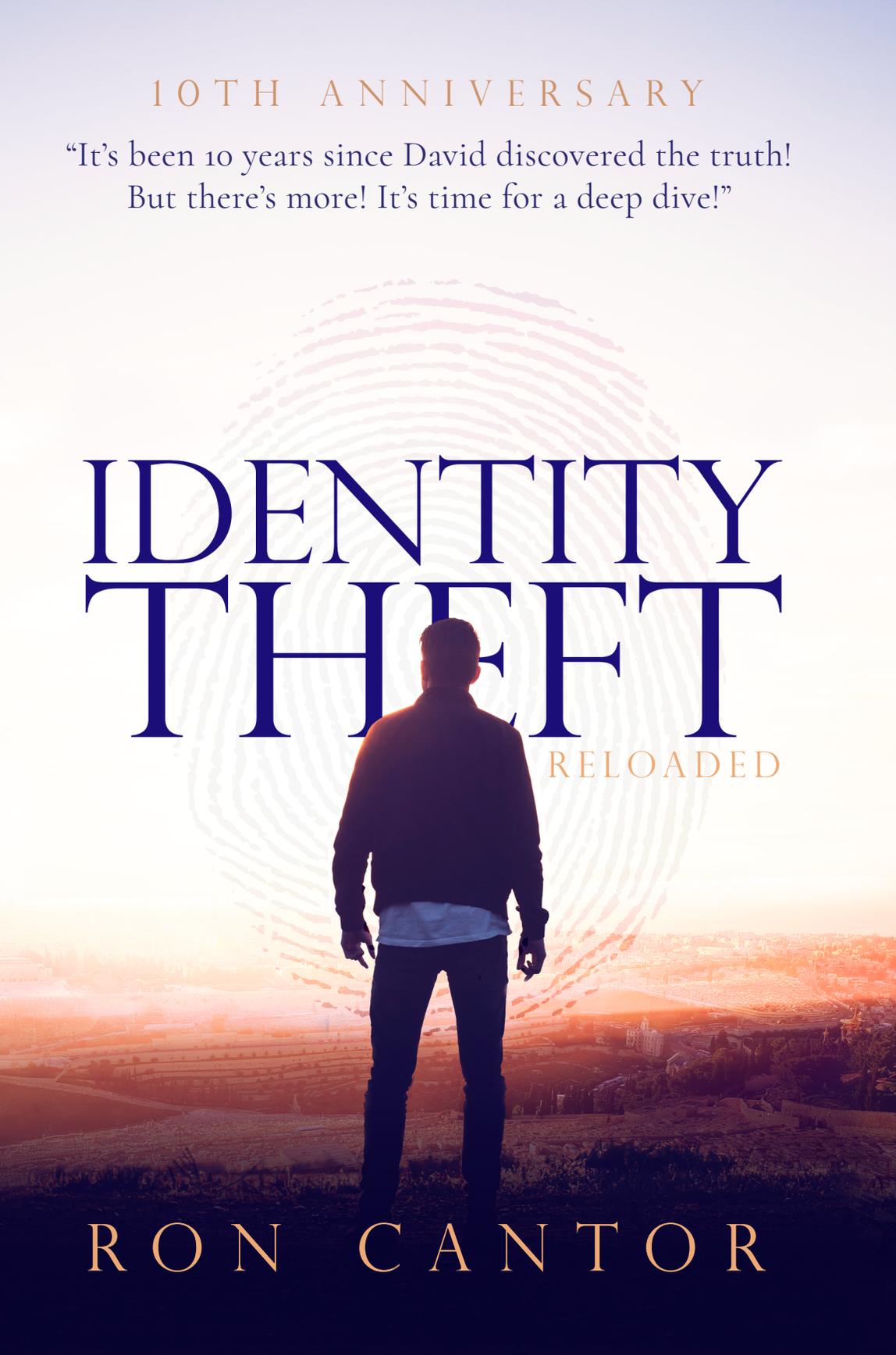


10TH ANNIVERSARY

“It’s been 10 years since David discovered the truth!
But there’s more! It’s time for a deep dive!”



IDENTITY THEFT

RELOADED

RON CANTOR

PRAISE FOR “*IDENTITY THEFT*”

“Ron Cantor is not only married to one of my favorite people on the planet, he is also a friend and co-laborer in Messiah for well over two decades. In his book, *Identity Theft*, you will find him witty and clever as well as insightful as he shares Jewish roots from a totally unexpected angle. I was pleased to discover that *Identity Theft* is an engaging page-turner! I believe you will find this book to be pointed as well as helpful, and you might even catch yourself becoming an agent in restoring Messiah’s true identity!”

PAUL WILBUR

Recording Artist, Integrity Music

“Ron had my rapt attention from page one of the Introduction! And what a great title, as Ron effectively portrays the Identity Theft of the centuries – that Jesus has been robbed of His Jewishness! Tragically, those who believe in Him would have put Him in the gas ovens of Europe had He lived during their lifetime.”

DON FINTO

Author, *Your People Shall Be My People*
Former Senior Pastor, Belmont Church
Nashville, Tennessee

“Ron Cantor’s new book, *Identity Theft*, is as riveting as it is revelatory and as entertaining as it is enlightening. With the unique vantage point of a Messianic Jew living in Israel, Ron gives you a guided tour of history from the pages of the New

Testament to the Holocaust and then back to the cross for an extraordinarily powerful portrayal of the Messiah's sacrificial death. Buy a copy for yourself and one for a friend!"

DR. MICHAEL L. BROWN

President, Fire School of Ministry

Concord, North Carolina

Host, National Radio Talk Show, *Line of Fire*

Author, *Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus Series*

"I've known Ron for a number of years and have always enjoyed his ministry. When I read *Identity Theft*, I was captivated by the story. I couldn't stop reading until I was finished. What a must-read for anyone wanting to be a part of an incredible journey to faith in the Messiah!"

DR. EVON G. HORTON

Senior Pastor, Brownsville Assembly

Pensacola, Florida

"How ingenious to embed a powerful teaching in an engrossing novel of a Jewish man's search for the truth! Many Christians today are experiencing a longing to know more about their Jewish roots, which are so foundational to all followers of the Messiah. But to really understand Christianity's Jewish heritage together with today's Jewish culture and mindset, Christians must know both the Biblical narrative *and* the story of the Jewish people over the last 2,000 years, as well as how it has been so influenced and even dominated by the Church. In *Identity Theft*, Messianic communicator Ron Cantor has written the book that will give you this information in

unforgettable portraits from first-century Jewish believers to the tragic wanderings of the Jewish people up until today.”

ARI AND SHIRA SORKO-RAM

Founders, Maoz Israel (www.MaozIsrael.org)

Senior Leaders, Tiferet Yeshua Congregation, Tel Aviv

“Not just dramatic but exhilarating!

An easy-to-read story that draws non-Jewish readers into Jewish consciousness and Jewish readers into Jesus’ consciousness. While many novels distract people from life, this one contains a life-changing message that can transform a reader’s life. Happy to recommend.”

DR. JEFFREY L. SEIF

Chair of the Jewish Studies Department,

Christ for the Nations Institute

Dallas, Texas

“This much-needed work is important for all seekers of truth. Though I am not much of a ‘fiction’ reader, I quickly found myself engrossed in Ron’s manuscript and unable to put it down. *Identity Theft* is a great book for both those who recognize the Jewishness of our Messiah as well as those who’ve never truly considered His identity. As we enter into a season of unparalleled antisemitism, we must remember that our Messiah was born into a Jewish home, lived as a Torah-observant Jew, died as King of the Jews, and is returning as the ‘Lion of the Tribe of Judah.’”

SCOTT VOLK

Pastor, Fire Church, Charlotte, North Carolina

President, Hineni International Ministries

“I first met Ron Cantor in our local congregation in Washington, D.C. decades ago. It seemed readily apparent he would emerge in a leadership role, and this has happened. Now we serve together in Maoz Ministries (Israel), where he is the winsome televised messenger of God’s Good News of the Messiah.

“His recent book, *Identity Theft*, artfully explains the ancient schism between Jews and Christianity. **This he does not through dry theology but rather through a captivating novel.**

“The book will fascinate both the Jewish and Gentile reader **with its portrayal of the heartbreaking truth of the Church’s treatment of God’s ancient people.** The robbing of Yeshua (Jesus) of His cultural identity has resulted in a terrible and lengthy tragedy to the Jewish people. Ron’s book seeks to restore to Yeshua His original ethnic context. The story helps us to better understand and reveals many, many things.”

