosophers, nor the kind that appeals to "logical thinkers" whose thinking dooms them to failure. Wisdom comes from My Father showing His plan for all people throughout the ages. My Father's wisdom is not understood by the great thinkers, for if "great men" understood His wisdom, they would never have crucified Me, the Lord of glory. The Scriptures explain, "No man has seen this wisdom nor have they understood My Father's wonderful plan that He has for those who believe and love Him." You must understand My Father's plan for all people because He sent the Holy Spirit to teach it to you. Now, the Spirit reaches into the depths of My Father's purpose to show you the things He hides from the world. A person

is the only one who knows for sure what he is thinking or what he is really like. So, no one can know what My Father is thinking or what He is really like, unless the Holy Spirit reveals it to him. My Father has given the Holy Spirit to you so you can understand His gifts and plans. He is different from the spirit of this world. Now you must tell others about His plans, not using the phrases of philosophy or logic, but use My words. Those who are in proper fellowship with the Holy Spirit can understand the spiritual meaning of My Father's message. The unsaved person can't understand His plans. They sound foolish to him. Nor can the unsaved know what the Holy Spirit is saying, for the unsaved are spiritually blinded. But the spiritual person understands spiritual things because the Holy Spirit indwells him. How could the unsaved understand because the Scripture says, "Who can know what the Lord is thinking? Who can instruct God?" But you understand because you have My mind.

If you want to be spiritual, yield to the Holy Spirit. Read, study, memorize, and live the Scriptures so you can live as closely to Me as possible.

Carnal Christians

3 Certain believers among you are not spiritual Christians because they are worldly and babes in Me, Jesus Christ. They couldn't be fed solid food because babies can't digest solid food. I will feed them the milk of the Word—the essentials—they are not ready for the meat of the Word to make them strong. They wrangle over leaders acting like average unsaved people. They are motivated by the desires of the flesh. Some in My church are proclaiming, "I am for Paul," others are yelling, "I am for Apollos."

Who is Paul and who is Apollos, but My servants who preach My Word and motivate people to faith. They use different ways of ministering because different spiritual gifts are given to each of them. Paul planted and Apollos watered, but I produce growth. Neither the planter nor the waterer count. Only the Holy Spirit matters because He makes seeds grow. Whether Paul or Apollos plant or water, they are a team and each will be rewarded for what they do. They are all My Father's co-workers. You are God's field, and God's building.

You must work with Me in ministry. I will do what you cannot do for I do the supernatural. You will do what only humans can do and together we will do My Father's work.

Paul was just the builder who laid the foundation on which someone else constructed the building. That means you are building on the original foundation of the gospel and doctrine that was laid by Paul. Therefore, be careful how you work. For no one can lay the foundation because it has already been laid. The foundation is Me, Jesus Christ. You must build on My foundation, using various materials of gold, silver, and jewels. Some will use only sticks, hay, and trash. But judgment day is coming where your good works will be revealed. God will use fire to judge your efforts. If your good works are burned up, you will be losers. If they stand the test, you will be rewarded. A few Christians will have everything burned up. The only thing left will be their salvation.

Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who lives in you. He wants you to be holy. He will destroy anyone who destroys His temple because His temple is sacred. Your body is the temple where He dwells.

Don't deceive yourself about spirituality, those who think they are wise by worldly standards have fooled themselves because the world's wisdom is folly. The Scriptures say, "I catch those who think they are wise in their own tricks." The Scriptures also say, "I know men's thoughts, and I know how futile their thoughts are." So, do not boast in human thinking, only boast in what the Holy Spirit has given you. Everything you have has been given to you: Paul, Apollos, Peter, life, death, everything; the present, and the future belong to the Holy Spirit. You belong to Me, and I belong to My Father.

Judging Christians

4I entrusted you with knowledge of My Father. Now the most important thing about a servant is that he be found faithful. Don't worry about what anyone thinks; don't even trust your own thinking. Have a clear conscience, but that is not enough to prove you are right. The Holy Spirit alone will tell you what's right. So, do not prematurely judge anyone as good or bad. Leave that until I return. Then all hidden things will be revealed, and everyone will know what each person is like and everyone will get the reward he or she deserves.

To keep from judging others, you need to look at people through My eyes. Do not be quick to judge anyone. Judgment should be left to Me.

I used Paul and Apollos as examples so no one would play favorites. Do not choose one teacher over another. The Scriptures teach, “Live by the rules,” and don’t elevate one servant above another. My Father didn’t make any superior to another. The Holy Spirit gave you the gifts you have so no one can brag about their gifts as if they were superior to anyone else. You thought wrongly that you had all the spiritual things you needed. You were acting like rich kings who sit contented on their thrones. Even Paul wished you were, in fact, reigning, and he was reigning with you, but that was not the fact. Paul was appointed an apostle by Me, and apostles will die for My cause. Like prisoners on death row, apostles are under the sentence of death, and the unsaved world will rejoice in their execution.

Paul said he was foolish by the world’s standards, but you were claiming to be wise. He said he was weak in the sight of the world, while you were claiming to be strong. Paul said the world laughed at him, even as you act like celebrities. He said he went hungry and thirsty. He wore rags, was brutally treated, and homeless; all for My cause. Paul said he had to work hard, yet when he was cursed, he blessed his attackers. He was patient with those who injured him. He answered quietly when insulted, even when people treated him like dirt. I am not writing to embarrass you, but to warn you because you are like children. You may have had a thousand who tried to teach you, but Paul was your father in the faith. You were saved when he preached the gospel to you. That is why he wanted you to copy his example and assume his attitudes.

My Plans for Paul and Timothy

Paul plans to send Timothy to help you because Timothy was saved under his ministry, just as you were converted under Paul’s ministry. I will use Timothy to teach you what I want you to know. It’s the same thing that was taught in all My churches. Paul realizes that some seized church leadership when he did not come to them. So he promises to come as soon as I allow him to come. Then Paul promises to examine the pretentious leaders to see if they measure up to My standards because the kingdom of God is not a matter of talking, but it is power, holiness, and obedience. So decide if you want Paul to come punish you, or come with love and gentleness.

Influence of Evil in My Church

5 There are reports of sexual immorality in My church. It was so bad that even the unsaved wouldn't tolerate it. A man was living with his father's wife in sexual immorality. Are you so proud and blind that you can't see this terrible sin? Shouldn't you be overwhelmed with guilt? You should have cast the man out of My church. Even though Paul was not present, you already know what he would do, just as if he were there with you. "Call My church together to vote on this matter, and remember, the Holy Spirit is present when you gather together. Vote the man out of your fellowship, place him in satan's hands for punishment in the hopes that his soul will be saved when I return, even though he dies prematurely."

I rebuke your pride in your accomplishments. I Am reminding you that only a small amount of yeast would influence all the dough. "Get rid of sinful yeast and make My church a completely new loaf of bread, remembering I Am your Passover meal. Get rid of the sinful man so that you can be bread without yeast for the Passover, known for sincerity and truth." I wrote, through Paul, in a previous letter telling you not to associate with those living immoral lives. I didn't mean that you should have no contact at all with unsaved people who are sexually immoral, greedy, liars, thieves, and idol worshipers. A Christian can't live in this world without doing business with people in the world. But disassociate with those who claim to be Christians that indulge in sexual sins, including all the sins I just mentioned. Don't even eat a fellowship meal with them.

Do not be like those in Corinth who gave themselves to sin. Be pure in thought so you will remain pure in body.

It's not your task to judge those outside My church, but it certainly is the job of believers to hold members of My church accountable when they sin in the above mentioned ways. The Holy Spirit alone is the judge of those on the outside My church, but you must deal with the sinning brother who disgraces Christianity. You must put him out of My church.

Believers Forbidden to Go to Court Against One Another

6 A Corinthian believer was taking a Christian matter before a secular court and not before My church. Christians will judge the world in the future, so if the world will be judged by believers, why are you taking cases to the world? Since Christians will one day judge angels, it follows you can judge one another on earth. Why are you going before a judge who isn't respected by Christians? You should be ashamed of yourselves. Isn't there someone in My church who is wise enough to decide these arguments? But you had one brother suing another in front of unbelievers. It is embarrassing for Christians to file lawsuits. It means you live defeated lives. You ought to accept injustice and let the matter go. But instead you are the ones who are doing wrong, and you do an injustice to your fellow believers.

Immoral people have no share in the kingdom of God, including idol worshipers, adulterers, homosexuals, thieves, greedy people, drunkards, slanderers, and swindlers. You committed all these sins, but now you are washed, cleansed, sanctified, and saved through My name and through the Holy Spirit.

You can do anything you want, but some things are not good for you. Even if you are allowed to do them, you will not become an addict to sin. You can eat food that is meant for the stomach, for the stomach is created to eat food. So don't let eating food dominate your life because one day My Father will do away with food and the stomach. My Father will raise your bodies from the dead by His transforming power, just as He raised Me, the Lord Jesus from the dead.

Sexual sin is never right. Your bodies were not created for sexual sin. They were created as a dwelling place for the Holy Spirit who dwells in the temple of your bodies. Your body is only one member that makes up My body—The body of Christ. That means you can't take My body and join it to a prostitute. Never! A man who has sex with a prostitute has become one body with her because the Scripture has stated, "The two shall be one flesh." Anyone who is joined to Me is one spirit with the Holy Spirit. Keep away from sexual sins. Other sins are outside the body, but sexual sins are against your own body. Realize that your body is the Holy Spirit's temple, and so let Him be manifested through your body because you received the Holy Spirit when you were saved. Your body does not belong to you; it belongs to Him. My blood has been paid for you. Therefore, use your body to glorify Him.

Keep yourself from any and all sins of the body. Keep your heart pure so your outward body won't be given to sin. The Holy Spirit lives in you,

and I want you to be a pure vessel for the glory of My Father.

Instructions About Marriage

7I will answer the question you wrote about in regards to the relationships between men and women. It is good for men to have no physical contact with women. Since immoral sex is always a temptation, each man should have his own wife, and each woman should have her own husband. The husband must attend to the sexual needs of his wife, and the wife must do the same for her husband. The wife does not have sexual rights over her body. The husband has those privileges. In the same way, the husband has no sexual rights over his body. His wife has them. Do not refuse sexual privileges to each other except for a limited time by mutual consent. Then have the same relations as before, so satan doesn't get an advantage over one another.

No one has to marry, but they may if they wish. All men should live like My servant, Paul. But each person is different in needs and desires. My Father gives some the ability to be a husband or a wife, others have the gift of remaining single, yet being happy. Unmarried and widows stay unmarried as Paul was unmarried, but if a person can't discipline himself, it is better to get married than suffer.

These principles for the married are My rules. A wife must not leave her husband; if she does, she must remain unmarried. The wife must be reconciled to her husband if possible, and the husband must not divorce his wife.

The following are My suggestions that weren't My commands. If a Christian has an unbelieving wife, and she lives peacefully with him, then he must not send her away. If a Christian wife has an unbelieving husband, and he lives peacefully with her, then she must not send him away, because the unbelieving husband may become a Christian through the influence of his wife, and the same thing may happen to the unbelieving wife. If there were no Christian influences from a parent, then perhaps the children would not be saved, but they can be saved by the influence of a believing parent. But if an unbelieving spouse wants to separate, then the believer is not obligated to the marriage. However, if a member of the marriage is a Christian, a believing wife may lead her husband to a saving knowledge of Me, and the Christian husband may lead his unbelieving wife to salvation.

Believers in My churches should accept the situation in which God puts them. Make sure in deciding matters about getting married that they are within

God's direction. If a man was circumcised before he was saved, he shouldn't disguise it. And if anyone was uncircumcised when he was saved, he need not be circumcised because circumcision or uncircumcision means nothing to My Father. Obeying His commands is what counts.

Christians, keep doing the work to which My Father has called you. If a slave becomes a Christian, he should serve My Father in the place where he was saved. If a person is free, he should use his new position to serve My Father. Even the slave who becomes a Christian is free in his spirit, but he is a slave to Me. Those who were bought with the price of My blood belong to Me. Let each one serve My Father happily, no matter what his condition when I called him.

There is no command from My Father whether young unmarried women should marry, but this is an opinion based on the wisdom My Father has given you. Because Christians face great danger, it is best for them to remain unmarried. Of course, if a person is already married, they should not separate. But if they are unmarried, do not rush into marriage. However, if a Christian is going to get married anyway, they should go ahead and do it. Yet marriage will bring extra problems that you don't need to face at the time. Know your remaining time is short. So those with wives should remain as free as possible to serve My Father. Marriage happiness or marriage disappointment should not keep anyone from serving My Father.

Live as though there is no happiness or sadness, and those who live to buy things should live as though they possessed nothing. Those who have to do business in the world should not become attached to it because this world is passing away. As Christians, you should be free from all worry because the unmarried person can devote all his time to pleasing My Father, but the married person has to be concerned with the affairs and business of this life. They are torn in two directions—between pleasing Me and pleasing their spouse. The unmarried woman can devote herself to My Father; she is concerned about being holy in body and spirit. But the married woman has to be concerned about pleasing My Father and her husband. These things will help believers be strong, not to keep them from marrying. Serve My Father as best as possible without being distracted by your marriage. If anyone feels they must marry because they have trouble disciplining their desires, they should marry; it is not a sin. If a person has self-control and decides not to marry, they have made a wise choice. So the one who marries is living in My Father's will, and the one who doesn't marry can serve My Father better.

The wife is one with the husband, as long as he lives. If he dies, she is free to marry again; only she must marry in the Lord. Even Paul is happier because he's not married and he thinks this is God's will.

Questionable Things

8 You have questions about eating food that was offered to idols. Everyone thinks they have the right answer because their knowledge makes them feel self-important, but love for others will make My church grow. If anyone says he has all the answers, he is just showing how little he knows. But the one who loves My Father and does His will is the one My Father knows.

Idols are just carved images. They are not really gods. My Father is the only true God, and nothing else is a god. Some people think there are a great number of gods both in heaven and on earth, but the Holy Spirit knows My Father, the only true God, and that I, His Son, created everything and give life to you.

Some people don't realize that an image is not god. They think food offered to idols is really offered to a god that lives. So when they eat food that's been offered, they think they are actually worshiping that god. You shouldn't care if people eat food that's been offered to an idol; the idol is not real or alive. You do not sin if you eat that food, nor are you better off if you refuse that food. Hamburger meat is nothing more than hamburger meat! But there are some Christians whose consciences are weaker. They think they are recognizing or worshiping an idol if they eat hamburger meat that's been offered to an idol. Here's the problem. The Christian with the weaker conscience may see you eat a hamburger that was offered to an idol; then they go against their conscience to do the same thing. They eat meat offered to idols, and they weaken their faith because they think they have sinned. So the Christian, with the stronger conscience, who know that hamburger is just hamburger, cause the weaker Christian to damage himself. It is a sin to cause a fellow Christian to stumble. Therefore, if food offered to idols can cause a brother to sin, do not eat another hamburger for the rest of your life. Don't cause any Christian to sin against his conscience.

There are many things that are borderline, so how can you know the difference between right and wrong? Don't walk on the edge of the temptation. Keep as close to the center of My Father's will as possible.

I Defend Paul's Apostleship

9 Paul is My apostle, but detractors are claiming Paul wasn't an apostle. He actually had seen Me, the resurrected Jesus, that changed his life. Now you, the results of his ministry, certify his apostleship. Even though some Christians deny Paul is an apostle, you prove he is, for he has won most of you to faith in Me. Therefore, he has the right to eat food that is given him and has the right to financial support. He also has the right to take a believing wife with him as do other apostles, namely My brother and Peter.

Paul had to defend himself against criticism from some in My church at Corinth. You too will face criticism. Learn when to defend yourself and when to say nothing.

Must only Barnabas and Paul work for a living? He deserves to be paid because soldiers are paid to serve. Those who plant a vineyard eat of its fruit, and shepherds drink milk from their flocks. While these are only illustrations, the Scriptures teach, "Don't put a muzzle on the ox plowing the grain." The plowman plows, expecting to get fed, and the harvester expects to get his share. Since Paul has sown spiritual things to them, he expects food, shelter, and clothing in return. You have given to other ministers. Surely Paul's rights are greater, even though he hasn't exercised his rights. Paul has never demanded money from you because you might be less interested in the gospel. Those serving in the temple got their food from the temple, and those ministering at the altar kept some of the food. In the same spirit, those who preach the gospel should be financially supported by their gospel ministry.

I am not exercising his rights, and I am not writing to get money from you. Paul would rather die than lose the blessings of ministering for free. But he testifies that he can't stop preaching the gospel since My Father has given him that responsibility. Paul states, "If I preach of my own free will, then do I deserve payment?" But I called him and had given him the responsibility to preach. So he must preach. What is his pay? His greatest joy is preaching the gospel without getting paid by anyone.

You are not a slave to anyone, but make yourself a slave to My Father so you can win as many as possible. When with the Jews, live like the Jews so you can win the Jews. When with Gentiles, subject yourself to their laws so you can win Gentiles to Me. When you are with pagans, who don't have any laws, live

among them to bring them to salvation. Don't offend the weaker Christians' conscience who are bothered about meat sacrificed to idols. You want to win the weak to salvation. Try to find a point of identification with all so you can present the gospel message to them. Do all this to get the gospel to all people so they can come to Me for salvation.

Every runner in a race tries to win, but only one person gets the prize. So always try to win the race. Every fighter disciplines himself to win an award. He wins a wreath that will wither, but you can win a prize that will never fade. Run the race of life to win, but not just to win, it's how you prepare and how you run. You must train hard so your body will be prepared if you want to win the race of life.

Paul wanted to be the very best to please My Father and receive the prize. Is that your prayer? Discipline yourself to be the very best. Learn everything to serve My Father. Commit yourself to excellence for His glory.

Purity at the Lord's Table

10 Never forget that the Jews followed the Shekinah cloud as they wandered in the wilderness. My Father kept guiding them with the glory cloud, and they walked safely through the Red Sea. This is called a "baptism" for they followed Moses into the sea and they came out on the other side. By a daily miracle, My Father sent manna to feed them, and they drank from the rock in the desert; that rock was a picture of Me before I came to earth. Yet, in spite of what He did for all of them, they rebelled against My Father, and many died in the wilderness. Israel's life in the wilderness is a lesson to you. Do not lust after evil things nor worship idols as some did. The Scriptures said not to follow their example for they sat down to eat the food My Father provided. Then they got up to dance and worship the golden calf. Never give into sexual immorality as some did in the wilderness and 23,000 died in one day. Some of them murmured against My Father, and they died of snake bites. Others were judged by the destroying angel. All the things that happened in the wilderness are warnings for you not to follow their example.

There are many dangers in the world, and you can't see them all. You need eyes to see dangers and wisdom to avoid them. You need protection when you can't protect yourself.

These negative rebellions were written as a lesson for you as the end of the world approaches. When you think that you would never do these things, take heed lest you fall into their trap. The temptations and trials that the Corinthians faced are no more than you face each day. But I will not let you be tempted with more pressures that you can stand. The evil desires that entice you are no different from what other Christians have faced. I will not let you be tempted beyond your self-discipline, but with your temptations, I will show you how to overcome temptation's power.

Avoid any idol worship, use your common sense to avoid any influence of idols in your life. You receive a blessing from Me when you drink the communion cup that represents My blood. And you also receive a blessing when you eat the bread that represents My body that was broken for you. The single loaf represents My whole body. Even though you are only one among many, you form a single spiritual unity in My body.

The Jewish people did the same thing in the Old Testament. They were one people when they ate together at the altar. Does that mean when the unsaved sacrifice food to idols that the idols are real and alive? No! Does their worship have some value? No, not at all! Those who offer food to idols are really offering sacrifices to demons. They are certainly not offering to My Father. You Corinthians shall not offer anything to demons. Don't provoke My Father to jealousy. I permit you to eat all kinds of food but not all food is good for you, nor will all kinds of food make you healthy.

Do not spend all your time thinking of yourself; be conscious of other people and what's best for them. You buy what you want in the market, but don't ask if it's been offered to idols lest it hurts your conscience or someone else's. Everything that comes to you from the earth comes from My Father, and I give it to you. If a non-Christian invites you to a meal, go eat what is served; don't ask any questions for conscience's sake. But if someone tells you that food was offered to idols, don't eat it out of consideration for the weaker brother who stumbles at this thing. The conscience of a weaker Christian is not yours, but don't use your freedom to hurt him. But don't let his conscience limit you. Eat everything with thankfulness, eating it to My Father's glory. Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether they are Jew, Gentile, or Christian. Don't do

only what pleases you, or what's best for you. Do what's best for others so they will be saved.

Follow and Imitate Me in All Areas of Life

11 In all things be followers and imitators of Me, the Lord Jesus Christ. You have done well by following the principles I taught you, but there is one matter I want to re-emphasize.

The wife is responsible to her husband, the husband is responsible to Me, and I am responsible to My Father. Therefore, if a man refuses to remove his hat when he prays or preaches the Scriptures, he dishonors his head—Me. However, a woman's hair is her honor, so she dishonors her husband if she prays or speaks the Scriptures without her hair covering her head. She might as well have shaved her hair. A man should not wear anything on his head since he is made in the image of God, for a hat or shawl is a sign of rebellion against My Father. My Father's glory is the man who is made in His image, and the woman is the glory of man. The man didn't come from the woman. The first woman came from Adam's side. Man was not created for woman, but she was created for him. Because the angels inspect authority in My church, the woman must let her hair cover her head as a sign of authority. Respect My plan and purpose for men and women, as the man and woman need each other. Although the first woman came from Adam's side, every man since then has come from a woman, and both men and women come from My Father.

Use your judgment: Is long hair on a woman proper, and shouldn't she have a covering (a shawl) when she prays? And isn't it foolish when men have long hair? And isn't it obvious that a woman's long hair is her pride and joy? If anyone wants to argue about this, this is the custom in all My churches.

When you come together for the communion service, you are doing more harm than good. First, there are divisions among you when you come together to the Lord's Table. You have a past history of being divisive. Each person thinks he's right. Each thinks he is closer to God than others. Therefore, you eat to honor yourselves, not to honor Me who instituted this meal. Some quickly eat all they can eat, they don't wait to share communion with one another. Some go hungry, they don't get enough to eat, while others gorge themselves or they drink so much they get drunk. Doesn't everyone have a home in which to eat and drink? You have disgraced My church, and embarrassed those who can't bring a lot of food. Do you want Me to praise My church? I will not do it!

The following instructions for communion come from Me. On the night I was betrayed, I took bread and thanked My Father for it. Then I broke it and said, “This is My body which is broken for you. Eat it in remembrance of Me.” In the same way, I took the cup and said, “This cup is the new covenant made by God My Father to forgive sins. Whenever you drink this cup, you remember Me.” Therefore, every time a believer eats this bread and drinks this cup, he relives the truth of the gospel. The Communion Table is a memorial until I come. Anyone who eats the bread and drinks the cup in an unworthy manner is guilty of sin against My body and blood. Therefore, examine yourself thoroughly before eating the bread or drinking from the cup, because any who eats or drinks in an unworthy manner, not meditating on My body and blood, is contributing to his own condemnation. That is why some Corinthians are weak or ill, and some have died prematurely under My judgment. Carefully examine yourself before communion so you will not be punished or judged by Me. Yet when a Christian is punished, it’s so he won’t be condemned with the unsaved. I give you one final exhortation about communion, “When you gather for the Lord’s Table, wait for one another. If anyone is hungry, let them eat at home, then the communion service will not lead to anyone’s punishment.” Paul will discuss other matters with you when he arrives in Corinth.

Instructions About Spiritual Gifts

12 Learn about your spiritual gifts that the Holy Spirit gave to each of you.

Before you were saved, you chose different idols that couldn’t say a single word. Now there are people in My church who claim they are speaking messages from the Spirit of God. How can you know if their messages came from Me, or if they are just making up what they say? Here is the first test—they can’t claim to speak My messages if they curse Me. The second test is that when they proclaim that, “I am Lord,” they are speaking My message.

You have received many different spiritual gifts, but they all come from the Spirit of God. These spiritual gifts are exercised in different ways, but there is one Spirit of God working in people. Also, their spiritual gifts have different influences on different people, because the Spirit of God uses people according to how much they yield to Him. He is the same God working through each believer.

He gives different spiritual gifts to different people for His own divine purposes. He gives to one the ability to preach with great wisdom, so people

understand My message. To another, He gives the ability to teach from great knowledge so people will understand many things in the Word of God. To another, He gives faith to move mountains, and to another, He gives the prayer of faith to heal the sick of their pain and sickness. To another, He gives the ability to do miracles, and to someone else the power to preach and teach. Some have the ability to recognize false spirits, another has the spiritual gift of speaking in a language they haven't learned, and still, someone else can interpret the language. The Holy Spirit gives all these different spiritual gifts to different people just as He decides. Therefore, believers have the ability to use these gifts to minister to the lives of others.

Discover your spiritual gifts and use them properly. Learn your strong gifts and use them effectively. Be patient when you use your weak gifts, and I will be glorified by the intent of your heart, and overlook your inabilities.

Just as a human body has many parts and all the parts make up one body, so is My church—My body. Though it has many different members, it is one body. You have all been baptized into My body by the Holy Spirit, some Jews, and some Gentiles; some slaves and some free. He baptizes you all into Me, and you all drink of the same salvation.

My body has many parts. If the foot says, "I am not a part of the body because I'm not the head," that does not make any difference. That does not make him less a part of the body. If the ear were to say, "I am not the eye, so I'm not a part of the body," that would mean nothing. If the body were all an eye, how could it hear anything? If the body were all ears, how could it smell anything? But My Father has designed the different parts of the body. If all the parts were the same, how could the body function? As it is, there are many parts of the body, but it is still one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I do not need you." Nor can the head say to the feet, "I do not need you." Every part of the body is necessary, but it seems the parts that are the weakest are the ones that are the most needed, and the parts that seem to be less necessary, their functions are among the most necessary. And the parts that are the most beautiful seem to be least essential in life.

So I have arranged to give the parts which lack importance more dignity than the others. So the body works together as a whole, all the parts having the same care for others as they have for themselves. If one part suffers, all parts

suffer with it. If one part is honored, all parts enjoy it. You are a member of My body, but each is gifted differently from everyone else. The first place was given to apostles, second to prophets, third to teachers, and after them those who do miracles. Next comes the gift of healing, helps, and leadership, and last on the list is speaking in tongues. Is everyone an apostle? Is everyone a prophet? Is everyone a teacher, miracle worker, or a healer? Can everyone speak in tongues without having learned it? And can everyone interpret the words? The answer is “No!” Eagerly seek the best gifts, but know love is the best gift of all.

Pray for the spiritual life of your church. Find your place in your church, and fill it properly. Honor those who are different from you, and do things you don't do. Glorify Me through all you do in your church.

Love Is the Greatest

13 If you speak with the eloquence of great speakers, or if you speak in the languages of angels, but you don't love others, you are making a noise like clashing cymbals or a ringing gong. If you can predict the future, or understand mysteries, or if you know everything, or have faith to move mountains, but you don't love others, you have accomplished nothing in life. If you give everything you possess to the poor, and even sacrifice your body, but don't have love, it would be of no value. Always patiently express love, and you will find ways to be kind.

Let Me give you love that you don't have. Let Me give you a deeper love for people so you can help them find salvation. Let Me give you sacrificial love to serve Me in My church. Let me give you passionate love so you can pray more effectively. Learn to love as I have loved you.

Love is never jealous of others, nor conceited or boastful. Love is not irritable or resentful. Love overlooks the mistakes of others and rejoices when others do well. Love bears all things no matter the circumstances. Love keeps hope strong, and love never wilts. Love outlasts everything in life because true love never fails.

The gift of prophecy will end, and the gift of speaking languages will cease. Also, knowledge will pass away, and prophecy will only be partial on this earth. But when that which is perfect is complete, other things on earth will back away. When you were a child, you thought as a child, you talked like a child, and your world was as small as a child's world. But when you were old, you put away childish things. In the same way, now you only see things darkly through a stained-glass window. But when you see Me face to face, you shall understand all things fully. Now your knowledge is partial and imperfect, but you shall see Me as I perfectly know you. There are only three things on this earth that will last: faith, hope, and love, and the greatest is love.

Instructions About Tongues

14 Let love be your greatest spiritual gift, but also seek the other spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy. Those with the gift of tongues speak to God, but those who prophesy speak to others. No one understands those who speak in tongues because they speak the mysterious things of the Spirit. However, those who prophesy help others grow in Me by motivating and instructing them. Those with the gift of tongues benefit only themselves, and those who prophesy, benefit My church.

While Paul wanted all the Corinthians to have the gift of tongues, he would rather they prophesy. Unless the gift of interpretation followed tongues, no one could benefit.

These are principles about languages, and I place them in an order of importance. First, use a language that you understand so you can be rational and sane. Second, use a language that others understand so you can communicate with them. Third, your language in the assembly must be understandable, so that people can be edified. Fourth, your language must be understandable to God, so that you can fellowship with God and He with you. Fifth, the greatest principle is communication with God. Whatever language you use, make sure you connect with Him and worship Him.

If My servant Paul only spoke in tongues, you would learn nothing new, and neither would you be inspired or instructed.

A musical instrument is an illustration of spiritual gifts in My church. If a harp or flute could play only one note, listeners couldn't appreciate that note from the others. They couldn't tell what is being played. If no one can understand a bugle's sound, who would be ready for battle? If tongues do not produce an intelligible message, can anyone know what is being said? He might as well be talking to the wind.

There are many different languages in the world that are helpful to those who understand them, but they didn't help Paul. Those speaking in a different language were foreigners to him, and he to them. The same principle applies to you. Concentrate on gifts that will benefit the whole church. If you use tongues, pray for someone to interpret what is being said. If Paul used tongues in his prayers, his spirit would be praying to God, but he wouldn't know what he was saying. He could pray in tongues, but if he prayed in ordinary languages, everyone would understand and pray with him.

Paul worships God not only in tongues but also with ordinary language, so everyone understands what he is doing. How can My church join you in worship if they do not understand what you are saying? No matter how well you speak, My church receives no benefit. Paul thanked God that he had a greater gift of tongues than all of them, but in My church, he would rather speak meaningful words than speak ten thousand words that no one understood. Do not be childish, but be adults in this matter.

The Scriptures tell, "Through men speaking strange languages, and through the lips of foreigners, I will talk to the Gentiles, and still, they will not listen to Me." Therefore, unknown languages are a sign for unbelievers, not for believers. Prophecy is a sign for believers and not for unbelievers. Otherwise, a visitor coming to a church meeting would think everyone was mad because they were speaking unintelligible words. But if a visitor heard everyone speaking a message he could understand, he can be convicted by what he hears. The visitor will have his secret thoughts exposed. Then he will fall on his knees, crying out to Me, saying, "Jesus, You are indeed living among this church."

When My church comes together, some will sing, another will preach, another will share what God said. Some will use their gift of tongues, others will interpret, but they must do what is most beneficial to all and build everyone up spiritually. Do you think the knowledge of God begins and ends with you? Absolutely not! Those who claim to have the gift of prophecy or any other special gift from the Holy Spirit should realize this is My command. If anyone disagrees with this conclusion, he should not be recognized by My

church. In conclusion, desire the gift of prophecy so you can explain the Word of God carefully. Do not suppress the gift of tongues. Do everything decently and in order.

Do not be belligerent when disagreeing with others. See conflicting issues from the other person's point of view. Then help them see the issue from your point of view. Be true to your convictions while loving those with a different point of view.

My Resurrection

15 The content of the gospel is the same good news Paul preached to you. You received it and became firmly established in it. This is the gospel that saved you unless you believed something that is not the gospel.

First, the gospel is: I died for your sins, just as the Scriptures teach. I was buried, and after three days I arose just as the Scriptures predicted.

The Appearance on a Mountain

I was seen by Peter, and then by the twelve. Next, I appeared to five hundred at the same time. Many are still alive and will attest to having seen Me. Then I appeared to James, and later to all the apostles. Finally, I appeared to Paul, the least of the apostles. Since he persecuted My church, he felt unworthy to be called an apostle. But by My Father's grace, Paul knew he was called to be an apostle, and his ministry has been fruitful. Paul worked harder than the other apostles, but it was My grace, not his doing it. What was important? Paul preached what the apostles preached. He preached the gospel that saved you.

You must clearly understand the reason for My death, burial, and resurrection. I accomplished, on the cross, something that needed to be done. I rescued sinners from inevitable destruction because of sin. You received the forgiveness of sins because I died for your sins. You received new life because you were in Me when I rose from the grave.



If I were raised from the dead, how can anyone say there is no resurrection? If there is no resurrection from the dead, then I could not have been raised, and if I were not raised from the dead, then Paul's preaching accomplished nothing and your faith is useless. Indeed, Paul has committed perjury against Me, and the God of heaven, because he swore that My Father raised Me from the dead. For if the dead are not raised, then I was not raised from the dead. And if I did not rise, you are still in your sins, and those in Me who previously died have perished. If your Christian benefits are in this life only, you have a miserable life.

If I didn't rise, your faith is vain or useless. You can know I arose from the dead and am alive in the world because I live in your heart.

But in fact, I have been raised from the dead, and I am the first of all who will live again. Death came through one man—Adam—and resurrection from the dead came through another man—Me. Just as all people died in Adam, so all believers will be brought to life through Me. However, there is an order to the resurrection: I rose first, then when I return, all believers who have died will be raised. After that, the end will come and I will turn the kingdom over to God My Father, having abolished all kingdoms, authorities, and rulers. I will destroy every one of My enemies, of every kind, including the last enemy, death. Then the unsaved will be raised to meet Me, their judge, who will punish them

according to their sins. When I finally become victorious over everything, I will put Myself under My Father's authority so that He will be supreme over everything.

If the dead will not be raised in the future, what is the point of baptizing people? Why would anyone be baptized if they didn't believe they would be raised in the future? Paul said he wouldn't continually risk himself if there wasn't a resurrection. He wouldn't face death daily and fight wild beasts in Ephesus if all he got was some reward down here on earth. If there is no resurrection, you might as well eat and drink, because eventually, you'll die. Don't be led astray, "Bad company corrupts good living." Some among you are not even Christians, and they should be ashamed that Paul had to say it.

The Resurrection Body

"How will you be brought back to life?" and, "What kind of bodies will you have?" The answer is in nature. First, a seed must be planted and then die in the ground; then new life shall appear. The thing that is sown is not what comes up. A dry little seed is planted in the ground. Then a new abundant plant comes out of the earth. The new bush is God's plan. The new plant has the same life as the seed that was planted.

Not all flesh is the same kind of flesh. There is human flesh, animal flesh, fish have flesh, and so do birds. The angels in heaven have believed, but their bodies differ from yours. The splendor of their heavenly bodies differs vastly from a human body. The sun, moon, and stars each has its splendor, and each one is different from the others. These are all illustrations of our earthly body that is planted in the earth to die or decay. But it will be raised never to decay again. What is planted is ugly and sickly, but it will be raised in glory and immortality. Yes, the weak, earthly body will be buried, but when raised it will be powerful and spiritual. Just as the soul is embodied in this earthly flesh, I will live in your new bodies. The first man—Adam—had a life-giving soul; the last Adam—Me—became a living-giving spirit. The first one—Adam— had a soul; the last one—Me—made you an eternal spirit. The first man was made from the dust of the earth; the second man came from heaven. Every human with a body like Adam's is made of earthly dust. Flesh and blood cannot enter the kingdom of God because your perishable bodies will not last forever. But every human who is born again by Me shall have an eternal body like Mine in heaven. Just as you are like Adam, one day we will be like Me.

This is a wonderful mystery; you shall not all die, but all believers will be transformed. It will happen instantly, in the twinkling of an eye. When the last trumpet will sound, the dead, who are in Me, will suddenly be raised and will be transformed. Your present perishable bodies will become imperishable, and your mortal nature will be immortal. Then the Scriptures will be fulfilled: “Death is swallowed up in victory. Death, where is your victory? Death, where is your sting?” Sin is the sting that causes death, and that sting is revealed by My law. So, thank the Holy Spirit for victory over sin through Me, your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Never give in to sin and never admit defeat. I will keep you safe to the resurrection so keep diligently doing My work, knowing your labor is not in vain.

You must base your relationship with My Father on My resurrection. “God has raised you up together, and made you sit together in heavenly places in Me, Christ Jesus.”

Personal Greetings and Conclusion

16 Paul asks you, to take up a collection for needy Christians. This is the same thing he told My churches in Galatia. Each Sunday set aside some money according to your financial prosperity so he wouldn't need to take a collection when he gets there. He will send your offering to Jerusalem by those that you approve. Those taking the offering can travel with Paul if they choose to do so.

Paul will come to Corinth and stay with you for the winter after he visits northern Greece. He didn't want to just “pop” in for a visit; he wants to spend time with you.

In the meantime, He plans to stay in Ephesus. I have opened a big door of opportunity to Paul there, so he plans to stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, but he is also aware of much opposition.

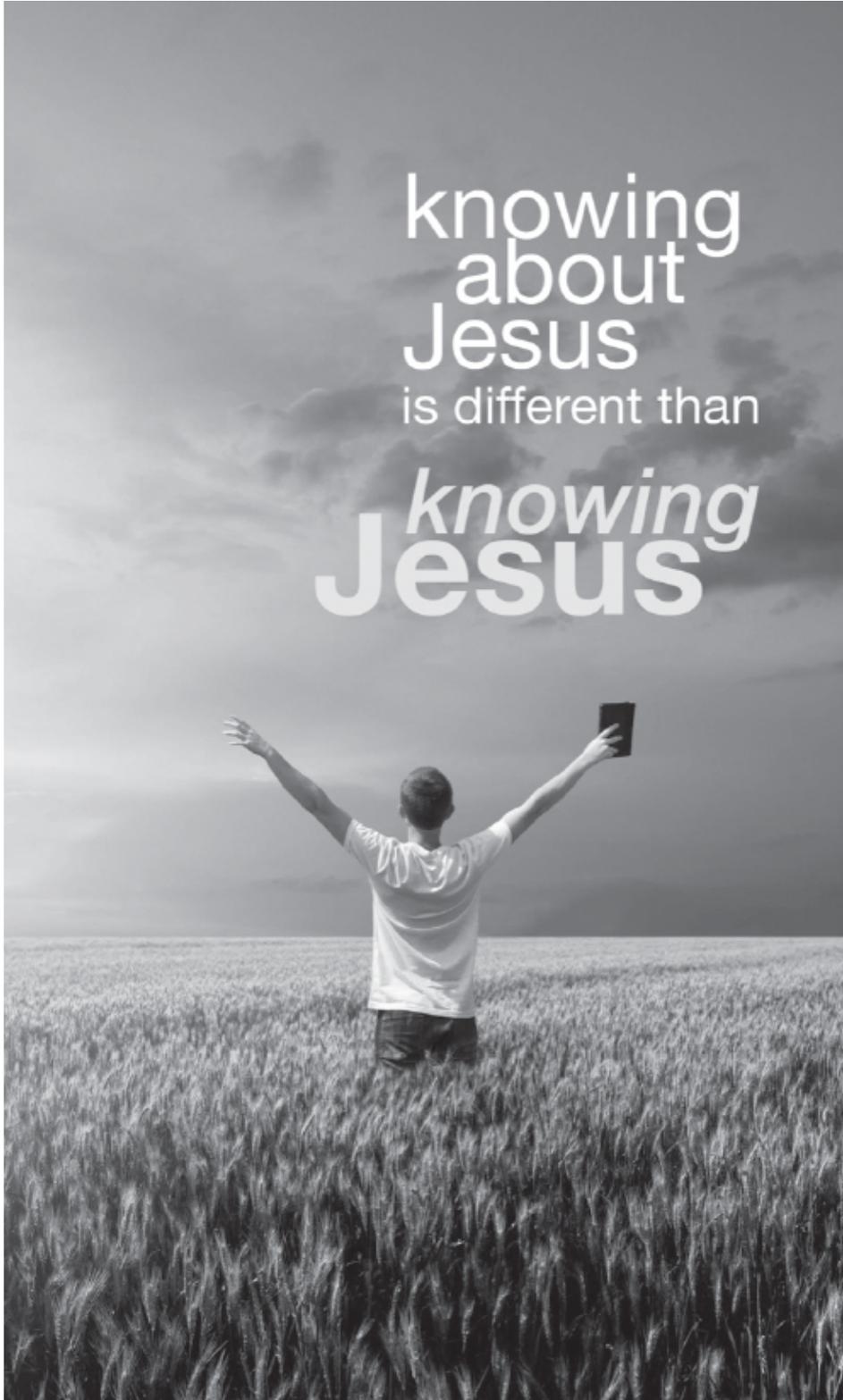
Paul asks you to graciously receive Timothy because he is coming to Corinth to do his work. Paul urges you to not despise Timothy, but bless him and send him back to Paul. He begged Apollos to go to Corinth, but Apollos can't go at the present time. However, he will go to Corinth in the future.

Be aware of dangers to your faith and courageously face them. Determine to let love motivate you in everything that you do. Stephanas' family were the

first believers in Corinth. They had looked after the Christian brothers. I ask you to help families who have this type of ministry. Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus have arrived in Corinth. They have encouraged Paul in Ephesus. Paul wants you to appreciate these men.

Paul sends you greetings from Aquila and Priscilla and My church that meets in their house. All the believers in Ephesus send greetings. Paul sends you his warmest greetings, wishing he could be there to embrace you. He said if any does not love My Father, a curse should fall on them. This is his prayer, "May you experience the grace of the Lord Jesus." Paul sends his love to all in My name. "Maranatha, I will come quickly."

knowing
about
Jesus
is different than
knowing
Jesus



I AM JESUS

The One You Serve

My Second Letter to the Corinthians



I wrote this second letter to the Corinthians, through Paul, to comfort and encourage them. This letter also reflects Paul's weariness, pain, and deep burden for My churches. First, Paul was anguished over Jews who opposed My churches; and second, over the Jewish Christian legalizers who denied his apostleship. As you read this letter, think about how exciting it can be to serve Me, but realize too that being a Christian can sometimes lead to pain and suffering.

Greetings to My Church

1 I Am Jesus, Who led Paul, with Timothy, to write to you believers in the Corinthian church as well as Christians in the surrounding area. May

you experience blessings, grace, and peace from the Holy Spirit, your heavenly Father, and from Me your Lord and Savior.

Encourage others who are in trouble with the same encouragement I gave you. When you are deeply hurting in every area of life, let My promises greatly encourage you. I suffered on the cross for you so you could be saved and grow in grace. My servant Paul was hurting at the same time you had great pain. And as I was encouraging Paul to continue in ministry, so I Am encouraging you to remain strong in your faith. Remain steadfast, even though you are now suffering, because you are encouraged by the Holy Spirit.

I didn't want to withhold information about Paul's troubles from you so you would not be ignorant of what was happening. In Asia, Paul had intense pressures, greater than he ever experienced in his life, so much so that Paul thought he would die. He knew that he might be killed, but he was not trusting in earthly deliverance. Paul trusted Me to raise him if he died. He rejoiced that I delivered him from the threat of death, and he knew that I would deliver you who are believers in Me. The gift of his deliverance comes through the prayers of many you, and now you deserve credit for your intercession.

I allow trouble in your life to keep you dependent on Me. When trouble comes, you need Me to get you out of trouble, or at least you need Me to help you endure trouble and get you through it.

Always follow the leading of your conscience to treat everyone kindly and above board without any selfish ulterior motives. Depend on the Holy Spirit to help you. That's the way Paul acted toward you.

Paul's letters have been straight to the point. He hasn't used worldly wisdom with you, and he hasn't written anything you can't understand. Paul realizes you don't know him well, but he wants you to accept him because when he returns, you will be glad that you know him just as Paul will be glad he knows Me.

Paul's original plan was to visit you before going to northern Greece and then return to you after leaving northern Greece. He wanted to bless you with his ministry and then go on his way to Judea. So he thought you

might have doubted his intentions because he did not immediately come to you. He didn't want you to think that he couldn't make up his mind. I remind you that "My Father means what He says. He doesn't say 'Yes' when He means, 'No.'" Paul knew what I wanted him to do.

I have a plan for your life. I will faithfully fulfill My promises to you, no matter how many promises there are. I have helped you be a faithful believer and given you the responsibility to spread the gospel. I have set My seal— brand of ownership—on you, and you receive the indwelling Holy Spirit as a pledge of blessings to come.

Paul did not come to you because he wanted to rebuke you to your face or to sadden or embarrass you. He is not your dictator to tell you what you must do. Rather, he is your fellow worker to make you happy and firm in your faith.

Forgive the Sinner

2 Paul decided not to visit you because it would be painful to you. He felt it wasn't smart to make you miserable because you gave him joy. He couldn't be happy if you weren't happy.

The previous letter was grief to him because I deeply exposed your sins. I didn't write to hurt you, but I had to deal with your sins because I loved you so much.

The men I wrote about caused great sorrow, so I had to rebuke them all because they allowed sin to exist in their midst. Now one man's punishment was enough. I want you to forgive and receive him back; otherwise, that man may become bitter and give up. I tell you to show the man that you still love him. My previous letter tested you to see if you were completely obedient. I forgive anyone that you forgive because I Am God. When you forgive, satan doesn't get an advantage of you. Do not be ignorant of satan's strategy; he wants to discourage and defeat you.

You should forgive those who sin, and those who sin against you because you are commanded to do so. Your prayers will be answered, and they will heal and grow in Me. This will be a testimony to the world, and it is for your own good.

Now when Paul arrived in Troas, a city, and region in the northwest corner of Asia Minor, to proclaim My gospel, even though I had opened a door of opportunity for him, he had no relief in his spirit, because he did not find his brother Titus there. So he said goodbye to them and set out for Macedonia.

Your Triumph in Me

Be thankful I helped you triumph over problems, and used you to spread the gospel like a sweet fragrance to motivate people to be saved. You must become My fragrance everywhere you go, both to those who are being saved and to those who refuse salvation. Sin has the smell of death that leads to judgment, but the sweet fragrance of the gospel leads to life, go spread My influence everywhere. Go everywhere to spread the gospel. Speak with integrity and power. Don't serve My Father for money, as some are in the ministry for a salary. I send you to speak for My Father, and I will minister through you.

Enjoy every victory in your life I help you achieve every triumph and will give you victory over the ultimate enemy of death.

Instruction About Ministry

3 Paul didn't need to commend himself as other people needed a letter of recommendation when they go to meet new people. The transformation in your hearts was Paul's letter of recommendation. The Corinthian believers are letters written by Me, not penned with ink, nor engraved on stone; but written by the Spirit of the living God. Paul was confident of this because of his great trust in My Father and Me. You should brag about the results of their ministry, but should have confidence in Me because your ability comes from the Holy Spirit.

Your life is an open book for all to read. My Father will forgive all your sins and mistakes through Me so others will learn from you. Use the victories you've accomplished through the Holy Spirit as a testimony to others.

I have made you a minister of the new covenant which is not a written legal contract, but it is the inner transformation by the Holy Spirit. The written law says you will die if you try to keep the law to be saved, but the Spirit gives you eternal life. The face of Moses shone when he was given the command that led to death. His face had such a brilliant brightness the Israelites couldn't look on him. You will experience a far greater brightness by the Holy Spirit when you give out the gospel. If the gift of the law was glorious, how much more glorious will be the giving of the grace of God? Actually, the law that you thought had such great splendor now seems to have none compared to My splendor. And if the law that was temporary had some splendor, how much more glorious is your heavenly hope in My Father's eternal plan of salvation? This new splendor will never cease.

Rest in the comfort of My Father's forgiveness. His grace is glorious. Learn more about My ministry and grow to enjoy more glorious grace.

Moses had to put a veil over his face so the Israelites wouldn't see his face shining. But the Israelites' minds were hardened and even to this day whenever the Old Testament is read, a veil covers their minds so they cannot understand it's truth. But the veil is taken away by believing in Me. To this day, the same veil is over the minds of Jews everywhere so that when the Old Testament is read, they can't understand what they are reading. But when any Jew turns to My Father, the veil is lifted from their hearts so they can understand My message. Now the Holy Spirit is working in hearts, and when He works in your life, there is freedom to understand My truth. Now you, with unveiled face, look to Me to see My brightness reflected in the mirror of the Word of God. Then you will constantly be transformed into My image by the work of the Holy Spirit.

Instruction About Ministry (Continued)

4 Because I have given you a great ministry that you didn't deserve, do not falsely represent yourself nor hide My truth. Do not use tricks, nor interpret the Bible according to your own inclination. Declare My truth to everyone so they can understand My Word. Lost people are spiritually blinded; they cannot understand the gospel. Satan has blinded their spiritual understanding to prevent them from understanding the glorious gospel. They cannot see Me, in Scripture, who is the image of My Father. Do not advance yourself or your reputation. Preach Me, the Lord. Serve those you are trying to help. My Father, who commanded light to shine out of darkness, will shine My light into your heart, so My glory is seen in you.

Satan has blinded unsaved people so they can't understand Me who is the Light of the world. But My Father sent the Holy Spirit to enlighten darkened hearts so they can see Me and believe in Me.

You have My treasure in your frail human body (a clay pot) so that outsiders will see My Father's power and know it doesn't come from your weakness.

You have troubles everywhere you go, but you are not distressed, and you don't give up. You are persecuted, but not forsaken. You are knocked down, but not knocked out. You face death daily, but serve Me who died for sinners like you. Your life is renewed daily so others can see My life shining through you. You always face the threat of death so that others can see My life in you. So you live in the face of death so that others can have eternal life.

You need the faith that is described in Scripture, "What you believe, you speak." May your life reflect what you speak. May you say what you believe, then believe what you say. Because the Holy Spirit raised Me up from the dead, I'll raise you up in the last days.

You suffer so they can be saved, and when more are won to Me, you will thank My Father more and glorify Him more.

Don't give up even when your outward body is hurting; your inward desire is strong to serve My Father.

Your little troubles will pass away, but this short time of suffering will result in My blessing on you and My church. Do not look at your present sufferings, but look forward to being happy in heaven, because things you see on earth last only for a short time, but the things you can't see with your physical eyes are eternal—they last forever.

There are difficulties in this world but do not give up. There are trials and temptations, but they should make you try harder. When you get frustrated with the things you can't do, and you get tired, do not give up.

Your Bodies Now and in Heaven

5 If your earthly body dies, you have a spiritual body for heaven, an eternal body made by My Father alone. In your present body, you groan as you wait to receive your spiritual body, for you are not just a spirit without a body. Every person has a physical and spiritual body. You groan and get weary in this body, but it's better than not having a body at all. Yet, when you get to heaven, you will have a new body, and you won't lose this present body. It will be transformed into an eternal body. This is My Father's plan for you and My Father guarantees it by giving the Holy Spirit to live within your present body. Therefore, you can be absolutely confident, knowing that while you live in this earthly body, you are not yet in My Father's presence. In this present body, you must live by faith, which is obeying My principles and not living to please the body. Do not be afraid to die because when your body dies, you will immediately go to be with My Father in heaven.

Therefore, aim to please My Father in everything, whether you are in an earthly body or a heavenly body, knowing one day you will stand before Him to be judged. Then everything you have done will be examined, and you will get what your actions and thoughts deserve, for each good or bad deed you have done.

You are limited, and you get tired in your present physical body, but you go on. You yearn to be with My Father in glory, but you know you have work to do on earth. Serve My Father as long as you have strength.

Because you know My Father will judge you, work hard to win people to Me. He knows your intents and actions.

You correctly knew Paul's motives. Paul was not making another attempt to commend himself to you, but giving you reasons to support his ministry. Then, you would have an answer to those who constantly criticized him. If Paul was "out of place" defending himself, it was only to bring My Father glory. And if he was making a reasonable case, it was for your sakes.

My love should overwhelm you when you think of My death. Remember, I died for all sinners. If I died for all, then all died with Me. Then you should no longer live for yourself but for Me who died for you and was raised to new life. Therefore, stop judging Christians by what the world thinks of them. Before Paul's conversion he knew about Me only as a human, now he knows Me differently.

Because you have received Me into your life, the Holy Spirit has created in you a new person. The old life is gone; now you have a new life in Me. Your transformation is My work, and you are reconciled to My Father. Now, you must get others reconciled to My Father. The Holy Spirit worked through My death to get the world reconciled to My Father so they will not be punished for their sin, but My Father accepts them in Me. You are My ambassadors to spread the message of reconciliation, asking people to be "reconciled to My Father," because My Father has placed your sins on Me, the Sinless One, and My Father put My righteousness on you. Now you stand perfect before My Father.

The Holy Spirit promised you new things when you got saved. You have a new nature and a new hope in heaven. You have a new indwelling by Me, and a new access to My Father in prayer. Never take for granted the new things I have given you.

Hardship in Ministry

6I want you to be My partners in ministry. I wanted everyone to take advantage of God's grace from the Holy Spirit that is available to all believers. The Scriptures teach,

“I, the Lord, have listened to my people,
when they needed salvation,
I came to them and helped them.”

Now, this is a good time for all people to be saved. Today is the day of salvation.

“Do not practice anything to discredit yourself so that you make it hard for people to get saved. Actually, do the opposite. Do everything you can to bring people to Me. Patiently go through suffering difficulties and pressures for Me. Be willing to be beaten and imprisoned, and face angry rioters. Be willing to work hard, go without sleep, or go without food for Me. Be pure, patient, kind, loving, and knowledgeable of My principles. Then you can minister in My power according to the Word of God, clothed in the armor of righteousness.

There are many challenges and blessings in life and ministry. Face the good times and bad things with optimism and power from the Holy Spirit. Remain pure in heart, fervent in Spirit, and aggressive in serving.

Stand true on the right hand and on the left, prepared for honor or dishonor, whether good reports or bad reports. Continue ministering if you are accused of lying or if people accept an honest presentation. It doesn't make any difference if you are ignored, or if you are well known. Continue in ministry if you narrowly escape death, or if you have a safe environment. When people think your life is miserable, always rejoice. They may treat you like you are poor and have nothing, but compared to all people, you are rich and have everything.

I speak frankly to you, not hiding anything from you. The conviction you feel comes from your hearts. It didn't come from Paul. Paul said he had spoken to them as children. Now he wanted them to respond with childish enthusiasm and obedience.

Do not tie your life to the decisions of unsaved people who will lead you astray. Good intentions can't tolerate an evil agenda. There is no common agreement between light and darkness. I and the devil do not agree on anything. There is no agreement between My temple and idols, don't let unbelievers control your life. Live in your body as the temple of the Holy Spirit because I said, "I will dwell in My people, just as I dwelt in the Old Testament temple. I will walk with them, and they will be My people." Separate yourself from unsaved people and do not touch dirty things, so your heavenly Father can welcome you and all believers. Then you will be His sons and daughters as He has promised.

When I tell you to be holy, I mean for you to be separate from any and all influences of sin in your life. "Come out from among them, and be separate."

About the Repentant Sinner

7 With promises as great as these, separate yourself from evil, whether it touches your body or spirit. Be completely holy unto Me, living reverently for Me.

Keep your minds open about Paul and realize he had not exploited anyone, hurt anyone, or ruined anyone's reputation. He was not fussing at you or blaming you because you were always on his mind, you succeeded or failed together with him. Paul had the highest confidence in you and was encouraged by you. You made Paul happy in spite of his suffering. Paul didn't get any physical rest, even when he got to northern Greece. There he found trouble everywhere he turned. There were fightings within and fears without. But the Holy Spirit, who encouraged those who are depressed, encouraged Paul when Titus arrived. Titus told how you received him, were sorry for your sin, and were concerned for Paul.

Paul was not sorry he sent you a letter, but he was sorry that the letter pained you. However, you will hurt only a little while. Now Paul is glad he sent the letter, not because he hurt you, but because your pain drove you back to My Father. You had a beneficial sorrow, the sorrow sent by the Holy Spirit to draw My people back to Me. For godly sorrow leads to repentance for salvation. Never regret this type of sorrow that drives you back to Me. But worldly sorrow does not lead to repentance, rather to discouragement, despondency, and death. But your sorrow was good. You are now diligent to serve Me, and you are also quick to get rid of sin. The Corinthians have completely cleaned themselves of their wrongdoings.

Paul didn't write to blame the offender or comfort the offended but to make them responsible to Me. Titus encouraged Paul when he arrived to tell of your love for Paul, and Titus was happy to bring good news. Before Titus left to bring the letter to you, Paul told Titus you would repent of your sin, and you did not disappoint him. Paul said he always told the truth, and his boastings of you proved true. He told how Titus loved My church in Corinth because when he read you the letter, you willingly received it with deep concern. Paul was happy that there was no barrier between you and him. Now Paul has great confidence in you.

Collection for the Saints in Jerusalem

8 Paul wants you to know what My grace accomplished in northern Greece. The believers in Macedonia have had difficult times recently, and they have been tested with disappointments. But now they were extremely generous in giving money, even though they didn't have much. The Macedonians gave as much as they possibly could, even more than they should. They begged Paul to receive their offering so they could rejoice in helping the poor saints in Jerusalem. They did more than expected. First, they gave themselves to My Father, and then they gave money to Paul for Jerusalem. So Paul encouraged Titus to visit you and finish the collection of money that he began on a previous visit.

Your church had good leaders, and they had strong faith, good preaching, much knowledge, and enthusiasm. Also, the believers had a deep love for Paul, and now he wants you to be leaders in giving joyfully to the Jerusalem project.

*Learn the proper ways to give your time, talent, and treasure to Me.
Take the gifts you offer and use them for My glory.*

Paul is not giving a command, but he's reminding you what others have done.

I reminded you of My grace that when I had all the riches of heaven, I gave up everything for others so all believers could be spiritually rich because of My poverty.

Therefore, you should finish the project because it was you who first suggested it to him. Having begun so enthusiastically, you should finish the financial project with zeal, giving whatever money you can. God wants you to give from what resources you have, not from what you don't have. Paul also reminds you that you shouldn't give so much money that you suffer when you give to relieve the suffering of others. Suffering should be shared by all believers; since the Jerusalem Christians are suffering now, you can do something about it. In the future, your church may have sufferings, and the Jerusalem Christians will help you. The Scriptures say, "He who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered only a little bit had enough to meet his needs."

Paul was thankful that Titus had the same concern for your church as he had. Titus would visit you again at Paul's suggestion, but Titus would have gone anyway because he has a deep concern for you. Paul also sent another brother with Titus who was recognized as a good preacher of the gospel among all churches. Paul tells you this brother was elected to travel with him to take the money to Jerusalem. His election would prove to all My churches his eagerness to help the Jerusalem Christians and that God's grace overcomes difficulties. By traveling together, the two would overcome any rumor about how this large offering would be used in Jerusalem. Paul said, "I am trying to do right in the sight of all men and of God." To accomplish this, Paul sent a third brother who was well known to Paul. The brother wanted to visit you because Paul had told him about you. Paul says, "Tell everyone Titus is his partner and he is coming to help you. Also, tell everyone the other two brothers are outstanding Christians and represent both the churches and Paul." Finally, Paul said, "Show your love to these men, and do for them what I promised you would do."

It is a privilege to serve with other believers who encourage and motivate you to greater service. Bless them as they have blessed you. Work together in My work.

More About the Collection for the Saints in Jerusalem

9 Paul didn't need to write to you about giving to needy saints. He had been boasting to the believers in Achaia that you were eager to help. That motivated the believers in Achaia to give. But the three brothers would make sure you gave as you pledged you would. Because if the Macedonians came with Paul and you didn't give what you pledged, both Paul and you would be embarrassed. So Paul urged the three brothers to visit you to make sure the gift was ready and waiting. The money would be a real gift, not something that was given under pressure.

Remember, "If you give little, God's blessing will be small; and when the farmer plants a few seeds, he gets small results. When the farmer plants a lot of seeds, he gets a big harvest."

Everyone must decide the budget they need to live on, so they will always have enough for their needs and have some left over to give to others. As the Scriptures say, "He who gives to the poor, his gift will be remembered by God." Seed is given to the farmers to grow grain to make bread for the hungry. I will also give you what you need and make your harvest great. When I make you rich in every way, you will be able to give generously and cause others to thank My Father. As you give money in a Christian way, I supply your needs and the needs of the needy. You give thanks to Me by giving a generous gift. Your church demonstrated their Christian integrity by their gift and those receiving the gift praised Me. Then Paul prayed fervently for you because you receive My grace through them. I say to you, "Thanks to My Father for His gift beyond words, I Am His gift to the world."

Your harvest will be according to your planting or investment. Therefore, get a vision of doing great things for My Father, pray for big projects, make big plans, work for big results, and trust My Father to bless your endeavors according to the “seed planting” or investment.

I Defend Paul’s Apostolic Authority

10 Paul appealed gently to you Christians about these matters, as compassionately as I would have pleaded. Yet some of you were saying that Paul was timid when he was with you, but bold in his letters. Do what Paul asks so he won’t have to be harsh when he comes. Some in Corinth thought Paul was an ordinary man, so they didn’t want to do what he asked or said.

Paul said, “Yes, I live as an ordinary man in the flesh, but I don’t use the strength of an ordinary man to win battles.” Paul didn’t use the weapons of the world. He used My power to tear down strongholds, to demolish arguments, and every barrier against knowledge about Me that keeps people from finding salvation. With these weapons, you can capture people and bring them back to My Father, so they become obedient to Me. Once you are fully obedient to Me, then Paul will be ready to punish disobedience.

The enemy is stronger than you are, and his weapons are stronger than you naturally have. You need help, or you’ll be overwhelmed and defeated. Use My weapons to intercede against the enemy. Pray for victory from Me, your Lord and Savior.

You were looking at outward things, so Paul seemed weak and powerless, but do not look at the surface. If anyone can claim My power, it is Paul. He was sorry for talking too much about having My authority, but I gave it to him, not to pull down, but to build up the saints. Paul would not apologize for using it. He’s not trying to frighten you, even though some said his letters were forceful, but he is unimpressive in person. You criticized him for being a poor preacher, and you said there’s nothing

authoritative about him. Those who criticized him should remember that what Paul was like in his letters is what he would be when he is in person. He is not comparing himself to people who write their own “brag sheet,” because their ego is their standard. Rather, Paul said his standard for achievement was a divine yardstick for measuring faithfulness, which he followed in Corinth. He was not overstepping his commission when he brought the gospel to you, or when he exercised authority over you. He was not taking credit for ministry others had done in Corinth. Instead, he hoped your faith would grow; then others would appreciate what he had done. He would carry the gospel in the future to unreached fields; then no one would criticize him for working in someone else’s field. If anyone wants to boast, let him boast in My Father and Me. Then it’s not a matter of self-approval but of having Our approval.

False Apostles

11 Paul asked you to put up with his foolishness because he was jealous over you with the right kind of jealousy. Paul said, “I am concerned that the Corinthian believers have a deep love for Christ alone, as a virgin bride has for her groom.” Paul was concerned you would be led away from your pure love for Me, as Eve was deceived by satan.

Shun imitation Christianity. Let Me open your spiritual eyes to see Christianity clearly, and Me only. Believe the truth, and only the truth.

You were gullible about your faith because when anyone preached another Jesus, that was different from the one Paul preached, you would quickly embrace any false teacher. Also, you were quick to embrace a false spirit, different from the Holy Spirit you got at salvation. Those who claimed to be apostles were no better than he was.

If Paul were a poor speaker, at least he knew the message he was presenting, and he had preached it many times. He asked if he did wrong by not taking money from you when he preached to you. He was taking money from other churches to live on, so he could preach to you. When Paul ran

out of money in Corinth, he didn't take money from you. Those who came from Philippi brought him money. He said he was very careful not to burden you. He also said he'd tell everyone the same thing in Greece, not to embarrass you but to cut the ground out from under those who say they minister, just as Paul does. I never sent those false ministers. They have fooled you into thinking they were My apostles. This didn't surprise Paul because Satan can change himself into an apostle of light, so that those who serve the devil actually appear to be godly ministers. In the final judgment, they'll get the punishment their evil deeds deserve.

Paul asked you not to think he was a fool, but if the believers took him as a fool, he wanted to brag as a fool boasts. The bragging of the false apostles is not prompted by Me. But Paul had something to brag about. The false teachers had been bragging of their worldly achievements, but Paul bragged about his spiritual achievements. Paul said you had tolerated fools by tolerating false teachers who made you slaves. The false teachers made the believers feed them, obey them, and give them all their money. The false teachers were slapping the believers in the face. Paul never demanded things like that. Yet, whatever the false teachers bragged about, Paul had more to boast about. Are they Hebrews? So was Paul. Are they Israelites? So was Paul. Are they descendants of Abraham? So was Paul. Are they ministers of Me? Paul said he was foolish to even compare himself to them because he was called personally by Me.

Paul said, "I have served more time in prison, I have been beaten more times, I have faced death time and again. I have received thirty-nine lashes, five times from the Jews. I have been beaten with rods five times. I have been stoned once. I have been shipwrecked three times, I drifted twenty-four hours in the sea. I have been in danger while crossing rivers, from thieves, from Jews, and from Gentiles. I have been in danger in city streets, in the desert, on the sea, and by false teachers. I have experienced hard work, exhaustion, sleepless nights, hunger, thirst, fastings, cold, and exposure." Finally, Paul said, "I have had the constant responsibility of the churches. Every time someone sins, I have to deal with it. When Christians fail, I pick them up. When they are hurt, I comfort them."

Paul said, "I'd rather brag about my weaknesses, than my accomplishments. God My Father and the Lord Jesus Christ know I am telling the truth. Let all praise go to Them forever." Even the governor of

Damascus under King Aretus tried to arrest him at the city gates, but he was let down by a basket on a rope to escape through a window in the wall.

Paul's Thorn in the Flesh

12 It was foolish for Paul to boast about accomplishments, but he has had visions and revelations from Me. Once Paul was taken to heaven, whether it was physically or spiritually, only My Father knows. All Paul knew was that he was caught up into Paradise where he heard things that he could not repeat. So he said, "I'll not brag of that experience. I'll brag only in my weaknesses. I have plenty to brag about, but I won't do it because people will think I am a fool. I don't want people to think more highly of me than they ought to think."

Because Paul had this extraordinary revelation, I gave him a thorn in the flesh to keep him from getting puffed up. Three times Paul pleaded for Me to relieve him from that pain, but I told Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you. My power will be evident in your weakness." So Paul said, "I'll be happy to boast of my weakness so the power of Christ will rest on me. Since it is for Christ, I am happy to live with my thorn in the flesh. I will be happy to suffer insults, hardships, difficulties, and poverty for when I am weak, I am strong."

There are many reasons why I don't answer prayer. Sometimes you have asked for the wrong thing, or asked at the wrong time, or asked with a wrong attitude or with sin in your life. Focus on My Father and the past prayers I have answered, not the unanswered prayers.

You were making Paul look foolish. You should have been bragging on him, not Paul bragging on himself. He was not behind the first apostles. The things that characterize an apostle are signs, wonders, and miracles, which he did among the believers. These miraculous gifts meant you were not inferior to other churches. The only thing lacking in your church was the fact that you didn't pay Paul a salary. He asked forgiveness for this exception.

Paul told you he was coming to you a third time, and he would not take money from you. He only wanted your love, not your money. Children don't take care of their parents; parents take care of their children. Paul was willing to spend his money on you. He would even be spent for you because he loved you more than any other teacher loved you. Paul even said, "Some of you argue that I didn't receive money from you, but you think I tricked you. You think I made money off you some other way." Paul asked you, "How did I make money?" Titus and the others sent Paul money. He didn't take money from them. Paul noted, "We are all supported by the Holy Spirit. We all live by the same standard."

Paul explained, "You think I'm telling you these things to justify myself. Actually, I speak the truth in Christ before God the Father." He said this so you would know he did everything for your spiritual growth. When Paul got to Corinth, he was afraid that he would not find what he wanted to find, and that you would not see in him what you expected. He was afraid he'd find arguments, jealousy, hatred, divided allegiances, slander, expressions of ego, and disharmony. Paul asked you, "When I come again, will I be embarrassed by your behavior? Shall I grieve over any who have sinned, and are guilty of impurity, yet have not repented of their evil?"

Final Exhortation and Conclusion

13 On his third trip to Corinth, Paul would tell you the same things he said on the second visit. Now he was absent from you but would still tell you the same things, "At the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established." Paul had already warned everyone, and especially those who were sinning, that he would punish them severely when he comes. He would give proof that I speak through him and he would not be weak in dealing with My church.

My weakened body was crucified, but now I have the mighty power of God My Father. For you are also weak in your human body, but through My resurrection power, you will be strong.

Examine yourselves if you are actually a Christian. Test yourself with this question. Do I have the presence of Jesus Christ living in me? Have you failed this test? Do you belong to Me?

Paul prayed that you would live godly lives, not to make him look successful, but that I may be glorified. Paul said his responsibility was to encourage you to live right all ways and not do evil. He was glad to be weak and despised if it meant you would become strong. He hoped he wouldn't need to use his apostolic authority to break you, but to lift you up.

Rejoice, grow in Me, your Lord and Savior. Live in unity, peace, and may the God of love and peace be with you. Greet one another warmly as you should. All the saints greet you. May My grace, the love of God My Father, and the presence of the Holy Spirit be with all of you always.”

I AM JESUS

The Giver of Grace

My Letter to the Galatians



I wrote this letter to My churches in Galatia. I warned them against false teachers. My message to the believers was to place their complete trust in Me, plus or minus nothing. This is the simple message of salvation which was taught to them. As you read this letter, be sure you are saved through personal faith in Me and ask God to help you walk in Christian love and peace.

You Have Departed From My True Gospel

1 I am Jesus, Who used Paul to write My letter to you, the Galatian Christians, reminding you that Paul was an apostle by My divine commission and from God My Father. He was not appointed by any individual or by any group; therefore, you should not reject his clear teaching, from Me, on salvation by grace through faith alone.

I greet all My churches of Galatia, from all those who were with Paul, praying for My Father and Me to give them grace and peace. He wanted you to desire the same grace and peace that came only from Me.

My Father sent Me to die for your sins, to deliver you from this present evil world according to His eternal plan, and for you to give all glory to My heavenly Father, and continue to do so throughout the eternal ages.

Paul was startled that you have turned away so quickly from grace teaching to follow a gospel of works. You no longer follow the gospel of salvation by faith alone. You are being blinded by those who twisted My truth into legalism.

Paul wanted My curse on anyone who preached that salvation comes by works. He said, “Even if an angel preached works, that he should be cursed. If anyone preaches a gospel contrary to what he preached to the Galatians, let him be under a curse forever.”

Paul didn’t want to please people. He wanted Our approval: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. If he catered to people, he’d not be Our servant.

The Galatians were being drawn away from the gospel. I reminded them, “Do I seek to please men? For if you yet pleased men, you will not be My.” Your prayer should be to please My Father in all you do.

The good news is that Paul’s preaching didn’t come from human thought or logic. He didn’t think it up nor did anyone teach it to him. His preaching on grace came by a direct revelation from Me, Jesus Christ. Before Paul was saved, he persecuted Christians and tried to destroy Christianity. Paul was more zealous than most Jews his age and tried as diligently as possible to follow all the Jewish traditions. But I called Paul before he was born and chose him to be My apostle. It was revealed to Paul to preach My gospel to the Gentiles. When Paul was saved, he didn’t consult with anyone, and he didn’t go to Jerusalem to consult with the apostles. Immediately after Paul was saved, he went to Arabia (the desert) where I revealed to him the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith, apart from works. Then he returned to Damascus.

Three years later, Paul went to Jerusalem to meet Peter and stayed there fifteen days. The only other apostle Paul met was James, My brother. (Paul affirmed before God this was the way it happened. He was not lying.) Then Paul went to minister in the provinces of southern Turkey and then Antioch of Syria. My churches in the Holy Land didn't even know what Paul looked like. All they knew was, "The One who used to persecute Christians now preaches the faith he formerly tried to destroy." They praised God for saving Paul.

How to Live the Christian Life

2 Paul returned to Jerusalem fourteen years later accompanied by Barnabas and Titus with definite orders from Me to confront the leaders about their false teaching that a person must be circumcised to be saved. Paul talked privately to the leaders, telling them that in his ministry Gentiles were being saved without circumcision. The leaders agreed with Paul and did not demand that Titus, who was with him, be circumcised, even though Titus was a Gentile. Paul said the issue of Titus would not have come up except some false brothers had infiltrated the meeting to spy on what was discussed. They wanted to make everyone a slave to the Old Testament, taking away the freedom you all have in Me.

You are saved by grace. Your faith is not measured by keeping the law. Salvation is based on what I did for you on the cross, plus or minus nothing.

Paul did not give in to those spying on him. He established the truth of the gospel for all. The leaders didn't add anything to what Paul had said to them, or what Paul was preaching to the Gentiles. Just as I used Peter to win circumcised Jews, I used Paul to win uncircumcised Gentiles. Each had his unique calling and special gifts to do his task. When Peter, James, and John realized the special grace given to them, they shook hands with Barnabas and Paul and encouraged them to keep on preaching to Gentiles, and they would preach to the Jews. The only thing they added was to help the poor, which was what Paul was already doing.

When Peter later came to Antioch, Paul accused him of hypocrisy. Peter ate with Gentile believers, but when a delegation of legalists came from James in Jerusalem, Peter separated himself from the Gentile believers because he was intimidated by the Jews. Then some other Jewish believers followed Peter's example by discriminating against Gentile believers. Even Barnabas was caught up in this compromise for a while.

When you face heresy or compromise with the truth, you must stand strong for the gospel. Notice, "Paul withstood him [Peter] to the face."

When Paul realized what was happening, he said to Peter in front of everyone, "If you are a Jew who lives like a Gentile, why do you try to make Gentiles live like Jews?" Paul explained: "A Jew becomes a Jew by birth. A Christian becomes a child of God by being born again. No one becomes a child of God by keeping the law, but a person is saved by faith in Jesus Christ. Jews who believe in Christ become a child of God by faith in Christ and not by obeying the law." No one can be saved and justified by keeping the law. The Jews who keep the law are as much sinners as Gentiles who do not keep the law. Does that mean I allow you to sin? No! That is absurd teaching. Paul did not try to rebuild a new system for Christians to keep the law because he taught that the legalistic system of the law was abolished by My death. I died because the law condemns all to death, but in Me, you now live with new life.

To be justified means you are declared perfect in My Father's sight. It does not mean you are made perfect; it means you are declared perfect. You stand before My Father "in Me." You are clothed in My righteousness and are as perfect as Me the Righteous One. You don't deserve heaven, nor do you have the right to stand before My Father. You come to My Father in My perfection, and there is nothing more perfect than Him.

You were crucified with Me. You died when I died on the cross so you should no longer try to live for God in the flesh. Now I live within you to

give you new life. The Christian life is the outliving of My indwelling. You live by My faith who loved you and gave Myself for you. If you could be saved by keeping the law, then there was no need for Me to die, and My death was worthless.

You were crucified with Me. This is a past completed action. You don't have to do anything to "crucify yourself," nor do you put yourself to death with extended times of prayer or self-mortification. The crucifixion prayer is when you act on My accomplishments on the cross; you apply the cleansing and power of the cross to your life. My crucifixion saved you and gave you power to live victoriously over sin. So tell the world, "I was crucified with Christ." Your great strength is that I indwell you. You can say, "Christ lives within me." You live by My strength so you can move mountains by faith, "My faith, the Son of God." To get this power, you must yield to Me and allow My strength to live through you.

The Law Condemns You But Faith Saves

3O foolish Galatians who has blinded you to the truth of My death. Did you receive the Holy Spirit by obeying the law? The obvious answer is, "Of course not!" Are you now trying to live the Christian life by the law after having been saved by the Holy Spirit? You have suffered many things for the gospel; now you are throwing it out. You are getting nothing in return for legalism. If you want My power, you must have the Holy Spirit work miracles in your life. You don't live supernaturally by the law. I give miraculous power to live for Me by faith.

Abraham believed in My Father, and it was credited to him for righteousness. My Father looked on Abraham as though he were perfect. If you want to be a child of Abraham, wholly trust Me for everything. The Old Testament predicted the Gentiles would be saved by faith when it said, "In Abraham, all the nations will be blessed." So the blessing I promised to all is now available to you by faith.

Those who try to keep the law are under the curse that comes with the law. Legalists who can't keep all the law will be judged by the curse

promised in Scripture. No one ever got saved by obeying the law. Only those living by faith will be justified and declared perfect.

I declared in the Bible, “The just shall live by faith.” Faith makes you members of My family. Live by a higher standard as children of God. Don’t come praying to My Father because you keep the law. No! Come as children to a loving Father. Come to Him confessing you are not perfect. Be sorry for your sin. Come by faith as a child to be accepted because of His grace and because I died to forgive you and make you perfect.

Remember what the Scriptures teach about the law. You must obey every law without exception; otherwise, you are cursed by the law. But I took you out from under the curse of the law when I was made a curse for you. The Scriptures teach, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.” The blessings I promised Abraham come to you through faith in Me. Receive My promises.

Now in this life, a man must do what he promises. He cannot change his mind after he pledges his word. God promised to save those who exercise faith, so My Father cannot change or cancel His promise. God gave this promise to Abraham and to his seed; one seed—I was one—the One who saved you. Four-hundred and thirty years later, I gave the Ten Commands. But keeping these commands did not save anyone because I promised Abraham salvation by faith.

I added the law to teach you the existence of sin until I—the Seed—came to fulfill My promise. Then My Father forgave the sin of those who exercised faith. I gave you the law by angels. The very fact I used angels proved that the law did not fulfill the promises I made to Abraham because My promise does not depend on angels. It depends on Me alone who fulfilled that promise because I alone took away your sin.

Does the law contradict My promise? No! For if the law gave anyone spiritual life, then the law would produce righteousness. But the Scriptures teach that all are prisoners of sin. The only salvation is by faith in Me by whom you are rescued and made a son or daughter of God. Before I came, you were all prisoners of the law until My coming freed you. The law was

like a strict drill sergeant showing you your weaknesses until you went to My school and learned to be justified by faith. Once you have faith in Me to be free, you don't need the law's authority. Now that you have faith in Me, you are a child of God. When you were baptized into Me, you became a part of Our family. You put on Me and became like Me.