PAUL LIBERMAN

President, Messianic Jewish Alliance of America

Publisher, The Messianic Times

“Ron Cantor has written a fast-paced novel that powerfully defends the faith. It reflects the understanding of many Messianic Jewish leaders in Israel and speaks the Gospel with simplicity and clarity to Jewish people who do not yet follow Yeshua. This book will open up minds and hearts – not for only Jewish people, but for many in the Church who will

be enlightened as they see the first followers of Yeshua in their historical Jewish context.”

DR. DANIEL C. JUSTER

Executive Director, Tikkun International
President, Messianic Jewish Bible Institute, Jerusalem

“Ron Cantor adds his voice to the still small choir singing out the truth of the story of Jesus, his Jewish life and times, and the tragic opposite effect the rewritten story has had upon the Jewish people and Christians. As an Orthodox Jew, I have not been convinced by this book to change my own life, but I hope Ron is not ‘preaching to the choir,’ and Christians who feel uncomfortable with their understanding of Jesus will pick up this volume and discover biblical truths that they never knew existed. Identity Theft is an important milestone in the journey that Christians must take in times such as these, and by extension, it impacts Christian-Jewish relations as well.”

GIDON ARIEL

Christian-Jewish Friendship Cultivator
Founder of the Facebook Group *Jews Who Love Christians
Who Love Jews (and the Christians Who Love Them)*
and www.root-source.com

“From the time I picked it up, I didn’t want to put it down. Ron Cantor has ventured into ‘No Man’s Land.’ Is it possible that the bridge between Judaism and Christianity is where truth resides? This book will challenge Christians to reexamine their theological presuppositions and take a much different view of the origins of their faith. It will also challenge the

Jewish community to reexamine their 2,000-year-old wound inflicted by Gentile hypocrisy and take a new look at this ‘Yeshua of Nazareth’ in his real clothing!”

RICHARD FREEMAN

Messianic Rabbi, Beth Messiah Congregation

Houston, Texas

“Ron is a passionate communicator, teacher, and storyteller. I had the joy of serving with Ron in both Ukraine and Hungary, where his teachings on Jewish roots, history, and Messianic theology blessed many. In this creative book, Ron takes you on a journey of his Jewish people’s experience through the centuries. You will be enlightened and encouraged as you see the ‘family story’ told in a very new way. I wholeheartedly recommend this book.”

WAYNE WILKS JR., PH.D.

International Director, Messianic Jewish Bible Institute

“If Jesus is both 100 percent deity and 100 percent human, then it’s essential to understand what kind of human He is. He is certainly not a blue-eyed Scandinavian, as some have portrayed Him. For more than a decade, Ron Cantor has been passionately revealing the true face of Jesus to Israel and the nations. As Ron shows how Jesus came to earth as a Jew, many truths in Scripture become more comprehensible and alive. You’ll be enriched by Ron’s insights.”

WAYNE HILSDEN

Senior Pastor, King of Kings Community,

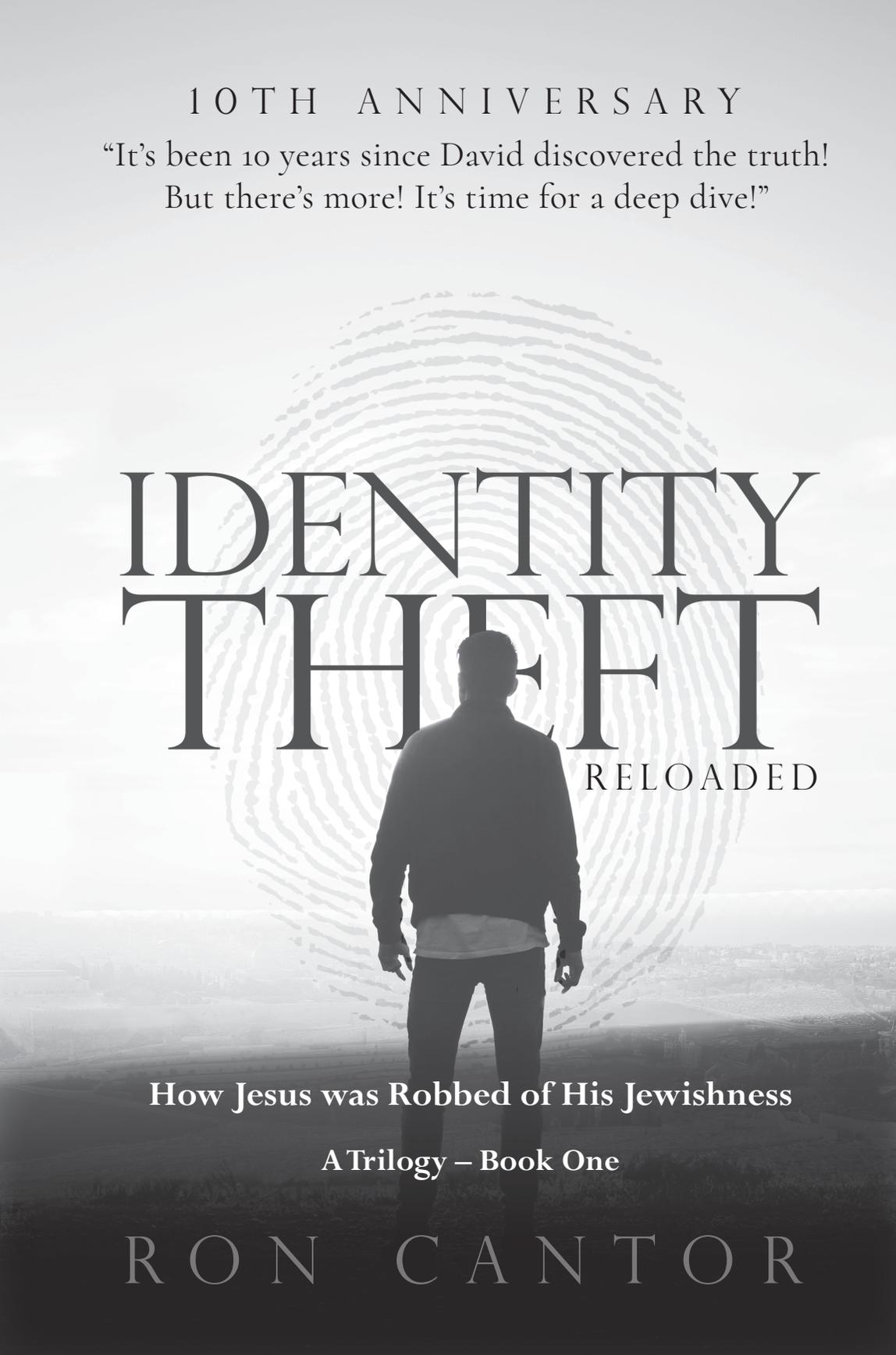
Jerusalem, Israel

“The emotional depth and immediacy evoked in this novel would be impossible in a theological tome with the same purpose. It’s a book you will want to read at one sitting, and if you’re like me, your only regret will be having to wait for the remaining two volumes of the trilogy.”

DR. DAVID H. STERN
Translator, *The Complete Jewish Bible*

10TH ANNIVERSARY

“It’s been 10 years since David discovered the truth!
But there’s more! It’s time for a deep dive!”



IDENTITY THEFT

RELOADED

How Jesus was Robbed of His Jewishness

A Trilogy – Book One

RON CANTOR

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For more information about Ron Cantor, his books, or his ministry, Messiah’s Mandate, please visit www.roncantor.com.

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to all the indirect victims
of this Identity Theft – *the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*

I implore you to take a fresh and honest look
at Yeshua (Jesus) the Jew.

I think you will be surprised.

PREFACE

When I wrote *Identity Theft*, my intent was to help Christians understand and meet the real Jesus, the Jewish Jesus, who came to Jewish people.

I was stunned when a few weeks after it was published, I received an email from an Israeli saying that the book played a vital role in bringing him to Yeshua. He is still serving Yeshua!

Later, a young man in our Tel Aviv congregation told me that *Identity Theft* was the best tool for reaching Jewish people. We immediately made plans to translate it into Hebrew and have since given out thousands of free copies.

I started receiving emails from people all over the world telling me how the book changed their life.

I never dreamed I would write a novel, but one night, as I put my head down to go to sleep, the entire story came to me. Well, at least the outline.

I spent the next three weeks writing. Then I took a year to do research and craft it into a truly gripping, suspenseful fantasy novel.

I felt like I got on a roller coaster, and I had no idea where it was going. Finally, with one more chapter to go, I was driving in Germany on my way to minister when the ending came to me. I was weeping in my car as I pulled up to my host's house. I ran inside, opened my computer and finished the book.

Now for the 10th anniversary, *we have made it even better!*

Over the past 10 years, I have learned quite a bit more about the Jewish Roots of the New Testament, how the church became antisemitic, and the coming End Time Awakening in Israel (get my book free on that topic at roncantor.com). So

I took a month and went through the entire book to make it better.

I hope this new version will strengthen your faith, even as it entertains you. And when you're done, give it to a Jewish friend.

Ron Cantor

Thanksgiving, 2021

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are several people I would like to thank for making this project a reality. Christy Wilkerson was the first to read this manuscript and alerted me to the fact that it needed work. Mark Gerofsky also proofread the original manuscript. He would often call me from Canada and tell me that he was on his way to some trip but had five minutes to go over corrections. Pastor Ed Crenshaw added some great insights that I had missed. Wende Carr, living in Beirut, also did a great job of editing and would often send with her edits notes of encouragement that she felt that this book was going to have an impact.

However, one person stands out. Susette McLachlan from New Zealand put almost as much time and dedication into this book as I did. She volunteered to edit *Identity Theft*, and I don't think she fully understood how deeply she would get involved. This is a better book because of her hard work. She would sometimes stay up all night working on it. Thank you, Susette!

I want to also thank my daughter Danielle, who, from the first time she understood I was writing a new book, never stopped encouraging me and showing interest.

Dr. Daniel C. Juster and Dr. Michael L. Brown, both scholars, authors, and personal mentors to me, made valuable contributions in helping me to present what I believe is an accurate portrayal of the first-century believers.

I wish to thank Ari and Shira Sorko-Ram, who have graciously given me a platform to share my heart through Maoz Israel.

And I would be remiss not to acknowledge the sacrifice

of my sweet Israeli wife, Elana. When I made the decision to rewrite this book as a novel instead of a teaching, I had to get it done in a matter of weeks. *I disappeared – physically and emotionally.* Even during a ministry trip to Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, Elana was often out sightseeing by herself while I was confined to my hotel room with my MacBook Air. Thank you, sweetheart, for being so patient and understanding. I promise to take you somewhere amazing just as soon this book hits the printing press! I love you!

Lastly, I want to mention my Hero, My Champion, my source of encouragement and creativity, Yeshua the Messiah, who pursued me when I had no regard for eternity. *Identity Theft* is His story.

Introduction



CUT OFF FROM MY PEOPLE

*“Don’t you ever say that you *used to be Jewish!* You are still Jewish and always will be!”*

Like an Old Testament prophet, complete with a boney finger in my face, Ziva, an Israeli believer, rebuked me because when I greeted her, I blurted out, “I also *used to be Jewish.*”

I was a brand-new believer, and Ziva was the first Jewish believer I had met. Until this time, I had considered myself cut off from Judaism. It was a painful price to pay (and one I would discover later that I didn’t even have to pay!), but Yeshua had radically changed my life, and I loved Him for it... no matter what the cost. I didn’t want to be rejected by my family, but He was worth it.

Erroneously, I assumed that to believe in the Jewish Messiah was to renounce Judaism: my religion, my heritage,

my culture, and my people. The very statement seems strange, right? If He is the Jewish Messiah, why would I consider myself *cut off*? To understand that, you need to know what it was like to grow up Jewish.

Mr. and Mrs. Christ?

“I was about twelve years old when I first learned that Jesus was Jewish,” writes Dr. Michael Brown in his book *The Real Kosher Jesus*.¹ In the same chapter, he also shares the story of our mutual friend J. B. Bernstein, who grew up thinking that Jesus was the son of *Mr. and Mrs. Christ!*²

I can relate to both of their experiences. I, too, thought for the longest time that Christ was simply Jesus’ last name. His parents were Joseph and Mary Christ, right? We are taught, if not directly, indirectly, that one of the very definitions of being Jewish is that *we don’t believe in Jesus*.

I have a strange memory of a phone call I made when I was about ten years old. I saw a sign on a car that read, “I found it!” In fact, if memory serves me correctly, I had seen this phrase in different places around town; however, this time, I jotted down the phone number and called it when I got home. I was curious to discover just what he had found.

The person on the other end of the phone was excited to inform me that he had indeed found *Jeesus*. I hung up the phone. Had I been cleverer at the time, I might have quipped, “I didn’t know He was lost!” But I was 10.

¹ Michael Brown, *Our Hands are Stained with Blood*, Destiny Image; Revised, Expanded edition (September 17, 2019) p. 21

² *Ibid.*, xvi.

When I did “find” Him for myself in 1983 as an eighteen-year-old freshman in college, I assumed I had “left” Judaism. I was now a *Christian*. I didn’t like this term, mostly because everyone I grew up with – except for my Jewish friends – claimed to be one, and yet it didn’t seem like any of them lived like Christians. It didn’t take long for me to realize there were *cultural Christians* and *true believers*. There were people who claimed to be Christians because they grew up in homes where their parents told them they were Christians or because they went to a church on Sundays – and there were those who truly had a relationship with the living God. In fact, growing up, most of the Jews I knew simply defined Christians as non-Jews.

Even though I did not dare call myself a Christian, I was still quite sure I was now separated from my people, my religion, and my heritage – cut off. If there was one thing I had learned growing up Jewish, it was that Jesus and Judaism don’t mix! I couldn’t explain everything we believed as Jews, but I could sure tell you exactly what we *didn’t believe!* In my mind, I was now outside the camp.

I Am Still a Jew?

However, when Ziva shared those amazing words with me – *You are still Jewish!* – it changed my life! This was a revelation to me. *I am still Jewish? I am still part of the people of Israel?*

Of course, this would have seemed a very strange revelation to the very first followers of Yeshua, whose Jewishness was never in question. They struggled with the question, *Do Gentiles have to become Jewish in order to believe in Jesus?* – not

their own Jewishness. (See Acts chapters 10 and 15.)

Ziva also told me of congregations of Jewish believers who met on the Jewish Sabbath and worshiped Yeshua. Again, I couldn't believe my ears. *Jewish synagogues where they believe in Jesus?* One year later, when I walked into Beth Messiah Congregation in Rockville, Maryland, tears filled my eyes as I saw the largest number of Jewish believers I had ever seen worshipping the Messiah.

For a guy who grew up thinking Mary was Catholic, John was a Baptist, Peter was the first pope, and the New Testament stories took place in Rome, I was stunned. I began to read the New Covenant for myself. The more I read it, the more astonished I became at how "Jewish" it was. This story didn't take place in Rome; there is no mention of the Vatican or a Pope, And the word *Christian* can only be found three times in the entire book! *These people were not starting a new religion – they were Jews who believed they had found their Messiah.*

Moreover, I discovered:

- Jesus' Hebrew name is *Yeshua*, which means "salvation."
- Mary was an Israelite called Miriam, a Jewish name, like the sister of Moses.
- John was not a Baptist but a Jewish prophet in the ranks of Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and Isaiah.
- Paul was actually a Jewish rabbi named Sha'ul.
- Peter was not a pope but one of the greatest Messianic Jewish communicators in history.

In fact, I was shocked to discover that Gentiles didn't even begin to believe in Yeshua until many years after He was

raised from the dead – and the entire community of the first followers of Jesus was Jewish!

I have a litmus test on how to come to the right conclusion on controversial theological issues. I ask myself a simple question: *If I were untainted by either view, and I was given a Bible and locked in a room...what conclusion would I come to?*

So let's apply that test to the historical Jesus. If a Jewish person, unaffected by the anti-Jesus bias in modern Judaism, were locked in a room and given the Gospel narratives to read (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), would that person come out of that room concluding that Yeshua was a Gentile, antisemitic, or the father of a new religion apart from Judaism?

I contend not only would they not see Him in that light, but they would fall in love with Him! They would see Him as a hero who stood up to the religious establishment of His day (like Jeremiah and the other prophets did) as well as the political rulers and ultimately demonstrated His love in the greatest way possible. And that is why I wrote this book – to present the real Yeshua, a Jewish Man from Israel, to my people.