You can pray as a result of your spiritual baptism into My death and resurrection. As a result, you have all the benefits of a son or daughter, which include forgiveness, righteousness, access to My Father, and assurance of salvation. You also have all the benefits of My resurrection, which includes a new nature, eternal life, and membership in God's family. Therefore, ask with the authority of a child who asks a request of his father. Then you can have intimacy with My Father, Me the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Come into Our presence because you are Our child.

You are no longer known as a Jew or Gentile, a slave or free person; or even men or women. You are all equal in Me. Since you belong to Me, you are a spiritual descendant of Abraham, and a true heir to My promises.

You come to My Father in faith, which means you believe in the existence of God and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. By faith, you accepted Me into your hearts. I transformed you and gave you access to pray to My Father. Therefore, when you pray by faith, you go to My Father in your new relationship with Him and ask accordingly. Ask for things based on your new relationship with Me.

Legalism Is an Enemy of Faith

4 The son of a rich father who doesn't have the use of his father's wealth is no better than a servant in the house. When the father dies and leaves the child an inheritance, the child then has to do what his guardian or manager tells him to do. You are a child of My heavenly Father, and one

day you will enjoy the riches of heaven and perfect fellowship with Him. But for now you live as a slave in this present world, and you'll obey every command given you. Before I came into the world, you were slaves to the Jewish law that only covered over sins. But in the fullness of time, My Father sent Me to be born of a woman—born as a Jew—to purchase freedom for those who were slaves to the law. Now My Father has adopted you as His child. I was born as a Jew. I perfectly kept the law, and nailed the law to the cross, satisfying its claims, so that you are now free from its demands. Because you are My Father's child, He has sent the Holy Spirit, into your heart so you can talk to Him, saying, "Poppa, Father." You are no longer a slave, but His very own child. And since you are His child, all spiritual blessings belong to you.

No one can legally call God his Father until he is born again by the Holy Spirit. Then you are "a son" and an heir of God through Me. My Father has sent the Holy Spirit into your heart so you can cry out, "Abba, Father."

Before Gentiles were saved, they were slaves to idols and their man-made gods. When they found My Father—or He found them—how can they want to go back to a weak and beggarly religion and try to please My Father by obeying laws? They are observing special days, months, and seasons to establish favor with Him. They are canceling the preaching of the gospel that they once believed. May you never try to please My Father by keeping laws, for you are not perfect—nor can you ever be perfect. Your only plea is My blood who has forgiven your sin and given you access to My Father.

The legalist should feel as Paul about the law. They should be as free from the chains of the law as was Paul. You did not despise Paul when he first preached to you, even though he was sick at the time. You welcomed Paul as though he were an angel sent from God, as though he were Me, Christ Jesus. Paul wants to know what happened to your gracious spirit. Everyone should have a good spirit about new converts as Paul had for you. Love them and pray compassionately for them so they will be encouraged to grow in Me.

Because of Paul's illness, you originally would have given your eyes to him. Now he wants to know why you have become his enemy. Legalists have taught you to live by the law, and they are wrong. The legalists attacked Paul so they could win you to their point of view. Paul was glad when people took an interest in you if their motives were good, but the legalists would make you slaves again to the law. There are some Christians who live by the law, and they try to make others slaves to the law. I have freed you from the law. Now live free in My kingdom. Paul says his children he led to salvation are hurting him, as though he was going through childbirth again for them. He was suffering till I was formed in them. Paul wants you to know that if he were with you, he could change your opinion. He did not like to deal with this issue by a letter. He was perplexed and didn't know what to do.

The essence of Christianity is that I am formed in you, that I live in you, and that I shine through you to the world.

I asked, do you really understand what the law requires of you? Since you were not able to keep all of the law, why should you want to be under any part of it?

You know you live in the flesh and cannot be perfect. Abraham had two sons, one born of a slave girl, and the other born to a free woman. The son born to the slave had a natural birth, the other one was born supernaturally according to My Father's promise. The first woman—a slave—represented Mount Sinai, in Arabia, the land of Ishmael, the son of the slave woman. The second woman—a free woman—represented Mount Zion in Jerusalem. This one typifies the heavenly Jerusalem and is "spiritually" free from the law.

When you were born again by the Spirit of God, you were given a new nature to obey My Father, which is a much greater motive than trying to keep the law to please Him. Isaiah wrote:

"Shout for joy, you barren one who bore no children, break into shouts of joy and gladness you who were never in labor. For there are more sons of the forsaken one than sons of the wedded wife."

You are like Isaac, children born of the promise. The legalists are like the child born of Hagar. Then Ishmael persecuted Isaac, which is what the legalists are now doing to them. The Scripture says, “Drive away the slave girl and her son because she should not have an inheritance with Isaac.” You are children born of the free woman and are not become children born to the slave woman.

“Those who are born again are the children born of the promise,” which means; My Father promised life to those who believe in Me, His promises are applicable to His children, and you must claim the promises to receive My Father’s blessings.

Characteristics of the Life of Faith

5 I freed you from the law, so don’t be chained again to Jewish legalism. Don’t be a slave to the law. Don’t consent again to religious laws. Let Me be your freedom. Circumcision will get no one favor with God. If any think he must keep one law, then he must obey all the other laws. If anyone tries to be justified by keeping the law, he cuts himself off from My life; he has fallen from grace. For by faith you have the hope of being righteous, and the Holy Spirit will work in you to make it happen. For in Me, circumcision or uncircumcision means nothing. So let your faith express itself in love. The Galatians were growing in Me until someone stopped them from obeying the truth. This wasn’t from My Father because He originally called them. The Judaizers had corrupted them. It only takes a little yeast to influence the whole lump of dough. I have confidence that the Galatians wouldn’t fall to legalism and that the Judaizers would be punished.

Some said Paul was preaching that circumcision was necessary for salvation. But if that was what Paul was doing, he wouldn’t be persecuted. The fact that Paul was being persecuted proves he was preaching salvation by grace through the cross alone. Paul wanted the Judaizers to be cut off altogether from you.

The cross is offensive to the world because they want to do “good works” to be saved. Also, the message of the cross rejects their good works. The cross rejects the world’s desire to fulfill the lust of the flesh, to enjoy the thrills of the world, and fulfill the desire to make self “number one” in all things.

You have been called to freedom in Me, not freedom to follow your sinful nature. You are called to serve others in love. The law is summed up in one command, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Freedom does not mean freedom to attack others and tear them down and ruin any fellowship with them.

Live in the Spirit, and do not satisfy the lust of your sinful nature. All the energy of your sinful nature fights against My control, and all of My energy fights against being controlled by your sinful nature. These two forces are constantly fighting to control your life, and you will feel constant pressure from both of them. When you are controlled by Me, you are no longer a legalist.

God has promised to give the Holy Spirit to all who believe in Me. When the Holy Spirit comes into your life, He gives you eternal life, indwells you, illuminates spiritual truth, guides you, seals you, and prays for you.

The fruit of the sinful nature is sexual immorality, impure thoughts, sensuality, worship of false gods, spiritism (contacting demons), hating people, attacking people, jealousy of others, and anger at everything, drunkenness, wild parties, and things like these. Those who indulge in these things will not see the kingdom of God.

The fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, and a generous spirit, faithfulness to one’s word, gentleness, and self-control. This is completely different from trying to live by the law.

Pray to be changed by the Holy Spirit. He has promised to give fruit in your life. Accept His love so you can love others. Let His joy

make you happy. Let His peace take over your confused mind. Let Him teach you to be patient at all times. Let Him change your heart into a kind heart, and may you be good to the core. Be faithful to others, treating them gently.

Put to death—crucify—the lust that comes from your sinful nature that tries to control your life. Live by My direction so you can produce the Holy Spirit’s fruit in you. Do not be ambitious for your own reputation, but make Me the passion of your life.

The Faith-Life Is a Brotherhood

6 When you see a fellow Christian overtaken by sin, humbly try to get him on the right path. Do not feel superior to him but guard yourself against all temptations. Bear the burden of other believers so you can obey My commands. When people think they are important, but they are really nobody, they end up deceiving themselves. May everyone do their very best in all things so that you can have personal satisfaction. When you do something worth doing, then you won’t have to depend on the approval of others. Each one is responsible for their own faults and sins, for none of us is perfect.

Attempt to restore a fellow brother “in the spirit of meekness; considering yourself lest also you be tempted.” Pray for his restoration as you pray for yourself to be strong against temptation.

Those who teach the Word of God should be paid by those who learn from them. No one should be deceived by ignoring what I want them to do. Everyone will reap the kind of crop they sow. When someone sows to their sinful nature, their harvest will be death and destruction; but when they sow to the Holy Spirit, their harvest will be everlasting life. Do not get tired of doing good things because you will reap a good harvest if you don’t give up. Do good to others every opportunity you have, especially to those in the household of faith.

Paul wrote with large letters because he had eye problems. He warned you that the legalists were trying to become popular by getting you under the law. The legalists would be persecuted if they admitted that salvation comes only by My cross. Even the legalists who teach circumcision do not try to keep the rest of the law. The legalists want to boast that you were their disciples.

Do not glory except in My cross. By the cross put to death—crucify—the world’s attractions, and by the cross crucify your attraction to it.

You have been crucified with Me (a past action) so identify with Me to get the benefits of My death. Self-crucifixion is not something you do to yourself. It is not starving yourself of food, nor is it imprisoning yourself in a cell or self-flagellation. You don't even nail yourself to a physical cross thinking this is a way to identify with My cross. The prayer of crucifixion is accepting all the accomplishments of My death, namely, forgiveness of sins, redemption, justification, and reconciliation with God.

Now, it doesn't make any difference if you have been circumcised. All that matters is your new desire to please Me. May peace and mercy be on all believers who live by the power of the Holy Spirit and on all who belong to My Father. Paul didn't want anyone to bother him with this issue anymore. He had been persecuted enough, with scars to prove it. Paul prayed for My grace from Me, his Lord, to be on you, the Galatian believers.



I AM JESUS

Who Lives in You

My Letter to the Ephesians



I wrote this letter to My church in Ephesus. In the first half of the letter, I explain My great plan to redeem the world, and what this means to individual Christians and for the whole church. In the second half of the letter, I give practical advice on how to live the Christian life. As you read this letter from Me, first examine yourself to be sure you are saved. Then prepare yourself to fight against satan and show your love to your family, your church, and your community.

Your New Standing in Grace

1 I Am Jesus, Who used Paul to write as My ambassador to you, the believers in Ephesus.

Trust in Me, and I will give you spiritual victory in every part of your lives. I want you to live faithfully in Me.

Experience grace that only comes from My Father, and from Me, your Savior and Lord. May you be blessed with every spiritual blessing that comes from heaven. My Father chose you in love before the creation of the universe so that you can be holy—set aside from sin and imperfection. I want you to enter My presence to worship and praise Me. You were chosen to be My Father’s children according to His plan of salvation, to bring praise to Him commensurate with the glory He already had. I have already accepted you according to the good pleasure of My love.

Your sins are forgiven through the shedding of My blood. This redemption comes by the greatness of My Father’s grace that has been lavished on all believers. My Father designed this plan before creation to accomplish His will in your life and the life of every believer. Everything in heaven and on earth will come together for the salvation of the lost. You received a great spiritual inheritance that My Father planned according to His infinite purpose for you and for each who puts their trust in His salvation.

When you heard the message of My truth—the gospel—it delivered you from sin. You put your trust in My Father and were sealed by the Holy Spirit who guaranteed your eternal life until you come into possession of it at the rapture or your death, and thus bring glory to My Father.

Ever since you trusted in Me, you’ve had a love for all in My body. Paul has continually given thanks to My Father in his prayers for you, asking that I would give you full wisdom and understanding so you could have full knowledge of Me.

Paul was continually thankful for everything My Father let him do, and for all the people he reached with the gospel. He prayed, “I cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers.”

Ask that the Holy Spirit open the eyes of your heart to understanding the hope to which My Father called you.

The Riches That Await You

One day you will see the glorious riches of your inheritance that the Holy Spirit has given you, and you will experience the greatness of My Father's power working in you. It's the same mighty power that raised Me from the dead and seated Me at My Father's right hand, far above earthly rulers, authorities, and power in this world or in the world to come. All things were put under My feet, and I was given authority over everything to benefit My church, which is My body, the full expression of My life. I fill everything, and My presence is everywhere.

Desire these three things in your life. First, have spiritual insight to know the Godhead better; second, pray for wisdom to allow Me to direct your life according to what you have learned; and third, understand My Father's plan for your life.

Your New Salvation

2 Even when you were dead in sins, the Holy Spirit gave you spiritual life in Me. Before you were a Christian, your life was controlled by the world, and you were tempted by satanic powers and jerked around by the rebellious spirit of people around you. You lived to fulfill the lust of your flesh, and self-advancement, and you were as rebellious as other people who are angry with God My Father.

My Father is rich in mercy because of His great love for you. When you were dead in sins, He made you alive with Me—this is My grace that saved you—and raised you up together with Me, and made you sit together with Me in heavenly places. Then in ages to come, I will continually show you the exceeding riches of My Father's grace that flows through Me to you.

When you were saved, you were placed in Me in the heavenlies. That is your spiritual position before My Father while you continue to live on this earth. You live positionally in the heavenlies, which means being made alive in Me. You were raised from spiritual death with Me and shown the riches of My Father's grace.

You were saved by grace because you put your faith in Me. It was not your own doing, but My gift to you. You cannot boast that you had anything to do with it. I have made you what you are, a new person created in Me to serve My Father by doing good works, which He planned for you to do.

You don't deserve salvation because of your past sins, but My Father gave you the greatest free gift of all—salvation. Then He equipped you to serve with good works.

You Are United in Me

Remember that at one time you were a slave to your sinful desires—the Jews who circumcised their outward flesh were no better—because both you and the Jews were separated from My heavenly Father. You were not a part of His family, and you were not an heir to His covenants but addicted to worldly pleasures, without hope, and salvation. But now you are united with Me—the Lord Jesus Christ. You were far away, but now you are one in Me by My death that gave you My peace. Then you were brought along with all other believers into My body. It was My physical death that tore down the wall that separated you from My heavenly Father. My death satisfied the legal charges against you, and brought all believers into union with My Father, giving them My peace. My death on the cross united everyone into one body and brought all to My Father. I brought peace to those who were far away in rebellion and to those who were close but in self-righteous works. Only through Me are any able to come into My Father's presence. Those who once were rebellious in sin and those who were legalists, are no longer foreigners or strangers but are fellow members of My body. Both are now one building constructed on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. I am the cornerstone. I hold the building together and make it grow. It is a sanctuary where My Father's presence dwells. Those who are My followers are being built with other believers into a building—a sanctuary—where My Father lives.

The greatest thing about salvation is that you are placed into My body, also called a building and a sanctuary. A sanctuary is where God My Father dwells. So this means I come to live in you as you live in Me.

Your New Place in My Church

3 Paul became a prisoner of Rome because he was first captured by Me, the Messiah of the Jews. He was given a special task of evangelizing the Gentiles, and he was arrested because he persisted in preaching to Gentiles. I gave Paul the revelation of his ministry to the Gentiles. To understand Paul's new task, is to understand My mystery, which was not revealed in previous generations, but now I have revealed this task to Paul and the apostles. It was the mysterious secret plan that We, the Godhead, intended the Gentiles to share equally with the Jews in all spiritual riches. We made this available so that the Jews and Gentiles are now one body in Me. Because of what I accomplished in My sacrificial death, both Jews and Gentiles are joint heirs and joint partakers of the same body—My church—because of their faith in the gospel.

This is the message of grace that I gave to Paul to give to the world. Paul was the least deserving person in the world because he blindly put to death those people who followed Me. But My Father chose Paul to tell Gentiles about the spiritual treasures now available to them. Paul was chosen to tell everyone this mysterious secret plan that My Father Creator had hidden from the beginning. Now the riches of His plan is seen by all, that Jews and Gentiles are joined together in My body, My church.

This plan was carried out through My grace, and now redemption is offered for all. Paul has suffered because of this truth, but he is not discouraged even though he has gone through troubles and persecutions. Instead, he is honored and encouraged to be a testimony to the truth. Because of Paul's faith in My Father, you can come fearlessly into His presence, knowing He will receive you and listen to your request.

Now everyone is accepted in Me.

The Riches of My Love for You

Fall on your knees before My Father, the creator of heaven and earth, praying that His power will give you inner strength through the Holy Spirit, so that I can make My home in your heart by faith and that you'll be rooted and grounded in My love. Also, pray for the ability to understand—as all of His children should understand—how broad, how long, how high, and how deep is My love. Again, pray to fully experience My love—even though it is beyond understanding—so that you can be filled with all the fullness that comes only from Me. Pray for My Father to work His mighty power in you to do exceeding abundantly above all you dare to ask or think. Now to Him be all glory from ages to ages and forever!

You should completely understand My love. It is wide, high, long, and deep, and My love goes beyond comprehension. I want you to know the unknowable and for your spiritual blindness to be removed to understand My complete unselfish love for you.

Walk Worthy of Your New Position

4 Paul, a prisoner of God My Father, wants you to live a life worthy of Me. You must be humble, gentle, and patient with people, tolerating their faults because of My Father's love for them and acceptance of them. Preserve unity in My body and live peaceably with other believers.

Recognize all believers are one body, placed there by the baptism of the Holy Spirit and all have the same calling to the same hope.

We, the Godhead, are One Lord over believers. All share the same one faith and one baptism. There is One God and Father who is in each of you and lives through each of you.

The Holy Spirit has given spiritual gifts to each of you according to His generous Spirit. This is why the Scriptures say, "After Christ ascended up into the heights of heaven, He led those He captured, and spiritual gifts were given to all of His followers." The phrase, "Christ ascended up" means I returned to heaven after I first came down to live and die on earth.

Then I descended into the lower parts of the earth—hell—to lead Old Testament saints to heaven. Now I rule heaven and the entire universe.

The Holy Spirit gave spiritual gifts to My followers: some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some shepherd-teachers.

Their duty is to equip My followers to do My work and build up My body, the church, until all become united in faith and knowledge of My will, so that each one grows to full maturity, according to the standard I have set up. Your standard is to become like Me. Don't be like a child always changing your mind about what you believe because someone tells you different things, or because someone misleads you. Instead, hold on to the truth in love, growing more like Me every day, because I am the head of all. I am over the body in whom you are members. Under My direction, each part of the body will help others grow so that all become mature believers, and the whole body becomes mature in love for one another.

Don't be swayed by false doctrines or any other trick of satan to pull you from Me. You should be solid Christians. The Holy Spirit gave spiritual gifts to My followers: some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some shepherd-teachers. Their duty is to equip My people to do My work and build up the body, My church.

No longer live the way the ungodly live because they do not understand My Father's ways. Their minds are spiritually blinded, and they are far away from My Father because they have shut their minds to the truth and resist His will. They don't care about doing right but have given themselves to immorality. Their lives are filled with filthiness and greed. That is not the way you were taught to live.

Put off your old evil nature because it is thoroughly filled with lust and lying. Put away lying, and tell everyone the truth because you are related to one another in My body. Be spiritually renewed in your thoughts and attitudes so that you put on the new nature which is created to be godly, righteous, and holy.

Stop being angry and sinning against others, and do not let the sun go down on your wrath because anger gives room for the enemy to get into your life. The thief must stop stealing and work for an honest living and

then give to those who have needs. The curser must stop using foul language and allow only good words to come from his mouth, words that are helpful to those who hear him.

Do not grieve the Holy Spirit by living a sinful life because I have sealed you with My presence that will keep you until the final day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage, name-calling, mean-spirited words, and slander, along with spiteful retaliation. Instead, be kind to others, tenderhearted, forgiving others as your Father in heaven has forgiven you because of Me.

Don't let sin lurk in your hearts because the Holy Spirit wants you to be holy. You grieve the Holy Spirit by living a sinful life. You are sealed with the authority of My presence that will keep you until the final day of redemption.

Walk Worthy as Children of God

5 Follow God as a child follows his parents because you are a child of My Father. Walk in love to others as I loved you and demonstrated it by giving Myself as a sweet and acceptable sacrifice for your sins.

Do not be involved in sexual sins, dirty actions, or greed because those things are contrary to godliness. Also do not be known for filthy speech, foolish talking, and jesting, but be gracious in all things. There is no place in My kingdom for those who are sexually addicted, nor for the filthy minded, nor for greedy people. No matter how much people excuse these sins, My Father will still punish them, as well as all who are disobedient. Therefore, do not get involved in those things.

In the past, you walked in darkness but now that you have My light, walk in it. Seek the fruit of the Holy Spirit in your life. Be good and do what is right, and tell the truth so you can be acceptable to My Father. Have nothing to do with the works of darkness; instead, expose them. Remember it is shameful to speak about the things people do in secret. And when light shines on them, their deeds are clearly revealed for what they are. This is why it is said, "Awake, sleeper, get up from the dead; and I will give you light." Therefore, be careful how you live your life, not as a fool but as a

wise person. Use your time wisely because these are evil days. Do not be foolish, but try to understand My will for your life.

Don't drink alcoholic wine because you will lose control of yourself. Let the Holy Spirit continually fill you and control you.

Sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with other believers, making music in your heart to God My Father. Continually give thanks for everything to My Father in My name. Submit yourself to other believers out of reverence to My Father.

Wives, submit yourself to your own husbands, just as you do to God. For the husband is the head of the wife, just as I am the head of the body; and I am its Savior. Just as the body submits to Me as its head, so wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

Husbands love your wife just as I loved My church and gave My life to make it holy and clean through washing of the Word of God. I did this to make My church glorious, without spot, wrinkle, or blemish. Husbands love your wife as you love your body because a man is actually looking out for himself when he loves his wife. No one hates his body. On the contrary, a man will feed and care for his body, just as I care for My body the church. The Scriptures teach that a man should leave his father and mother to be joined to his wife, then the two become one. This is a great mystery, but it illustrates the relationship between Me and My church. So each man must love his wife the way he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.

Your Spiritual Warfare as a Believer

6 Children, obey your parents because you belong to My heavenly Father, for this is what He wants you to do. One of the Ten Commands has a promise stating, "Honor your father and mother so that it will go well with you and you will live a long and prosperous life." Fathers, do not irritate your children because it makes them resentful. Rather, bring them up with positive discipline that God My Father approves.

Obey and respect your employers and fear to displease your boss, just as they would fear displeasing God My Father. Don't work hard just to "butter up the boss" when he's watching. Put passion into your work as though

working for My heavenly Father because He will reward everyone for their good service, whether they're a boss or a worker. And bosses must treat their workers right, not threaten them because both bosses and employees work for My Father and He has no favorites.

Be strong in My power and put on all the spiritual armor so you can stand against the deceptive strategy of the enemy. You are not fighting against humans who have flesh and blood but against evil powers, authorities, and demons of the unseen world; and you are struggling against the mighty powers of darkness and their tricks. You are fighting against filthy spirits who influence this world from their ethereal realm. Use every piece of My spiritual armor so that when evil comes, you'll be able to resist and win the battle. Stand in battle with My Father's truth buckled around your waist. Cover your chest with the armor of righteousness, and wear the shoes of peace that come from the good news of the gospel. Carry the shield of faith to stop all the arrows and fiery darts of temptation from satan. Wear the protective helmet of salvation and protect yourself with the sword of My Spirit, which is the Word of God.

Pray at all times with every type of intercession and spiritual warfare. Pray persistently and boldly for all Christians everywhere.

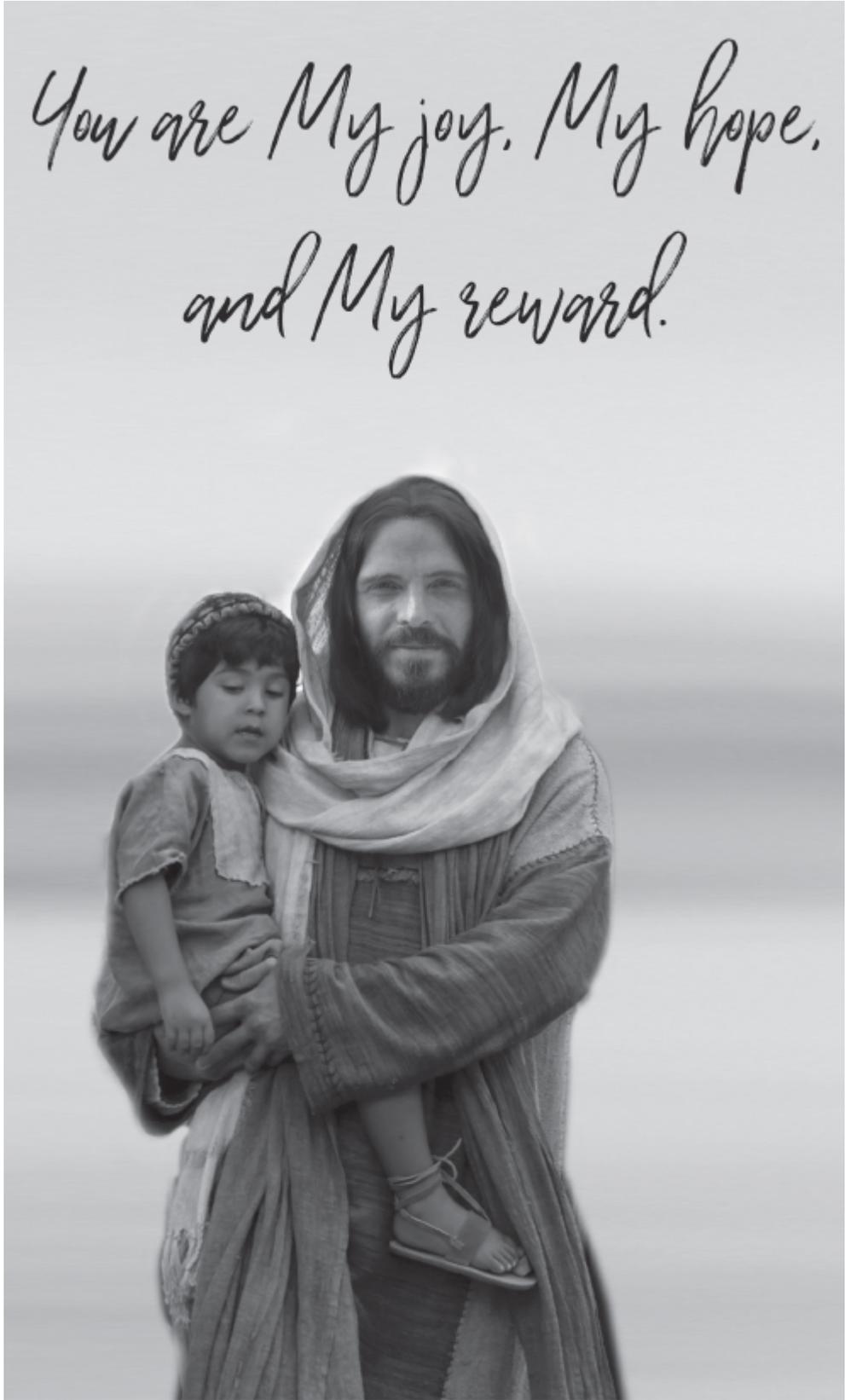
Pray for My ministers so they will have boldness and the right words to proclaim the message of the good news of the gospel. This was Paul's request and the reason why he was in chains in Rome. Just as Paul prayed for strength to keep on sharing the gospel, that should be your prayer for all My servants.

Pray for others just as you want them to pray for you. Pray for their victory over sin, their influence in the world, their growth in Christ, and their fellowship with one another.

Tychicus delivered this letter to the saints in Ephesus and told them all about Paul so they would be encouraged.

Let My peace rule your heart, so you develop a deep love for My Father. Let My grace rest on your life and on all those who love deeply with an enduring love.

*You are My joy, My hope,
and My reward.*



I AM JESUS

The Source of Joy

My Letter to the Philippians



In this letter, I exhort the Philippians to live triumphantly. Paul was their example of living for Me. It was Paul who said, “For me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.” He writes joyfully as Nero’s prisoner facing death, yet he expresses joy, and peace and he is not anxious about anything. Paul knows that death means entrance into heaven, but he also realizes he can serve God while he remains alive. But Paul warns against attempting to drift into heaven. He wants believers to know Me more intimately while on earth and strive to do all they can for Me while on this earth. As you read this letter, remember to always rejoice in Me and to be content, whatever the circumstance.

Paul’s Confidence in Spite of Suffering

I Am Jesus, Who used Paul to write you, the believers in Philippi, that he and Timothy considered themselves slaves of God My Father. They wrote greetings of grace and peace, thanking My Father for their salvation and ability to live godly. He also prayed for your partnership in helping proclaim the good news from the very first until then.

I, the Lord Jesus Christ, who began a good work of salvation, will continue it until the day I return. You were always on Paul's mind and heart, so it is only right that he had this confidence. It was his privilege to serve both in difficult circumstances and good days. His deep assurance came only from My heart, his Savior.

Paul prayed that his love for you would keep growing and that you will grow in true knowledge and perfect understanding of My Father so they will always make the best choices and live pure and blameless lives.

Be filled with all the good qualities that only I can produce in you.

Paul wanted you to understand what I had done in his heart that made him share the gospel with others. All those who knew about Paul knew that he was My slave. That gave him boldness to serve Me and to spread the gospel without fear.

Some preach My message out of jealousy or competition, and others preach out of a pure heart. Still, others preach Me for the wrong motives, doing it out of selfish pride. But others are motivated by My Father's love because He has given them this task. Paul did not care what their motives were just as long as I was preached. Whether I am preached from right or wrong motives, Paul rejoiced and continued rejoicing because My message will set many free.

Paul's earnest desire and hope was never to embarrass My Father, but that with all boldness as always I would be magnified in his body whether by life or death. His passion was to live for Me, and if he died, it would be his gain because he would come to live with Me. If he continued living in his body, he would still continue serving Me. He was not sure which option he desired. He wanted to leave his body to be with Me which seemed the best choice. But if he stayed in his body to serve Me, he would still accomplish much. Paul was sure that if he stayed and continued his ministry, he could further My work in many believers. Paul prayed that you would continue living for Me, that whether he remained on this earth or died, you remained firm in your faith in the gospel.

Do not be afraid of your enemies but be courageous in My care because a godly testimony will convict the enemies of their sin and make them aware of judgment. You have been given the privilege of believing in Me, but also to suffer on My behalf. You are now in the same struggle that Paul fought. You will also fight.

I Am the Pattern for Believers

2 If there is any encouragement because of Me, if there is any comfort from My love, if there is any fellowship with the Holy Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill My joy by agreeing with one another, loving each other, and walking together with one heart and spirit. Be humble and think of others rather than thinking only about yourself. Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory, but in lowliness of mind let each of you think of others more than yourselves. Let each of you look out not only for your own things but also on the things of others.

Have the same attitude toward others, as I showed by My example of humility. Even though I am God, I did not make exceptions for Myself because of My deity. On the contrary, I emptied Myself and took on human flesh and became a servant. I humbled Myself even more. I became obedient to death, even the death on the cross.

Therefore, My Father raised Me to the highest possible position and gave Me a name above every name. So that at My name, every knee will bow in heaven, earth, and under the earth, and every tongue will declare that I am the Lord to the glory of My Father.

Because I gave Myself in death, My Father raised Me from the dead and exalted Me above every name. In the future, every knee will bow at My name. Now join all angels and believers to worship Me for what I have done for you and for all believers of all ages.

You followed Paul's instructions when he was with you. Now you need to be just as obedient while he is away from you because your reverence and fear demonstrate to everyone your salvation. Develop a deeper desire to serve My Father, just as He gave you the power to please Him. Do all

things without murmuring and complaining, so that you will be a blameless child of God in the eyes of all who live in a crooked evil world. May you shine as a light to them all.

Do everything without griping or complaining so that you have a blameless testimony to all. Live a clean life as My Father's child so you will be a light in a dark and lawless world.

Share with others the Word of life so that you'll be faithful until My return. Run your race victoriously so that your works will not become useless.

Even if you die a martyr's death, rejoice in that opportunity. May other believers rejoice with you if you have the privilege of dying for Me.

Paul wanted to send Timothy to you to find out how they were getting along. That would encourage him because Timothy was Paul's trusted helper who put other people's interests ahead of his own. Timothy was like a son to him and wanted the same things Paul wanted. Timothy demonstrated his godly character when he sacrificed with Paul for the gospel. As soon as Paul's affairs in Rome are settled, he will send Timothy to you; then he would visit you in Philippi.

Paul also wanted to send Epaphroditus back to you. He had brought money to Paul from you. Paul was concerned because you heard Epaphroditus was sick and had almost died. But My Father had mercy, and he lived. His death would have been an unthinkable burden. Now Paul sent Epaphroditus back to you because you wanted to "Welcome him with Christian love." Epaphroditus had almost died doing for Paul the things you couldn't do for Paul because you were so far away.

I Am the Object of the Believers' Desire

3 You must stay away from the threats of mean-spirited legalists who bite at you like a dog. They want everyone to keep the law to be saved. You have the true circumcision of the heart and worship My Father through the Holy Spirit, and you rejoice in Me. Paul had better qualifications than all

the legalists so that he could have been the best of all strict legalists. But do not put confidence in the flesh but in My grace. Paul was born a Jew into the tribe of Benjamin and circumcised on the eighth day. He spoke Hebrew, kept the law as a Pharisee, and persecuted believers. Everyone considered Paul blameless, but he thought the perfections of his legalism were unimportant. The law is useless to give you intimate fellowship with Me.

You must give up everything for Me, counting everything loss to gain an intimate fellowship with Me. Yes, give up everything to know Me and no longer treasure them but let Me become your treasure. Now united in Me, you do not have your righteousness based on legalism, but based on faith in My righteousness.

Make this your passion; experience Me and the power of My resurrection. Then you will know what it means to suffer and to share spiritually in My death, and eventually, be resurrected from the dead. You have not yet reached My goal, but keep pursuing it so you can become the “Christ-dominated person” for which I originally pursued you.

Thank Me for the privilege and strength for everything you have accomplished in the past. Now, build on your past and reach out to do more in the future.

You have not attained the goal, so do not consider your life perfect. But focus your entire energies on this one thing: daily forget past accomplishments and failures, then daily look forward to what lies ahead. Give all your energy to win the prize of your upward calling in Me. Have this attitude, and if you think otherwise may My Father change you to this purpose in life. All spiritual believers should have this attitude, but many are not pursuing Me. Everyone must live at the level they’ve learned and obey the truth they know.

Follow Paul’s example and learn from the pattern he set for all believers. Many live as My enemies. Paul told us about these people. They are walking toward destruction, and their belly is their god. They are proud of their sin when they should be ashamed of it. They live for things on this earth.

You are a citizen of heaven, and you wait for Me, your Savior, to come take you there. Then I will transform your finite body to be like My glorious body with the same power I will use to conquer everything on earth.

I Am the Believers' Strength

4 Paul wanted to see you, his friends in Philippi, that he had won to Me because you were the fruit of his work. He begged Euodia and Syntyche to settle their disagreement and have one focus in serving Me. Then Paul asked My church to work with these women and with Clement to spread the gospel.

Rejoice gladly in all My Father's goodness, so always be filled with His joy.

I want you to be happy in your Christian faith and live daily for Me in light of My soon coming. Be anxious for nothing, but let your requests be made known unto God. This is a picture of My Father's child bowing in prayer to tell My heavenly Father about every anxiety and worry in life.

Let your gentleness and goodness be evident to all because I may come at any moment. Don't worry about anything, but pray about everything, and be thankful for all things that happen. Then My peace will guard your heart and mind because My presence in your life surpasses anything that you could ever understand.

Constantly meditate on whatever things are true, whatever things are honorable, whatever things are right, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things contribute to your having a good reputation. Keep doing in your daily life these things; then I will be with you.

Paul was thankful you had not quit expressing concern for him and sending money for his ministry. He did not say this to ask for more money, but to let you know his appreciation. Be satisfied with what you have. On

occasions, you may experience poverty, and on other occasions, you may have more than enough. Learn in every way and in every place to be satisfied with what you have, whether you are full or hungry, whether you have abundance or poverty. You can do all these things and more through Me who gives you help to get it done.

Nevertheless, Paul thanks you for your gift to him that helped him through his present difficulty. You were the only ones who sent money in his early ministry. Even in Thessalonica, they sent money more than once. He was not asking for more money; he was telling them that their gift will bring them rewards through his ministry. Paul had no need because of the gifts you sent by Epaphroditus. It is a sweet-smelling aroma that pleased My Father. Now, I will care for your financial needs the same way I took care of Paul. It's all because of His glorious riches in Me.

Glory be to My heavenly Father, forever and ever. Paul sends greetings to all of you from all the fellow workers with him. Then he sent greetings from all the Christians in Rome, especially those who had been saved in the emperor's household. May My grace rest on you.

I AM JESUS

The Superior One

My Letter to the Colossians



I Am Jesus, who used Paul to write one of the loftiest passages in praise of My nature. I have all power and glory and will guide you in all things pertaining to your life in Me. As you read this book, put your complete faith and trust in Me. I will help you to show Christian love and compassion.

My Prayer for Believers

1 I am Jesus, Who used Paul to write to you, Colossian believers, with Timothy using his authority as an apostle to remind you of the greatness of My indwelling and to warn you of some new doctrinal problems springing up among you.

Paul has given thanks for you believers from the first time he heard about your salvation, and for your new expressions of love for all the saints.

Look forward to the promise of heaven. This pledge was yours the moment you first believed, just as it guarantees the same hope to others who also believe. My gospel is the power that is transforming your life and all other lives everywhere. This good news is being given out all over the world, changing lives, just as it transformed you Colossians.

I remind you that Epaphras faithfully brought My gospel to you. Now Epaphras is My representative helping Paul in Rome. As a matter of fact, Epaphras was the one who told Paul about the strengths and problems of the new church at Colosse.

I want you to have a total understanding of My Father's will and to understand what the Holy Spirit wants you to do with your life. I will give you spiritual wisdom so you can make decisions that will honor and please My Father.

Continually do good things for others, for this is My Father's command to you. I want you to know My Father more intimately so you can enjoy fellowship with Him. Be strengthened with spiritual power so you can endure with patience and be filled with joy so you will always be thankful for your spiritual inheritance. Remember, you were rescued from the kingdom of satanic darkness and delivered into My kingdom. My cleansing blood has forgiven all your sins.

My Superiority

I am the perfect reflection of My Father who cannot be seen. I am the firstborn of all creation, and I am supreme over all things. I also created everything in heaven and earth. I created the things you can see, and the things you can't see. Everything has been created by Me and for Me, including kings, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities. I existed before all things were created. Now, My power holds creation together. I am the head of My church which is My living spiritual body. I was the first to rise from the dead; that I might have the preeminence in everything.

All the fullness of My Father lives and dwells in Me. By Me, God My Father reconciled all things to Himself. By My blood on the cross, My Father in heaven made peace with everything in heaven and on earth.

I brought you back as a friend when you were far away in sin by your evil thoughts and sinful actions. I brought you into the very presence of My Father by the sacrifice of My body on the cross. Now you have access to My Father's presence because in His sight, you are holy, blameless, and pure. You must completely believe this truth about Me and base your faith on it. Do not drift away from this assurance for this is the good news that has saved you and has also been preached all over the world.

When I brought you back to Me as a friend, I simply asked you to follow Me. In following Me you will discover all the hidden treasures that are yours in Me. My treasures are not temporal, but they come with eternal gain. In this you will find true happiness in this life, and the life to come.

Paul was happy to suffer for you believers in Colosse because you identified with My sufferings, and through My sufferings, others are brought to saving faith. I gave Paul the commission to spread the gospel to all Gentiles, a message that was not known by them in past generations and centuries; but now has been revealed to them, that My riches and blessings are for them also. Rejoice greatly in the truth that I live in you. I am your hope of glory. Share this message with all so that they may become perfect in Me.

Paul was motivated to serve Me because My Father energized Paul.

Warning Against False Wisdom and Legalism

2 Paul interceded for believers in other churches, even though he had not seen them, He prayed the following request for them: that they would be encouraged, and that they would experience strong ties of love to one another, and that they might have a full understanding of how My Father's mystery works in their lives, and that they would live confidently for Me, understanding the treasures of wisdom that are hidden only in Me.

Do not be deceived with cunning arguments of wisdom. Only I am the wisdom of God. You believers were living as you should, and your faith was steadfastly rooted in Me.

As you received Me, your Lord, when you first believed, now walk in Me, being rooted in the faith, and nourished by Me so you'll grow strong in your Christian life and always be thankful for what I have done for you.

Beware of those who would lead you astray by human logic or deceitful theories that come from depraved thinking or evil principles of the world. Such "teaching" didn't come from Me. Remember, the fullness of the Godhead lived in My human body, and that only when you are indwelt by Me could you experience My full understanding and leadership.

When you came to salvation in Me, you were spiritually circumcised — set apart—in your heart. This was not a physical procedure. You were spiritually set apart from satisfying your sinful nature so that you might please Me. You were identified with My death when you were spiritually baptized into Me, and you were raised with Me to new life by the same power that brought Me from the dead. You were dead in your rebellious sins against My Father, being controlled by your sinful nature; but My Father forgave all your sins. He wiped your record clean of all the charges against you and forgave them by nailing them to My cross. Now evil powers have no authority over you because I publicly triumphed over sin by My victory on the cross.

You get spiritual victory through My power, My death, burial, and resurrection. Now you triumph over sin because I triumphed over sin.

Because you are completely forgiven, let no one condemn you for what you eat or drink, or for not celebrating holy days or Sabbaths. These Old Testament rules were only a shadow of coming things. They pointed you to Me who fulfilled these rules.

Do not let anyone cheat you out of your relationship with Me, even when they insist on self-denial or worship of angels, for they are puffed up by their deceitful insight. They are not united with Me, the head of the body, where all believers are nourished into a vital union that grows together by the Holy Spirit.

Since you have died together with Me, be separate from this sinful world. Why would you subject yourself to worldly regulations claiming,

“do not taste, touch, or handle?” These are merely human rules that mean nothing, even though these rules seem “right” because they demand self-denial and humility. But they never help you triumph over your evil thoughts and desires. Victory comes only through Me.

Your Daily Walk

3 Since you have been raised to new life in Me, control your thinking by the principles of heaven where I am sitting at My Father’s right hand in the seat of honor and influence. Think on things in heaven and do not be controlled by things on this earth, because you died when I died, and your new life is hidden in Me by God My Father. Then, when I appear to the whole world, you will appear with Me in glory.

You have been united with Me by My death. Therefore, you are “one” with Me. You don’t lose your separate identity in that union, but are indwelt by Me. Since you have been raised to new life in Me, you can control your thinking by the principles of heaven where I Am.

Put to death any sinful desire—your sexual lust, filthiness, evil desires, and greed—which is idolatry. These are the vices My Father will punish in those who are rebellious against Him. You used to be guilty of these things when your life was controlled by the world. But now that you have Me dwelling in your life get rid of anger, rebellious behavior, slander, and filthy language. Do not lie to anyone, turn away from your old nature with its sinful urges. Turn to your new nature that My Father continually renews within you, as you learn more and more about Me. All new believers in Me can be controlled by their new nature, whether they are Jews, or Gentiles, whether they are circumcised or not, whether they are barbarian, civilized, slave, or free. I am the only power that can control a life because I live in all believers.

Since I chose you to live a holy life, clothe yourself with mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Recognize that some believers let outward sins disrupt their lives, so forgive their trespasses as My Father

forgave you. Love is the most important attitude you can put on because love makes you one with all other believers. Also, you want My peace to control your heart because all believers are called to live in peace.

Let My words live richly in your heart so you can have My wisdom to teach and correct other believers. Sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to My Father with a thankful heart. May everything you say and everything you do be expressed in My name, giving thanks to your heavenly Father.

Wives must submit to their husbands because this is what I desire of them. Husbands must love their wives and never be mean to them. Children must always obey their parents for this pleases Me. Fathers must not provoke their children to anger because they will become discouraged and give up.

Servants must obey their earthly bosses in everything, not just when they are watching. They must obey from the heart because that pleases Me. Do everything with your whole heart because you are working to please Me and not men.

Then I will give you an inheritance as a reward, and those who do wrong will be repaid for their rebellion because I will not let anyone get away with sin.

Earnest Prayer

4 Masters who direct servants must be kind and fair just as I, your Master in heaven, treats you.

Give yourself continually to prayer, always remembering to be thankful. Pray for Christian ministers to have opportunities to preach My message (this is the reason Paul was in chains). Pray that ministers will preach the gospel as clearly as they can.

Live a good testimony among non-Christians and use every opportunity to share Me with them. Make sure your words are gracious and useful with the right answer for everyone.

Tychicus will come to tell you how Paul was doing. Tychicus had been faithfully serving Me as he served Paul. Paul is sending Tychicus to give you a message of encouragement. Paul also told how he was sending

Onesimus back to you in Colosse. Onesimus had recently been saved, and now he was a brother in Me.

Paul gave you greetings from Aristarchus, who is a prisoner with Paul. He also sent greetings from Mark, Barnabas' cousin. Then Paul told his readers to receive Mark when he comes their way. Finally, Paul sent greetings from Justis, noting these are his Jewish Christian co-workers. Paul sent greetings from Epaphras who is from Colosse, who continually prayed for you, asking God to make them strong and mature in their Christian faith. Paul reminded you that Epaphras is a prayer warrior for all believers. Paul included greetings from Luke, the physician, and Demas. Then Paul asked that his greetings be passed on to other believers. Paul asked you to greet My church in Laodicea, and to pass this letter to My church in Laodicea, and that they should read the letter he wrote to you.

Paul told My church to exhort Archippus to be faithful to the ministry that I gave him. Paul signed the letter and told them, "Pray for me because I am in chains." Grace to you. Signed, Paul.



I AM JESUS

I Am Coming Again

My First Letter to the Thessalonians



Because of persecution, Paul was forced to leave Thessalonica and almost immediately he wrote back, under My guidance, this first letter to the Thessalonians. He wanted to deal with their confusion about My return. Some Christians in My church died, and those still alive wrongly thought the dead had missed out on My return. In this letter I tell “the dead in Christ” would be first in the rapture. I also describe the richness of local church evangelism. Then I exhort believers to the holiness of living, and finally, confirm young believers in foundational truth.

Characteristics of a Model Church

1 I am Jesus, Who used Paul, Silas, and Timothy to write to you, My church in Thessalonica, Greece.

I remind you that your heavenly Father and I founded My church. Grace and peace to you and may you always be thankful for others as Paul was thankful for you for your faithful work, deeds of love, and patient anticipation of My return. My Father chose you to be His very own people.

The gospel came to you by preaching and the demonstrated power by the Holy Spirit. Paul's life was a demonstration of the truth of his preaching. You received his message with joy, in spite of persecution that came on your young church. You were an example to all others, just as the believers in Greece and the gospel reached many because of you. You welcomed the gospel and turned to Me from idols to serve My Father, the living, and true God. Look forward to My return from heaven to deliver you from the terrible wrath and tribulation that will be poured out on the world in the future.

The Thessalonians believed I could return at any moment. Their hope carried them through persecution. If your hope is in Me, you can have the same confidence.

Characteristics of a Model Servant

2 I remind you about Paul's visit to you and how badly he was beaten in Philippi before coming to you. He had a strong ministry there in spite of vicious opposition. He didn't use ulterior motives or impure desires, nor was he trying to trick them. He preached a message from My Father, and the Holy Spirit spoke the message of salvation to their hearts. He did not preach to please people, but to please My Father, who knows the motives of people. He never used flattery to get them to believe, nor did he pretend to be their friends just to get their support. He also didn't preach to build up a reputation or to get human praise. He reminded them he could have asked for money because he is My apostle, but he didn't.

Be gentle among new believers as Paul was unassuming and kind to you. Care for My young followers by feeding and protecting them as a mother cares for her baby. Help by loving new Christians, willing not only to give them the gospel but also to give them your own soul. Paul loved you dearly, not only giving you My gospel but also his own life. Paul worked with his hands day and night so he wouldn't be a burden to you. I am his witness that

his treatment of you was fair. He treated you as a father would treat a son, teaching you what is truthful, encouraging you to live worthy of your divine calling, and inviting you to share in My Father's kingdom of glory.

Paul was thankful that you received his preaching, not as human words, but as though his message was the very Word of God, which it was. It was the living power to transform lives. You are like My churches in Judea, in that you suffer from your countrymen, just as the Christians in the Holy Land suffered from the Jews, the ones who killed Me and the prophets. Those who persecute My church are against both the Gentiles and God because they don't want anyone other than the Jews to be saved. Their punishment is adding up in God's records, and one day, God's punishment will fall on them.

Part of warfare praying is recognizing the ways satan tries to defeat you, and the tricks he uses to stop My work. Just as Paul realized satan was trying to stop his ministry, you must realize the many ways satan opposes you and tries to defeat you.

Paul wants to see you; even though you are separated from him physically, he still has you in his heart. He has longed to come and see you, but satan has prevented his coming. He lives to see his young children grow in grace. You are his joy, his hope, and his reward. You will bring him much joy at My coming when he stands before God for rewards. You will be his "glory and reward."

Paul's greatest joys were the people he led to saving knowledge in Me. He called them his "crown of rejoicing." Just as a crown was a symbol of achievement, it was also the king's symbol of power and authority. You should want no other authority in your life than the influence of winning people to salvation. The Thessalonians were Paul's "glory and joy."

Characteristics of a Model Brother

When Paul went to Athens, he sent Timothy to minister to you, even though
3 it meant he was left alone at Athens. He wanted Timothy to keep you strong in the faith and prevent anyone of you from dropping out. Troubles are part of God's plan for the believers. When Paul was with you, he told you that some persecution would come as you had recently experienced. Paul was so concerned for you that he sent Timothy to find out if you were standing firm in your faith. He was afraid the tempter would have tripped you up, and his efforts were destroyed.

Sometimes My Father answers your prayers and stops the problem before it reaches you. Sometimes My Father gives you the grace to endure the problem. Whatever you do, make My Father of storms your Security in the storms.

Timothy had just returned bringing the good news that you were standing firm. Paul also learned that you wanted to see him. This news gave Paul confidence in his present trials, and that his ministry of planting new churches would succeed, even when trials hit new churches. Now Paul was ready to really throw himself in ministry because of the positive news that you were standing true. Paul cannot thank others enough for all the joy you give him. This is especially true, so your work prospers in spite of trials.

Now may My Father help you stand in the face of trials. May He make your love grow and overflow to those suffering persecution and make your heart strong, blameless, and holy. And may you live a guiltless life because I am returning with all those saints who are Mine.

The Hope for All Believers

4 The Scriptures teach that you should please My Father with your daily life. And the Scriptures command you to live as close as possible to the biblical standards. I want you to be separate from sin, especially keeping away from sexual immorality. Marry in holiness and purity and not in sexual lust as do the pagans, for this is a sign they do not know My Father.

You must pray to live a holy life and ask My Father to give you strength to keep your bodies disciplined. Remember you have an old nature that tempts you to sin. So I can give you strength to overcome sin. I want your body to be a holy temple that will glorify My Father.

Never sin by having sex with another's spouse for I have promised to punish this sin. I have not called you to be filthy minded, but I want you to think pure thoughts. If any rebel against the rule of purity, they are not only disobeying man's laws but My Father's law and rebelling against the Holy Spirit who indwells them.

I didn't need to tell you to love your brothers since that was already taught in Scripture. Let your love grow toward other Christians and love them more in the future. Your goal is to live a quiet life, to work diligently at your task, and do faithfully all you are required to do. This way you will influence those who are not Christians and have enough money to live on.

Don't be ignorant of what happens to believers when they die, so you wouldn't grieve like the world that has no hope beyond the grave. Since you believe that I died for you and rose again from the dead, those who have died and sleep in Me will I bring with Me at My return. You who are alive at My return will not be raptured before those in graves, but they will be caught up first. For I will come down from heaven with a shout as loud as an archangel and as loud as a blast from a trumpet. Then those dead in Me will be the first to rise to meet Me Lord in the air. Then you who are alive and remain on earth will be caught up with them in the clouds, to meet Me in the air to ever live with Me. This promise assures you that you will live with Me forever. You want everyone to know about this prospect, so they'll face death and danger with courage and hope.

There is hope beyond the grave, "To be absent from the body is to be present with Me." And when I return, you will be with Me, your Lord and Savior, forever.

Characteristics of a Model Life

I will not tell you when I will return because “no one knows the exact time **5** of My return to earth.” All you need to know is that “the day of the Lord will come unexpectedly like a thief in the night.” When everyone is saying, “We have peace on earth,” sudden disaster will come like labor pains on a pregnant woman, and no one can hide from it. Everyone everywhere will be punished. You have known about My return, you are not in the dark about coming judgment, and you won’t be surprised. Believers are children of light and live in the daylight. You don’t belong to darkness and night. Do not sleep as some do, but watch and be sober. Those who live in the darkness of night will sleep and get drunk. You will be protected by the armor of faith. So nurture your love and wear the helmet of hope. My Father never meant for believers to experience wrath and tribulation that is coming. He meant to save you through My salvation. I died for you so that whether you are alive or in the grave, you will be protected by Me and live with Me. So be encouraged by this fact and encourage others.

Be considerate of those who minister among you as My teachers. Honor them and obey them, and do not agitate other believers.

You should pray for your church leaders so that the whole local assembly will prosper and will grow in Me. Pray for the success of your church leaders so that your church will grow spiritually and reach out to the unsaved.

Warn those not working for Me and give courage to those who are frightened. Give watch care to the weak, and be patient with all. Do not pay back evil for evil, but always do good to believers and unbelievers alike. Rejoice at all times, and pray constantly. Give thanks always to My Father for everything because this is what He expects you to do. Do not suppress the Holy Spirit from working in your life, but listen and obey the preaching of the Word of God. Do not be gullible, but analyze everything by the Word of God to determine what is true. Stay away from every form of evil and anything that tempts you to sin.

Grow in the abundance of My peace. Keep your body, soul, and spirit strong and blameless until I return to receive you. My Father is faithful to all His children to accomplish His purpose in their lives.

It's not your faithfulness, but My Father who dwells in you. He makes you faithful. When you are faithful in ministry, it is not you, but My Father is working His will.

Paul asks you, the believers, to pray for him and greet one another with a holy kiss. Read this letter to all Christians. My grace be with you.

I AM JESUS

Who Saves From Tribulation

My Second Letter to the Thessalonians



I led Paul to write this second letter to the Thessalonian church because some were “shaken in mind” and were “troubled” because they were going through persecution. They thought their trouble was the seven years of tribulation and they missed the rapture. This second letter tells them why the rapture hadn’t come yet. Then I outline the horrible things that will happen during the tribulation. I finally instructed the Thessalonians about the glorious event when “I come.” As you read this book, remember that I want you to look forward to My return as well as to continue doing your daily work.

Comfort Because They Are Being Persecuted

I Am Jesus, Who led Paul, Silas, and Timothy to write greetings to you, My church in Thessalonica that belonged to My Father and Me. Grace and

1 peace to you from My Father and from Me. Paul continually thanked My Father that your faith was growing and your love for others was manifested. He prayed that you would receive patience and faith when you faced trials and troubles.

Paul's constant determination demonstrated that My Father's care of you was correct and that you were worthy of the kingdom of God for which you now suffer.

My Father will punish those who persecute believers. He will reward those who are suffering by giving them an inner confidence and peace that all will receive when I appear from heaven with My powerful angels. I will come in flaming fire to punish those who reject Me and refuse to accept My good news of salvation. They will be punished in everlasting hell, forever separated from My Father's presence, never to see the glory of My kingdom. I am coming to be glorified and be seen by My saints who believe in Me.

Paul prayed continually that you will be worthy of My calling, and be the kind of followers I want you to be. Because this way My name will be glorified when others see the kind of life you live.

Paul thanked My Father because the faith of the Thessalonians was "growing exceedingly" and their love "toward each other was abounding." Isn't that My Father's plan for you that you continually grow in Me?

Antichrist and My Coming Back to Earth

2 Know that at My coming you will be gathered to Me. I do not want you to be alarmed by a false prediction, rumor, or any letters that claimed to come from Me. You have heard that the tribulation has already begun. You are confused because you are suffering more persecution than ever before, and you thought the tribulation had begun and I had returned and you had missed the rapture.

The tribulation cannot begin until the man of sin—the antichrist—is revealed and Christians in name only fall away from the faith. The

antichrist will oppose everything about My Father and exalt himself so that he is worshiped as God. He will sit in the temple of God claiming that he is God. The antichrist cannot come until the Holy Spirit is taken out of the way. That is because the Spirit holds back a full onslaught of evil in the world. But the One restraining sin—the Holy Spirit—will be removed when believers are raptured.

The antichrist will be fully revealed after the rapture, but I will eventually destroy him with the breath of My mouth and with the glorious appearance of My coming at the end of the tribulation. The antichrist will be satan's representative, full of demonic power and lying tricks. He will deceive all the lost people who don't have spiritual insight because they have already rejected the truth, and have chosen not to believe it. Then the Holy Spirit will send them a strong delusion so that they will believe satan's lie. They will all be punished because they refused to believe My truth and because they chose willingly to sin.

You will forever give My Father thanks because He loved you and chose you from the beginning to be saved. Now you are set apart to Me and to the truth. Be thankful for the good news that came to you and that you obtained eternal life through Me. Therefore, stand fast and hold on to the message that was delivered to My churches by word and by letters. Pray that your heart will be comforted and be established to do every good work for My heavenly Father, and for Me, Who loves you and gave you the hope of My return.

How to Live While Waiting for My Return

3 Pray that the Word of the Lord may spread quickly and be effective in winning many to Me, just as it is with you. Ask that you will be delivered from people who are evil and bigoted because they have no faith. Pray to be faithful and that My Father give you strength to guard you from the evil one. Pray that the Word of God will continue to be successful and turn many hearts to My Father's love as they wait patiently for My return.

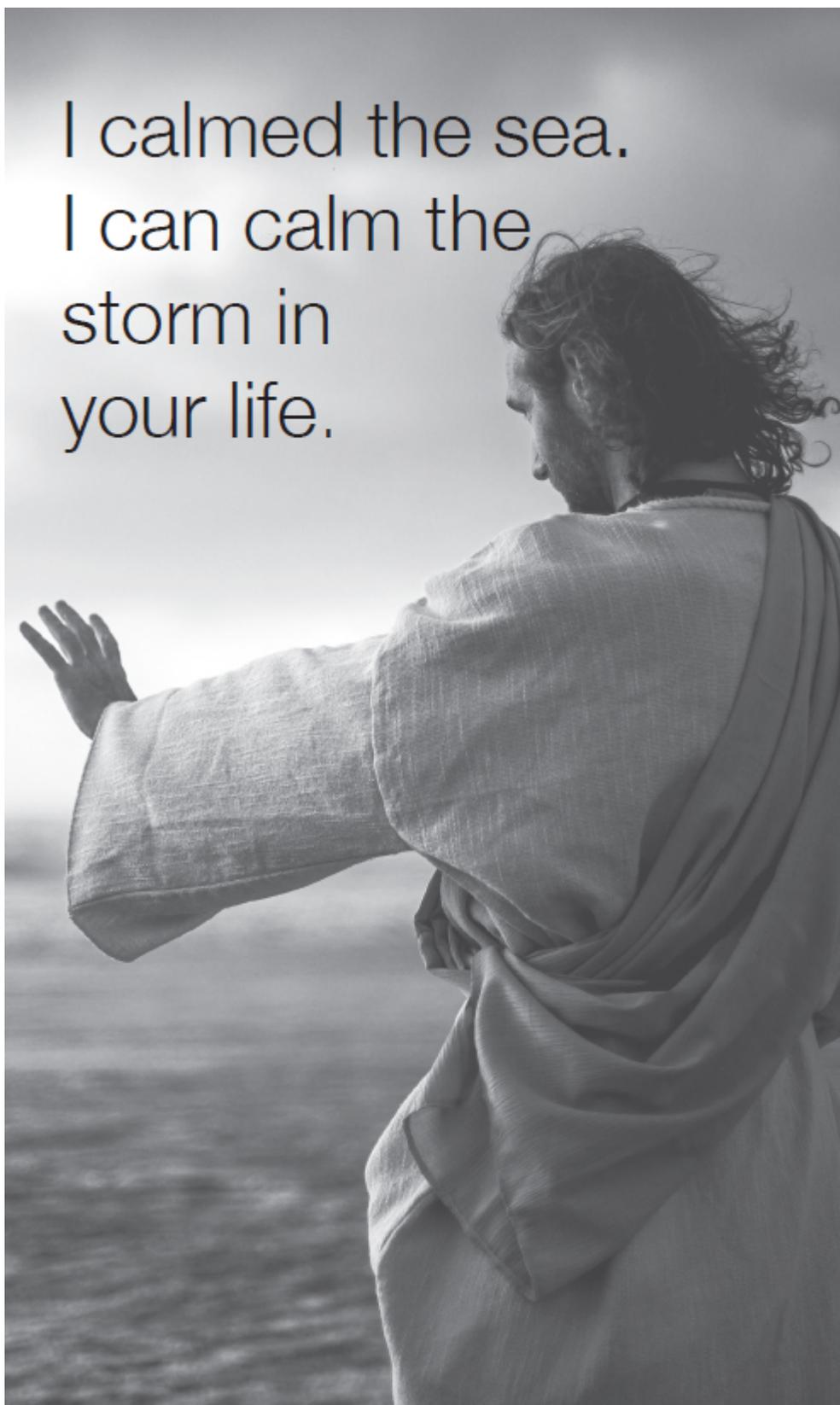
And now, dear brothers and sisters, I give you this command in My name, the Lord Jesus Christ: if any refuse to obey the command to work, have nothing to do with them, so they'll be convicted of their lazy ways.

However, the lazy one is not My enemy; rather, he is a brother who needs correction.

Paul, Silas, and Timothy were not idle when they were with you. They never accepted food from anyone without paying for it. They worked hard day and night so they would not be a burden to any of you. They certainly had the right to ask you to feed them, but they wanted to give you an example to follow. Even while they were with you, they gave you this command: “Those unwilling to work will not get to eat.” Yet some of you are living idle lives, refusing to work and meddling in other people’s business. I command such people and urge them in My name, to settle down and work to earn their own living.

Pray for peace every day. In every way, I, the Lord Jesus Christ, will be with you! In conclusion, Paul greets all of you, through Me, in his own handwriting to give genuineness to this letter. Finally, Paul prayed for My grace to be on you.

I calmed the sea.
I can calm the
storm in
your life.



I AM JESUS

The Victor in Spiritual Warfare

My First Letter to Timothy



I led Paul to write this letter, “So that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is My church.” Four times I use the keywords “faithful sayings” to remind them of the essentials of Christianity. As you read this letter, promise God that you will not stray from true faith in Me.

A Warning About Heresy

1 I Am Jesus, Who wrote through Paul to you, Timothy, his son in the faith. Timothy, you are an apostle by My command, and I Am your

Savior and hope. Grace, mercy, and peace from My Father and from Me, Jesus Christ your Lord.

Timothy, you are to stay in Ephesus to stop certain false teachers from spreading false doctrine, and spreading myths and genealogies that create controversy in My church. Rather, you should build up the faith.

Love comes from a sincere heart, a pure conscience, and believing faith. Some have drifted from these qualities and spend their time arguing about nothing, so they don't know what they're saying.

The law is good when applied properly to your life. The law was not given to keep good people in line. The law is aimed at rebellious people to teach them My truth, and point them to salvation. Thus the law is aimed at adulterers, perverts, slave traders, liars, and perjurers. It was written to those who deny the gospel, sound doctrine, and the truth that was committed to Paul.

Thank Me for giving you strength to serve My Father. When you are faithful, I will call you into My service. Before Paul was saved, he was a liar and curser, and he was against the faith; doing those things in ignorance. But I showed him mercy, so he became a believer and grace filled him with My faith and love.

This is a faithful saying, I came into the world to save sinners, and Paul was the greatest of them. My mercy was shown to him because I made him an example of My inexhaustible patience. As a result, other people have come to trust Me and gain eternal life. Give glory and honor to My Father in heaven, the only true God, He is immortal and invisible, forever and ever.

When you worship My Father, something essential happens. First, My Father comes to receive your worship because I said, "My Father seeks worship." Therefore, you can experience His presence as you worship Him. Then worship becomes a two-way street. His presence includes joy, confidence, acceptance, and peace. These things will become a part of your life when you worship My Father.

I remind you to do the things I Am telling you. These are truths spoken by prophets, so fight for them like a good soldier. Your weapons are faith and a pure conscience because some have denied their conscience wrecking

their faith, such as Hymenaeus and Alexander. I gave them to satan to punish them so that they won't bring shame to My name.

Instructions About Prayer and a Call for Right Living

2 Pray in every way for all types of people, interceding for My Father's mercy in their lives. Give thanks for His work in every area of people's lives. Pray for political leaders and government supervisors so you can live peaceably and follow holiness and honesty in your life. In this way, you fulfill your prayer obligation and will please God My Father. He wants everyone saved and learning the full scope of biblical truth. My Father is the only God and I, Christ Jesus, am the only Mediator between My Father and all people. I sacrificed Myself as a ransom for all people. This is the message of truth everyone must hear and believe. I appointed Paul as a preacher and apostle; no one can deny this. Paul was appointed to teach faith and truth to all.

Freely lift your hands in prayer to My Father, to free yourself from anger or jealousy.

There are four different ways to pray to Me. First is "plead," which means you pray to God because of personal needs. Second is "prayers," which means you approach My Father in "face-to-face" intimacy. Third is "intercession." This pictures a childlike confidence. Fourth is "giving thanks," showing your gratitude for what My Father has done for you.

I Call for Decency

Women dress modestly without being indecent or calling undue attention to yourself. Christian women should be noticed for their inner godly personality, not for their outward dress or fixing their hair, or gaudy jewels, or indiscreet clothing. Women do good works and listen to mature Christian women so you could be godly. Women don't teach men, putting yourself in authority over men. Quietly listen in church. Adam was created before Eve,

so My Father created men to be leaders. Eve was blinded, and then deceived by satan, but Adam sinned with his eyes wide open. Thus he was guilty and plunged the human race into sin. The women were punished with pain and suffering in giving birth to children, but they will be saved by trusting Me as Savior and then living quiet lives before Me.

Qualifications for Pastors and Deacons

3 If any man wants to be a pastor/leader, he desires a noble work. But he must be a good man; blameless, the husband of one wife, self-disciplined, hardworking, and obedient. Also, he must be courteous, a good teacher, and must open his home to visitors and guests. A pastor can't drink alcohol or be hot-tempered. But he should be courteous to people and gentle. He must not be greedy for money but must manage his family well. Because if a man can't make his family behave, he shouldn't be responsible for church behavior. A pastor must not be a new convert, because he may become proud and arrogant. Then God would condemn him as God condemned satan for his pride.

I have a list of qualifications for pastors/leaders and for deacons, and their wives. Do you measure up to My requirements? So grow in every area of your life to please Me and develop your abilities to serve Me acceptably. These are the ones I choose to serve Me.

Deacons should live by the same standard as the pastor of My church. Deacons should be respected by My church and do what they promise. Deacons should not drink alcohol, or be greedy for money. They must be conscientious Christians, believing and walking in faith. My church must examine them before putting them into the office of deacon. Deacons should be the husband of one wife, with happy, obedient families. Those who do a good job as deacons should be respected by all in My church. God will reward them with His blessings, for their faithful walk in Christ Jesus.

In the same way, the wives of pastors and deacons must be respectable, not gossipers, but faithful in every area of life.

Paul told you he wanted to be with you soon. But in case he is delayed, you must tell people how they should behave in My family—The church of the living God— because My church teaches and protects My truth.

This doctrinal statement is for all of My church to learn and believe. I appeared in a human body, I was anointed by the Holy Spirit, I was seen by angels, preached among the Gentiles, many in the world believed in Me, and then I was taken up into glory.

Doctrinal essentials of faith must include a correct view of Me. I was born of a virgin and lived a perfect life in My human body. I was seen by angels and preached to lost people as the only source of salvation. I ascended into heaven where I now sit at the right hand of God My Father.

How a Good Minister Should Live

4 The Holy Spirit tells clearly that in the last days some will turn away from Me. They will follow seductive spirits and will believe false doctrine that comes from demons. These false teachers will lie about the truth. They are hypocrites whose consciences are seared as though branded with a red-hot iron. They will forbid marriage and demand that people abstain from food. But I have created every good food to eat; so do not reject food, but thankfully enjoy it all. Bless it and give thanks. Following these principles, make your food acceptable.

Explain this to My church as a good pastor who knows the Word of God.

Do not waste time arguing with those deceived by godless myths and old wives tales. Develop your spirituality, and remember, some physical exercise is all right but do not go to extremes with it. Spiritual exercise is unlimited; it rewards you with a good life here on earth and will reward you in heaven. Give yourself diligently to ministry and take whatever suffering comes so that people will believe in Me. Remember, I died for you and live forever. Put your hope in Me along with all others who put their trust in Me.

Teach these things to everyone, and let no one ignore you because you are young. Be an example to all believers in your speech, behavior, love, faith, and purity. Discipline your time by reading the Word of God to people, and then preaching and teaching it to them. Use the spiritual gifts that came to you through the Scriptures and have been recognized by My church.

Put all your energy into your work, so everyone will see what I am doing through you. Be careful what you do and teach so people who hear you will be saved.

The Good Work of a Minister

5 Never speak harshly to elderly men, but speak to them respectfully as to a father. Speak lovingly to younger people as you would speak to those in your family. Treat elderly women as you would treat your own mother.

Instruct My church to take care of widows if they don't have anyone else to care for them. Their children or grandchildren are the ones who should take responsibility for them to repay the debt the young owe to their elders. A grateful heart pleases Me very much. But My church should especially care for widows when they have no one in this world to care for them. Then let them spend their nights and days in prayer, not running around looking for pleasure and entertainment.

Take care of people and do what is right. The ones who won't care for their needy relatives, especially those in their immediate family, have no right to call themselves Christians. They are worse than nonbelievers. Widows should be involved as special church workers when they are sixty years old, having been the wife of one husband. She must have been hospitable to others and helped those in trouble.

My church should not accept young widows because they will want to get married again. And people will condemn them for not keeping their promise to be a special committed church worker. Besides, young widows can become lazy, going from house to house gossiping and meddling in others' affairs. Young widows should re-marry, have children, and look after a home. Then no one can accuse them of anything. Some young widows have already turned from Me, having been led astray to follow

satan. The relatives of a widow must take care of her, and not expect My church to do it. Then My church can use its money to care for needy widows who fit the qualifications of genuine widows.

My church should give worthy pastors double consideration in paying them, especially those who preach and teach well. The Scripture says, “Never put a muzzle on the ox to keep them from eating. When they work to bring in the crop, let them eat as they work in the fields.” In another place, the Scriptures teach, “Those who work deserve their pay.”

You have special obligations to the pastor(s) of your church. You are to follow their example, obey their teaching, and, perhaps greatest of all, pray for them. You must pray that they are kept from satan’s temptations, that I use them to preach the Word, that they become godly examples, and that they manage well My church—the church of God.

My church should not listen to complaints against church leaders unless there are two or three witnesses. If My church leaders are wrong, rebuke them in front of My church before Me, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the holy angels. Be impartial whether they are friends or not, as a warning to all believers. Treat all people equally without favoritism for you are all equal in Me. Never choose a pastor too quickly because some faults may be overlooked. Therefore, your leaders will be an example for all to keep themselves pure from sin.

Quit drinking only water, but take some grape juice for digestion because of your frequent sickness.

Some people’s sins are obvious to all, long before a formal complaint is made against them. Others have sins that are not easily discovered until they actually come to light. In other cases, the sins of some will not be discovered until judgment day. The same truth applies to the good deeds that some do. They will not be hidden forever.

Warnings to a Minister

Workers should work hard for their bosses, and respect them in all ways.

6 Then My name and Christian expectations will not be laughed at by the world because you are lazy. A worker must not take advantage of his boss because he is a Christian. On the contrary, Christian workers must do better since they are helping their boss make their business effective and successful.

Teach these principles. Those who have different views are both selfish and ignorant because these truths are effective and based on My words. Those who question these truths stir up arguments that lead to anger, jealousy, and abuse. These people always cause trouble, and they never tell the truth. They use religion to get rich. You are truly rich when you are happy and satisfied with what I give you in life. You have brought nothing into this world, and you will take away nothing when you die. So, as long as you have food and clothing, you should be content. Those who are passionate about being rich are open to all types of temptations and get-rich-quickly schemes. Their financial lust will hurt their walk with Me and eventually destroy their life because the love of money opens people up to all kinds of evil. Those who spend their lives chasing wealth wander away from My standards for living and open up their souls to fatal wounds.

Because you are dedicated to Me, avoid the evils associated with money. Purpose to live a saintly life and seek to be filled with faith, love, and gentleness. Fight to put My Father first in your life and hold tightly to eternal life. This is your calling and commitment. So confess this to My church and before Me who had a good confession before Pontius Pilate. Do all that you say you will do so that no one can find any fault in you both now and in the future till I return. For at the right time I will come from heaven, being sent by My Father, the Almighty God. Remember, I Am King of kings and Lord of lords. I live forever, and I live in light so brilliant that no one has seen Me or can see Me. Recognize My honor and power, forever and ever.

Warn those who are rich in this world that they should not look down on others, nor trust in their money but trust in My Father who out of His riches gives all anyone needs to be happy. Tell rich people to use their money to do good. They are to be rich in good works, and to be generous and willingness to share with those in need. This way rich people can store up real wealth for themselves in heaven. This is the only safe investment in

life. Guard carefully the commission My Father has entrusted to you. Keep out of pointless arguments with those who show off their knowledge for they are not really that smart. They have missed the most important thing in life. They don't know My Father at all. May they continually experience My grace.



I AM JESUS
Living Right, Dying Right
My Second Letter to Timothy



I led Paul to write this letter from severe circumstances, knowing he would be martyred soon. Paul emphasized his personal life as My servant in a time of apostasy. He said, “All those in Asia have turned away from me,” and, “Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world.” Paul added a few personal items, “Do your best to come to me quickly.” Then Paul asked Timothy to bring a few items, “the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas and my scrolls, especially the parchments.” As you read this letter, be sure to find your daily strength in Me and in My inspired Word.

My Charge to Timothy

1 I Am Jesus, Who led Paul to write to you, Timothy. He was appointed by Me to be an apostle to preach eternal life to those who believe. You are a son in the faith to Paul. Grace, mercy, and peace from My Father and from Me, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul prays night and day as he longs to see you because he cried when you left him. Paul even remembers your genuine faith which was first in your grandmother, Lois, and then in your mother, Eunice.

Stir up the inner fire I gave you, which was evident at your ordination when Paul laid hands on you. I have not given you a spirit of cowardice but a spirit of power, love, and self-control.

You are given spiritual gifts to serve My Father. If you let the fire of enthusiasm die, then you need to pray to the Holy Spirit to revive your commitment and service.

Never be ashamed of witnessing for Me or ashamed of other Christians. Accept your share of hardships as you share the gospel, relying on My power to accomplish My Father's will.

The heart is deceitful and will mislead you; therefore, do not follow your heart but pray for boldness to testify for Me and serve Me. Use your testimony to bring people to salvation. In this will, I be glorified and you will receive rewards in heaven for your work for Me on earth.

I have saved you and called you to holiness, not because of anything you have done, but for My purpose and by My grace. My kindness and love was shed on you before the beginning of the world but was revealed when I abolished sin and proclaimed life by My death. You believed the gospel and received it.

Timothy, you are a preacher, and because you are an apostle to the Gentiles, you have also suffered hardships. Continue believing and be persuaded that the Holy Spirit is able to care for all you have entrusted to My Father until that day when I will return to earth for you. Continue to believe and live by the sound teaching you have learned from Scripture. Guard the special calling for your life. Trust the Holy Spirit, Who lives in you, to keep you faithful.

Phygelus and Hermogenes have refused to have anything to do with the gospel. Paul has prayed blessings on Onesiphorus' home because he was not ashamed of Paul's chains. Onesiphorus came to see Paul in jail and helped him when he was in Ephesus. Onesiphorus went to a lot of trouble to

find Paul when he was in Rome, so Paul prayed a blessing on him knowing he would be rewarded at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

How to Minister in the Day of Apostasy

2 Be strong in the grace that comes from Me, Christ Jesus your Lord. All the truth you heard from Paul among many witnesses, communicate to trustworthy people who in turn will be able to teach others also.

Accept difficulties as My good soldier. No soldier gets bound up with worldly things. He must always obey his commanding officer. Therefore, separate yourself from sinful things.

Endure hardness, like My good soldier. This includes self-discipline, trials, temptations, persecution because of your faith in Me, and natural difficulties in life.

An athlete cannot win a contest unless he keeps all the rules. Therefore, discipline yourself to obey Me to win the prize.

And a farmer gets first claim over the harvest of any crops he planted in his field; so work hard to get your part of the harvest.

Remember that I was a descendant of David. I died for you, and I was raised from the dead. This is the gospel for which, being persecuted, Paul was chained like a criminal, but the gospel is not chained. Paul suffered his persecutions for the sake of those who have believed the gospel, that they may be saved by Me and obtain eternal glory that comes to those who are saved.

This is a faithful saying that you can rely on and share with others. If you have died with Me on the cross, you will live with Me in heaven. If you hold firm in your profession of faith, you will reign with Me in glory. If you deny Me, I will deny you; if you become faithless, I am always faithful.

Remind everyone of this truth and do not argue with anyone over this statement of faith, because your argument will only confuse those who are listening. Study to know everything about the faith so you can be My approved workman.

Be a workman who does not need to be ashamed. In one sense, the quality of work you do is an extension of the quality of your character, so you must do your best at all times, in all situations, for all tasks.

Do not be ashamed of your ministry, but rightly handle the word of truth. Avoid foolish discussions that make people get angry and sin against one another, as it destroyed Hymenaeus and Philetus. They claimed the resurrection of the dead had passed, departing from the truth of My Father. Then they dragged others down with their self-destructive arguments. Even though there are false teachers, My truth is as solid as a rock. I know all who belong to My Father, and all who call on His name must avoid doing sinful things.

In a large home, there are all kinds of dishes. Some are made of gold and silver, others of wood and clay. Some dishes are used for special occasions; other dishes are used for ordinary things. Be a special dish used by Me your Master, and keep ready to do My good work.