But not only that! Gentiles have much to *unlearn* as well. The Church's guilt in obscuring the Jewish nature of this Man from Galilee is well documented. Church fathers taught their followers the most bizarre and unscriptural doctrines, such as:

- God hates the Jews.
- It is your duty to hate the Jews.
- The Jews are cursed and will never return to be God's people.
- The Church is the new Israel.

- The Jews must suffer as a nation for the killing of Jesus.
- No one can be both Christian and Jew.

They changed the Gospel, and they changed the Savior. The tragic result is that they see a blonde-haired, blue-eyed, European facsimile of the true Messiah. Religious Jews tend to rely entirely on the interpretations of the rabbis and sages before them. But they need to think for themselves. They need to meet the real Yeshua.

Identity Theft seeks to do that; to allow my Jewish brothers and sisters to see Him as He truly is: A Jew, a Torah follower, born outside of Jerusalem in the city of David. And for my non-Jewish brothers and sisters, get ready to meet your Savior in a new, honest and exciting way.

Why Jews Are Simply Not Interested

There are three primary reasons why Jewish people tend to reject the Gospel:

1. The horrible witness of the historic Church toward the Jewish people over the past 1,900 years, which includes the murderous Crusades, forced baptisms, and expulsions from one's country, all of which made the Holocaust plausible. "Christianity did not create the Holocaust – indeed, Nazism was anti-Christian – but it made it possible."³
2. The Gospel message presented today has been *ethnically cleansed* of its Jewish roots so that it

³ Michael Brown, *Our Hands are Stained with Blood, Destiny Image*; Revised, Expanded edition (September 17, 2019) p. 21

appears to the Jew to be altogether foreign to and distinct from Judaism, when in fact, it is a Jewish story. It is presented to Jewish people as a new religion: They must leave Judaism and convert to Christianity. But as you will see in the coming pages, in the beginning, it was Gentiles who were told that they must convert to Judaism in order to believe in Jesus. As Messianic Jews, we are often accused of dressing up Christianity in Jewish garb, when in fact, just the opposite is true. Messianic Judaism, the faith of the first-century Jewish believers, was stripped of its Jewishness in favor of the priestly robes of Rome.

3. Lastly, the Bible says that there is a veil over the minds of the Jewish people (Is. 6:9-10, Rom. 11:25, 2 Cor. 3:14) that blinds them to the truth of the Messiah. More and more, that veil is being removed, as was also predicted (Zech. 12:10, Hos. 3:4-5, Ezek. 36:25-27, Rom. 11:26). More and more Jewish people are seeing Jesus as their Messiah.

I wrote *Identity Theft* in hopes that Yeshua, in His truest form, would be presented to the Jewish people and Gentile believers as well.

No Lord, I can't!

Just two days after I sent the final manuscript to my publisher, I made a crazy decision. You see, a few days before that, I had this thought, “*Ron, you need to rewrite this book as a*

novel – as a story rather than a teaching.” I immediately had an idea for how to do it, and I knew it would make the book better and more effective. But I quickly said to myself, “**Are you nuts?** *You’ve just spent the past nine months writing this book, having it edited, changing it, adding to it, etc., etc. And besides that, you’re not John Grisham... You don’t know anything about writing a novel.*”

I was feeling emotionally drained from the final editing that we had just finished, but then three things happened.

A friend, who had been involved in the first major editing of *Identity Theft* e-mailed me and said, “Driving to my meeting last night, still praying about the book, I had the image of the butterfly being brought out of its cocoon prematurely with the result that it would never fly. I don’t want that for your book, so all I am asking is for you to seek God as to whether what I am feeling and seeing is of Him or not.”

Another friend, who did the second major editing, e-mailed me shortly thereafter, saying that my first chapter didn’t fit the rest of the book. It was written more like a novel. She said she liked it, but it would be better in another book.

Things were beginning to make sense, although I was terrified. I had never written fiction. And where would I find the time?

The turning point came when I shared with my daughter Danielle what I was considering. “*Dad, you’ve got to do it!*” she screamed. The next morning, I started writing. With no experience writing novels, I felt like I had gotten on a roller coaster and had no idea which curve or loop was coming next. It was incredibly exhilarating. When Danielle woke up, I read

her the first few chapters. There was one moment where I hoped the reader would have an emotional response. Or maybe not? Like I said, I had no idea what I was doing. However, when I got to that point, and Danielle burst into tears, I knew that *Identity Theft – the novel* – would be something special.

Final Thoughts

It is somewhat problematic writing fiction when Biblical characters are involved. For instance, it is widely thought that Luke was a Gentile. However, there is a strong minority view that he was actually Jewish. Some say he was a convert to Judaism. How do I present him? You will have to see, but if you disagree, don't make it an issue because I am not dogmatic about it. I imagine that there will be some aspects of how I recreate other characters (such as John before Emperor Domitian) that some may feel are inaccurate. I am sure I will get e-mails. But please don't focus on that, as the stories are there, when there is no clear historical consensus, to make the book more entertaining and to help us imagine what life *may have been like* for the first-century Jewish believers.

The same goes for my theological conclusions. I don't want to give away the story but understand that I wrote this book to reflect personal revelations based on study, research, and prayer. I don't expect that everyone will agree with my conclusions. In the book, they are presented as fact – you will understand as you read – but on issues that are not central tenets of the faith, it is merely *Ron's opinion*. Just keep that in mind as you read.

There were times in the writing where it was not convenient

to mention the Scripture reference. In many of those cases, I simply put it in parentheses for the reader's sake, even though it's not an actual part of the dialogue.

Interchanging of names: One of the first things I seek to do in the book is to establish the correct, original names of many of the New Covenant characters. But then, throughout the book, I didn't exclusively use these corrected names, resorting, in some instances, to their more popularly known names for clarity's sake.

Enough said.

Enjoy the journey on which you are about to embark.

RON CANTOR

May 9, 2012

*In defending myself against the Jews,
I am acting for the Lord. The only
difference between the church and me
is that I am finishing the job.*

— ADOLF HITLER

Chapter One



THE VISITATION

It happened a year ago. He came in a vision. I have never fully shared this with anyone except my wife, and at first, she didn't believe me, but I felt it was time to put my testimony on paper. After all, I am a writer, and He chose to send His messenger to me. People must know the truth. Christians must know the truth. And by all means, Jews must know the whole story.

Is that it?

Three words that turned my life upside down: Is that it. It wasn't that I was unfulfilled. On the contrary, I was extremely content. I was five years married and had two amazingly cute little girls. At twenty-eight, with only a bachelor's degree, I had risen in the ranks. I already had a daily column in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* and a well-read blog. Life was perfect.

And yet *that* was the problem – what if there was something I was missing? Maybe there was a God out there who expected something from me. Maybe not, but the truth is, *I had no idea*. What keeps my heart ticking day after day? Who makes sure that it continues to pump blood through my veins?

I had taken all of this for granted. It suddenly hit me that we spend entire lifetimes working and planning just to make sure we are comfortable when we retire, which is a very short period of time. Yet, we rarely consider what happens *after* retirement when we die. Is that it? Six feet under and never another conscious thought? Or is there life beyond the grave? And if so, where would *I* spend eternity? I had no idea.

I was determined to find God – if He was there. I was full of questions, and I had no clue where to begin. How do you *find God*? It's not like I could just Google Him as I had learned to do for everything else.

Where to start?

Being Jewish, I began to go to synagogue and even attend afternoon prayers, the *Mincha* service, when I could. It felt great when nine men were waiting, and I showed up to complete the *minyan* (a quorum of ten Jewish Bar Mitzvah'd males required to begin the prayer service). As a last resort, they might grab some poor just-over-thirteen-year-old out of his studies to reach the required number, but then I would show up, saving the day.

While that made me feel good about myself, I didn't sense any personal connection with the Almighty. It was more a satisfaction that I had performed some religious duty than actually feeling His presence. One thing I would learn

later, many people mistake emotional euphoria for the actual presence of God. Religion can bring a sense of emotional security, but that should not be mistaken for a relationship with God.

I began to study other religions and actually began to pray – not in a formal sense like in the synagogue, but I simply asked God to show me if He was real and what He expected from me. To be honest, I was drawn to Jesus. His message of salvation was so different from any other religion I had studied. Every single one of them put the emphasis on what *I* did. *Do this on Friday. Do that in the morning. Be a good person. And by all means, never do this.*

But the message Jesus preached conceded that my case was hopeless. There was nothing I could do to please God in light of all I had done against Him. That was why He came; in order to give His life as a sacrifice, to take my punishment – or so they say. It was the only philosophy that didn't stress religious obligation, but instead presented me with the opportunity to accept the fact that 1) I was a sinner; 2) I could not save myself; 3) Jesus had taken my punishment; and, 4) through faith in Him, I could have eternal life.