Instead of giving into the lust of youth, seek holiness, faith, love, and peace in fellowship with all who call on My Father. Avoid foolish arguments that upset people and lead to quarrels. Do not quarrel with anyone, but be kind, be a good teacher, and be patient with all. Be gentle when you correct people who disagree with you, remembering that I can change their minds so that they will recognize the truth, escape satan's grip on them, and be free of his trap.

The Prediction of Apostasy and My Answer in Scripture

3 In the last days, before I come back, there will be dangerous times. People will be aggressively self-centered and greedy for money, boastful, arrogant, and scoffers. They will be contentious and ungrateful to their parents and lack any sensitivity for people. They will be inhumane, without love and without forgiveness, and they will be sarcastic, violent, and rebellious. They will hate anything good, but they will be treacherous,

rash, conceited, and addicted to pleasure, rather than lovers of My Father. They will say they are Christians and will attend church, but their lives will deny what they profess. Don't have anything to do with these people. Keep away from them. These types of people break up homes, having sex with those who are obsessed with sex, trying one fantasy after another. They continually try to educate themselves, but they never come to the truth. They defy the truth, just as Jannes and Jambres defied Moses. They have polluted their minds and have turned against the Christian faith. In the long run, they won't be very influential. Their folly will be their downfall, and everyone will see their rebellion.

Those who believe in My Father should also live godly lives, just as Paul demonstrated faith, patience, and love in a consistent lifestyle. Paul was persecuted in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra, but I rescued him from all of them. Therefore, anyone who tries to live a life dedicated to Me will be attacked.

Those who follow Me will suffer persecution. Therefore, pray for those being persecuted. Prepare yourself to remain true in persecution.

Wicked impostors of Christianity will go from bad to worse, deceiving themselves as they deceive others. Be true to the teachings of Scripture, remembering who your teachers were and what they taught you, just as Timothy remembered his teachers from childhood, making him wise in the Scriptures so that he accepted Me as his Savior and was saved. All the Bible was written by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and is useful to teach the truth, and points out what is wrong in your life, helping you do what is right. The Bible is My tool to prepare you in every area of your life so you can do My work.

Paul, My Faithful Servant

4 You will stand before My Father and before Me who will judge the living and the dead at My appearing when I set up My kingdom. Preach the Word continually, at every place, at all times, when it is suitable and

when it is not. Correct all false teaching and rebuke those who believe and spread it around. Encourage all people to do the right thing all the time, based on what My Word teaches.

Teaching a lesson is like planting a seed; it takes time to see fruit from your endeavors. You need to minister with great patience and careful instruction.

The time is coming when people won't listen to the truth but will seek out teachers who reinforce their sin. They won't listen to My Word but will live by their misguided rebellious ways. Be careful to always follow My principles, and always be ready to suffer for Me. Try to win others to salvation and do the things you should do.

Paul testified it was time for him to die. His life was being poured out as a sacrifice to My Father. He said, "I have fought a good fight to the end, I have run the race to the finish line, I have kept true to the faith." Now Paul expects the crown of righteousness that I will give to faithful witnesses and to all who anticipate My appearing.

Paul asks you to come to him as soon as possible. Demas has forsaken him. Crescens went to Galatia and Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with Paul. Bring Mark when you come and bring his coat from Troas and also his books and scrolls."

Paul has sent Tychicus to Ephesus. Beware of Alexander, the coppersmith because he bitterly contested what Paul was teaching. So Paul prayed, "Lord, repay him for the evil he has done."

No one was with Paul when he made his first defense before the judge. He prayed for those who deserted him, "May they not be judged for what they did." But I, his Lord, stood by him and gave him power so that the message of grace was proclaimed for all the unsaved to hear. On that occasion, I delivered him from being thrown to the lions.

Just as I delivered Paul, My servant, I will always deliver you from danger until it's your time to go to heaven.

Paul asks you to “Greet Prisca and Aquilla and the household of Onesiphorus. Erastus is in Corinth, and Trophimus is sick in Miletus. Greetings from Eubulus, Pudens, Linus, Claudia and the other believers. Come before winter. May the Lord Jesus Christ be with you, and may you have His grace.”



I AM JESUS

The Hope of Eternal Life

My Letter to Titus



I motivated Paul to write this letter after he and Titus journeyed to the island of Crete. Titus was left in Crete to “straighten out” the problems they found there. First, My churches were careless about essential doctrine, and second, My churches needed to organize and properly administer the work. Titus was a Gentile who was led to salvation in Me by Paul. Both of them worked together in Antioch before the Council in Jerusalem. Then Titus accompanied Paul on his trip. As you read this letter, note God’s concern for true teaching about Me.

Qualifications for Pastors

1 I am Jesus, Who led Paul to write to you, Titus, My servant. Paul is the slave of My heavenly Father and My messenger. I commissioned him to preach so people would have faith in the Word of God, and be transformed in this life and finally gain eternal life. I cannot lie. I promised this eternal

life before the world was created. Then, I revealed the gospel to Paul so he could share it with everyone.

Paul shared his ministry with you in Crete. Originally Paul led you to salvation. Now he prays for you to experience grace and peace from My Father, and from Me, his Savior.

Paul left you in Crete to organize churches and appoint pastors in every town.

The pastor must have unquestioned character and be the husband of one wife. His children must be believers, and he must not be charged with disorderly conduct.

A pastor will be My representative to the people. He must be blameless, never arrogant, short-tempered, violent, greedy, or a brawler. He must also be hospitable, friendly, self-disciplined, fair-minded, and dedicated. He must have a firm grip on the message of salvation and agree with My doctrine so he can teach sound doctrine to all, and refute those who oppose it.

There were many rebellious Christians in Crete who must be dealt with because they demand everyone to keep the Jewish ceremonial law. You must silence them because they were ruining whole families just to make money. A Cretian poet said, "Cretians are nothing but liars, dangerous beasts who live to fill their bellies." Therefore, correct them harshly and point them to sound doctrine so they will stop listening to Jewish fables and stop obeying rules that are man-made because these restrictions turn believers from the truth.

Those who are committed to purity will find purity in their search for truth. Those who are rebellious and evil will find corruption everywhere they look. They claim to know God personally, but their actions deny their honesty. They are outrageously rebellious toward Me, and they only do evil.

The Work of a Pastor

2 Teach sound doctrine and tell older men to be self-disciplined, dignified, and serious about the truth. Do everything patiently and quietly, but most of all, to be men of faith.

Teach older women that they must be holy in behavior and not gossip nor get drunk, but be teachers of godliness. Older women must teach the younger women to behave rightly, love their husbands, and love their children. Younger women must be sexually pure, gentle, keep their houses clean, and obey their husbands, so they don't disgrace the gospel with their lifestyle.

Younger men must behave and be serious about their duties in life. They should be an example of sincerity, honesty, and keep their promises so no one can accuse them of lying. They must not take advantage of others financially.

Workers, must be obedient to their bosses and obey the orders given by them. They must never steal anything from their employers but be completely honest at all times. Slaves must strive to be an example, like Me, in everything they do.

My grace is made available to the entire human race. Deny everything that leads to ungodliness and lust. But live carefully, obediently, and godly in this present world, looking for the blessed hope and My glorious appearing, your Savior, and God. I sacrificed Myself to redeem you from all contamination and wickedness. I have purified you to be My very own people, and I always want you to do the right thing. Teach these truths and then rebuke anyone who would not listen to him. And do not let anyone despise you personally.

When your correct someone, begin with prayer for the one you correct; for you to have the right attitude; for the problem to be corrected; and for the Father to be glorified in the process of correcting.

Command to Godly Living

3 Be obedient to government officials, and obey all civic laws, be ready to do good works. Do not slander government rulers, nor pick fights with them. Be courteous to them and be kind to all people. Remember that you were sometimes disobedient, foolish, and given over to your lust and pleasures and hated people.

Then My love was revealed to you, and you knew that I, your Savior, loved all people. It was not by works of righteousness that you were saved, but by My mercy. Your sins were washed away, and you were born again by the workings of the Holy Spirit in your life. He poured abundant grace on you when I became your Savior. I did this so you might be justified in My Father's sight, and become His heir, and joint-heirs with Me, looking forward to inheriting eternal life.

Rely on this truth and affirm it constantly so that they who believe in Me for salvation will be careful to maintain good works. This truth is good and will work for you and for all who believe it.

Do not argue over pointless questions, and genealogies, and controversies over the Jewish law. They are useless and cannot help anyone. If anyone quarrels about this truth after the first and second rebuke, put him out of My church. That type of person has already condemned himself and has rejected the truth.

Paul promises to send Artemas or Tychicus to you. Paul wants you to join him at Nicopolis where He plans to spend the winter. Make travel plans for Zenas, the lawyer, and Apollos. All believers must help others who have need. This makes them productive. Everyone with Paul sent greetings to you, and he finally prays, "Grace be with you."



I AM JESUS

The Forgiver

My Letter to Philemon



Onesimus had robbed his master Philemon in Colosse and escaped to Rome. Then, by My providence, he crossed paths with Paul who led him to faith in Me. Onesimus began serving Paul who was renting his own house, where he was continually chained to an armed Roman soldier. Eventually, Paul sent Onesimus back home. I led Paul to write this letter asking Philemon to forgive Onesimus and treat him as a “brother in Christ.” Paul could ask this because he had led Philemon to salvation in Me. This short letter is a picture of My redemption. Onesimus represents all who have sinned against God My Father. Philemon represents My Father. Paul, representing Me, intercedes to My Father to forgive the sin of Onesimus (a picture of your sins).

A Prayer for Forgiveness and Restoration

I am Jesus, who led Paul to write a letter with Timothy from prison in Rome to you, Philemon, a rich Christian in Colosse. The letter is also addressed to

1 your wife, Apphia, and to your son, Archippus, a church leader in the Colossian church.

May grace and peace be on your life from My heavenly Father and from Me, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul thanks God for you and has committed to continue praying for you, that you would keep trusting Me and develop a deep love for all believers.

Actively work at sharing your faith in Me with others. Then you will completely understand every good thing you have in Me.

You are fully committed to the work of My Father, and when you put this generosity to work, you will understand what you can really accomplish.

Your generosity has given Paul joy and comfort, and refreshment.

If Christianity is real it will impact every aspect of your life. People are watching you to see if your faith is real.

Paul's Plea for Onesimus

Paul boldly asks a favor from you, even though Paul could have demanded it because of all he has done for you. Paul asks that his request be received as from a friend, now an old man in prison for My sake. Paul requests kindness be shown to Onesimus, your runaway slave, whom Paul has led to salvation in My Name.

Onesimus was not much profitable to you in the past, but now Onesimus is profitable to both of you because he has been serving Paul in prison. Paul is sending Onesimus back to you, and part of his heart comes back with him. Paul really wants to keep Onesimus in Rome to do things for him that he couldn't do, because his chains restrict him. Onesimus could have helped Paul's ministry, and that would be your contribution to Paul, but Paul doesn't want to make Onesimus stay in Rome without your consent, nor does he want to force you to let Onesimus stay in Rome with him.

Onesimus ran away for a little while so you could have him permanently. Don't take him back just as a slave, but receive him as a beloved brother in Me. Onesimus will do more for you now as a brother

than he previously did as a slave because now he belongs to My Father and to Me.

Paul asks you to receive Onesimus as you would receive Paul. If Onesimus has stolen anything or cost you any money, Paul says, "Put that on his account, and he will repay it to you." Paul did not mention that you owe him your very life.

Paul trusts that you will respond positively, then added that you would do more than he asked. Paul added one more request: "Get a room ready for me, and pray God will send me to see you." Paul sends greetings from Epaphras, Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, his co-laborers. Paul concludes by praying, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you."

I AM JESUS

Who Gives Better

My Letter to the Hebrews



I am Jesus, Who led the writing of the book of Hebrews. Its purpose was to stop the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem and around the world from going back into the temple and resorting to Old Testament religious practices and celebrations. Some may have gone back into the temple because it was their religious heritage, or because of their natural commitment to friends and relatives who were not converted to Me. But the more they visited the temple, the more likely they were caught up in its practices, and this eventually would lead to backsliding. Therefore, the message of this book is that I am “better” than angels, better than Moses, better than the Sabbath, better than the priesthood, better than the covenants, better than the temple, and better than Old Testament heroes. As you read this book, commit yourself firmly to Me as your Intercessor, and be sure to grow daily in your faith in Me.

I Am Better Than the Prophets

Long ago, the Holy Spirit spoke in many different ways at many different times to past believers through the prophets, giving a partial picture of My

1 Father's eternal plan. But He spoke completely and finally through Me, the Father's Son, to whom He has given everything, and through whom He created the universe. I am the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature. My power sustains all things. After I provided forgiveness of sins, I sat down at My Father's right hand in glory.

During Bible times the Holy Spirit spoke through prophets, miracles, and many other means, but finally spoke the ultimate message in Me. Today, you get the complete message of My Father from the Scriptures. It tells of Me, the Savior, from the beginning to the end. When My Father speaks, you must listen and pray to understand (through scriptural insight) what He says to you. Then you must live by the message you have heard from My Father.

I Am Better Than Angels

I am much greater than the angels. My name—Jesus, Savior—is much greater than their names.

My Father never said to the angels, “You are My Sons. I have become Your Father.” He never said about the angels, “I am your Father, you will be My Son.” My Father said, “When I bring the firstborn into the world, let all the angels worship Him.” He said, “I make the angels swift as the wind, and My servants will punish with fire.” But about Me, the Son, My Father said, “Your kingdom, O God, will last forever and ever, and You will rule in righteousness. My Father loves righteousness and hates iniquity. Therefore, Your throne—is set above all others, and My Father will pour out the oil of righteousness on You.” My Father called Me His Son—Lord—when He said, “In the beginning, O Lord, You laid the foundation of the earth. The heavens were the work of Your hand. The heavens will vanish, but You, My Son, remain. They will wear out like old clothes, but You, My Son, will remain forever and Your years will never end.” He never said to any angel, “Sit at My right hand until I humble your enemies under your feet.”

No, My Father didn't exalt any angel, because they are spirits who minister to Him in worship, and they minister to those who will receive salvation.

My salvation is so much better than all the means used to save people in the Old Testament. I am the centerpiece of salvation, and you should worship Me, which means giving Me the worship that is due to Me. Worship Me because I became flesh to live among you as an example. Worship Me for My perfect life and life-changing teaching. Worship Me for suffering in your place and dying for your sin to give you forgiveness and cleansing. Worship Me for My resurrection that gives you new life. Worship Me because I became your High Priest who intercedes for you now in heaven.

First Warning Against Neglect

2 Pay careful attention to the biblical things you have heard so that you don't drift away from My Father. Because the message spoken by angels was true, and every disobedience has its own judgment, no one will go unpunished if he neglects My Father's salvation that is promised to him. The promise was first announced by Me and passed on to you by them who heard Me speak. I confirmed this message with signs, miracles, and gifts from the Holy Spirit and gave them to you.

I Am Better Than Created Man

My Father did not make angels the rulers of the world to come, but He made Me the ruler of everything. David said in the Psalms, "What is man that You are concerned about him, but You honor the Son of man? You made Him a little lower than angels so that You could crown Him with glory and honor, and You put everything under His feet. You left nothing that was not put under Your Son, yet at the present time, everything is not subject to Him." I, for a short time, was made lower than the angels, now I am crowned with glory and splendor in heaven because by My Father's grace I submitted to death for all humankind. It was His purpose to allow Me to suffer because, through My death, I brought many to heaven, and I became the leader of their salvation by My sufferings. You have been made holy by Me, now you have the same Father, and I am not ashamed to call you My brother and sister. For I predicted in Psalms, "I will tell My

brothers about My Father, and in their presence, I will praise Him.” At another place, I said, “I will trust My Father;” and again I said, “Here I am with Your children You have given Me.” Since all My Father’s human children have flesh and blood, I shared this same humanity, so that by death I could destroy the one who holds the power of death, that is, the devil. Thus, I freed all those held captive by the fear of death for their entire lives. My Father didn’t give this ministry to angels, but to the children of Abraham. Therefore, I became like man, that I might be a merciful and faithful intercessor to My Father for you and satisfy His wrath against you. Because I suffered willingly, even when I was tempted to by-pass the cross, I am now able to help you and others when you are tempted.

You should be grateful that I suffered in your place so that you do not have to suffer punishment for your sins. That doesn’t make you exempt from suffering in this life. The more you suffer for Me, the more My Father will shower you with His comfort through Me.

I Am Better Than Moses

3 Because My Father has set you apart for Me, and because He has chosen you by a heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Me, the Apostle and High Priest of your faith. I faithfully served as a priest just as Moses faithfully served My Father in the holy sanctuary. But I was worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder has greater honor than the house he built. Every house is built by someone, but My Father is the builder of everything.

Moses was faithful to his calling just as I was faithful to death. You should pray to be faithful to your calling. You have the examples of faithful biblical servants, and you have My indwelling strength to make you faithful.

Moses was faithful to serve in My Father’s house. His work was a type — an illustration—of My work that was coming, but I have complete

authority over My Father's house. And as a Christian, you are part of His house. So cling with confidence to that hope to the end.

My Second Warning Against Unbelief

When you hear His voice speaking to you, do not stubbornly resist My Father as Israel rebelled against Him and wandered in the desert forty years.

Today is the only day God can work in your life. Yesterday is past and is history. Tomorrow has not yet come. It is a goal for all that you do today. You can't serve Me tomorrow, at least not yet. But today is now. And perhaps now is the favorite word for service, for now, is the time I can do My work in your life.

In the desert, the Israelites constantly tested My Father and disobeyed Him, even though they knew what He did for them in the past. That is why He was angry with them and said, "Their hearts are hardened, and they refuse to obey Me. They shall never enter into the rest I have for them." Do not have a disobedient heart that rejects My Father.

Because you have an old nature that would pull you away from Me, you must protect yourselves with prayer and Bible study to keep your hearts from unbelief.

Listen to My Word today so you won't develop an unbelieving, stubborn heart. Faithfully trust Me to the end, just as when you were first saved, so you can share all the blessings I have planned for you. Do not harden your heart as Israel did in the desert. The Jews were the people who heard My voice and rebelled. They were the ones Moses delivered out of Egypt. They were those who made Me angry, so I made them wander in the desert forty years because of their sin. Their bodies were buried in the wilderness. Those were the ones I swore would never enter My rest. Why couldn't they enter the Promised Land? Because of their unbelief.

I Am Better Than the Sabbath

4 Since My promise of entering My rest still stands, be careful not to neglect entering My rest. I had the gospel preached to you just as it was preached to Israel, but they couldn't take advantage of it because of unbelief. Now you can enter My rest by faith, because I said, "I made an oath that those who will not believe Me, cannot enter My rest." My rest is waiting for you because I will finish My work. After I worked six days, I rested on the seventh day because I finished all My work.

I rested after the creation week on the seventh day as your example and as a promise to you. Obviously, you still have a seventh day of rest available to you, but I also promised a "rest for the people of God." I said, "Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

The promise remains for you to enter My rest today. Even though those who heard the gospel preached to them rejected it. I still warn, through the words of David, "Today, if you hear My voice, do not harden your hearts against Me." If the promised rest were only the land into which Joshua led them, I would not have later promised a different rest. There remains a Sabbath rest for you who read this letter. When you enter My rest, you cease from your labor, just as I ceased from My labor. Therefore, make every effort to enter My rest, being careful not to disobey Me as the Israelites did in the wilderness. My Word is alive and active, sharper than a two-edged sword, piercing the unseen things such as your soul and spirit, exposing your thoughts and attitudes for what they are.

I know everything about everyone. Nothing is hidden from Me so I will judge everyone. I know who will enter My rest.

I am Jesus, the Son of God. I have gone to heaven as your great High Priest, so hold fast to your faith. I, your High Priest, understand you and sympathize with your weaknesses because I was tempted in all parts of My being, just as you are, yet I did not commit sin. So come boldly to My Father's throne and receive mercy and find grace in your hour of need.

I Am Greater Than Human Priests

5 The human high priest was selected from among human men and was chosen to represent My people before My Father. I sympathize with the ignorant and those who make mistakes because as a mortal the high priest was subject to weaknesses. This is why the high priest offered sacrifices for his own sins before he offered them for anyone else. No one makes a choice to be a high priest. He is chosen by Me, just as Aaron was chosen.

So I did not make the choice to be the High Priest, but My Father chose Me, saying, “You are My Son, today I am Your Father.” Again, My Father said, “You are a priest forever in the priestly order of Melchizedek.” In My earthly days, I prayed with loud cries and tears to My Father who could save Me from death. I was heard because of My obedience.

Although I was with My Father, I learned obedience when I experienced suffering. It was after this experience that I became the giver of eternal life to those who obey Me. Then My Father declared that I am the High Priest after the order of Melchizedek.

Third Warning Against Disobedience

The Holy Spirit has more to say about the priesthood of Melchizedek, but you don't fully understand what is written. When you ought to be teachers, you are still students needing someone to teach you the elementary truths of Christianity. You needed milk, not solid food! Spiritual babies still live on milk not knowing how to live right because solid food is for mature Christians who, by training, can distinguish between good and evil.

Third Warning about Disobedience (Continued)

6 Don't stay with the elementary teachings about salvation, but go on to maturity in Me. Don't go back to your original repentance from sin, nor keep studying your baptism, spiritual gifts, the resurrection from the dead, or eternal judgment. Build your life on these foundational truths and grow beyond them to maturity in your daily walk with Me.

It's impossible for those who have been saved to go back to the temple to have their sins forgiven by a blood sacrifice. If a person knows Me, and tastes the heavenly gift, has been filled with the Holy Spirit, understands the Scriptures, feels the assurance of heaven, and he turns against Me, it's impossible to be spiritually renewed in the temple. When they sacrifice a lamb, it's like crucifying Me again and torturing Me anew.

When farmland drinks in the rain from heaven, it grows a good crop because it experiences My blessing. That's a picture of your spiritual prosperity. But if farmland keeps growing weeds and thorns, the land is worthless, and it might as well be cursed. That's a picture of a person who doesn't produce spiritual fruit.

I am persuaded better things of you, things that accompany salvation. I am not unjust. I will not forget a person's faith, nor his life, nor his good works.

Therefore, show the same diligence to the very end of your life, so you will get your full reward when you get to heaven. Do not become lazy, but follow the example of those who through faith and patience received the prize.

I Am Better Than Abraham

I will do what I promised. When I made a promise to Abraham, since I couldn't swear by any other, I swore by Myself. I promised to bless Abraham and give him many descendants. So Abraham received a son after waiting patiently for many years. People today swear an oath by someone greater than themselves to guarantee what they promise. Because I wanted to make it very clear to My Father's children what I would do, I guaranteed it with My oath.

I have given you two things: My promise and My oath. Since it's impossible for Me to lie, know without a doubt that you will receive eternal life that I have promised. You have this certain hope of heaven as an anchor for your soul because you are connected to Me who has gone before you to enter the most holy place in heaven where I intercede for you as your High Priest.

You should have confident hope. Why? Because My Father has promised you will live with Him, and “It is impossible for My Father to lie:” Because you have a safe anchor, and I have already gone to heaven, and you are “in Me,” so positionally you are actually in heaven. That gives you the hope of heaven that guarantees you will go where I am when you die.

I Am Better Than Melchizedek

7I became a priest after the order of Melchizedek, who was King of Salem and priest of My Father. I called My Father by the name El Elyon, Possessor of heaven and earth. When Abraham returned home after defeating the kings, Melchizedek interceded for him. Then Abraham gave Melchizedek a tenth of everything he gained.

The name Melchizedek means King of Righteousness, and the title, King of Salem, means King of Peace. There is no record he had any previous ancestors, or that he died. He is like Me, the Son of God, a priest forever. Melchizedek was great. Even Abraham, the father of the Jews, gave him one-tenth of all he had. The Old Testament required the descendants of Levi who became priests to collect one-tenth from all the people, that is, their brothers. However, Melchizedek did not trace his heritage to Levi, yet he collected one-tenth from Abraham and blessed him.

In the case of Levi, ordinary mortals received tithes, but Melchizedek, who received tithes, lives forever. Levi, who was in the body of Abraham, paid tithes to Melchizedek who lives forever. The Jewish priests, who came from the line of Levi, couldn't save you. God sent you Me, as a priest from the rank of Melchizedek, to save you.

I Am Better Than Aaron

For there to be a change of priesthood, there also needed to be a change of law. I, who became a priest, was from the tribe of Judah, not from the tribe of Levi. Moses didn't write anything about a person from Judah to serve as a priest at the altar. So My Father's method changed because of My new position as High Priest came from Melchizedek. I didn't become a priest

based on the requirements of Levi. I became a priest by the power of a life lived forever. The psalmist proved this about Me, “You are a Priest forever, after the rank of Melchizedek.” The former laws of the priesthood were set aside because they were weak and useless. The law never saved anyone, but now you approach My Father with a better hope. My Father promised that I would be an eternal priest. Remember that My Father never promised this about the Levitical priests. Only to Me did My Father say, “You are a priest forever, after the rank of Melchizedek.” Because of this oath, I now guarantee you a new and better covenant with My Father. Under the old system, there were many new priests who took the place of the older ones who died off. But I live forever and have a continuous priesthood so you can come to My Father anytime through Me, your Intercessor. Now, I am able to completely save you when you come to My Father since I live forever to make intercession for you.

I am now at the right hand of God My Father in My human body, scars and all. I died, was made alive, and ascended up into glory. In My physical body, I intercede for you today. My indwelling presence lives in your heart, and the heart of each believer and I live within My church.

I am the kind of high priest you need, one who is holy, blameless, and without sin, and I have access to My Father in heaven. I am not like human priests who need to sacrifice for their sins, first for themselves and then for others. I sacrificed only once for all the sins of the world when I once and for all offered Myself on the cross. The old law brought sinful men into the priesthood, but My Father’s oath brought Me into His priesthood. I am your eternally perfect priest.

I Am Better Than Aaron (Continued)

8 You have a High Priest who sat down at My Father’s right hand in heaven, who now serves in the heavenly tabernacle that was set up. Since earthly priests appointed by My Father offer gifts and sacrifices, I must also make offerings for sin, but My sacrifices are far better than the

Levitical sacrifices. Earthly priests serve in an earthly tabernacle that is a reflection of the one in heaven. When Moses built the tabernacle, My Father told him to build it after the pattern He showed him on the Mount.

I Am Better Than the Old Covenant

My ministry is far better than the former priest because the new covenant is far better than the old one. Why? Because the new covenant is based on better promises. If there were nothing wrong with the old covenant, there wouldn't have been a need for a new one. But My Father realized the old covenant was limited, so He said, "The day will come when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and Judah."

You have a more superior ministry of approaching God in prayer than Old Testament priests because you come through My transcending preeminence. "I obtained a more excellent ministry."

"It will not be like the old covenant My Father made with them when He led them out of Egypt. Israel did not keep their part of the covenant, so My Father canceled it. He promised to write the new covenant in their hearts, so they would know what He wanted them to do as His people. No longer would His people evangelize others saying, 'Know the Lord,' for all would know My Father, from the influential to the least important. He promised to forgive their transgressions and no longer remember their sins." Because He called this covenant "new," He made the old covenant obsolete and what is old becomes antiquated and disappears.

I Am Better Than the Old Sanctuary

9The old covenant had laws about how to worship, and the place to worship was a tent. Inside this sanctuary were two rooms. The first room, called the holy place, had the golden candlestick and a table of loaves of bread without yeast. Then there was the golden altar of incense that represents prayer, and a curtain that separates the two rooms. The second room was called the most holy place with the sacred chest which contained

a jar with some manna, Aaron's rod that budded, and a stone engraved with the Ten Commands.

I, the Lord Jesus Christ, entered in once into the holy place, through My death on the cross, and I obtained eternal redemption for you. Now, because of my death, burial, and resurrection, you don't have to come to an actual tent or building, but you can come directly to My Father in heaven. You come because all your sins have been forgiven, once and for all. You come shouting, "Hallelujah" for all I have done for you.

On each end of the chest were carved gold creatures with their wings stretched out over the lid of the chest called the mercy seat, the place atonement was made.

Many priests followed certain regulations, going into the outer room—the holy place—to carry out worship. Only the high priest entered the most holy place, once a year. He took blood with him for his and others' sins. The average person could not enter the most holy place so long as the old system of law was in place. Under the old system of law, the sacrifices and gifts had to be continually given for they never permanently cleansed the hearts of the worshipers. The old system of laws dealt with what foods to eat, how to wash, rules about a lot of little things that people had to obey until I brought in a better covenant.

I Am Better Than the Old Sacrifices

I came as the High Priest of a new and better covenant. I took My own blood into the most holy place in heaven and sprinkled blood on the mercy seat to permanently forgive all sins.

I did not take the blood of bulls and calves into heaven's most holy place, but with My own blood, I entered once and for all to obtain eternal redemption for all who believe. If the blood of bulls and calves could temporarily and outwardly cleanse those who were unclean, thus sanctifying them, how much more will My blood offered by Me cleanse you so that you can serve the living God?

Therefore, I offered this new covenant to all, so that they may receive the promise of an eternal inheritance. And don't forget that My death took away all the sins committed under the old system of law.

When a person dies and leaves a will that is in question, the death of the one who wrote the will must be established. Then people receive the things that were promised in the will. The first covenant became operational when dedicated by blood. Then Moses took blood and sprinkled everything having to do with the old law saying, "This blood seals the agreement between the Father and people." Moses then sprinkled blood on the tabernacle and all the instruments of worship. All things were sanctified by blood, and without the shedding of blood, there was no redemption. The tabernacle and instruments of worship are copies of the true tabernacle in heaven. The instruments on earth were purified with the blood of animals. But the tabernacle in heaven was purified with a better sacrifice. For I did not go into the earthly tabernacle, which is a copy of the heavenly one. I appeared before My Father in heaven for you. I did not offer Myself repeatedly as the earthly high priest has to make offerings every year for himself and others. No! If I did that, I would have had to suffer many times. But only once in time did I come to put away sin by the sacrifice of Myself. It is appointed that each person will die once, then be judged once. So I offered Myself once for sins for all. The next time I come, it will be to take you where you will sin no more.

I Am Better Than the Old Sacrifices (Continued)

10The old system of law was only a reflection of coming spiritual realities, not the realities themselves. The law could never bring the worshiper to spiritual maturity, even though it was repeated endlessly year after year. If the sacrifices sanctified the worshiper or made him mature, then they would have stopped bringing their sacrifices when they reached perfection. Instead, the worshiper had to recall his sin yearly, every time he brought a sacrifice because the blood of bulls and goats never took away sin. When I came into the world, I said, "Sacrifices and offerings didn't do away with sin, so You, Father, prepared a body for Me." It is written in Scripture, "I have come to lay down My body as a sacrifice for sin," and the

Scriptures said of Me, “I am here, I have come to do My Father’s will.” Now you have been made pure and clean by My death, who died for all, once and for all. Under the old law, the priest had to offer the same kind of sacrifice, day after day, which never took away sin. But I, your priest, offered one sacrifice for all time, to take away all sin, then I sat down at My Father’s right hand in heaven. Now I am waiting for My enemies to become My footstool. For by one sacrifice, I made those perfect who now claim power from Me to live holy lives.

Two forces are at work in your lives, “I made those perfect who now claim power from Me to live holy lives.” First, the word “perfect” is a once-for-all action that is the result of My sacrifice. You are born again, and you stand perfect before My Father. Second, there is still work for you the believer to do. The words, “to live holy lives,” shows you that you are separated from all that is evil to do all that is good. You were separated from evil, at your conversion, to do good. You were then given My power to do good today and the rest of your life here on earth. One day you will be separated from sin, all together, when I take you home to be with Me in heaven forever.

My Father said, “This is the new arrangement I will make after they did not keep the old system of law. I will put My laws in their hearts so they will want to obey Me.” Then He said, “I will no longer remember their sins and lawlessness. Because I have forgiven all sin, there is no longer need of daily animal sacrifices.”

Therefore, child of God, you can walk right into the most holy place, into the presence of My Father, by My blood. You have a new and living way into My Father’s presence, through the offering of My body which tore the curtain down. I am your new High Priest, draw near to Me with a true heart and confident faith because your heart is clean by My blood. Hold fast to your confession of faith because My Father is faithful. You will motivate other believers to love and do good works as you assemble weekly with other believers to motivate them to serve My Father as you do.

There are three conditions for “drawing near to God.” First, you must have a “true heart,” which means an honest attempt to relate to God. Second, you must come in “full assurance,” which means “you believe that God exists.” Third, “having your hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience,” you come to Me sincerely because you are cleansed by My blood.

Fourth Warning Against Rejection

If anyone sins after he has been given knowledge of the truth of the new covenant, there is no forgiveness in the animal sacrifice of the temple. They have only the terrible judgment of My Father and His raging fire that will punish rebels. If those who rejected the law of Moses were killed without mercy, how much more severely will those be punished who trample Me—the Son of God—underfoot and considered My blood unworthy. This insults Me who worked in their hearts. My Father said, “Punishment belongs to Me,” so I will repay. Also, the Scripture says, “Because My Father will judge His people, it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

Many believers had suffered when they first believed for they stood in the face of insults and violence. And sometimes they suffered because they stood with other believers who were being persecuted. They not only were persecuted because they stood with those in prison, but their goods were stolen, yet they knew they had better possessions in heaven. Do not let your confidence fade away, knowing you will be richly rewarded in heaven. Persevere, so that when you have done My Father’s will, you will receive what I have promised.

In a little while, I—the Coming One—will come and not be delayed. Do what the Scripture directs, “The just will live by faith, and if he shrinks back, My Father will have no pleasure in him.” Do not turn back from following Me. Your faith assures you that you will be saved.

The Superiority of Faith in Me Alone

What is faith? It is the confidence that what you have worked for will happen. Your faith makes things certain that you can't see. Because of **11** your faith, you know the world was created by Me so that things that are seen came from things that are not. Because of Abel's faith, he brought a better offering than did his brother Cain. Abel pleased My Father, and He accepted Abel by receiving his sacrifice, and you can learn lessons of faith from Abel, even though he is dead.

Because of Enoch's faith, I took him to heaven without dying. No one could find him for I took him away because I was pleased with him. You can't please My Father without faith, so come to Him because you know He exists and you know My Father will reward those who earnestly seek Him.

To get your prayers answered, you must please Me. You do that by believing I exist. You come to Me knowing I live, knowing I will hear you, and knowing I can answer when you pray according to My will. Remember that you can't find Me if you don't search with all your heart.

Because of Noah's faith, he warned people about a flood he had never seen. Then he built a boat to save his family. The faith of Noah condemned the world, and his faith gave him a basis to claim My righteousness.

Because of Abraham's faith, he obeyed My call when he left his home to go where I led him, even though he didn't know where he was going. Because of his faith, Abraham settled down in the Promised Land like a stranger in a foreign country, living in tents as did Isaac and Jacob who were heirs with him. Because of his faith, Abraham confidently looked forward to living in a heavenly city that would be built by Me. Because of his faith, Abraham was able to become a father when he was too old to have children. And Sarah, who was barren, had faith to bear a child because she realized that when I promised a son, I was certainly able to do what I said. So the whole nation of Israel came from Abraham when he was too old to have a child. Eventually, the nation of Israel had so many children that it was like the stars of heaven and the sands of the seashore, they can't be counted. Because of the faith of these people, they continued to look forward to the home I would provide for them, even though they never received it down on this earth. They confessed they were only visitors and

strangers in this world. If they liked the old country better than the one promised by Me, they would have found a way to return. But they were looking for a place—a heavenly place. That is why I am not ashamed to be called their God, and I have prepared a city for them.

Because of Abraham's faith, when he was tested, he offered up Isaac as a sacrifice to Me. Abraham believed My promise that if he offered his only son as a sacrifice, I would raise him from the dead because I had promised that from Isaac would come the whole nation of Israel.

Because of Isaac's faith, he knew I would bless his two sons, Jacob and Esau, after his death.

Because of Jacob's faith, he blessed Joseph's two sons as he steadied himself with his staff to worship Me.

Because of Joseph's faith, when he was about to die, he predicted the exodus of Israel from Egypt and instructed that his body would be buried in the Promised Land. Because of Moses' parents' faith, they hid him for three months after he was born because they realized he was an extraordinary child.

Because of Moses' faith, he refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. Moses chose to suffer the affliction of My people rather than enjoy the pleasure of sin for a short lifetime. Moses considered that My "reproach" was better than inheriting the riches of Egypt because he looked forward to the reward I would give him.

Because of Moses' faith, he left Egypt and wasn't afraid of the king's anger. He would not turn back because he saw God, who is invisible. Because of Moses' faith, he began the Passover and sprinkled blood on the doorpost so the destroyer wouldn't touch the firstborn of Israel, but the firstborn of Egypt died that night. Because of faith, Israel walked through the Red Sea on dry ground, but the Egyptians drowned when they tried to follow them.

Because of faith, Israel walked around the city of Jericho, and the walls fell down. Because of the prostitute Rahab's faith, she received the spies and was not killed with the rest of the inhabitants.

There's more to be said about the faith of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, Samuel, or David, or the prophets. Because of the faith of these men, they conquered kingdoms, did what was right, and received what I

promised. They were not harmed by lions, or the fiery furnace, and were protected in battle. Some were given strength to be brave in battle. They defeated foreign armies, and women received back their dead. Others were tortured to death, knowing they would rise again from the dead to a better life. Others were mocked, beaten with whips, and chained in dungeons. They died by stoning, being sawed in two, and put to death by the sword. Some were homeless and wore skins of sheep and goats. They were destitute and ill treated. The world was not worthy of those who lived in deserts, caves, and ravines. These were all heroes of faith, yet none of them received their reward in this life. I have something better for them, but they had to wait to share something even better.

The Superiority of Faith in Me (Continued)

12 These many leaders of faith mentioned previously, are like a large crowd telling you to also run the race of faith. Strip off everything that weighs you down, especially any sin that would trip you up. Steadily run the race without losing sight of Me, your leader, who was willing to die a shameful death on the cross because I knew the joy that was coming in the future. Now I sit at My Father's right hand in heaven.

The Christian life is pictured as a race that must be run with patience. The secret to running is not your style or pattern of steps. It's not keeping up with others, and it's not beating others. It's looking unto Me. So, you must lay aside every sin that would hinder you or anything that would slow you down. Continue running your race.

Fifth Warning of Coming Punishment

When you think of the way I endured such torture by sinful men, do not give up. After all, you have never had to take a stand for Me to the point of shedding your blood.

Do not forget God's words of encouragement to you, "Do not be discouraged when He rebukes you because He disciplines those He loves

and punishes everyone acknowledged as His child.” Suffering is part of your training because He will treat you as His child. And what child is not corrected by its father? If anyone is not corrected by God My Father, then he or she is not His child. He is an illegitimate child and not His true child. Moreover, many have had wicked human fathers who corrected them. Therefore, you ought to be willing to submit to your heavenly Father. Your human father’s punishment prepared you for life on earth, but I am preparing you to live a holy life and for heaven itself. Punishment isn’t enjoyable at the time you receive it, but it makes you live right and submit to the laws of men so you will live in peace and develop character.