You may be thinking, *So what's the problem? Buy into it!* Really, *what's the problem???* *I am Jewish!* And, being Jewish, I was convinced that to believe in Him would be to deny my faith, my heritage, and my community. Everyone knew that to believe in Yeshua was to betray the Jewish people – a people who had suffered more than any other and had so often suffered in the name of the very One to whom I was attracted.

Also, add to that the fact that the whole Jewish community

knew my father was the son of Holocaust survivors. Surely, they would all turn on me. And it seemed to me that they would be right. What kind of a Jew takes sides with the descendants of the Crusaders? When I went to my rabbi to confide in him, he nearly bit my head off. He told me to drop my pursuit and never bring it up again – “for the sake of your family – your future.” I was completely and utterly confused and immobilized.

And then he came. His name is Ariel. I was at Starbucks sipping on double-shot espresso. I have never been a *Venti, non-fat, no-foam, no-water, six pumps, extra-hot, chai tea, latte* kind of a guy – just strong espresso. That was all I needed to get my creative juices flowing in order to write.

I was sitting there reading the paper, getting ready to start on my column, when suddenly the entire room became white. In fact, it was so bright that *white* seems like an understatement. Everyone was gone – the girl behind the counter, the tattooed hipster, listening to his iPod, the student on his computer, the couple that appeared to be going over a business plan... *all gone!*

I was terrified. Suddenly a man appeared...*an angel*. He introduced himself. “I am Ariel, an angel of the Most High.” He was about six feet tall, quite fit, with dark hair, dark skin, and a short beard. He was wearing a white robe, interestingly, just as I would have imagined an angel to be dressed.

I said nothing. “David, you who are highly esteemed, consider carefully the words I am about to speak to you and the lessons you will learn, and stand up, for I have now been sent to you.”

When he said this to me, I stood up trembling.

“I have been sent to give you understanding. You are a confused young Jewish man, but you have found favor in the eyes of Adonai.”

I knew Adonai was Hebrew for *Lord*. Even though I had not been very religious, going to Hebrew school three times a week during much of my teen years had not been a complete waste.

He continued, “I have come to take you on a journey, to show you the past, the present, and even the future. At times you will beg me to stop, but in order for you to understand the truth and help others to understand, you must experience it – you must experience *all* of it.”

I found my voice but could not think of anything to say. Before I knew it, the angel grabbed my hand, and suddenly we were flying through time. It is very hard to explain on paper, *in words*, what I was experiencing, which is one reason that it has taken me a year to begin this testimony.

I somehow knew that we were going back in time. It was thrilling and yet petrifying. I could see scenes in time but from a distance. And then everything suddenly grew bigger, as when a plane lands. As though watching a timeline, I could see that we were in the second century and then the first. Things grew really close as if we were zooming in on Google Maps. The Middle East, Israel, Jerusalem! And then, we passed right through a roof and gently landed inside what seemed like an ancient synagogue from the Second Temple period. Only there were several rows of seats, like in a modern movie theater, and a massive screen. Torches lined up every meter or so, lit up the

room; it was night.

There were other angels there. Two were above me, and there were two at every entrance. They said nothing, and Ariel didn't even acknowledge them. It appeared they were standing guard. Then I thought, *am I in some kind of danger?* It reminded me of the first time I visited Israel. The armed soldiers at the airport made me feel safe and deeply concerned at the same time. From who or what were they protecting me? And now the question that plagued my mind was, *What dangerous spiritual force is seeking to bring about my demise?*

“What is going on? Is this a dream?” Words finally found their way out of my mouth. I knew this couldn't really be happening, and yet I was quite sure I was awake. The only thing missing was Morpheus offering me a blue pill or a red one.

“David, your journey will begin here. You will watch events in the lives of four Jews, all from different time periods during the last 2,000 years. You see, David, you are struggling with the idea of *being Jewish and believing in Yeshua*. You don't mind if we refer to Him by his Hebrew name, do you?”

It was more of a statement than a question. He continued, “You feel that to believe would be a betrayal. But that is only because you do not know that the Yeshua you imagine in your mind is not the Yeshua who walked the streets not too far from where we are right now two millennia ago.”

“So, we *are* in Jerusalem?” I asked.

“The Old City, to be exact. The year is 35 CE, a time when the Messiah was understood in the context in which the Jewish prophets described Him. The multitudes who followed Him

during this period were all Jews.

“Over the years, that has changed. His message has touched nearly every nation... and that is a good thing. However, in the process, the nature and identity of the Messiah has been tampered with, *photoshopped*, if you will, by those without the authority to do so. In short, there has been an insidious case of *identity theft*.

“Long before computer hackers and credit cards, the most destructive, most horrendous case of identity theft occurred, and the victim was the Messiah Himself! Through this journey, you will uncover it, and then you, David, will expose it to the world.”

“Wait! What?... ‘Expose it to the world,’” I just came to get coffee and write my column. What in the world was happening? I was confused and terrified, and at the same time, I was thinking, This is getting interesting!

“Sit down. Let’s begin,” instructed Ariel.

Feeling completely confused and utterly intrigued, I sat in what was the most amazingly comfortable chair I had ever sat in – like one of those high-priced movie theaters where they bring you food. I immediately forgot the burden that he had just placed upon me – “You will expose it to the world.”

I waited to see what would come next. Ariel picked up a remote, pointed it towards the screen, and pressed a button. The torches in the room faded until it was completely dark. This was definitely the coolest movie theater I had ever experienced! The film began to play.

Chapter Two



ESTHER

Words emerged on the screen:

37 CE, Capernaum, Galilee

Then a woman appeared and began to talk as if she were being interviewed:

“I am a Jewess, and my claim to fame is that my story, wonderful in and of itself, was recorded – at least the most important part – for posterity, by not just one, but by *three* ancient writers!”

As she continued to talk, I watched her story unfold like a movie...

“I spent my childhood playing on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. And each evening, my father would come home after

a day of fishing, bringing fresh tilapia with him for dinner. Now I know that the smell of fish isn't everyone's favorite, but for me, it conjures up precious memories of my hardworking father, who loved and provided for his family. My mother worked hard as well, taking care of the home and her children, using all her ingenuity to feed and clothe us. But no matter how hard they worked, there was never enough after paying the crippling taxes imposed by the nation's Roman overlords.

“Like most Galileans, we longed for the day when the Messiah would come and free us from the tyranny of the Romans. Every Shabbat, we would go to the synagogue in the center of our village to hear the Torah read and pray. It was a constant reminder to us all that God had saved our people once before when we were slaves in Egypt – surely, He could do it again, and the sooner, the better.

“In my late teens, around the age when many of my friends were being given in marriage, I began to bleed heavily. I went to every doctor in the area, but none of them could help me. For twelve years, I suffered greatly. The deepest pain of all was the social stigma, the loneliness, and the knowledge that no one would take me in marriage with this condition. I had no friends because everyone I came in contact with would become ritually unclean. I began to realize that even if I lived a long life, I would never know the joy of having children, of holding a baby in my arms, hearing my children's laughter at play, or being held by my husband. Who would want someone unclean? It broke my heart.

“Along with being emotionally drained, I was physically weak and, to make matters even worse, I was now destitute.

Because I was unclean, I could never enter a synagogue to hear the Scriptures read. And the people were so judgmental. I heard the whispers: she's cursed from God; she obviously has sinned; whatever she did in private is being exposed in public through her sickness. The voices never stopped; the people could be so cruel. All my girlfriends from childhood abandoned me.

Over the years, I had spent all I had on doctors and medicines – all to no avail. If it weren't for the fear of the Almighty, I think I would have taken my own life. *Baruch HaShem* (Praise the Lord), I didn't!

“I was in my late twenties when I first heard of the Rabbi from Nazareth. He was trained as a carpenter, they said, but He spoke like an angel – like someone who truly knew God, not just knew *about Him*. He had recently come to live in Capernaum and was invited to read from the Torah in our synagogue.

“I remember it so clearly. People were truly amazed by His words. He didn't speak like the other rabbis or the *cohanim* (Jewish priests). He spoke with such authority!