Therefore, hold up under My discipline so you’ll not be weak. Be strong. Stand firm on shaky legs, then those who follow you will not stumble but will walk strong. Do everything possible to live peaceably with everyone, and live a holy life, because without it no one will see Me.

Make sure other believers don’t miss My grace, and that no bitterness grows in My church to cause trouble and poison the assembly. Make sure no one is sexually immoral or ungodly like Esau who sold his inheritance for one meal. Afterward, Esau wanted his inheritance but was rejected even though he begged for it with tears.

My Presence Is Better

You don’t come again to a mountain that burned with fire or to a religion that was dark and gloomy. There they received the first system of law, that is, the old covenant. You don’t listen to a trumpet blast that was so scary that the people begged it to stop. You don’t fear a mountain, “So that even if an animal touched the mountain, it had to be stoned.” The experience was so terrifying that Moses said, “I am afraid,” and he trembled with fear. You come to Mount Zion, My city, and the heavenly Jerusalem. You come into My holy presence where millions of angels gather to worship My Father. You come with all My church into My city—heaven itself—where everyone is a first-class citizen. You come to your Father, the judge of all people. You join the spirits of all the redeemed who possess their inheritance. You come to Me, the Mediator of the new covenant, whose blood intercedes better than Abel’s sacrifice.

Sixth Warning of Future Judgment

Never refuse to listen to Me when I speak, as those who refused to listen to Me in the Old Testament and were punished. How much more will those be punished who go back to temple worship? In the future, I will send an earthquake to shake the earth. I promised, “Once more I will send an earthquake, not to shake the earth only, but heaven also.” This means that at the final earthquake, everything will be removed that is not permanent. Only the things made by Me will remain. You are part of the kingdom that is unshakeable: therefore, serve My Father with worship and thankfulness. Worship My Father but always with reverence and fear, because His fire of judgment is always burning.

Faith in Me Is the Better Way

13 Love Christians with brotherly love and be hospitable to strangers because you may entertain angels without realizing it.

Be concerned for those in prison as though you were there, and remember those who are ill treated, because you know how they feel. Honor the sanctity of the marriage vows because the marriage bed should be kept pure. I will punish adulterers and sexually immoral people. Live free from greedy lust for money and be content with what you have.

I have promised, I will never leave you, or forsake you. But you sometimes feel alone or alienated. Perhaps it's your sin that makes you feel that way. So, don't live by your emotions. Approach Me in view of the fact that I said, "I will never leave you." If sin has broken your fellowship with Me, confess it immediately, then enter My fellowship again.

Because of My promise, “I will be your helper, do not be afraid of what anyone can do to you.”

Respect church leaders who teach the Word of God. Remember their example and imitate their godliness. Rejoice that I am always the same, yesterday, today, and will continue forever. Do not be sidetracked by

strange new doctrines. Realize your spiritual strength comes from Me, and you will not become godly by any rules you keep. You are fed by the food that I give you. No one can get spiritual strength by going back to the temple. Those who do, won't be fed by Me.

The bodies of animals, whose blood is still used for sacrifice, were burned outside the city of Jerusalem. So I suffered outside the gate of Jerusalem to offer My blood for you and all who come to Me for salvation. Go to Me outside the temple and outside the city walls: there, identify with Me and bear My shame. Realize that there is no permanent city for you in this life. So look for an eternal city that will come in the future. Therefore, offer your worship to Me to magnify My Father.

Continue to do good deeds and share with others because I am pleased with that sacrifice. Continue to obey your church leaders and follow their directions because they give an account to Me of how well they watch over your soul and others. Obey them, so they will enjoy their ministry because you would be the loser if you cause them grief. Have a clear conscience in this matter, and act honorably in every way.

The writer asked for prayer that he could visit the readers. Now, pray that the God and Father of peace—the One who brought Me, the Lord Jesus, back from the dead to become your great Shepherd of the sheep—equip you thoroughly to do His perfect will by My blood of the everlasting covenant. Let Me work in you everything that will please My Father. To Me, Jesus Christ be glory forever and ever.

The writer asked the readers to listen patiently to this letter because it is a short one. Timothy has been released from prison and will come to see them. Also, he will come with Timothy. The Christians in Italy send greetings to the readers.

I AM JESUS

Who Saves You

My Letter From James



I inspired James, My half-brother, to write encouragement to Jewish believers who were going through various tests and trials in their Christian life. My Fathers children were tested so they would become stronger, and through difficulties, they can demonstrate the genuine nature of their faith. A person's outward "religion" was proof of My transforming faith. James is stating that if you have experienced My free grace, you will demonstrate it by your actions or good works. As you read this book, ask yourself if others can see that you believe in Me by what you do and say.

Preparing for Trials

I am Jesus, Who wrote this letter, through James, to Jews who were being persecuted and were scattered abroad outside the Holy Land. I wanted to

1 prepare Christians everywhere for suffering.

Rejoice when you suffer, even when you fall into every type of trial because trials will build your patience. Let patience have its perfect work that you may have complete faith, wanting nothing.

When you lack wisdom, ask Me for it, because I liberally give you spiritual understanding, and you will know that you receive it from Me. But you must ask with unwavering faith because those who are unstable are like the unpredictable waves of the ocean, driven by the wind. The vacillating man will not receive anything from Me because a double-minded person is unstable in everything.

I will honor your prayers when you ask with confidence. You will be heard even before you pray. Confident-praying is based on these facts: you've met the conditions of praying, you diligently ask, you have no willful sin in your life, and you are living in fellowship with Me. I will teach you to pray properly for the right request and keep you from asking for wrong things.

Humble yourself and take a low position. I will lift you up for My purpose. Those who exalt themselves, as the rich, will be like the flower that is temporally here and then dies and is gone. Because the sun burns them and they wither with the grass, their beauty is destroyed in the same scorching heat. In the same way, the proud will be destroyed. I will bless you as you endure the trials that try you. Then you will receive the crown of life for enduring persecution which I have promised to those who continually love Me.

When you are tempted to give up, you can't say I tempted you; for I cannot be tempted by evil, neither do I tempt anyone to evil actions. People are tempted by their own sinful desires that drag them away and entice them to sin. When evil lust is planted and grown, it brings forth sin; and when sin is fully grown, it brings death. Don't be deceived. Just know that every good gift is from above; coming down from Me and from the Father of Light. I give you spiritual birth, through the Word of truth, that you might be a firstfruit of praise to My Father's glory.

Throughout your life, your faith will be tested in many ways, in all parts of your being. But true faith will withstand testing and glorify Me. I will give you the courage to withstand this testing. When your faith is tested, you can look to Me as your example and the goal of your life.

You must realize that all the good things in life come from Me because I love people. I want to make them better. I want to bring people to repentance and faith in Me. Just thank My Father for the good things I give. Receive them from Me and praise Me for My continued goodness to you.

I tell you, be quick to listen, slow to speak, and even slower to become angry because anger does not produce a righteous life. Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and evil intent that is prevalent everywhere. Humbly accept the implanted Word that saves you. Do not merely listen to the Word, because that is not enough. Do what it says! Those who merely listen to the Word and don't obey it are like people who look at themselves in a mirror and forget what they see. I want you to look intently into the perfect law of liberty. I will bless you if you don't forget what you see there and if you continue to obey what you learn there.

You do not find happiness just seeking it so that you may be happy. Happiness is not a valid goal in life. You find happiness on the road to duty. When you seek to grow in Me, serve Me, and glorify Me, you will find happiness in relation to achieving your goal. While there may be momentary times of happiness, it is not the same as lasting peace, joy, and contentment that you get from Me. I say to you, don't pray to be happy, but pray that you may grow to be like Me, serve Me, and be able to worship Me. When that happens, you get peace and contentment from Me. Then happiness flows into your life.

Some people appear to be religious, but they can't control their speech. Their religion is empty. To have pure religion and be clean before Me, you must minister to the needs of orphans and widows and keep yourself unspotted from the world.

Your Good Works Demonstrate Your Faith

2I say to you, do not segregate yourself from any person, but accept everyone equally. Do not show partiality to those who are rich or finely dressed, nor look down on those who are poor and dirty. I will not bless those who accept only people in rich apparel and who reject the poor by making them sit in a segregated place or stand in the back of the crowd. Those who show partiality are judged by their evil thoughts. So accept all people equally, and reject those who segregate themselves against any. I love the poor of this world, many of whom are rich in faith and heirs of My kingdom which I promise to all who love Me. Those who despise the poor will eventually have some rich man oppress them and deliver them to judgment. These rich men blaspheme My very name by whom all believers are called. I say to you, obey the second part of the royal law found in Scripture, “Love your neighbors as you love yourself.”

My royal command tells you to love others as you love yourself, but that is sometimes difficult to do. Self-love is at the core of your existence. So, you must pray for a change of attitude about people, to crucify your self-exaltation. Also, pray for strength to love others, and pray for specific people whom you ignore or despise.

But if you reject anyone, you are guilty of sin, and you have broken the law. If you keep the whole law but break just one point, you have broken all the law. I said, “Do not commit adultery,” and “Do not kill.” If you do not commit adultery, but you kill, then you are a transgressor of the whole law. You will live by the law and speak it because you know that you will be judged by it. I will judge those without mercy who have shown no mercy, but those who show mercy will persevere in judgment.

I say to you, “It is not good to minister by faith if you don’t have good works to go with your faith.” If a brother or sister doesn’t have bread and is naked, and you say, “Go in peace, be fed and be clothed,” but you do not give them what they need, what good is your faith? If your faith doesn’t result in good works, it is dead because it has no fruit. If you tell anyone, “You have faith, and I have works,” he will try to show you his faith without works, but you will show him your faith by your works. You can

say that you have faith because you believe in God, that's all right, the demons believe in God, but they tremble. You can't prove you have faith without works. I say to you, your father Abraham was justified before others by works when he offered his son on an altar. Therefore, he demonstrated perfect faith by works.

Your faith is useless if it is not proven by the good works you do for others. I tell you, "Faith if it has not works, is dead." You validate your faith when you are moved to serve others.

Then the Scripture was fulfilled that said, "Abraham believed in God, and it was counted to him as righteousness. Therefore, he was called a friend of God." Now, you see how a person is justified by works, not by faith only. I say to you, Rahab, the harlot, was justified before others by works because she protected the Jewish messengers and directed them away from the soldiers of Jericho. Just as a body without a soul is dead, so faith without works is also dead or useless.

You Must Control Your Tongue

3 I say to you don't be just a teacher in position only because teachers are judged by a higher standard. Just know that you can offend in many ways. If anyone doesn't offend by his speech, he is perfect because when he controls his mouth, he controls his whole body. People put bits in horses' mouths to control them. This is the way to turn around a horse.

A great ship is driven through the sea by fierce winds, yet the ship is turned around with a small rudder. The ship goes wherever the captain decides. In the same way, the tongue is a little thing, but it can boast great things and cause great trouble. It's like a little flame that can start a great fire.

I want you to discipline your whole body by learning to discipline your tongue. Why? Because the tongue, which is small, controls the actions of the whole body.

Therefore, your tongue can spread sin throughout your body, just like a little flame can start a forest fire. So your tongue can defile your entire life if you don't realize it is a fire from hell. People have been able to tame every kind of animal, and birds and snakes, and things in the sea, but no one is able to tame the tongue; it is uncontrollably evil and a deadly poison. With your tongue, you can bless Me, even My Father, or you can curse people, who are made in Our image. Out of the same mouth come blessings and curses. This is wrong! Can a fountain give salt water and fresh water? Obviously not! Can a fig tree produce olives? Obviously not! Can an olive branch produce figs? Again no! So, you cannot bless God and curse men!

If there is a wise man, I want to see his wisdom in his conversation with other people. I want to see his meekness and wisdom by the things he says. Those who are bitter and envious and start arguments are full of self-glory, and they lie against the truth. Their wisdom doesn't come from heaven; it comes from the earth. Their wisdom is fleshly and devilish because they produce arguments and confusion and evil. I give you the wisdom that is from above. My wisdom is pure, then peaceable, and gentle, and it will listen to others. I give you wisdom that is full of mercy and good fruits, impartial to anyone and not hypocritical. I give you the fruit of righteousness that is sown in peace. I want you to be a peacemaker.

You must ask for help to live properly by asking for the Holy Spirit to take away your spiritual blindness so you can use what you know.

The Danger of Worldliness

4 I say to you, don't fight other believers because these battles come from your old nature that makes Christians fight one another. When you lust, you don't get what you want. People destroy others and don't get the things for which they pray. People fight and argue and still don't get the things for which they pray. You do not have what you pray for because you don't ask rightly. Sometimes you ask and don't get what you request because you ask wrongly to satisfy your lust.

I tell you this, that people who commit adultery are friends of the world and they hate Me. I will help you realize that those who are friends of the

world are My enemies. I want you to know that the Holy Spirit, who is in you, has a strong desire that you live a holy and godly life. So, let Me give you more grace to repent of evil. I want you to know that I give grace to those who humble themselves, but I resist the proud. Submit yourself to Me, resist the devil so that he will flee from you, and then you will have power from Me.

Draw near to Me, as I draw near to you. Cleanse your hands from sin, and purify your heart from double-minded thinking. Be sad and mourn over your sin, and don't laugh over it either, because sin is a serious thing. Humble yourself in My sight so I can lift you up.

My greatest passion for you is that you draw near to Me, that you have continual fellowship with Me. It is an invisible act of the heart.

Don't speak evil of other believers. Those who say evil things about a believer and judge a believer actually hate the law. The law prohibits you from judging one another, and those who don't obey the law actually hate the law. I am the only Law-giver, and you are accountable to Me. I can free or judge. I judge correctly. I can take away all bitterness and give you love for all.

Do not say that tomorrow you will go to a certain city and live there a year, buying and selling different things because you don't know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? It is like steam from a kettle that's seen for a short time, and then it disappears. Therefore, here is what you will say, "If You, Lord, permit me, I will live and do certain things within Your plan for my life. I will not take confidence in my boasting because boasting is evil. Since I know what's good, it's evil if I don't do it."

Because I Am Coming—Pray

5I want you to know that all proud people will soon suffer misery. Therefore, they ought to weep and moan for coming judgment. The riches they trusted are corrupt, and their fancy clothes are moth eaten. The tarnish on their gold is a witness against them. Their treasures will condemn them, and their flesh shall be eaten with fire. I hear the weeping of the

workers who harvest the field of the rich because they are defrauded. The rich live in pleasure and fulfill their lust. The rich condemn and “eat up” good people who do not resist them. But the rich have only fattened themselves for slaughter.

At the same time, the poor must be patient until I come. Just as the farmer waits for his crops to grow, and as he waits through the spring and falls rain, so the poor must wait for My coming judgment.

Patience is a fruit of the Spirit, so pray to develop godly patience, to reflect My nature, to give evidence that you trust Me to control your life, to become a Christian testimony to others, and to become more godly.

Do not envy what other people have because I Am the Judge standing at the door. You will also learn from the prophets who have spoken My Word. They were blessed because they endured trials. They are your example to teach you patience in suffering. You have heard of the patience of Job, and you know what I do for those who endure suffering. I am very tender and kind to them. I will help you endure all your circumstances. I say to you, do not swear in trials or pain neither by heaven nor earth. Let your yes be yes and your no means no because you don't want to be condemned by your speech.

Pray when you are afflicted, and if you are superficially merry, read the Psalms to understand the severity of life. When you are sick, call for the elders of My church so they can pray over you and anoint you with oil in My name. Know that the prayer of faith will save the sick and I will raise them up. If the sick will confess their sins, and pray for one another, the sick will be healed, and when they have committed sins, they will be forgiven. Know this, that the continuous sincere prayer of a righteous man will accomplish much. Elijah was a man subject to the same weakness as you, but he prayed continually that it might not rain and it didn't rain for three and a half years. Elijah prayed again, and I gave rain from heaven, and the earth brought forth fruit.

I say to you, if any believer strays from the truth and I restore him, I not only turn around a sinner from the error of his ways but also save a soul

from death and hide a multitude of sins.



I AM JESUS
When You Suffer
My First Letter From Peter



I inspired Peter to write this letter to suffering believers in Asia Minor. They were driven out of their homes in areas that My Apostle Paul evangelized. The theme is victory in the midst of suffering. The book has a threefold message: living for Me while suffering in light of your full salvation, your suffering in light of the new position you have in Me, and serving Me in light of My return. As you read this book, decide to do your best to live a holy life as you look forward to My return and the reward I promise to give My followers.

Your Full Salvation

1 I Am Jesus, Who led My apostle Peter to write this letter to you, Jewish Christians who were scattered throughout Turkey.

You were chosen by My Father's foreknowledge, sanctified by the Holy Spirit, and cleansed by My blood. You have obeyed Me in thought and action and enjoy My grace and peace more and more.

All honor and praise to God My Father in heaven because of His great mercy. You have been born again into My Father's family and given eternal life by My resurrection. Now, may you have confidence in your perfect inheritance reserved in heaven for you that will not decay or change. Your

faith is guarded by the Holy Spirit's power until the coming of My Father's complete salvation that will be revealed by Me in the last days.

You have a spiritual inheritance waiting for you in heaven. How can you draw on that account now? Because you have a future inheritance, you should conduct your life as children of the King by living your life with assurance, facing uncertainties, and keeping in prayer-fellowship with God My Father.

So be truly glad this wonderful hope is ahead because you may have to suffer all kinds of trials on earth. Know that when I am revealed, your faith, though tested, will be genuine like gold, and will bring praise, and glory to My Father when I return to earth. Love Me even though you have never seen Me with your eyes. Though not seeing Me, you trust Me more because I have filled you with joy that can come only from the Holy Spirit. Your future reward for trusting Me will be the salvation of your soul in the final day.

Your faith is purified by testing, just as gold is purified by fire. Therefore, when tested, you should pray to be a good testimony to Me, to be faithful in trials, to not give up, to influence others to salvation, and to praise My Father for the experience because He helps you become more godly.

The prophets didn't fully understand this salvation even though they wrote about it. They had many questions about the meaning of Scripture. They didn't understand what the Holy Spirit within them was saying when they wrote the prediction of My coming suffering, and the glory that I would have afterward. The prophets were told these events would not happen in their lifetime but would occur many years later. Now, these events have happened and have been communicated to all of you by those who have preached the gospel to you. Even now the angels, like you, are studying these predictions to know My Father's plan.

Therefore, do not let your thinking be sidetracked, nor should you live in the future so that you ignore the present. Obey My truth, and do not be

conformed to the evil desires that controlled your life before you were saved. Live a holy life just as I, who called you to salvation, am holy because the Bible says, “Be holy because God is holy.”

Know that your heavenly Father has no favorites. Therefore, pray boldly with reverence, knowing He will judge all people fairly. You were not redeemed with gold and silver that perished from your meaningless life before you were saved. But you were redeemed with My precious blood because I was a sacrificial lamb without blemish or spot. My Father chose Me before creation for this purpose, but only in time did He reveal Me to you. Now you have new life because My Father raised Me from the dead and glorified Me. Now you have hope beyond the grave.

Therefore, separate yourself from sin and obey My truth, and love believers with all your heart. You were born again to new life, not from earthly parents who give physical life that will eventually die. But you were born again to new life that will last for eternity. This life comes from a knowledge of the Word of God. Your physical life will pass away as the grass withers and flowers die, but My Word will stand forever. Put your trust in this Word that was preached to you.

Live Holy Because I Am Holy

2 Repent of all known sin in your life. Do not lie, slander anyone, or be jealous of them. Like a newborn baby, thirst for My pure Word and taste My goodness so you can grow to the fullness of salvation.

You should be thirsty for My Word and Me because I Am the only One who can truly satisfy you.

Indeed, come daily to Me for spiritual strength. I am the Rock rejected by unsaved people, but chosen because I am precious to My Father. Now you are a living stone that is part of the building which is My house, but you are also a holy priest offering worship to Me. As the Scripture says, “Behold, I lay in Zion My precious Son as a cornerstone. You will not be put to shame because you believe in Him.” When you put your whole trust in Me, I become precious to you. But to those who do not believe in Me,

reject Me as the cornerstone on which to build their lives. Then I, the primary cornerstone, become a stumbling block to the unsaved, an execution stone used to punish those who reject Me.

But you are not disappointed in Me in whom you believe. Now you are part of a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a dedicated citizen of heaven, and one claimed by Me. You have been set apart to proclaim My victory because I have called you out of darkness into marvelous light. You are part of the people of God—a saved Gentile—who once was not My Father’s, but now you belong to Him. You were outside His mercy, but now you have mercy.

Keep yourself free from self-destructive passions because you are a pilgrim in a foreign land. Behave honorably among unsaved people so they can see for themselves your good works; so that when the Day of Judgment comes, they will remember the things they now criticize.

Submit yourself to human institutions for My sake, and especially to government leaders because they are Your representatives to punish lawbreakers. It is My will that your good testimony silence what fools have said about Me in ignorance. You are a slave to no one except Me. Live free but never use your freedom as an excuse to sin. Respect everyone, love My church, fear Me, and keep the laws of your government.

Christian employees must be respectful and obedient to their bosses, not only when the bosses are kind to them, but also when the bosses are cruel and demanding. There is a reward for putting up with undeserved punishment when it is done for My sake. But there is no Christian reward when you’re punished because you’ve done something wrong and deserved punishment. Your reward comes when you accept punishment patiently and do your duty, even when you don’t deserve punishment. Because, when I suffered undeservedly for you, I left you an example that you should follow My steps. I did not commit one sin, nor was I ever deceitful in anything I said.

I Am your example, and you are to follow My steps. When you don’t know how to act or what to do, you should ask yourself, “What Would Jesus Do?” Then, you can walk accordingly.

I did not threaten to get even when I was tortured, but I committed Myself to My Father who will judge rightly. I suffered for your sins on the cross so you could repent of your sins and live a godly life. Through My wounds, you have been healed. You were straying like a lost sheep, but now you have come back to Me, the Shepherd and Protector of your soul.

I Suffered for Your Sins

3A married woman should be obedient to her husband so that if her husband refuses to obey the Word of God, he may be won to Me by his wife's godly behavior. Her holy life will speak louder than her words. Women, do not dress to show off and do not try to be spiritual by depending on jewelry, lovely clothes, and hair arrangements. You must be beautiful inwardly, with a gentle spirit and a quiet appearance. That kind of inward beauty was seen in women of the past who trusted My Father and submitted to their husbands. Sarah is an example who obeyed Abraham, calling him Lord. Women today can become her descendants by doing what is right and not worrying their husbands or giving them cause for anxiety.

Husbands treat your wives with respect and honor them as the weaker vessel because husband and wife are heirs together of the grace of life. When the husband does this, his prayers will not be hindered.

Harmony is the Right Way to Live

Live in harmony with other believers, be sympathetic, love all believers, and be compassionate and humble. Never repay wrong with wrong, or a curse with a curse. Instead, repay a curse with a blessing. That is what I have called you to do, and you will be blessed by Me.

Do not let your tongue lie, and become deceitful because that destroys a happy life and prosperity. Turn away from evil and do good. Try to live peaceably and hold on to peace when you catch it, because I am watching you and listening to your prayers, but I frown on those who do evil.

Usually, no one tries to hurt you when you do good, but if they do try to hurt you, I will reward you, and you will not be afraid of them or their threats. Hold Me reverently in your heart, and when someone asks why you believe as you do, tell them why you have hope in Me. But give your

answer with courtesy and respect so that when attackers curse you, they'll become ashamed when they see your exemplary life and conduct. If it is My will that you suffer, it is better that you suffer for doing right than for doing wrong.

The Way of Salvation

I suffered once for your sins, the just for the unjust, that I might bring you to My Father, being put to death in the flesh, but raised by the Holy Spirit. I descended into hell to announce My victory to people in prison because they were disobedient to My Father and refused to repent, like those who rejected Noah's preaching. Even then I patiently waited while Noah was building the ark. But only eight persons were saved from that terrible flood. That was a symbol of baptism. The water was a picture of judgment for sin that I suffered on the cross. Because of My death, you received cleansing for your sins. And you received the promise of eternal life because I was resurrected. Then I entered heaven to sit at My Father's right hand, and now angels in heaven are subject to Me.

When you are saved, you should have a clear conscience before My Father. A picture of your salvation is baptism. You are not saved by water baptism, but by My death, burial, and resurrection. Because your sins are forgiven, and your conscience is clear, you can pray to My Father.

Attitudes About Suffering for Me

4 I suffered when I was tortured: therefore, be ready to suffer for your faith with the same attitude as I had. You should not suffer because of personal sin. Therefore, don't let sin have domination over you. Always do My will. You have lived for Me too long to go back to your unsaved ways, giving yourself to sex, debauchery, drunkenness, orgies, and worshiping idols.

Your unsaved friends think you are strange for not indulging yourself in the same evil activities they do. They laugh at you in scorn. But they will

have to give account to My Father who judges the living and the dead. Then they will be punished for the way they lived. This is why the gospel was preached and received by those who later died as martyrs for Me. They were judged and condemned by Roman law to martyrdom in the flesh, but they are alive in spirit, living with My Father in heaven.

The world will soon come to an end. Be clear-minded and self-disciplined so you can pray for all who don't know My Father and do His will.

A watchful attitude concerning My coming means you keep clean from sin, you keep short accounts with Me, you pray for both saved and lost people, and you love My appearing.

Love everyone because love makes up for your faults. Feed and give hospitality to those who need it. I have given you spiritual abilities (spiritual gifts), so you can use them to help others, being careful to pass on My kindness. If I call you to preach, allow Me to speak through you. If I lead you to help others, do it in My strength. Glorify My Father through My power. To Him be glory and power, forever and ever.

You must use your spiritual gifts. Pray for wisdom to know your gift and My anointing on your ministry. Pray for opportunities to use your gift, and allow Me to produce results from your ministry.

Do not be surprised when painful trials come, because trials are not an unusual thing for Christians. Be glad that you can suffer as I did. Then you will rejoice when My glory is revealed. When people curse and blaspheme you as a Christian, you will have My blessing resting on you. Your suffering will not be for crimes such as murder or theft, or even for sins such as hurting people or gossiping. When you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed of Me, but praise Me that you bear My name. Time will come when judgment begins among God's followers. If you will be judged for your failures, how much more will the unsaved be judged? If the righteous will barely make it through judgment, how much more punishment will the

ungodly have? So when you suffer for doing My will, keep doing right. Trust your soul to Me, the faithful Creator, for I will never fail you.

Do not be surprised when suffering and trials come because that is part of the Christian life. When you suffer for Me, you identify with Me.

Serving Me in View of My Return

5 Now a word to you who are elders because Peter was an elder, and a witness of My suffering, and one who will share in My glory. Elders feed the flock that God has entrusted to you, ministering as overseers, not because you have to, but because you want to do what I want you to do. Don't do it for money, but serve eagerly. Don't be dictators over God's people but be an example to everyone in the flock. When I, the Chief Shepherd, shall appear, you will receive a crown of glory that will never tarnish.

Younger men follow the leadership of older men. Clothe yourself in humility and serve one another. Because I oppose the proud but give grace to the humble. Therefore, bow before My Father so He can lift you up. Put all the weight of all your problems on Him.

Give Me your problems and concerns. Then yield the consequences of everything to Me.

Be watchful for attacks from your enemy, satan, who prowls as a hungry lion, looking for prey to devour. Stand firm against satan, knowing Christians throughout the world are undergoing all kinds of suffering.

After you suffer for a while on this earth, I will show grace and call you to eternal glory with Me. But now I can protect you, make you stronger, and confirm your faith. I have all power, forever and ever.

You will be encouraged when you learn how I have blessed other believers who are going through the same kind of sufferings that face you:

therefore, stand firm.

This letter is sent by Silas whom Peter trusted. My church in Babylon sent greetings along with Mark, greeting all believers in all peace. Peace to all in Me.



I AM JESUS

Who Delays My Coming

My Second Letter From Peter



I Am Jesus, Who led Peter to write that a believer's salvation is validated by his practice of Christian virtues. Peter tells of My transfiguration, that prophecy is inspired and authoritative, that false teachers bear certain marks, that I will return, and that spiritual diligence and steadfastness are encouraged. Peter was aware that martyrdom was near, just as Paul was also aware that his martyrdom was near. Yet both men rejoiced in serving Me. Both men saw false teaching creeping into My church. As you read this letter, remember that I will ultimately win the battle against false teaching, and study to increase your knowledge of the Bible.

Learning Virtue From the Scriptures

I Am Jesus, Who led Simon Peter to write a letter addressed to you, Christians who had obtained the same precious faith that he received.

1 You too have that precious faith, and you stand before My Father in righteousness having been made righteous by Me, My Father's Son. May My grace and peace be multiplied in your life as you grow in knowing My Father and Me.

My divine power has given you all things that relate to life and godliness. You will grow as you learn to know Me who called you to a life of excellence and goodness. I have given you My precious promises that through the Word of God you received a divine nature which is the new nature with new desires to obey Me.

I have promised divine power for all things that pertain unto life and godliness. My power is not for just anything you desire, but for your need to be godly. My power is not for a luxurious lifestyle or to fulfill your dreams. It's for godly living.

Add character to your faith so you will do the right thing in the right way. Add Bible knowledge to your character so you will always know what to do to please Me. Add self-control to your biblical knowledge so you will be steadfast in knowing and doing right. Add godliness to your steadfastness so that you will have a basis for becoming more godly. Finally, add brotherly love to your godliness so that your godly life will lead to a loving relationship with all.

When you abound in these traits, you will not be ineffective or unfruitful in your walk on this earth. Those Christians who don't have these godly traits are blind, they have forgotten that their former sins are forgiven. You have been called to salvation and chosen by Me. Be diligent to demonstrate My call in your life. If you do all these things, there is no danger that you will ever fall away into sin. Then you will eventually be given admission to My eternal kingdom to live forever with Me, your Lord and Savior.

Strive to make your salvation a "sure" thing in your life. Why are some Christians not sure of their salvation? Here are a few reasons.

They have sin in their life. They are ignorant of Scripture. They are following false teaching about assurance of salvation, which leads to doubts. Some Christians never had a saving knowledge of Me in the first place.

Throughout eternity you will continually retell these truths, even though you know them now and hold them firmly. Peter said it is his duty to remind everyone of these truths as long as he is in the body, that is, the tent. Peter knew his time to leave the tent was coming soon, just as I predicted His death.

Peter wrote these things so that after his departure, believers everywhere would be able to recall these things. He did not make up a myth when he went preaching the power of My coming. Peter saw with his eyes My majesty on the Mount of Transfiguration and heard My Father speak, “This is My beloved son, in whom I am well pleased.” He actually heard the voice that came from heaven.

Therefore, hold more certain than ever the word of prophecy and give careful attention to that word for it shines like a bright light in a dark world. It will shine until the day of My return. I am the morning star arising in your heart.

Understand and believe that no prophecy of Scripture can be interpreted and understood in isolation, but every verse must be understood in light of all Scripture. No word of prophecy was written by human initiative. The words men wrote in the Bible were inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Warning Concerning Apostasy

2 There were false prophets living when the Bible was written just as there are false prophets today. These false prophets will subtly introduce dangerous heresies. They will deny I redeemed them and eventually they will cause their own destruction. Many will follow their filthy immorality, and by their lives will discredit My truth. In their lust, they will try to make many people their disciples, but their foolish arguments make My Father’s judgment on them inevitable.

I didn't spare the angels who sinned but bound them in chains and threw them in hell, so they must wait for the judgment day. And I didn't spare any of the people who lived before the flood. I completely destroyed the world with a flood except for Noah, who spoke for Me, and his family of seven. Later, I reduced the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into a heap of rubble and completely destroyed them as a fearful example to those who refuse to live by My laws. Yet I delivered Lot and declared him righteous, even when he was distressed at the sin of his day. Lot saw and experienced the filthy sins as he lived among sinners, and those sins tortured his soul day after day. Know for certain that I can rescue the righteous who are surrounded by temptation because I delivered Lot.

I reserve punishment for the wicked until the Day of Judgment comes. My judgment is reserved especially for those who indulge in their lusts and despise authority. These people are arrogant and presumptuous. They dare to scoff at Me, the glorious Lord Jesus Christ.

Even the angels, who are powerful, never criticize these evil men in My presence. These evil men are as dumb as animals which I gave you to eat and do your work. These men laugh at the great powers of the unseen world. But they will be destroyed in their own corruption. They will be destroyed with satan and the demons in hell. These men, who do their evil in broad daylight, are cancerous spots who revel in sin even when they come to My house to eat. They look everywhere for adultery to seduce the unsuspecting. They are cursed because they magnify their greed.

They have left My path to follow the path of Balaam who tried to profit from his sin. The donkey rebuked Balaam with the voice of a man, trying to restrain him from his sin.

False teachers are like wells without water. They are like storm clouds without rain. The dark underworld is reserved for them. With their proud works, they tempt new converts to return to sin, who have just escaped the world. They use lust to lead new believers back into sin. They promise freedom, but they are slaves themselves because they are dominated by sin. If anyone escapes the pollution of this world and allows himself to be enslaved again, his second state is worse than his first one. It would have been better if he never learned the way of holiness. He is like the proverb that says, "The dog returns to his own vomit," and "A pig that is washed returns to wallow in the mire."

Pray for those who are so entangled to snatch them from false doctrine. Ask for wisdom and strength so you can help those entangled in false doctrine.

My Return to Earth

3 I write this second letter, as I did in both letters, to motivate you to spiritual thinking so you would remember the words of the prophets and keep the commands of My apostles.

Scoffers will come in the last days, following their own evil lusts. Scoffers will say, “Where is His coming?” They will add, “Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation.” They deliberately close their eyes to the fact that the land was formed out of the waters by My command. They also forget that the earth was destroyed by a flood, and that the present heavens and earth are being maintained by Me. But know this. One day I will judge this earth, by fire, to destroy ungodly people.

Some will scoff at the promises of My return. They want Christianity to fail, and they want to continue their evil ways. They have enough “God consciousness” but are still motivated to deny the things My Father promised.

Remember, a day with Me is a thousand years, and a thousand years is only a day. Some people think I am slow about keeping My promises, as some people measure slowness; but I will keep My promises in My time. I do not want anyone to perish, but I want everyone to repent and trust Me for salvation. I will come as a thief in the night when the heavens will pass away with a thunderous noise, and the elements will dissolve with fire, and the works on earth will be burned up with fire.

In view of these things, live godly lives, looking for My return. In that day the heavens will disintegrate with fire, and all the elements will melt. Set your hope on the new heavens and the new earth where I have promised the righteous will live. Wait in hope for these things, and live without

blemish or spot. I am coming. I am waiting to return, giving you time to get this message of salvation to as many as possible.

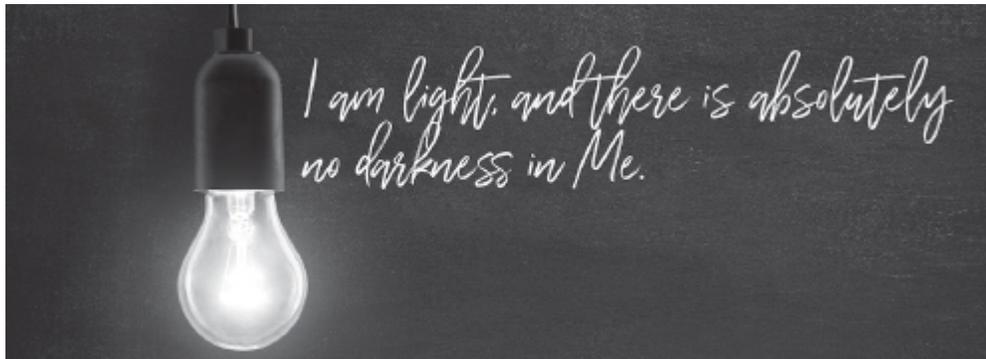
Paul wrote about these same things in his letters, yet some of his comments are not easy to understand. Some people who are unlearned and rebellious deliberately have twisted his writings to mean something quite different from what he meant, just as they do other Scriptures that judge them. Watch for false teachers and be not fooled by them. Stand firm on biblical doctrine. Grow in grace and in My knowledge. To My Father be all glory both now and forever.



I AM JESUS

Who Loves You

My First Letter From John



I led John to write an intimate family letter to My new brothers and sisters in the faith, telling them to love one another to demonstrate they are born again. I set a stark contrast with darkness, death, falsehood, and hate in this letter. Against that dark background, the child of God should have assurance of their salvation. “Now He who keeps My commands abides in Me, and I in him. And by this you know that I abide in you, by the Holy Spirit whom I have given you.”

Eternal Fellowship With the God Because of Me

1 I am Jesus, Who led the apostle John to write this message that is from the beginning, which your spiritual eyes have seen and read, and your hands have handled—the WORD OF LIFE. Eternal life was revealed to you, and you have seen it, and now you bear witness to others and tell them about eternal life which was with My Father and revealed to you. That which you have seen and heard, tell others that they may share life with you

as you share life with Me, Jesus Christ, the Son of God. These things are written to give you heavenly joy.

I am light, and there is absolutely no darkness in Me. So now declare this message to everyone. If you tell people that you have fellowship with Me and yet you walk in darkness, you lie and deny the truth. But when you walk in the light as I am in the light, you have fellowship with other believers, and My blood cleanses you from all your sins.

Because I am light, you must not walk in darkness, but walk in the light. Light walking is obedient fellowship with Me, interactive fellowship with other believers, not hating, and abiding or living in the light. Therefore, walk in My light, and reflect My light to the unsaved.

If you tell people you have no sin in you, you deceive yourself, and you don't have My truth. But when you confess your sins, I am faithful to forgive your sins and cleanse you from all unrighteousness. If you were to say you have never sinned, you make Me a liar, and My Word doesn't control you.

When you walk in the light, and all your sins are dealt with, then you can fellowship-pray. You can have a close, intimate relationship with Me and know My heart and what plans I have for you.

The Test of Fellowship With My Father

2 Because I told you not to sin, you must not do it. But when you slip and sin once, I stand at My Father's right hand to plead forgiveness for you.

I have forgiven all your sin. I didn't die not only for you alone, but also for the whole world.

When I paid the price for your sins, I satisfied your account. Your record in heaven is clean, and your sins are forgiven. Not for yours

only, but also for the sins of the whole world. My blood was sufficient for you if you will be saved. Then My blood is efficient to forgive your sins.

You can have confidence that you know Me because you keep My commands. Those who say that they know Me but don't keep My commands are liars and they don't have the truth in them. But those who keep My Word, have My perfect love in their heart. That's why you know that you are in Me. Because you abide in Me, you ought to walk just the way I walked. I didn't write anything new in this letter to you. I just repeated the original commands I gave you, and those commandments are found in My Word.

This is what is new about the original commands. Those who claim to be in the light, but hate their brother, are in darkness until now. Those who love their brother live in My light. These persons will not stumble in darkness. Those who hate their brothers live in the darkness of sin, and walk in darkness and they don't know what they're doing because the darkness of sin has blinded their eyes.

I write to you, My new children in the faith, to let you know that I have forgiven your sins. I write to you, mature fathers in the faith, because you have known Me from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you overcame the evil one. I write to you, children in the faith, because you know God My Father. I have written to you, mature fathers, because you have known Me from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and My word abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

Love not worldly attractions, or anything else that will pull you away from Me. Those who love the world, do not love My Father. Because worldly attractions involve the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. These are not from Me but are from the evil one. The world will pass away, as well as fleshly lust, but you will live forever by doing My will.