“He created quite a stir, and several of the young men from our village attached themselves to Him. In fact, a number of them had worked with my father on the fishing boats. Jacob and John, two brothers a few years younger than I, actually became part of His inner circle.

“Before long, stories began to circulate that He could heal the sick. Suddenly, for the first time in many years, I felt hope stirring within me. Could He heal me? But how could I, a woman, who could hardly walk the short distance to the market, ever get close to Yeshua?

“For days, I thought about nothing else. I was desperate. If He were to heal me, I could live again, maybe get married, even have children – I could have a life! But the more I thought about it, the more impossible it became. How could I, as a woman in my unclean state, ever get anywhere near the Rabbi?

“Then, one afternoon, I heard a commotion outside. Because I lived so near the city square, I went out to see what was happening. Quite a crowd had gathered, and I was told that Yeshua was coming, that He was on His way to the house of Jairus, one of the leaders in our synagogue. Jairus’ daughter had been very sick and, over the past few days, had taken a turn for the worse. Earlier that day, I’d heard they feared she might die. Jairus, in desperation, had begged Yeshua to come to his house and pray for his daughter.

“When I finally got to the square, I saw the Rabbi surrounded by masses of people. My heart sank. I felt so drained. I had no energy at all. Twelve years of bleeding takes its toll. And then, suddenly, I felt a surge of strength, of determination. I had to try. I knew that if I could just touch the *tzitzit*, the fringes on His garment, I would be healed. I was sure of it. I had to touch Him.

Caught up in the crowd, I began to push and fight my way through. I am sure many were surprised that poor, quiet little Esther was suddenly aggressively pushing her way past them. But if any were offended, I didn’t notice. After more than a decade of weakness and suffering, I really didn’t care. I meant to reach Him at any cost.

“In Jewish culture, it is forbidden for a woman to publicly touch a man, much less a man she is neither married to nor

acquainted with! Moreover, the nature of my problem deemed me perpetually unclean according to biblical law so that anyone or anything I touched would become unclean. And yet, I was compelled, driven in my soul, to go through with it.

“Finally, I could see Him in front of me. One final charge! And just then, I was flung to the ground. The crowd was so thick that I thought I would be trampled. A foot on my hand, a kick in the back... *No!* I jumped to my feet and pushed forward until I was within reach of the Rabbi.

This was it.

“With all the strength I could muster, I lurched forward, just barely managing to graze the fringe of His tallit with my fingers. And as I did, I felt such power come into me. But it was more than power... it was pure, it was clean, it was *life!!!*

“I knew at that moment that I had been healed, but more than that, I had been changed, radically changed. My life would never be the same. No, it wasn't that I would now be desirable to a man. At that moment, everything else was irrelevant compared to the pure joy that was radiating within me. I had found more than a husband – I had found the God I had only known from stories and traditions. Now, through this Galilean Rabbi, I was in the presence of the Almighty.

“Of course, I had believed in the God of Israel all my life. I had always celebrated the Holy Days of Passover and Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, Sukkot, and Shavuot. And I had hoped that the Messiah would one day come. But never had I realized that Elohim could be this close – He could be felt and experienced. And without ever realizing that I hadn't known it before, I now knew that *He loved me.*

“As all this was happening inside of me, I suddenly realized that the Master had stopped walking. He turned and asked, ‘Who touched Me?’ It seemed like a ridiculous question when dozens of people were touching Him as they pressed in. His puzzled disciples said as much. Yet, ignoring them, He continued to look around.

“I knew He was referring to me, and I was terrified. I wanted to run, and yet I wanted to be with Him forever. The way He said, ‘Who touched Me?’ made me feel like I had taken something without permission. I was scared, but still, I went forward and fell at His feet and confessed that it was I.

“*What had I done?* Everyone was looking at me. Barely above a whisper, I told Him about my sickness and how I felt that if I could just touch Him, I would be healed. And just like that, a huge smile appeared on His face as He took my hand and said, ‘Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.’

“Those words changed my life. He called me *daughter*, and despite the fact that I was nearly as old as He, I don’t know that I ever experienced more fatherly love than I did at that moment. In an instant, I was transformed from being unclean and undesirable to being a woman who was healed and highly favored by the Messiah Himself. Everyone else had judged me for my sickness, but He healed me of my sickness!

Now I was crying, weeping with joy for this woman. My daughters had always laughed at how easily I can cry during a movie. But this was the most moving thing I had ever seen! Hollywood could never compete with Heaven!

She continued.

“You might be wondering whatever happened to the daughter of Jairus. Sadly, she died before Yeshua was able to pray for her. Yet, the Master still went to Jairus’ home. When He arrived, everyone was weeping and mourning. ‘Why all this commotion and wailing?’ He asked. ‘The child is not dead but asleep.’

“But though they laughed at Him, He was not dissuaded. He threw everyone out of the house and, taking the child by the hand, told her to get up. And she did! She was brought back from death! We could hardly believe it! Not only could he heal the sick, but he could actually raise the dead!

“From then on, He traveled from village to village throughout Galilee, Samaria, and Judea preaching the ‘Good News of the Kingdom,’ healing all who were sick and casting out demons from those who were oppressed. Oh, what an amazing time it was!

“Yet, how abruptly it all ended – or so we thought. On the eve of Passover, just a couple of years later, He was betrayed and handed over to the Romans by some of our religious leaders. Many thought that once the Romans arrested Him, He would then lead a revolt against them. There were many Zealots all over Israel – especially here in the Galilee. Had he wanted to lead a revolt, they would’ve gladly joined him. But before we knew it, contrary to all expectation, the Romans crucified Him – they nailed Him to a cruel cross! Crucifixion – the most excruciating and humiliating kind of death that existed.

“Along with a number of others, I had followed Him to Jerusalem. We were all devastated. We had had such high hopes. We thought that, like Moses, He would deliver us

from our enemies. But instead, they killed Him. I don't have words to describe. With John by her side supporting her, His distraught mother was in agony as she watched her precious Son die a torturous death. This was not supposed to happen! He was our Hope.

“However, incredibly, after several days, in the midst of our despair, word began to spread that the One we had watched die was alive. And unbelievably, it was true! He had risen from the dead. Over a period of forty days, his disciples and hundreds of other people saw Him, including me! And then, while His followers watched, He, our Messiah, was taken up into Heaven.

“In accordance with His last instructions, 120 of us stayed in Jerusalem and waited for the promised Holy Spirit. For ten days, we prayed, and many fasted. Then on Shavuot (Pentecost), while seeking Him in one of the enclaves off of the Temple courtyard, without warning, suddenly, there was the sound of a mighty rushing wind, and the power of Elohim fell upon us.

“*Shimon*, from Capernaum, left the enclave, part of Solomon's Porch, where we had been praying and ventured into the Temple courtyard. Under the power of God's Spirit, he began to speak boldly to the massive crowd of Jews who were at the Temple for Shavuot. They were already wondering what was happening after hearing the sound of the mighty wind.

Shimon was like a different man. He spoke with authority, just like Yeshua, and with a deep knowledge of the Scriptures that he seemed to quote from memory. He proclaimed to them that the Messiah of Israel lives. It was hard to believe

that this was the same fisherman who had worked with my father. Suddenly, he had stature and passion. His words were tangible – like arrows piercing the hearts of his hearers. The thousands gathered there in the Temple courts hung on his every word as he spoke with incredible confidence and astounding authority about eternal life and their need to repent. That day our number grew from 120 to several thousand, as we immersed thousands of Jewish pilgrims who had come from all over for the holiday. Was there ever a day like that one? Oh, what joy! When Yeshua died, we thought all hope was lost, but actually, that was just the beginning.

“That was all of ten years ago. Tens of thousands of Jews have found peace through Yeshua, their Messiah, since that day. And yes, I did find a husband, and we now have four children, all of whom, except the baby, of course, have placed their trust in the Messiah, much to our delight.

“The future is bright. We know that soon Yeshua will return, and this time He will set up His Kingdom on earth, but first, we must spread His message to the rest of Israel and to the Jews scattered farther abroad.

“Oh, let me tell you the latest development that has everyone talking. We recently heard the strangest news from Shimon. He claimed that Elohim told him to go into the house of a Gentile, a Roman commander named Cornelius, and to preach there. This caused something of a commotion, as we Jews would never go into the house of a Gentile.¹ However, they are saying that when Shimon arrived, there was a huge crowd gathered. As he began to teach, the *Ruach Hakodesh*,

the Spirit of God, fell upon the people there just as He did upon us at Shavuot, and they began to speak in tongues and praise Elohim!