Because lusts or worldly attractions are part of your nature, you must pray to insulate yourself from sinful desires. Yield to Me and I

will give you a pure heart that's not dominated by your sinful lusts. Then you can love Me so deeply that sinful lusts will have no place in your life.

I have written to you because you live in the last days, and the antichrist will come in the future. Because the spirit of the antichrist is already here, you know he will come. Many Christians have stopped fellowshiping with you, which demonstrates they have abandoned their faith. For if they were with you in the faith, they'd still have fellowship with you. But because they went out from you, proves they were not believers in the first place.

You have an anointing from the Holy Spirit so you can know spiritual things. I want you to know the truth, and that no lie comes from the truth. Those who deny that I am the Messiah are liars. They have the spirit of antichrist because they deny both the Father and the Son. Those who deny Me don't have the Holy Spirit, but those who have Me, the Son, also have My Father.

Continue in the message you heard from the beginning, and you will continue abiding and fellowshiping with My Father and with Me. Then you have the promise that is eternal life.

I wrote to warn you about those who try to deceive you. But you still have the anointing that the Holy Spirit gave you at salvation, so you don't need anyone to explain the truth to you. That anointing gives you basic spiritual understanding so you will abide in the truth that has been taught you. If you know that I am righteous, all those who obey the truth are born of My Father.

You have "an anointing" to enable you to know the truth of God. This refers to the Holy Spirit who helps you understand spiritual truth. So to learn the more spiritual truth and understand it better, you must be rightly related to the Holy Spirit.

How Believers Relate to Each Other

Think about the love of My Father for you and the fact that He calls you His child because you belong to Him. When the world refuses to **3** acknowledge Me, it also refuses to recognize your salvation.

Approach My Father as His child because of your intimate relationship, because parents are obliged to provide and protect their children, because parents are the first line of care, and because parents are obliged to teach and correct their children.

Yes, you are My Father's child, and you have no idea what your fellowship will be like in heaven. Know this much about your future life. When I come, you will be like Me because you have seen Me as I really am. Everyone who agrees with this about their future relationship will keep themselves as pure as I am.

Anyone who keeps on sinning breaks My commands because sin is breaking My law. I became a man to take away sin, and there is no sin in Me. So when you stay close to Me, you won't continue sinning, and those who sin continually were not saved in the first place, and they don't know Me. You are My Father's child, so don't let anyone deceive you. Live holy because I am holy. Those who constantly sin belong to the devil. Sin began with the devil, and he constantly keeps sinning. I, the Son of God, have come to undo all that the devil has corrupted with sin. Because you have been born again, don't constantly sin because you have a new nature that tells you what to do. This is how to tell the difference between a child of God and a child of the devil. Whoever constantly sins and doesn't love other Christians, is not in My family.

You have heard My message from the beginning that you are commanded to love other believers. Do not be like Cain, who killed his brother, because he was not My Father's child. So do not be surprised when the world hates you. When you love other Christians, it proves you have been delivered from death and hell, and you have eternal life. If you refuse to love a believer, it proves you are just the same as a murderer who doesn't have eternal life.

Learn true love from My example because I died for you. So you too ought to live for others.

If someone has money and professes to know Me, yet refuses to give to a needy Christian, how could My love live in Him? Therefore, do not love in words only. Show your real love by the things you do. Only by actions can you be sure that you are My Father's child, and your conscience will be clear when you come into My presence. When your conscience makes you feel guilty because you sin, you realize I know everything about you for I am greater than your conscience.

There are two kinds of guilt. First, there is legal guilt when you are guilty before God for having sinned and broken God's law. The second is the experience of guilt because you don't live a perfect life. Experiential guilt can destroy your confidence in prayer and block answers. So don't expect to be perfect, but keep short accounts with God.

Therefore, when your conscience doesn't convict you, you can come to Me with your request in prayer to get what you ask because you are keeping My commands. And this is My commandment, that you believe in My name, Jesus Christ. Love believers as I commanded you. Because you keep My commands, you live in Me, and I live in you. This gives you assurance.

Warning Against False Teachers

4 Do not believe every person who claims to be a Christian but test their spirit to see if they are from Me, because many false teachers and prophets have gone out into the world.

Try the spirits to determine if they are from My Father. A false spirit will not confess that I am fully God, and fully man. I was never more God than when I was fully man. I was never more fully human than when I was fully God. I am the God-Man. I was never half-God and half-man. I am fully God and fully man at the same time, and will always be so in the future.

Every spirit that acknowledges that I have come in the flesh is from My Father. Every spirit that denies I had a body is not from My Father. Those who deny I was human are antichrists who were predicted to come and are now here. If I didn't come in a body, I couldn't live a perfect life, nor could I have died, nor would I have bled to redeem you, nor could I have been raised in My physical body. Be victorious over false teaching because the Holy Spirit in you is greater than the spirit of the world.

Those who speak the language of the world get attention from the world. But they are not from Me. But you are My Father's child, and I listen to you and those who belong to Me listen to Me. This is how you tell the Spirit of Truth from the spirit of falsehood.

Continue to love one another since love comes from My Father, and everyone who is born again has been given the gift of love. Those who fail to love other people have never known My Father because He is love. His love for you was revealed when My Father sent Me, His only begotten Son, into the world so that you could have life through Me. What is love? Not that you loved My Father, but that He loved you and sent Me, His Son, as a sacrifice to take away your sins.

The love of My Father for you has been poured into your heart through the Holy Spirit Who was given to you at your salvation. This is a real heart experience of being loved by God. This love cannot be contained because it is supernatural. You should love one another because My Father first loved you. This love reflects your love to My Father. I gave Myself for you, so you give yourself to others. I will love others through you.

Since My Father has loved you so much, you ought to love other believers.

No one has ever seen My Father at any time, but as long as you love other believers, He will live in you, and His love will be seen through you. My Father has put the Holy Spirit into your heart as proof that He lives in you, and you live in Him.

Furthermore, John saw with his eyes and writes to tell you My Father sent Me, the Son, to save the world. Those who acknowledge that I am My

Father's Son, live in Me, and I in them. My Father loves you deeply. He is love, and whoever lives a life of love, lives in My Father, and He lives in them.

My love will be complete in you when you stand boldly before My judgment seat. There is no fear in love because perfect love drives out fear. Those who do not love are fearful because they do not know what will happen to them in judgment. That proves they are not My Father's children. So, your love for My Father comes because He first loved you. Those who say, "I love the Father," but hate a fellow Christian whom they can see, cannot love the Father whom they cannot see. So this is the summary of love: anyone who loves My Father must also love his brother or sister.

You Can Know You Are God's Child

5 You can know you are born again when you believe I am the anointed Messiah. And all who love My Father will love His children. You can know you are His child because you love Him and do what He has commanded you to do. This is what love means—keeping His commands because they are not difficult.

You can know you are His child because you have victoriously overcome the lust of the world by faith. Who else can overcome the world? Only those who believe I Am the Son of God.

My Father gave His children an inner witness through the Scriptures that I Am the Son of God and those who know Me get their prayers answered. You can also know you are God's child because you invited Me into your heart, and My Scriptures reinforce this experience of assurance.

I came by water and blood. My blood was shed to cleanse you from sin. Water stands for Spirit baptism into My church, which is My body. The Holy Spirit is another witness that you are God's child. These three, the blood, water, and Spirit, agree that you are God's child. Many people accept a man's witness to the truth, but My witness is much greater. You know you are born again because you have My witness within. Everyone who

believes in Me, the Son, has life. Those who reject Me are liars. But you know you are born again because of My testimony in the Word of God that My Father has given Me to you. Those who have Me, the Son, have eternal life. You know you are born again because you have Me in your heart. Those who don't have Me are not born again. You also have confidence you are born again because I hear your prayers and answer them. I do not hear and answer the prayers of unsaved people.

Pray for those who commit a sin that does not lead to death, and I will give them life. There is a fatal sin which ends in death. You will not pray on this occasion, all wrongdoing is sin, but not all sin is fatal.

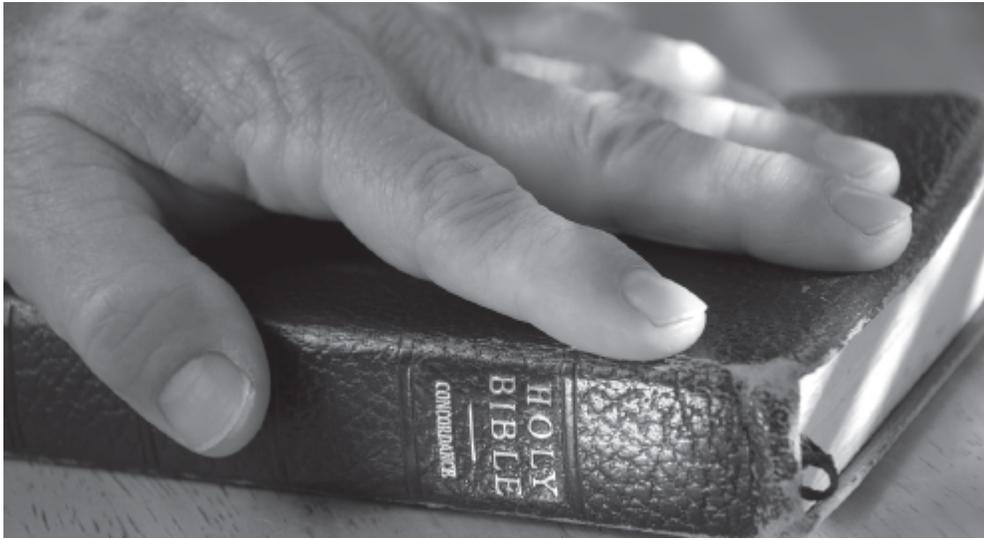
You know you are born again because you do not continually practice sin, and I, the Son of God, will protect you from the evil one. You know you are born again because you realize all non-Christians are lost. But My Father's children have spiritual insight. You can have assurance because I, the Son of God, have come into your heart to give you spiritual understanding to know Me. Now you know My Father is the true God who gives eternal life. Watch out for anything (an idol) that takes My place in your heart.



I AM JESUS

The Shepherd Over My Church

My Second Letter From John



I led John to write this second letter emphasizing the key word “truth” which is attached to love in the phrase “in truth and love.” In this way, I continue the theme of love from My first letter. Truth is the body of revealed truth through Me. And love is the defining attribute of My followers, because “many deceivers are entered into the world.” I tell My “children” to mark these persons, have no fellowship with them in their house, nor greet them. As you read this letter, learn how to stand up for Me as you encounter false teachers.

Live the Truth

1 I Am Jesus, Who led John the elder to write this letter to My church who is an elect lady and her children (church members) whom he loves in truth. John and everyone in Me, the body of Christ, love you because the

Word of God dwells in your heart. Grace, mercy, and peace from God My Father and from Me, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father.

I am glad that I found some of your children walking in truth and obeying My Word, just as you were commanded by My Father.

You must, “love in truth.” You can’t have one without the other. If you obey the royal law, but it does not grow out of love, it is not enough. The opposite also applies. You are not committed to the truth of God’s Word if you don’t love others. Pray that you may balance both truth and love by being filled with both.

And now I ask you, dear lady—not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but the one you have had from the beginning—that you love one another. And this is love, that you walk according to My commandments. This is the commandment, just as you have heard from the beginning, so that you should walk in it.

Watch out for false teachers who believe and teach that I was born only with a human body, and that I am not God. These false teachers are deceivers and antichrists. Keep a watchful eye that you do not lose the prize for which you and John worked for. Be constant, so you receive your full reward by being faithful in all things, because if you wander from My teachings you will lose My influence in your life.

You must guard yourself against those who teach that I did not come in the flesh. You must pray for God to take away spiritual blindness concerning their heresy, to understand My truth taught in the Scriptures, and to have the ability to teach My truth and warn against their heresy.

Those who remain true to Christian doctrine have both My Father and Me, the Son. If anyone comes teaching that I am not equal in nature to My Father, do not receive him or give him hospitality, nor recommend him to other churches because those who support him will become partners in his false teaching.

John had many things to explain to you, but he did not write them with pen and paper. You will be satisfied when he comes and speaks personally with you about these things. The children of your “sister” (My church at Ephesus) greet you.

I AM JESUS

The God of True Teachers

My Third Letter From John



I led John to write to a church where Diotrephes had exercised control over the congregation for his own selfish purposes. Diotrephes had rejected an apostolic letter and authority, and wouldn't receive visiting preachers. I spell out a believer's responsibility as a member of a local church in the days of coming apostasy. The key is to remain faithful to "the truth," the Word of God. That means to "love in truth." As you read this letter, think of how you can act as a friend to other Christians.

Watch Out for Church Dictators

1 I Am Jesus, Who led the elder John to write to the well-beloved Gaius, a church leader whom he loved. John prays for you to prosper physically

as he prospers scripturally. He rejoiced when he heard from different traveling ministers that My church was standing for the truth, and living by the truth. Nothing could make John happier than to hear that those he led to a saving knowledge in Me are faithful to the Word of God.

Dear Friend, thank you for giving hospitality to the traveling preachers and missionaries who came through your town. They told My church in Ephesus of your friendship and help. Thank you for sending them on their way with a financial gift because they travel for Me without a salary, and they refuse to take money from the unsaved, even though non-Christians attended their meetings and received their ministry. Remember that churches have a responsibility to care for them financially, thus becoming fellow workers with them in the truth.

Be thankful for those servants of God who teach you the Word of God. May you grow spiritually because of their ministry. May their ministry edify My Church and supply all their temporal needs.

John previously wrote to My church to take care of them, but Diotrephes, who loves to boss My church, refused to listen to John's advice. When John comes, he will show you the evil things Diotrephes is saying against the Ephesian church. He refuses to allow visiting preachers to carry out their ministry, nor will he allow others in My church to listen to them. He kicks them out of My church.

John rejected Diotrephes, who acted like a church boss, when Diotrephes rejected ministers that John sent to My church. Technically, no human is My church's boss. My church is led by Me, its Shepherd. Human leaders should be possessed by Me and lead for Me. You should pray for Me to lead My church, for My church to grow and serve Me, and against those who want to "boss" My church for their own egotistical purposes.

Dear Friend, do not follow his terrible example. Pattern your life after a good example. When the believers in your church do what is right, they prove they are My Father's children. Everyone recognizes Demetrius does

the right things, so receive him when he delivers this letter to you because he will tell you the truth and answer your questions. John has many things to tell them but can't write them because he plans to see them soon, then he can talk about them. Peace to you. Friends here send their love. Give everyone a special greeting from me.

I AM JESUS

Who Will Keep You

My Letter From Jude



I led Jude to write this brief letter describing the way apostasy was creeping into the early church. It will be even greater in the future. I warn about the consequences of apostasy and challenge the readers to “fight” against its every appearance. The end of this letter shares things that will protect against apostasy: living in the Word of God, prayer, fellowship with believers, hope, serving Me, evangelism of the lost, separation from sin, and resting in assurance. As you read this letter, begin to grow in faith and love in My Father, In Me, and in the Holy Spirit.

Defending Your Faith

I Am Jesus, Who led My servant Jude to write to all believers everywhere who have obeyed My call and walk with Me to receive My love and care.

1 Jude was the brother of James. Jude had planned to write about the wonderful truths of the salvation you share in common, but he found it necessary to urge you to defend the faith that was once for all given to all believers.

Some have infiltrated My churches who are the ones I am warning about. These people are condemned for denying My truth and have turned My freedom into an opportunity to sin. As a result, they have rejected My authority.

There is a terminal date when all revelation and inspiration for Scripture ended. This is “the faith” which was “once delivered unto the saints.” That means the writing of Scripture came to an end. I have said all that needs to be said for your salvation and spiritual growth. Now you have in the Bible everything you need to know about your faith. So you shouldn’t complain about what is not written because all you need to know is found in the Scriptures. You need to study every page of Scripture to learn as much as possible. Then you need to apply it earnestly to your life and ministry. If there’s any limitation, it’s not with My Word or Me. It’s your limitations.

I delivered the whole nation of Israel from the slavery of Egypt, even though I had to destroy later those rebels who went back to sin. Also, the sinless angels rebelled against Me, so I had to throw them into the bottomless pit of hell to be chained until the Day of Judgment.

When Christians give into sin, they are blinded by their lusts, and they lose their understanding of truth, just as Israel was rebellious of Me and became blinded by heresy.

Those in Sodom and Gomorrah lusted after sexual sin, including the unnatural lust of men with men. I had to destroy those cities with fire as a warning to you. There is punishment in hell for those who give themselves to sin.

Today, false teachers still rebel against Me by living their sinful, immoral lives, defiling their bodies, laughing at those in authority over them, and despising My messengers. Not even Michael, the archangel, dared to denounce the devil over the corpse of Moses, but said, “The Lord rebuke you.”

These false teachers will mock anything they do not understand. Then like animals, they do anything they feel like doing. By giving into their lusts, their actions become fatal. These false teachers will get what they deserve. They will be punished like Cain who killed his brother. They will get the same reward as Balaam, who cursed Israel. They have rebelled against spiritual leadership just as Korah. They will share his fate of falling into hell.

They are a dangerous threat to the fellowship at the Lord’s Table because they come just to get a good meal. They are like rain clouds that blow over a farm but bring no rain to the fields. They are like barren fruit trees that give no fruit so they must be dug up in winter like other fruitless trees. They are like raging waves that threaten the ship of faith. Also, they are like shooting stars that burn out but give no light.

Recognize false teachers and separate yourself from them and their influence. Do not let them spread their evil to good people. These false teachers follow their lusts, not the Word of God.

Enoch, who lived seven generations from Adam, knew about these false teachers when he preached and predicted that I will come with millions of saints to deliver judgment on all those who reject Me. Then I will judge the wicked for all the wickedness they have done and will punish those who speak defiantly against My Father. False teachers are complainers, malcontents, doing only what their desires—lusts—drive them to do. They boast and brag about their spirituality, and they give “lip service” to leaders in My church, but they do it to their advantage.

Jude had godly hatred for false teachers who destroy people with their false teaching. Develop a passion to be true to all you know and believe.

Remember I told the apostles that in the last days there would be scoffers who will live according to their sinful lusts. These false teachers will split churches, and stir up arguments. They reject Me who will teach them truth or convict them of their evil imaginations and sin. Commit yourself to becoming strong in faith. Pray in the Holy Spirit's power. Keep within the constraints of My love and wait patiently for My return to earth to give you eternal life.

I tell you to “pray in the Holy Spirit.” How does that happen? Do you pray through the Holy Spirit much as a person addresses a judge through a lawyer? Or do you let the Holy Spirit use your words as He fills you and prays to My Father for you? Or do you pray in the name of the Holy Spirit as you pray in My name, that is, with His authority? Or does the Holy Spirit just help you pray much as someone helps you write a letter or a request? The answer—all of the above. Let the Holy Spirit fill you to pray effectively, and present your requests to My Father.

Have mercy on those whose faith is wavering, and point them to Me by showing love to them. Some you will save by snatching them from the flaming hell. Be careful. Don't let them pull you into their sin and into hell itself. Hate everything about their sin, being careful not to be contaminated by their lusts.

Show mercy on the weak, and pull innocent believers out of the fire by having “compassion, making a difference.” Isn't that what you do by prayer and humbly serving others?

Now I am able to keep you from falling and deliver you faultless into the glorious presence of My Father who saves you through My power. To My Father be glory, majesty, authority, and power, both in the past and forever in the future.

I AM JESUS

The Lamb of God

My Revelation to John



I gave a revelation to John the apostle to write about My bodily return to earth. My return is not just about judgments, tribulations, and persecution. In this letter, you will see a threefold picture of Me. First, My eternal nature: “who I am, who I was, and who I will become.” Second, My death: “I washed you from your sins in My own blood.” Third, My return: “Behold, I am coming with clouds, and every eye will see Me.” The letter is divided into three time events. First, the past: “the things which you have seen.” Second, the present: “things which are.” And third, the future: “things which shall be hereafter.” Revelation is not an easy book to interpret. Don’t get sidetracked by what you don’t understand. Emphasize what you understand and then commit yourself to live it. There are many prayers contained in this book, pray them all, but especially the last, “even so, come, Lord Jesus!”

John’s Vision of Me

I Am Jesus, Who gave a revelation to the apostle John about My return to earth. I sent an angel to tell John the things that are to come in the future. He faithfully wrote down everything he heard and saw, that is, the testimony of Me, Jesus Christ. Now, may you read it and learn. I will bless you as you read My revelation that will enrich your life.

A Letter From Me

I wrote to seven churches in Asia Minor, praying peace and grace for them from Me, Who is, Who was, and Who is coming. I am the Faithful Witness, the Firstborn from the dead, the Ruler of the kings of the earth. I love you and free you from sin by My blood, and give you an intercessory role of a priest before God My Father. To Him be glory and dominion forever and ever.

Look, I am soon coming with clouds just as I left the earth with clouds. You will see Me along with every other person, even those who crucified Me will see Me. And they, along with every other person who rejected Me, will mourn because they are not ready to meet Me. I am Alpha and Omega. I am the Lord God Almighty. I was, I am, and I am coming again.

John on Patmos

John suffered because of his faith, but he was patiently kingdom bound. John was imprisoned on Patmos Island because he preached about Me and witnessed to lost people. On a Sunday, the Holy Spirit filled him, and he heard a voice like a trumpet behind him that awakened him. I was the voice, and I told him, “Write down everything I show you and send it to seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea.”

Then John turned to see the person speaking to him. He saw seven golden candlesticks in a circle. I—the Son of Man—was standing in the middle. I had on a long robe tied with a golden sash. John could barely make out My head. My hair was shining brilliantly, like the sun reflecting off white snow. My eyes were aflame with anger, burning through the lies and sins of sinners. My feet gleamed like polished bronze, and My voice thundered away every other sound like mighty waves breaking on a rocky shore. I had seven stars in My right hand. The words of My mouth cut like the sharpest sword. My face

glistened like the blinding sun. John fell at My feet like one dropping dead. “Do not be afraid,” I told him, “for there is no fear to those who worship Me.”

Sometimes I surprise you. I answer a prayer you didn't expect or send an unexpected person or event into your life. John was praying one Sunday when I came unexpectedly to visit. John was so surprised, he wrote, "I fell at His feet as though dead." How do you respond when I surprise you? Are you scared? Excited? Do you laugh? Weep? Shout? Or do you bow your head in worshipful gratitude? When John saw Me glorified . . . flashing . . . shining . . . glowing . . . brilliant . . . John fell at My feet, and he worshiped. If you saw Me, would you worship?

I said, “I am the First and the Last, I am the Living One who lives eternally. I was dead, but now I am alive. I will live forever and ever. I have the keys to death and hell.”

I told John to write all he saw presently happening and then showed him what was coming. The seven stars in My hand were the seven pastors of the seven churches. And the seven golden candlesticks were the seven churches to which I am writing.

My Message to Seven Church Leaders

My Message to the Leader of My Church at Ephesus

2 This is My message because I am holding the seven stars, and I am walking in the middle of My churches. I know everything that you Ephesian Christians do, realizing your hard work and patience in trials. I know you don't tolerate sin among your members, and you test impostors claiming to be preachers, revealing their false teaching. I know you have patiently suffered for Me, without giving up and quitting. I have some complaints about you—you have lost your first love for Me. Remember those times when you were first saved, and how got back to doing what you originally did. I will come to remove your testimony if you do not repent.

Your candlestick will no longer stand with other churches. But I note some good things about you—you hate the deeds of the lustful Nicolaitans because I hate fleshly sin. I warn you, “Those who have ears to hear spiritual messages, listen to what the Holy Spirit is saying to My churches. Those who live victorious over sin will eat from the tree of life in Paradise.

I commend the Ephesian church for several reasons: they didn't tolerate evil people, they tested and rejected false teachers, and they hated false teaching. But I found some things wrong in My church. They lost their first love, and they forgot where they used to be spiritual.

My Message to the Leader of My Church at Smyrna

This is the message from the First, and Last, the One who died and came back to life. I know all your trials and sufferings, and I know your poverty, while you are rich in heavenly treasures. I know the slanderous accusations against you by religious people who claim to know God, whose house of worship is satan's home. Don't be afraid of coming sufferings. Some of you will be tested by imprisonment. You will be persecuted for a time. Even if you die for Me, be faithful. You will receive the crown of life. If you have ears to hear spiritual messages, listen to what the Holy Spirit is saying to My churches. Those who are victorious have nothing to fear in My second death.

My Message to the Leader of My Church at Pergamum

I have the sharp sword to divide between error and truth. I know the place you live is where satan rules. I know that you are holding firmly to My name and will not deny Me when persecuted. I know Antipas, a faithful witness, who was martyred before your eyes by the followers of satan. But I have some complaints against you. Some “Christians” have been following Balaam who taught Israel to commit adultery and sacrifice to idols. I also know that some “Christians” have accepted the teachings of the Nicolaitans. I tell you, “Repent, or I will come to judge you with the truth of the Word of God. If you have ears to hear spiritual messages, listen to what the Holy Spirit is saying to My churches. Those who are victorious will receive hidden manna from heaven to strengthen them, and their new names will be

engraved on a white stone. And no one knows what it is, but those who receive it will know.”

My church at Pergamum was influenced by false doctrine, that is, “the teaching of Balaam.” They were also facing idolatry and the “teaching of the Nicolaitans,” which is clericalism (a special class of priests who claimed infallibility). False doctrine is serious; it’s where “satan lives.” First, Christians at Pergamum must change their hearts first before changing their mind. Second, they must repent of the “war” they have against God. Third, they must listen to the Holy Spirit.

My Message to the Leader of My Church at Thyatira

I Am the Son of God, whose eyes penetrate like a flaming fire, and whose feet will judge all sin. I know all about you—your good works, your love, faith, and patience, and that you are still growing in grace.

But I have a complaint against you—you permit a woman like Jezebel to teach and prophesy among you. She entices Christians away from the true faith by getting them to commit adultery and sacrifice to an idol and eat its food. I told her to, “Repent and change her ways,” but she did not give up her adulterous ways. I will bring suffering to her life, and those who commit adultery with her will suffer more intently unless they repent. Her children will die prematurely under judgment. Then all churches will realize that I continually search deeply into hearts to give people what their behavior deserves. I do not condemn faithful Christians in Thyatira who have not followed the teachings of Jezebel, nor learned the “deep secrets” of satan. I tell the faithful ones, “Hold firmly to your faith until I come.” Those who are victorious and continue serving until the end will receive power over the nations. They will rule with Me who will rule with absolute authority like a rod—a rod of iron—in the millennium and crush all rebellion against righteousness. Then I will reward them with the morning star. “If they have ears to hear spiritual messages, listen to what the Holy Spirit is saying to My churches.”

This church was caught up in the sins of Jezebel, that is, sexual sins. Even though this church tried to hold on to good deeds, love, and faith, it was corrupt. How can you pray for such a church or person? Pray for them to realize My coming judgment. Pray for them to realize I search hearts and minds. And pray for them to know what the Holy Spirit is saying to them.

My Message to Seven Church Leaders

My Message to the Leader of My Church at Sardis

3 This is My message because I hold the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your reputation as an alive church, yet you are inwardly dead. Wake up, revive what little you have left because you are about to die. I have not seen anything in you that is commendable. Remember what you hear, and hold on to the gospel. Repent and wake up. Otherwise, I will come unexpectedly to judge you like a thief in the night. There are a few Christians in Sardis who haven't dirtied their clothes with evil. They are fit to walk with Me because they are clothed in spotless garments. Those who are victorious will be dressed in white. Their names will not be blotted from the Book of Life, and I will acknowledge them to God My Father. If you have ears to hear spiritual messages, listen to what the Holy Spirit is saying to My churches.

This is a prayer for believers and My church that has basic truths or doctrines but are (dead) not active in their life or service. It is a prayer to wake up, strengthen what they believe, obey what doctrines they know, realize they will be punished for inactivity, and realize the blessings they could have when they "conquer" and walk with Me in white.

My Message to the Leader of My Church at Philadelphia

This is a message from Me, the Faithful One, who has the keys of David, the One who can open what no one can shut, and shut what no one can open. I know all about you. You have an open door of opportunity that no one is able to shut. I know you are not a strong church, yet you have kept My commands, and have not denied My name. I will judge those false Christians who wrongly claim to be Christians, making them bow at My feet at the Great White Throne and acknowledge those in the Philadelphian church that are right. I will protect the Philadelphian Christians in the hour of great tribulation, which will come upon the whole world, testing believers to determine their faithfulness. I want you to hold firmly to your faith, and not let anyone take away your rewards because I will be with you. I will make those who are victorious over sin like a pillar in the temple of God, and they will be tested no more. I will write My Father's name on them, and they will be inhabitants of the New Jerusalem, the city that will come down from My Father in heaven. "If you have ears to hear spiritual messages, listen to what the Holy Spirit is saying to My churches."

This is an active church that is serving according to its knowledge. I had little to criticize. Pray for people or churches like this: Thank God they have obeyed the truth. Recognize they withstood "the synagogue of satan." Pray for their endurance, and claim the promise.

My Message to the Leader of My Church at Laodicea

A message from Me, the Faithful and True Witness, the One who created all things. I know that you are not hot or cold. I want you to be one or the other. But because you are lukewarm, I will vomit you out of My mouth. You are claiming to be rich, that you have everything you need, but you don't realize you are wretched, miserably poor, blind, and naked. I warn you to buy from Me gold purified by the fire that will make you truly rich. I tell you to dress yourself in righteousness, like pure white robes to cover your spiritual nakedness. Put spiritual ointment on your blinded eyes so you can have spiritual insight. I Am the One who rebukes and disciplines all of My followers whom I love. Therefore, repent from your indifferences, and take a stand for righteousness and diligence. I am standing at the door of opportunity, knocking to see if you will open to Me. If you hear My voice

and open the door, I will come in to feed you spiritually. Those who are victorious will share My throne, just as I was victorious over death and took My place at the right hand of My Father. “If you have ears to hear spiritual messages, listen to what the Holy Spirit is saying to My churches.”

Seeing the Throne

4 John looked toward heaven, and his eyes saw an open door. His ears heard My inviting voice say, “Come up here.” My voice penetrated the air like a trumpet. I promised to show John the things that will happen in the future. John yielded himself to Me, Who whisked him through the open door into heaven. John saw a throne in the center of heaven, and My Father was sitting on the throne. Coming from Him were white glistening rays like the flashes of a diamond. Also, there were red beams like the glistening of a ruby. There was a rainbow circling the throne with a backdrop of emerald green light. John saw twenty-four thrones surrounding My Father’s throne, with twenty-four symbolic saints sitting there. The saints wore golden crowns on their heads, and they were all dressed in white. John saw flashes of lightning coming from My Father’s throne and heard the rumble of thunder in the background. John saw seven burning lamps giving off light, which represented the sevenfold ministry of the Holy Spirit. John saw a sparkling crystal sea in front of My Father’s throne. There was not a ripple on its mirror-like surface. John saw four angels on the four corners of the throne. They looked in every direction as they guarded His throne.

The twenty-four elders before the throne of God represent you. They worshiped by casting their crowns before the throne. The crowns represent your awards for faithfulness and achievement in serving Me. But even when you are awarded for your service, you recognize I, the indwelling Christ in you, gave you a desire to serve Me. I work, through you, for all your achievements. And any righteousness you have is not yours. You are justified, which means you are declared righteous, and you stand before My Father in My righteousness.

The first angel looked like a lion who represented royalty. The second looked like an ox who represented service. The third was like a man to

symbolize humanity. And the fourth looked like an eagle that soars above all. The winged angels could see everything in all directions, at all times. Day and night they worshiped My Father, crying out, “Holy...Holy...Holy, is the LORD GOD ALMIGHTY, Who was...Who is...and Who is to come.” Then the angels gave glory, honor, and thanks to My Father who sits on the throne. The twenty-four saints fell on their faces before Him, worshiping Him who lives forever. The saints took the crowns from their heads and offered them in worshipful appreciation to Me who originally rewarded them with the crowns. The saints cried in praise, “You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive our glory, honor, and power.” Then they cast their crowns at My feet because I created the earth and all the heavens. By My will, everything exists.

Everyone in heaven worshiped Me as Creator, because I “. . . created all things, and for My pleasure they are and were created.” If I had not created all things, there would be nothing to worship and praise Me. So, worship Me as your creator God.

Who Is Worthy?

5 John saw a scroll in My Father’s right hand with writing on both sides of each page, and it was officially sealed with seven seals. John heard a mighty angel ask with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the seal and open the scroll? No one was worthy in heaven, on earth, or in hell to open and read what was on the scroll.” John wept bitterly because no one could open the scroll.

One of the saints on one of the twenty-four thrones said, “Do not weep; there is One who is worthy. Only Jesus, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, and the Root of David is worthy to break the seven seals of the scroll because Jesus has triumphed over satan who once ruled the universe of souls.”

John saw Me, the Lamb, standing next to My Father’s throne, standing between the winged creatures guarding the throne and the twenty-four saints sitting on twenty-four thrones. I, the Lamb, had been sacrificed. All divine wrath had been satisfied against all sin. The whole work of salvation—“It is finished.” I, the Lamb, took the scroll out of My Father’s hand. Then the four

winged creatures bowed to Me, followed by the twenty-four saints, who also bowed. Each one sang songs of worship to Me. Then they poured out all the worship praise of all believers, of all time, in praise to Me. Then they sang a new worship song to Me, “You are worthy to take the scroll and break the seals to open the scroll, because the sacrifice of Your blood purchased salvation for all people, of every language, from every tribe, and from every nation. You have made them priests to intercede and serve in Your kingdom.”

The earth had been dominated by the devil for he was “the god of this world.” But My death—as a lamb slain—had redeemed individuals, and also had lifted the curse on nature and, in a “head blow,” destroyed the power of satan. Then I opened the seal—the title deed of heaven and earth—to reveal what tribulation and judgment would be poured out on the earth at the end of time. Then My Father will make “a new heaven and a new earth,” where all His children will live forever with Him. The earth today is beautiful, but it’s nothing like it will be after I change everything.

In John’s vision, he heard the music of an innumerable choir of angels gathered around My Father’s throne. There were ten thousand times ten thousand angels, plus thousands upon thousands who were shouting, “The Lamb who was sacrificed is worthy to open the seals, for He has power, wisdom, riches, strength, honor, blessings, and glory.”

I will be worshiped in heaven because My death “redeemed you to God by My blood.” Then those redeemed ones and angels, elders, and everyone in heaven will cry, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain.”

Then John heard worship from everything that has breath—everything in heaven, everything that lives on earth, and in the seas and even hell itself. They worshiped My Father sitting on the throne, and Me—Jesus—who had the scroll in My hand, saying, “All praise, honor, power, and glory to the Father and to the Lamb.” And the four guarding winged angels and the twenty-four saints also worshiped saying, “Amen!”

The Seven Seals

6 John saw Me, the Lamb, break the first seal to unroll the scroll. Then one of the four winged angels with a voice sounding like thunder shouted, “Come!” John saw a white horse, and the rider was holding only a bow—no arrows. The rider was given a victor’s crown, and he went from one battle to another.

When I broke the second seal, another winged angel shouted, “Come!” John saw a second horse which was bright red. The rider was given a huge sword and commanded, “Take peace from the earth, so people slaughter one another.”

When I broke the third seal, another winged angel shouted, “Come!” John saw a black horse, and its rider held a pair of scales to measure things. The winged angel cried, “A loaf of bread or three pounds of barley for forty dollars. There is no oil or wine available anywhere.”

When I broke the fourth seal, a fourth winged angel cried, “Come out!” John saw a sickly pale horse, and its rider was named Plague. Hell was snatching up all who died. A fourth of the earth’s population was killed by Plague because of war, famine, disease, and wild animals.

When I broke the fifth seal, John saw under an altar all those who had been martyred for witnessing My Word and being faithful in holy living. The martyrs cried to Me, “How much longer will You wait before taking vengeance on those who have killed us?” Each martyr was given a white robe of righteousness and told to rest until the coming judgment because there would continue to be martyrs until My coming. Those martyrs would be killed, just as others had been martyred.

My people, who were martyred for the cross, are praying impatiently, “How long, O Lord?” This is not just a prayer of vengeance and retaliation. This is a prayer for Me to fulfill My promise to judge sin; for iniquity to finally get its reward, for truth to prevail, and for the violated law to be satisfied.

When I broke the sixth seal, there was a violent earthquake, and the sun didn’t shine. Darkness covered the earth. The stars began to fall like figs dropping from a tree when a windstorm shakes it. Everything was pitch

black. The mountains and islands of the sea shifted from their original locations. Everyone panicked and hid in caves. Kings, government leaders, military commanders, rich, and poor—all people tried to hide. They cried for the rocks to cover and hide them from My wrath because they wouldn't survive My coming judgment.

When the unsaved have been punished greatly for their sins, they cry out for relief. While technically this is not a prayer to be saved, it is a request to be shielded from their torture. Who can escape? The answer, "No one."

The 144,000 Witnesses

7 John saw four angels holding back the wind to prevent it from blowing on land or sea. Next, John saw another angel coming from the sunrise, carrying the seals of God. A voice cried, "First, seal the servants of God before you do any damage on land or sea." Then John heard there were 144,000 Jews who came from all the tribes of Israel. Twelve thousand came from each tribe—from Judah, Reuben, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Manasseh, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, and Benjamin.

The 144,000 represent Jewish evangelists who will preach My gospel around the world during the tribulation. They were martyred. "These are they which came out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb." Today, not many Jews are saved because they are judicially blinded. They are a nation that is rejecting Me. But when I return, Israel will be saved. In heaven, the 144,000 Jewish martyrs will praise My Father for their salvation, joined by all other Christian martyrs who were raptured, "a great multitude, which no man could count." They will worship, shouting, "Salvation belongs to our God."

A Large Crowd of Worshipers

In addition to the 144,000, John saw another great multitude from every race, language, and nation, standing before My Father and before Me—the Lamb—wearing white robes and holding palm branches. They cried out in worship, “Salvation comes from the Father who sits on the throne and from the Lamb who died for us.” Then the angels formed a huge circle around the 24 saints and the four winged creatures. The angels bowed to the ground and worshiped saying, “Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and power and strength be to the Father, our God forever and ever. Amen!” One of the saints asked John, “Who are these dressed in white robes? Where did they come from?”

John asked Me to tell him who these people were. I said, “These are the martyrs who were killed in the Great Tribulation. Therefore, their robes are washed in My blood. Now they stand in front of My Father’s throne to worship Him day and night. I, the Lamb, will take care of them so they will never hunger nor thirst, nor suffer anything ever again. I will satisfy their needs for food and will quench their need for water, and I will wipe away any tears of painful remembrance or suffering.”

The martyrs are described as “those who serve My Father day and night.” The word “serve” means “to minister.” How do you minister to My Father? Ministry means, “to meet the need of someone by preaching, teaching, or counseling.” Does God have needs that you must serve Him? Didn’t I say, “My Father is seeking worship?” Since My Father wants worship, then you serve by giving Him worship. You call Sunday meeting “worship service.” Do you go to church to be served? No! The pastor, ushers, and musicians don’t serve the people. All join together to serve My Father in worship as you exercise your spiritual gifts, giving worship to God.