“Shimon thought, *If the Spirit is falling upon them, how can we stop them from being immersed in water?* Can you believe it? We are all amazed that Gentiles are now following the Jewish Messiah and are even being immersed in water! No one is going to believe this!”

The movie ended, and the lights came on. I turned to Ariel and said, “I don’t understand. Why was she surprised that Gentiles were believing in Jesus? Virtually the only people I know today that believe in Him *are* Gentiles!”

“Let us not run too far ahead. All will be clear soon enough. Now sit down again,” he gently said, “intermission is over.” The lights dimmed, and once again, just as before, a date and place appeared on the screen.

Notes

1. To be clear, the Torah does not forbid fellowship with non-Jews, but the Pharisees placed a huge emphasis on ritual purity. Because they could never be sure if a Gentile had come into contact with something or someone unclean, it was far easier just to decree that you could not go into the home of a Gentile: that way, you would know that you were not ritually unclean.

Chapter Three



“HASHEM, WHERE ARE YOU?”

1099 CE, Jerusalem

This time I could hear a voice, but there was no one being interviewed that I could see.

“I am a Jew, and I am thirteen. My family has lived in Jerusalem for generations, going all the way back to *Melech D’vid*, King David – of course, Jews were not allowed to live in Jerusalem after the 135 CE Bar Kochba revolt, but eventually, my ancestors returned. But that family line is coming to an end. My name is not important since I will soon be dead. The Crusaders, of whom we have been living in dread, have finally broken into the city. They have already killed scores of Muslim soldiers. We Jews, those of us who are still alive, have gathered

in the Great Synagogue hoping against hope for mercy, but I can already smell the smoke. Soon, we will be burned alive.

“We’ve heard stories of these Christians who have come from every corner of Europe all the way to Jerusalem. If the rumors are true, and we pray to God they are not, the Crusaders have pillaged and slaughtered whole Jewish communities all along their way. We were told they were coming to *liberate the Holy Land* from the *Muslim infidels*. And truth be told, the Muslims have not been too kind to the Christians here in Jerusalem. Churches have been destroyed, and over the centuries, Muslims have murdered scores of them. The Christians had apparently had enough. But what does that have to do with me? I am not a Muslim! And why are they killing Jews all throughout Europe? What was their crime?

“Their religious leaders, we’re told, have promised them that if they die in battle, all their sins will be forgiven, and they’ll go to Heaven¹ – because they are serving Jesus Christ. But *where will I go if I die today?* I’m scared.

“We have always gotten along with our Muslim overlords – at least in my lifetime. They haven’t persecuted us. In fact, my father Isaac and my older brother Michael fought valiantly with the Muslims to protect Jerusalem. Those Muslims are now dead – slaughtered one after another by the Crusaders as they broke into the city.

“They arrived in early June and surrounded our walls. Jerusalem is an isolated city, barely protected by its ramparts and surrounded by mountainous deserts. Once they encompassed us, we knew it was only a matter of time before they would break through. We could get no food into the city,

and they poisoned our water supplies. In mid-June, as I was helping the fighters on the wall, we could see them, see their large banners with huge crosses on them. That is their symbol. It's painted on their shields and sewn onto their tunics.

“Finally, two days ago, around midnight, just over a month after their arrival, they broke through our defenses and took the city. While some escaped, I don't think there is a single living Muslim left in Jerusalem. As soon as they stormed through the gates, the Christians began to kill everyone around them, indiscriminately – men, women, and children, Jews and Muslims alike. There was blood everywhere. Bodies are stacked one upon another wherever you look. I have never seen anything like it – so much death. The stench is unbearable. People begged and pleaded for their lives, but the Crusaders showed no mercy. The last image their victims saw was the vivid cross worn by their killers. It was as if these men were possessed.

“Our family, along with about 1,000 other Jews, has taken refuge in the Great Synagogue. Actually, the Crusaders' leader, Godfrey de Bouillon, drove us in here. This de Bouillon, it is said, is hoping to kill every Jew because he is convinced that every Jew is responsible for the death of Jesus. I don't know much about the New Covenant, but I thought it was a book about love and forgiveness, not killing and murder. Did this Jesus go around butchering women and children as His so-called followers are doing? And what does a thirteen-year-old boy, just Bar Mitzvah'd, have to do with the death of a Jew over 1,000 years ago?

“Not that it matters what I think. Death has invaded our

city. Hope is all but gone. They are mercilessly cruel. They have already murdered thousands of Jews throughout the city in the past twenty-four hours. We are the only ones left.

“How could it be that less than a month ago, I was celebrating my Bar Mitzvah at the *HaKotel HaMa’aravi* (Western Wall) of the Temple Mount? I never dreamt that I wouldn’t see my fourteenth birthday. Such a day it was, reading from the Torah and chanting the blessings. They told me I became a man that day. Little did I know how quickly that would be the truth. Instead of playing with my friends or helping my father in our shop, I was supplying arrows to fighters on the walls of Jerusalem, fighting for our lives and watching Crusader arrows fly back at us.

“We had heard the stories of what they did in Europe. At first, this was considered purely a war against the Muslims. But in Europe, greed and bloodlust perverted their cause. They reasoned, ‘Why wait until we get to Muslim territory, when there are Jews, *Christ-killers*, all throughout Europe?’ I overheard horrific tales coming from my parents – stories of rape and slaughter, stories of Jews being offered protection for money and then being killed by the very ones they’d paid!

“Inside the synagogue, I huddle together with my sisters, younger brothers, and my parents. My older brother is dead. We were told he was killed yesterday, shortly after the Crusaders broke through. He was sixteen. Will I be next? I’m too young to die. What have we ever done to these people?

“I will never grow up, never marry or be a parent. Today the Crusaders will kill me.

Smoke is suddenly making its presence felt. Both the smell

and sight of sinister tendrils of gray smoke are curling their way under the heavy locked doors – our situation is dire!

“Hashem!!! God!!!

“Flames snake their way in through the barred windows, preparing to devour us. It is getting hotter. The godforsaken savages are going to burn us alive. Even over the screaming inside the synagogue, I can hear the Crusaders singing hymns to this Jesus Christ. What kind of religion is this? They are burning us to death, and they sing of love? They have slaughtered nearly every human being in the city, and they rejoice at the smell of burning flesh?

“The people who are praying now increase their supplication in fervency and volume. Others collapse in shock. All are in a state of panic. Some are screaming and beating on the door. Others seek to shelter their children from the smoke as most back away from the walls, which are becoming scorching hot. The flames are now clearly visible on every side. The realization that their families and little ones really are burning to death finally becomes an inescapable reality against a backdrop of voices singing *Christ, We Adore Thee!*

“Incredibly, as the flames wrap themselves around rafters, which are beginning to collapse, and the intensifying heat causes some, mercifully, to succumb to smoke suffocation, the sound of these murderous Crusaders singing hymns to their Jesus Christ escalates.

“Yet, they say this Jesus was a Jew.

“It’s inconceivable! They are singing to a Jew while they burn us alive for being Jews!

“HaShem! Where are You?”

I was angry! “Ariel, how could this happen? This is so different from the first story. What changed? What happened to healing the sick and raising the dead to life? Now they are putting the living to death! Clearly, Jesus is not telling them to murder in His name, for His cause! I don’t understand.”

“David, it gets worse,” he put a comforting hand on my shoulder. “You will have to bear with *not understanding* for a bit longer. In time, all will be explained.”

Once more, the lights went out.

Notes

1. Religion hasn’t changed much in the last thousand years. Al Qaeda, Hamas, and other Islamic fundamentalist groups have sweetened the pot by throwing in seventy-two virgins for suicide bombers who die in the “line of duty.” Yet, they have only copied the manipulative tricks of the Roman Catholic Church. How easy it is to motivate a poor peasant to fight for you when you promise him Heaven. We know from history that many of the Crusaders raped, pillaged, and killed without mercy. And yet, Church leaders went outside of scriptural authority, guaranteeing these men a place with Yeshua.

Chapter Four



IMMERSION OR EXPULSION

1496 CE, Tangier, Morocco

A young man is sitting in a chair.

“My name is Christophe. At least that is my *baptized* name. I am a twenty-three-year-old Jewish man. Several years ago, we had to make an extremely difficult decision as a family. The authorities told us that if we didn’t convert to Catholicism and join the Church, we would have to leave Spain.