Silence in Heaven

8 All eyes in heaven focused on Me—the Lamb—as I broke the final seal on the scroll. There was great silence in heaven as I prepared to return to the earth. It was time for My second coming.

Then seven angels stood before Me, and I gave them seven trumpets. Then I told them to be prepared to announce the coming judgments to the earth.

There was a great silence in heaven as the judgment of the seals ended and I was ready to return to earth. When something great is about to happen, don't you get still and quiet? Maybe you are too scared to move or speak. Maybe it's great anticipation. Perhaps it's like holding your breath. When I am about to do something in your life, you should worship silently because you know I am doing something great. You trust My sovereignty, you surrender to My actions, and you anticipate My intervention in a problem or introduction of something new.

Another angel went to the altar in heaven with a large amount of incense to mix with the prayers of My people to offer to My Father sitting on the throne. They held the sweet-smelling fragrance of prayers that ascend up in worship to My Father. When the angel threw fire from the altar to the earth, thunder rumbled, lightning crashed, and an earthquake shook the earth.

The Seven Trumpets

Then the seven angels with seven trumpets prepared to blow their message of coming judgment. When the first angel blew his trumpet, hail and fire rained down on the earth. One-third of the earth was set on fire. One-third of the trees and one-third of the green grass were burned up.

When the second angel blew his trumpet, something like a great mountain of fire was dropped into the oceans. One-third of the salt water was polluted as with blood. One-third of the living things in the oceans and one-third of the ships were destroyed.

When the third angel blew his trumpet, a huge burning star named Wormwood fell on one-third of all the rivers and streams. The fresh waters became bitter as persimmons so that many people died who drank the water.

When the fourth angel blew his trumpet, one-third of the sun quit shining, and light from one-third of the stars went out. Daylight was shortened by one-third, and the night was blacker than usual.

John saw an angel like an eagle fly over heaven announcing, “How terrible it will be for the inhabitants of the earth.” The next three trumpet judgments will be much worse than the original four.

The Judgment of Trumpets

9The fifth angel blew his trumpet. One of My servants came from heaven to earth with the keys to the bottomless pit. Smoke poured out of it when it was unlocked, so the sun and sky were darkened. The smoke spawned locust-like demons, and they spread where the smoke blew. The locust-like demons attacked people who didn’t have My seal on their foreheads. The sting didn’t kill anyone but gave constant pain like a scorpion’s sting. People wanted to die, but death escaped them.

In this judgment, people will be in such horrible torment that they will pray for death. But their prayers will not be answered because “death shall flee from them.” When My wrath is poured out on them, I hide the keys to death so no one will die until it is My time.

The locust-like demons looked like horses armed for battle having faces that looked human with crowns on their heads, and women’s hair, and teeth like lions teeth. They wore body armor as strong as steel, and the noise of their wings sounded like the charge of horses and chariots into battle. Their tails stung like a scorpion, and the sores they left ached for five months. The king of them was the angel from the bottomless pit whose Hebrew name is Abaddon, and his Greek name is Apollyon. One woe is past; there are still two more woes to come.

When the sixth angel blew his trumpet, John heard a voice from the altar before the throne, saying, “Release the four demons kept captive beyond the Euphrates River for this hour. They will kill one-third of the remaining population of the Earth.” Then John heard it. There were 200,000 locust-like warriors. John saw the locust-like demons like riders on horses. Some had red armor, others had blue armor, and the color of the rest was yellow. The horses looked as if they had lion heads. Smoke, fire, and brimstone blew from their mouths, killing one-third of the remaining population. (Their power was in their mouth and tail. Their tails were like snakes that were able

to kill with their bite.) The population of the world that escaped My wrath did not repent of their evil, nor did they stop worshiping demon idols made of gold, silver, bronze, stone, and wood—idols that can't see, hear, or walk. Nor did they quit murdering, stealing, committing sexual sins, or practicing witchcraft.

People will ask, "Where is God?" I am omnipresent, which means I am everywhere present at the same time. My indwelling presence dwells in your hearts. My institutional presence lives in My church on earth. My localized presence is when I sit on My throne in heaven. You can come into My presence at any time and at any place when you pray.

The Strong Angel

10 John saw another mighty angel come down from heaven, surrounded by a cloud with a rainbow about his head. The angel's face shined like the sun and his feet like fire. He had in his hand a small open book. He planted his right foot in the oceans and his left foot on land. He shouted louder than a roaring lion. Then seven thunder judgments rolled across heaven. John was prepared to write what he saw when a voice stopped him saying, "Keep secret the message of the seven thunder judgments; do not write them down." The angel standing in the oceans and on the land lifted his right hand to heaven and swore by My Father who lives forever, who created all of heaven and everything on the earth. The time of waiting is over. I will come when the seventh angel blows his trumpet.

Then, My secret intentions will be fully realized. John heard a heavenly voice telling him to get the little book. So John asked the angel to give it to him. The angel said, "Read it as you would devour a meal; it will upset your stomach, but it will be sweet as you eat it." As John read the book, the angel's words came true. It tasted sweet as honey, but it turned his stomach sour. The book contained a message for John to preach and write, a message of what will happen in the tribulation to rulers, people, ethnic groups, and nations.

Two Prophets in Jerusalem

11 John was given a measuring stick and told to go measure the temple in Jerusalem and the altar to find out how many people worship there. John was told not to measure the outer court because Gentiles gather there, and they will destroy the temple after forty-two months. I promised to send two witnesses—Enoch and Elijah—from heaven because they did not die on earth. They will preach for 1,260 days in Jerusalem. They came as the fulfillment of the two olive trees and the two lamps which stood before My throne. When enemies attacked these two, both were able to do judgment miracles to destroy their enemies. They prayed that it would not rain and they turned water into blood and sent plagues—as Moses did—on their enemies. After three and a half years, the antichrist came from the bottomless pit to fight them and finally killed them. Their corpses were left in the main street of Jerusalem so unsaved people could see they were dead. The people put their trust in the antichrist. People from every nation, ethnic group, and language saw their bodies for three and a half days. The unsaved rejoiced thinking their torment was over and the suffering caused by the tribulation was passed. Nonbelievers celebrated and gave presents to everyone, thinking these two who had brought plagues on the world were now dead and their troubles were over. After three and a half days, I breathed life into the two witnesses. Just as everyone had seen their dead bodies, now everyone saw them being raised from the dead. Then a loud voice shouted, “COME UP HERE!” They went to heaven as their enemies watched. Immediately, a violent earthquake shook Jerusalem, one-tenth of the city was destroyed, and seven thousand people died in the earthquake. Those who lived in Jerusalem—the Jews—were fearful and began praising My Father, the God of heaven.

God Will Rule Forever

The second woe is past; the third woe is coming quickly.

People don't have authority. Only I have authority. In this chapter, two witnesses (Enoch and Elijah, the only two who went to heaven without dying) came back to preach from the city of Jerusalem. They have authority to stop rain and to do miracles. Elijah shut the heavens by prayer because "he prayed earnestly." While you don't

have authority, you have access to My authority by prayer. You can do nothing by yourself, so pray for My authority to get done the impossible.

When the seventh angel blew his trumpet, I brought all people into My presence where they saw the original temple in heaven. There was shouting, telling heaven and earth, “The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of Christ, and He will reign forever and ever.” The twenty-four saints bowed in worship, prostrating themselves on the ground, saying, “We give thanks to My Father, the Almighty Lord God, The One who is, the One who was, and the One who is to come, because He has exercised His omnipotent power, and has begun to reign on the earth.” When I judged the nations, they were angry because I judged them in wrath. They were not remorseful or repentant. Now is the time to punish the wicked and reward My servants and prophets, and those small and great who revered My name, because I destroyed those who destroyed the earth and My followers. Then the temple in heaven began to open for all to see behind the veil. Everyone could see clearly the sacred chest. Suddenly, there were flashes of lightning, rumbling thunder, an earthquake, and violent hail on earth.

A Woman Gives Birth to a Son

12 Then John saw a woman in heaven clothed with the sun, with the moon beneath her feet. The woman was the nation Israel from whom I promised the Deliverer would come. The woman was with child, and she was constantly persecuted by satan because he wanted to prevent the Deliverer-Messiah from being born. John also saw satan as an enormous dragon controlling seven nation rulers with ten horns and a crown on each head. Satan pulled one-third of the fallen angels with him when he was banished from heaven to earth. Satan wanted to devour the Deliverer-Messiah so He wouldn't be born. I was the Child. I am the Messiah who will one day rule over the earth. I, the Child, completed My work on earth, and My Father received Me back into heaven. Then the woman fled into the wilderness where I had prepared a place for her. I fed her there 1,260 days.

Satan constantly accuses you “before your Father day and night.” What defense do you have? First, you have Me—Jesus—the High Priest who constantly intercedes for you. Second, you have the Holy Spirit who is also praying for you. Third, you can pray for protection as you pray against evil forces.

There was war in heaven where Michael, the Archangel, fought against the devil and his fallen angels. Satan was cast out of heaven to earth where he fulfilled his evil desires on earth. Satan is also called the devil, the serpent, who tried to lead the whole world into sin. John heard a loud voice shouting, “Victory, and power, and rulership now belong to the Father.” Again, he heard shouting, “Now Jesus Christ can rule. Satan is cast down. He will no longer persecute Christians. He will no longer accuse the brethren.”

Satan is defeated by the blood of the Lamb and by the faithfulness of martyrs who did not hold onto their life in the face of death. A loud voice said, “Let heaven and its citizens rejoice, but to those on earth beware.” Satan is angrily coming to persecute believers because he knows his time is short. When satan found himself cast to the earth, he turned his anger against the Jews because I, the Messiah, came from them. During the last half of the tribulation, Israel escaped to the wilderness, away from the devil who persecuted her. Israel stayed in the desert fortress of Petra for three and a half years. During the last half of the tribulation, satan used every scheme to destroy Israel. But satan’s schemes were stopped in the desert. Then satan determined to punish every one of My followers left on the earth.

There is continued war in the heavenlies between satanic forces and angelic forces. It centers on satan’s hatred for Me and the Jewish people from which I was born. To this day satan hates the Jews. We should pray against satan, using My power, and pray for the peace of Jerusalem, always remembering, “greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world.”

The Antichrist and the False Prophet

John saw a terrible animal emerge from the sea. It was the antichrist, the false
13 messiah. The antichrist had in his hand seven nation rulers, and they had
crowns on ten horns. He controlled the ten nations of the revived Roman
Empire. The antichrist was like a leopard but ferocious like a bear, and
wanted to rule like the king of the jungle—the lion. Satan gave the antichrist
the same power he possessed and allowed the antichrist to rule the world for
him. One of the antichrist’s seven heads had been killed but came back to
life. As a result, multitudes marveled and followed him. The antichrist, in a
very persuasive speech, blasphemed Me and slandered My temple and those
who follow Me. Satan gave the antichrist power to fight against My people,
to overcome them for three and a half years, and to rule every ethnic group,
language, and nation. Everyone worshiped the antichrist except those whose
names were in My Lamb’s Book of Life and those whom the antichrist had
killed. I said, “Those who have ears to hear spiritual messages, listen
carefully to what will happen.” Christians will be arrested, taken away, and
imprisoned. Other believers will be killed. This will be an opportunity for My
Fathers children to demonstrate their endurance and faith.

John saw another terrible animal emerge from the sea who tried to look
like a lamb with two horns, but he had a haunting voice like satan. The
second animal—the false prophet—served the antichrist, and propagated his
evil influence everywhere. He pointed to the antichrist’s fatal wound and told
everyone that he had been raised from the dead, persuading everyone to
worship the antichrist. The antichrist brought down fire from heaven just as
the Holy Spirit sent fire on Pentecost. The false prophet did miracles to
convince everyone to follow the antichrist. The false prophet erected a statue
to the antichrist, showing the wound that killed him, yet also showing that the
antichrist was now alive. The false prophet breathed on the statue of the
antichrist so that it spoke his word. Those who refused to worship the
antichrist’s statue were put to death.

*Lucifer fell from his lofty position as the highest angel because of his
pride. He declared, “I will be like the Most High.” Satan wants to
rule this world, as does My Father in heaven. Satan wants to take the
place of My Father, and receive the worship given to Him. The world,
during the tribulation, will be forced to worship an (idol) image of the
antichrist?*

The false prophet ordered everyone to be branded with the brand of the antichrist in their forehead or right hand. Everyone was branded no matter how young or old, rich or poor, slave or citizen. And no one could buy or sell anything unless they were branded with the name of the antichrist or his number. Anyone can calculate the number of the antichrist—it is 666.

There is a satanic tri-unity, that is, satan wants to replace My Father, the antichrist (the beast) wants to take My place, and the false prophet wants to take the place of the Holy Spirit. Just as on the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit filled each disciple, so in the tribulation, the false prophet imitates the Holy Spirit: “makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men.” This satanic miracle is to motivate people to believe in the antichrist and satan, just as the miracles in the Bible made people believe in Me.

My Worshipers

14 John saw Me—the Lamb—standing on Mount Zion in the city of Jerusalem, and with Me were 144,000 martyrs. They had My name written on their foreheads. John heard a groaning sound like a roar of a great waterfall, like rolling thunder over the plains. Yet the sound was pleasing, like the singing of a mighty choir accompanied by harps. The martyrs were singing a new song in front of My Father’s throne. The four winged angels were worshiping with them, so were the twenty-four saints on their thrones. Only the 144,000 could learn the new hymn because they had been redeemed from the suffering and tribulations of the earth. These had not defiled themselves spiritually. They were as pure as virgins. Because they had followed Me in persecution, they were redeemed from tribulation. They are a firstfruits offering to My Father. They never told a lie, and their lives were blameless.

The 144,000 martyrs in heaven sing a song that no one else knows because no one else had given the supreme sacrifice of their lives to My Father. They were singing praise to Him, and they are your example that you can sing your prayers, worship, and gratitude to My

Father. They were first in line and followed Me, the Lamb—wherever I went. They sing, “Holy, Holy, Holy” in worship to My Father. Let the music glorify My Father.

The Time for Judgment

John saw an angel flying over heaven, announcing the end was near. The good news had been preached to all people—to every ethnic group, language, and nation on earth. The angel shouted, “Fear God and praise Him, for His time has come to sit in judgment. Everyone worship the Creator of heaven and earth.” Another angel followed, saying, “Babylon is fallen because she made many people intoxicated with the wine of sexual pleasure.”

The angel said to the unsaved, “Fear God, and give glory to Him.” Fear means being scared, and they should be scared of My Father because He can condemn to eternal hell. But fear also means reverential trust. They should come into His presence with reverence given to a king; reverentially trust Him to save them. Fear also has the meaning of awe, and they should stand in awe of His great creative power and results.

John saw another angel shouting, “All people who worshiped the antichrist and branded themselves with his brand, must drink the wine of judgment that is poured out by My Father who is angry against sin.” They will be tortured in My presence and in front of the holy angels. The smoke of their torture will rise forever and ever. There will be no relief for them day or night, because they worshiped the beast and his statues, and accepted his branding in their right hand and foreheads. But, “Christians remained faithful in persecution and kept the Commands of Jesus.” Then John was told to write, “Happy are those who die in the Lord during the tribulation.” The Holy Spirit said, “They will rest from their trials, forever in the Lord Jesus, for their good works will follow them.”

Dead saints have three great reasons to rejoice: first, they “die in the Lord,” which means they were faithful to God right up to death.

Second, they are now enjoying rest from their labors. Third, the results and influences of their good works continue after their death.

Time of the End

Again, John looked to see Me—the Son of Man,—sitting on a cloud with a golden crown on My head. I had a sharp sickle in My hand ready to begin the harvest. Another angel came out of the temple and shouted to Me, sitting on the cloud, “The time has come. Use the sickle on the earth, for sin is ripe and ready to be harvested. The people of the earth have gathered to fight You.” Then I swung My sickle against all unsaved people, gathering them for judgment before My Father’s throne. Another angel, who also had a sickle, came out of the temple. Then another angel shouted, “Put Your sickle to work to cut all the grapes from the vine of the earth because sin is abundantly ripe.” So the sickle was put to the harvest and filled the winepress of My Father’s anger with the people of the earth. The battle in the valley of Armageddon began, and blood flowed like a river a hundred miles long, as high as a horse’s bridle.

The Temple in Heaven

15 Then John saw another spectacular sign in heaven. Seven angels held seven bowls of wrath to pour out on the earth. This was the final and complete judgment of My Father. John then saw a sea without a ripple on its surface. The sea had a glowing fire in the water. Standing by the sea were those saints who had triumphed against the antichrist. They had refused to worship his statue. They had not been branded with the number 666. They had harps and were singing the victorious song of Moses—when he defeated the Egyptians. They also sang My song—The song of the Lamb—who had given them victory over the antichrist. “Great and wonderful is everything You do, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are all Your ways. You are the King of the nations. Who would not reverence and praise Your name, for you alone are holy? All nations will come before You to worship and adore You, for the righteous things You’ve done.”

A crowd was singing Moses' song of deliverance (from Egyptian servitude) and redemption (from sin). All of My people can join in this song. In singing, they extol My greatness and marvelous works, My righteousness and truth, My sovereignty over the nations, and My holiness in judgment.

John saw another awful scene in heaven. An angel was distributing the last seven judgments—last because they were to exhaust My anger to sin. John saw the temple opening, and he could look into the most holy place. Out came seven angels, each with a different one of My judgments. Each angel had a pure white linen robe and a golden sash around his waist. One of the winged creatures around the throne gave the seven angels seven bowls filled with My anger. Smoke from My glory filled the temple so that no one could enter until the seven bowls of judgment were finished.

The Seven Bowls of Judgment

16 John heard a voice shout from the temple to the seven angels, “Go pour your seven bowls out over the earth.” The first angel poured his bowl on the earth, and ugly painful sores broke out on all people who had the brand 666 and worshiped the antichrist statue.

The second angel emptied his bowl on the oceans, and they turned to blood. Every living thing in them died.

The third angel poured his bowl into the rivers and springs. They also turned to blood. Then the angel said, “Lord, You live now, and You lived in the past. You are holy in Your judgments. Because evil people have shed the blood of Your saints, so You have given them blood to drink. This is what they deserve.” The angel at the altar responded, “Yes, Lord, God Almighty, Your punishments are true and just.”

The fourth angel emptied his bowl on the sun, so the sun scorched people as if they were burned with fire. People cursed Me for sending these judgments because they were severely burned by the sun, but they would not repent and turn to Me.

The fifth angel emptied his bowl over the throne of the antichrist, and his empire was plunged into darkness. People bit their tongues in pain. They

continued to curse Me, and they refused to repent of their evil.

The sixth angel emptied his bowl over the Euphrates River, and all the water dried up. And the armies of the East crossed the dry riverbed, heading to invade the Promised Land. There came a message from the mouth of satan, and the antichrist, and the false prophet, “To all the kings of the nations of the world, join us in fighting God Almighty. We will finally do away with the Jews and defeat the God of the Jews.” Three foul spirits came out of their mouth like frogs. They were demons sent to deliver the message and convince the kings to wage war. Then God attacked them unexpectedly, just as a thief in the night catches victims when they do not expect violence. All the armies of the world came to fight God at the battle of Armageddon.

The seventh angel emptied his bowl into the air, and a voice shouted, “The end has come,” for the last bowl was My second coming to earth. Then there were flashes of lightning, rolling thunder, and a violent earthquake that shook the earth more violent than ever before. The city of Jerusalem was split into three parts. The cities of the earth crumbled to the ground. The city of Babylon was not forgotten. It was punished for the violence of its crimes. The islands of the ocean disappeared. No mountain was left standing. Storms of hail, each weighing one hundred pounds, fell from the sky. The more people rebelled and cursed Me, the more fierce is My punishment.

The Great Whore—Religious Babylon

17 Then one of the seven angels with bowls spoke to John, “Come, I will show you the punishment for the prostituted followers of the antichrist.” The kings of the earth have committed sexual sins by worshiping in this vile temple. They have made the whole world sin against God by forcing them to partake of her adultery. John was taken by the Holy Spirit to see the prostitute, riding on a scarlet red animal. It had seven heads who were ruling leaders, and ten horns representing the revived Roman Empire. Blasphemy was written all over her. The prostitute was dressed in purple and red with gaudy jewelry of gold and pearls. She was drinking a cup of disgusting filthy fornication. On her forehead was written, “Babylon the Great, mother of all prostitutes.” The prostitute was drunken with the blood of martyrs whom she had killed. John stared at the prostitute in alarm.

The angel said, “Don’t be horrified. I will explain who the prostitute is and the beast she rides. She is the followers of the antichrist which was alive, but she died. She will come up from the bottomless pit to eventually be judged for all her ways. Those whose names are in The Lamb’s Book of Life will be dumbfounded by this reappearance.

John, the writer, was amazed at the things he saw. The angel told him, “This calls for a wise mind.” That means when you don’t understand what you read about the end times, you can pray for spiritual understanding. The seven heads represent seven rulers who live in a city with seven hills. Five leaders have already fallen, a sixth now reigns; the seventh is yet to come. The scarlet red animal is the eighth ruler. He will come up from hell but will be judged and returned there. The ten horns are ten kings who don’t yet have power. They will rule in the future for a short time, providing their strength and authority for the antichrist. They will war against Me—the Lamb—at Armageddon. But I Am the Lamb, the Lord of lords and King of kings. I will defeat them and their followers.” The angel continued his explanation, “The waters beside the prostitute are all the people who follow the antichrist from every people group, language, and nation. But the ten rulers and the antichrist will turn against his followers, stripping them of their rituals and power. The Holy Spirit will influence the minds of sinful people to do God’s will until He comes to judge the antichrist and his followers.” The woman will be influenced by the antichrist.

Babylon has always opposed Me. Those in Babel rebelled against Me in building a tower temple to the heavens until I changed their language. Babylon was the nation that destroyed Jerusalem and My temple in 587 BC. The future “people group” that will rise up against Me will be “Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots.” Babylon will get wealth from “the kings of the earth.” She will be guilty of all types of sexual sins and rebellion against Me. She will make an alliance with the antichrist. Babylon will get political power from seven kings and ten nations.

Economic Babylon

John saw another angel come from heaven. His brightness shined to all the earth. He shouted, “Babylon is fallen, Babylon is fallen, which is the **18**den of demons. Every filthy spirit and every detestable idea also live there. All the nations have been intoxicated with her proposition to sin. All the world leaders have committed adultery with her and grown rich from her extravagance.” Then John heard My voice from heaven, “Come out from her, My people. Do not share in her crimes and sins. I, who live in heaven, know about her sins. She will be treated as she treated others. She will be paid back double what punishment she gave out. Every one of her sinful pleasures and luxuries will give her grief and misery. She boasts that she is a queen on a throne. She is not sorry for anything she’s done. Judgment will fall on her in a single day. She’ll suffer disease, mourning, and hunger.”

I, the Lord God, who has great power will burn her up. The world rulers, who have fornicated with her, will weep and mourn for they lose everything. When they see the smoke of commercial Babylon burning, they will retreat at a safe distance and cry, “Alas! Alas! Our great city, Babylon, a mighty city, was destroyed in a single hour.” All the business people of the earth will weep and mourn over her because they will no longer be able to buy gold, silver, jewels, pearls, fine cloths, perfumes, costly furniture, and sculptures. They also cry for lack of oil, flour, wheat, meat, and automobiles. And no one will work anywhere because there is no money to pay anyone to do anything. The expensive things they loved are gone, never to return. All ease and pleasures have ceased. The business people who made a fortune out of commercial Babylon will stand at a safe distance to wring their hands and grieve saying, “This is terrible. What are we going to do?” Everything that was beautiful and fine and comfortable was destroyed in a single hour. All the fashionable clothes, accumulated wealth, exquisite meals, entertainment, and vacations were all destroyed in a single hour. All the captains of ships and people who made a living from the sea stayed at a safe distance, watching the smoke as commercial Babylon burned. They cried; “There has never been a civilization like this. We will never see anything like this again. That great city—commercial Babylon—that kept us rich through her excesses, was ruined in a single hour.”

There was rejoicing in heaven, from all the saints, apostles, and prophets; for I judged an economic system that persecuted them. I judged a way of life that rebelled against righteousness. Then a mighty angel lifted a huge millstone and threw it into the ocean saying, “So shall this commercial way

of life never be heard from again. Never again will there be the sound of music, dancing, reverie, and the laughter of pleasure seekers. Never again will there be the sound of machines in factories or the ring of cash registers, or any business ventures. There will be no electricity; everything will be dark. Every machine that runs will shut down. There'll be no laughing like people in love, and no one will achieve their heart's desire. All your luxuries, entertainment, and pleasures will be gone forever; for in commercial Babylon is found the blood of martyrs who were destroyed by her way of life."

Babylon of the future is more than the city of Nebuchadnezzar. It is a nation like Nebuchadnezzar's Empire, a culture that will embrace the entire near East, or what is called the Arab world. There are two sides of Babylon. First, Babylon is the political-religious empire that is a mixture or confederation of worshiping bodies held together by fear, brutality, and false doctrine from hell. Second, Babylon is an economic or business empire that makes the nations rich. The first side of Babylon is destroyed by the beast or antichrist because he doesn't want to share power or glory with it or anyone else. The second side is destroyed at My second coming at the end of the tribulation.

Hallelujah!

19 John heard the roar of a great multitude, shouting, "HALLELUJAH, victory, glory, and power to our God." It was all heaven worshipping because I was getting ready for My return to earth. The crowd shouted, "God judges accurately, and God punishes fairly. He has condemned the religious prostitute who corrupted mankind with her adultery. God has avenged the death of the martyrs that the evil prostitute has killed." The crowd sang, "HALLELUJAH, the smoke from the judgment of the prostitute goes on forever."

The word HALLELUJAH was a call to temple worship in the Old Testament. It is both a command and an invitation of opportunity. It was an expression of joy, praise, thanksgiving, and exaltation. So

John heard the people of heaven shout HALLELUJAH. First, Babylon and its evil world system were being judged by My Father. Second, I Am coming to destroy evil and all those who rebelled against Me and to establish My kingdom.

Then the twenty-four saints before the throne and the four winged angels around the throne fell on their faces to worship God the Father of judgment, crying, “AMEN, we agree with Your judgment. AMEN, Your will be done forever.”

Worshiping God

A voice echoed out over the multitude, “Praise our God, all His servants, great and small who reverence Him.” John heard the immense crowd roar like thunder, “HALLELUJAH, the reign of God over the earth is about to begin.”

Be glad and rejoice because My marriage supper is ready. I will be united with My Bride, My church. The Bride is ready because she is made pure by My blood. She is dressed in fine white linen, which is made from the good deeds of the saints.

Those in heaven shouted their worship to Me as the voice of many waters, and mighty thunderings. There's a time to worship quietly in your heart. There's also a time to shout your worship as loud as you can because your heart is filled and you can't contain yourself. You seize the moment with shouting. Your heart is filled with love and praise to Me. When you can't contain it any longer, you shout as loud as possible, “You are LORD.”

The angel told John to write, “Blessed are the saints who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lord.” John fell at his feet to worship the angel, but he said, “No, don't worship me, I am a servant of God like you. Worship God.” The angel explained the purpose of the prophetic words he had given John; it was to tell all about Me.

Every emotion of your heart is expressed in prayer, so there is a time to “rejoice and be glad” in My presence for what I have done for you in the past, and for what I am doing at the present time. The people of heaven are worshiping God and saying, “Let us rejoice,” because I am coming to finally judge sin on the earth and reward My saints.

I Return to Earth

Then John saw heaven open, and he saw a white horse. I was sitting on him. I am called Faithful and True. I am ready to make war with all the armies, gathered in the valley of Armageddon, who oppose Me and My plan for the Holy Land. My eyes are blazing fire as I peer into the hearts and rebellion of all people. I wear a crown, symbolic of My rulership over all the earth. I will have a name embroidered on My garment that no one knows but Me. My name is Jesus, the Word of God, and My garments are covered with the blood of those I have defeated. An enormous army follows Me. They wear white, symbolizing their purity, and they ride white horses. I held the sharp sword of justice to strike down those who rebelled against Me, and I will rule them with an iron grip. On My robe is written, “King of kings and Lord of lords.” Now I will tread over My enemies as grapes are crushed in the winepress.

John saw an angel standing in the sun, shouting to all the birds of heaven, “Come eat the bodies of those who fought against God and His plan.” The dead included all the generals, soldiers, horses, and citizens—great and small. John had seen the antichrist gather the world leaders to make war against Me, the One riding the conquering horse. John then saw the antichrist was taken prisoner with the false prophet who had worked miracles, deceiving those who were branded with 666 and who worshiped the statue of the antichrist. These two were thrown into the fiery lake burning with brimstone. All the rest were killed under My judgment, and the birds had a feast on their flesh.

The Millennium—One Thousand Years

20Next, John saw an angel descending from heaven with the key to hell. He had an enormous chain, and when he overpowered satan, who is also called the serpent, the devil, and the dragon, the angel chained him and threw

satan into a bottomless pit to remain there one thousand years. Then the angel shut the entrance and sealed it to make sure the devil would not deceive people until the one thousand years were over. At the end of that time, satan would be released for a short period of time.

John saw My followers who were given authority to rule for Me, sitting on thrones of authority. Then John saw the martyrs resurrected to new life. Many had been beheaded because of their testimony. They had not worshiped the beast or his statue, nor had they been branded in their heart or forehead with the brand of the antichrist—666. They reigned with Me one thousand years. The unsaved dead were not resurrected yet. They were to be judged after the one thousand years. The saved are raised in the first resurrection. The second death held no power over them. They will be priests who worship My Father for one thousand years, and they will reign with Me for one thousand years.

The Bible calls you “priests of God.” You should pray for people, worship My Father, attend My church, and live holy lives dedicated to God as a testimony to Me.

When the one thousand years end, satan will be released out of his prison. He will go out to deceive the ethnic groups of people scattered over the face of the earth, that is, Gog and Magog and organize them for battle, so many they are almost impossible to count. They will march and surround God’s people and His beloved city. But fire will come down from heaven and destroy them.

Then the devil, who betrays, will be thrown into the lake burning with fire and sulfur, joining the antichrist and false prophet where they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

The Great White Throne

John saw My Father sitting on a great white throne, the place all unsaved people feared and hated. And now, no one could deny judgment had come, and no one could escape their time of judgment. John saw the unsaved dead, all-important and common persons, being summoned to appear before the all-knowing Judge. My book, The Lamb’s Book of Life, was opened, and all,

whose name was not there, were condemned to hell. The Book of Works was then opened to determine the severity of their punishment. All graves gave up their dead, so did the oceans also. Hades also gave up its dead so that all could be judged. Then all those who were guilty of death were thrown into the Lake of Fire, which is the second death. Everyone whose names were not found in The Lamb's Book of Life was thrown into the Lake of Fire.

The New Heaven and New Earth

21 Then John saw a new heaven and a new earth because the first heaven and earth were burned up in fervent heat. The new earth did not have a sea.

John saw the holy city—the new Jerusalem—coming down from My Father's presence in heaven as beautiful as a bride at her wedding. Then John heard a loud voice announcing, "I am now making My home among people. I will live among them, and they will be My people. I will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death, sickness, or pain. All sorrows of the past are gone." Then My Father, who sits on the throne, announced, "I am making everything new!" Then I told John, "Write this down, for this is the way it will happen." Just as I said on the cross about sin, "It is finished," so I will say of life on this earth, "It is finished."

Then I said, "I am the Alpha and Omega, I am the beginning of all things, and I am the purpose of all things. I will give water from the well of eternal life to anyone who thirsts for Me. This is My gift to those who are victorious. They will be the children of My Father in heaven, and He will be their God. He reserves the Lake of Fire for unbelievers, cowards, those speaking obscenities, murderers, sex offenders, idolaters, and all liars—that will be their second death."

The City Walls

One of the seven angels, who had the bowls of judgment, said to John, "Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb." Then John was carried away in a prophetic vision to a high mountain where he saw the new Jerusalem, the holy city coming down from My Father. It was filled with My Shekinah glory, and it sparkled like a dish of precious jewels, and it was crystal clear. The walls were very high and very wide, and there were twelve

gates, guarded by twelve angels. The names of the twelve tribes of Israel were written on the twelve gates. There were three gates on each side—north, south, east, and west. The walls were built on twelve foundation stones, and the names written on them were of the twelve apostles who had followed Me on earth.

The angel held in his hand a golden rod to measure the city and walls. He measured 1,500 miles from side to side and from top to bottom. The city was foursquare, as long as it is wide, and it is high. Next, he measured the thickness of the walls. They were 216 feet across, according to his measurement. The city was constructed of transparent gold. One could see through it like glass. The walls were like jasper, and the twelve foundations were garnished with jewels. The first foundation was like jasper, the second foundation was like sapphire, the third foundation was like chalcedony, the fourth foundation was like emerald, the fifth foundation was like sardonyx, the sixth foundation was like sardius, the seventh foundation was like chrysolite, the eighth foundation was like beryl, the ninth foundation was like topaz, the tenth foundation was like chrysoprase, the eleventh foundation was like jacinth, and the twelfth foundation was like amethyst. The twelve gates glistened like a pearl, and the streets were paved with pure gold, as clear as transparent glass.

You expect the place where I dwell to be beautiful because I am there. I give beauty, order, and meaning to any area I inhabit. I give you the best and most beautiful life, and I purify everything I touch to make it beautiful.

There was no temple in the city because people worshiped My Father and Me—the Lamb—everywhere. The city did not need the sun or moon for light because it was continually lit by Me, and My Shekinah glory. The people who are saved will walk in the light, and everyone—including all kings—will glorify Me. The gates will never be shut. They remain open, for there is no night there. All the saved of all the ethnic groups of people will bring their praise and worship to Me in the city. Nothing sinful will enter the city. No one who is filthy or tells lies will be allowed in the city. The only ones there will be true believers whose names are written in My book, The Lamb's Book of Life.

When you get to heaven, there won't be a sanctuary because heaven itself is My dwelling place. In the Old Testament, the believers needed to go to a place to experience My manifest presence, while today you can experience My presence in your heart, no matter where you are. Therefore, you can pray anywhere.

Life With Me in Heaven

22The angel showed John a sparkling clean river, flowing from My Father's throne and from Me. It flowed down the middle of the central street of heaven. A Tree of Life grew on each side of the river, and a new crop of fruit that could be harvested each month. The leaves provided health for all people who will eat from the Tree of Life. There is nothing evil in the city because My Father's throne and My throne are there. All My servants will worship Me continually. My servants will see My face and My name will be on their foreheads. There will be no night—therefore, no need for lights because I will give light to the city. And I will rule My people forever.

I Am Coming Soon

The angel told John, “God's people can trust these words and descriptions of heaven. Be prepared. He is coming soon.” I, who tell the future to My prophets, sent My angel to tell John these things that will soon occur. They are blessed who read this book and believe what it says. When John saw and heard all these things that were about to happen, he fell prostrate to worship the angel who showed him these things. The angel said, “No! I am a servant of Jesus like you are. Obey what the prophets say, ‘Worship God!’” The angel instructed John not to close the book he was writing, but he should tell everyone its message because the evil person will continue to do evil and the filthy will continue to do filthy things. Also, good people will continue to do good, and holy people will continue being holy.

I said, “I am coming soon, and I'll have a reward for everyone, according to the deeds they have done. I am Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and Last of everything.” Those who live by My Word can enter the gates into the city, and eat the fruit of the Tree of Life. I will keep out of

the city all rebels, sorcerers, the sexually impure, murderers, idolaters, and those who love to lie.

When you reach heaven, you will stand before My Father, happy and holy. Christians experience happiness as they please My Father, and they learn the greatest joy in life comes from Me when they exalt Me in their thoughts and actions. Happiness is found on the road to Christian duty.

I sent an angel to tell John these messages for My churches. I was born in the family line of David. I am the Bright Star of the morning. I and the Holy Spirit tell all, “Come! Let all those who are thirsty, Come! All who want the water of eternal life may have it free.”

Every Word Is Imperative

John warned everyone who reads this book not to add anything to it, or I will add to their punishment. And if any take away from the things in this book, I will take away their part in the Book of Life and in the holy city. I repeated the warnings and said, “Surely I come quickly!” John agreed with Me and prayed, “Amen! Even so, come, Lord Jesus.” Then John gave the benediction, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.”

EPILOGUE

Do you know for sure that you will live with Me in heaven forever?

I had a plan for humanity when I created the world, and I have a plan for your life. It would be unfortunate if you went through life and missed out on My plan of eternal life with Me in heaven.

Standing Before God



One day you will stand before God, My heavenly Father. Imagine, on that day, that He would ask you, “Why should I allow you to live with Me in heaven forever?” How would you answer God? Before you go on, think about your answer.

I Came to the Earth I Created to Give Hope

One night, I met a religious leader named Nicodemus. This is what I told him. “My Father loved everyone in the world so much that He gave Me, His One and only Son, to die for each of them. Now everyone who believes

in Me will not perish, but will have eternal life. For My Father did not send Me to bring punishment to the people of the world, but that they might be saved through believing in Me.”



I Want You to Live With Me in Heaven Forever

God loved you so much that He sent Me to die, for your sins, on the cross. Now, if you place your complete trust in Me, and ask My forgiveness for your sins, you will never perish but you will have eternal fellowship with Me in Heaven. You can have this personal experience.

I want you to know and trust Me, and to spend your life learning about Me. Then, one day, you will live with Me for eternity in a place that I am preparing for you.

The Faith I Offer Allows You to Trust Me

If you put your faith and trust in Me, you can stop living by everyone else’s rules and you can start living by the principles I have given you in the Bible. I love you more than anyone else because I created you for a purpose. I want you, more than anything, to follow Me and let me direct your path in life.

Now, are You ready and willing to...

- Trust in Me completely for eternal life, knowing that you cannot save yourself?
- Believe that I took your place, and paid for all your sins on the cross?
- Repent of your sins and follow Me?
- Receive God My Father's gift of eternal life through Me?

If you can answer **YES** to these questions then you are ready to pray the following prayer, believing it in your heart.

If you are not ready at this time than continue to learn about Me and the love that I have for you.

Pray This Prayer and Believe it in Your Heart

Dear Jesus, I confess that I have sinned and cannot save myself. I believe that You died for me. Please forgive me of my sin and come into my heart right now, and save me. Help me to turn from my sin and become a follower of you. Amen.

I am so Glad You Prayed the Prayer!

I want you to know that there is joy in Heaven because of the decision you made to receive Me as your Savior. Don't be surprised at the things I will do in your life as you begin to follow me in your Christian life. I am going to be there for you in your new-found faith, and I will help you to overcome temptations in your life. There will be times when you don't know what to do, and which way to turn. I will shine a light in your heart through my Word, so you will know the plan I have for your life. I AM the light that brightens your path. Come walk with Me, and I will show you where to go.

The best thing you can do for Me right now is to find another Christian believer to celebrate with. This is the first day of the rest of your life on

earth, and you have eternity with Me to look forward too. Now, tell someone else about it.

Get to Know Believers Like You in My Church

As you continue your walk as a new believer in Me, you need to meet with other believers just like you. In the local church, you will find more of My followers who will pray for you and guide you as you learn to live for Me with all your heart.



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