“We were Jews, but Spain was home. Many of my father’s friends had already joined the Church and been baptized. For a while, they secretly continued to be our friends, but then, one by one, we ceased to see them.

“Their children were not allowed to play with us anymore. It wasn’t their fault. Now that they had left Judaism, the

Church forbade them to intermix with *non-converted Jews* – we were *poison*. The punishment, should they be caught, might well be death!

“For many, many months, my father wrestled with this decision. While many of his friends had already joined the Church and been baptized, many others had chosen to pack their bags and leave for other countries, such as Morocco, to the south. However, they had to leave almost everything behind. Property was sold for a fraction of its worth. Jewelry was traded for food. We heard reports that some of our friends had been robbed and even killed on the way to their *new life*. My father did not want this for our family.

“One evening, he sat us all down and explained that if we wanted to survive and maintain our current quality of life, we would have to play their game. He told us that we would be baptized as Catholics but remain Jewish in our hearts. This is what many Jewish families had done.

“We knew, and our tormentors knew as well, that this had nothing to do with religion; it was about politics. Spain was seeking to unify the country under Roman Catholicism. In fact, even Protestants and other *non-Catholics* were suffering the same fate as we were.

“When the day came, not only were we baptized, but my father had to read a public confession denouncing Judaism as a demonic religion. He promised never to celebrate any Jewish holiday or even associate with non-baptized Jews. We were told that if we ever returned to Judaism, *in any form*, we would face severe retribution from the Church. They could confiscate our property and expel us from Spain. Even death

was on the table. This was one of the worst days of my life. I felt so sick and dirty. How could we have compromised to this extent, trading in our faith for acceptance?”

This was how I felt. Although no one in twenty-first-century America was threatening me with expulsion, I knew, like Christophe, that to become a Christian was to deny who I was.

Christophe continued.

“We were called *Conversos*, New Christians, or the more derogatory title, *Marranos* – meaning “pigs”! Despite giving an appearance of welcoming us into the Church, they did all they could to humiliate us. It was clear that we would never be permitted to be one of them, and yet we couldn’t be who we were. We were stuck in the worst kind of identity crisis.

“My father reminded us many times that we were still Jews and would always be Jews, but that we must be very careful. Everything had to be done in secret. Just a refusal to eat pork was considered sufficient reason to have a person arrested. We could trust no one, as the Church had its spies. Imagine that? A religious institution was hiring people to spy on their subjects to ensure truly Catholic behavior. How could such a system claim to represent God? And how did they expect such coercion to spawn true devotion? Well, of course, they didn’t. This was all about Spain, not about religious devotion.

“Outside the home, we maintained the facade of being good Christians while inside the home we remained God-fearing Jews. We lived this way for many years. And while I carried with me a permanent feeling of uneasy guilt, we were able to remain in Spain. All that came to a very abrupt end,

however, when my father was finally arrested.

“A friend came by to greet us on the Sabbath. Candles had been lit to welcome in the day of rest. We thought this *friend* could be trusted. But in fact, he was a spy. In the beginning, we had been much more careful – *especially* on Friday nights. Spies were encouraged to poke around the homes of *Conversos* on *Erev Shabbat*, Friday evenings, hoping to catch someone honoring the Fourth Commandment. Lighting Shabbat candles, saying the Jewish blessings, and singing the songs I grew up singing on *Erev Shabbat* were forbidden under the threat of imprisonment and sometimes death.

“Tragically, we had grown careless; we’d relaxed our caution. Three days later, they came for my father. He was arrested and brought before an inquisition. The Church then tortured him until he confessed to the wretched crime of *lighting Sabbath candles*.

“My father was given a choice. He could repent of his *deceit* and take part in a *verguenza* – a ‘shaming,’ in which he would be stripped to the waist in freezing temperatures (it was winter). He would be paraded through the streets, led by monks, and mocked by the crowds. And he would suffer other indignities all along the way.

“Additional punishments would be imposed once my father accepted the *verguenza*. They would expect him to turn in other *Conversos* who were secretly living as Jews. But he had been humiliated enough. Hadn’t he already denied his faith, in public, for our protection? And now, these Christians wanted to add insult to injury. No, it was too much. He would not!

“When my father declared he would not recant, he was

taken back into custody and sentenced by the religious magistrates, apparent followers of this Christ, to be burned alive. Yes, my father would be tied to a stake and endure the inconceivable agony of burning to death as the fire slowly, painfully, consumed him.

“All this in the name of their religion!

“My father was not the first to be killed this way. A few years ago, the very thing that led up to this massive expulsion was when nine Jews were burned at the stake. Six of them were *conversos*, and three were still living as Jews. They were accused of kidnapping a Christian boy. Everyone knew it was a farce. But they needed a reason to begin this persecution. Of course, no body was ever produced, but they were accused of actually taking out the boy’s heart for an anti-Christian ritual. Four months later, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella unleashed the plan to expel unconverted Jews.

“Thomas of Torquemada was a ruthless man. He was the grand inquisitor who oversaw a program to ensure that Jewish converts would not return to Judaism, or else. He believed that the blood of Jews was tainted...impure. Therefore, we could never be trusted to become true Christians. But you know what is truly ironic? This man was a Christian minister, trusting in the blood of a Jew to wash away his sin while accusing Jews of having polluted blood.

“When the day came, my family watched. We did not want him to die alone. This was it. The *religious police* were going to kill my father – take him from me because we lit candles. They brought him out with his hands bound behind his back. He was tied to a stake. He said not a word. Even when the

flames engulfed him, burning his living body, he would not scream. He was telling us, without words, *'Don't give in... don't compromise...be strong...'* And then, my father died.

“After my father was murdered and all our property confiscated, we did what we should have done in the first place. We made the journey to Gibraltar and sailed on to Morocco, where we settled in a thriving Jewish community in the city of Tangier. I miss my father deeply, and I will never forget his courage. I live to honor his memory and to honor Judaism, for which he laid down his life.

“Oh, and by the way, please don't call me Christophe. My name is Jacob.”

“Ariel, I can't handle much more of this. I studied the Inquisition in college, but that was just words in a book. This is different. Those poor people! How could Christians act this way?”

“Patience, David, patience.”

At this point, my mind had ceased trying to determine whether I was imagining all this or really talking to an angel and traveling through time. My emotions were fully taken over by what I had just seen. All that we Jews had ever wanted was the freedom to make a life for themselves, but it seems there was always someone seeking to keep us from that – to persecute us. I thought, *My God, Hitler didn't have to look too far back in history to find a pretext for killing Jews. He needed only to look at the Church.* And then it hit me.

“No, Ariel! I can't! I won't watch it! Take me back! It's too much....”

Chapter Five



HORROR!

The lights dimmed, but this time I wouldn't watch. I sought to get up in order to escape and found that I couldn't. I was literally glued to my seat. I yanked and jerked, but nothing worked. I was stuck there. Finally, I resigned myself. On the screen were the words:

1945, Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp

And a young boy began to tell his story of horror...

"My name is Tuvia Lebowitz. I am sixteen years old. Today, I am free. But while my body is free, my soul will ever be held captive to memories and horrors too painful to utter. My mother is dead. My father is dead. My sisters may be dead. My little brother is dead. And I have not eaten a proper

meal in five years.

“It all began when I was ten years old. My father was a university professor. We lived a comfortable life, and I was happy. My friends were Jewish and Polish, but over time fewer and fewer of my Polish friends were permitted to play with me. I was very sad about it, and so were most of them – we didn’t understand. But one day, one of those boys, Jacek, came up to me as I walked home from my violin lesson and yelled, ‘You Jew! You killed Christ. You will also suffer!’

“I had no idea what he was talking about, but the anger with which he said it sent a shiver up my spine as I had never known before. The coming years, however, would bring ample fulfillment of the premonition I felt in that moment.

“The day came when all the Jews of Warsaw, nearly a third of the city’s population, were required to leave our homes and move inside an area that was smaller than 2.5 percent of the city. Four hundred thousand people were living in an area that was designed for just over 3,000!

“Once inside, no one was permitted to leave the *ghetto*, as it came to be called, without a work permit. And these were restricted mainly to older people. Fortunately, my father was one of the few to be granted one, although his status as a university professor was now relegated to *factory worker*.

“Over time, food in the ghetto became scarce. We were surviving on fewer than 200 calories a day. My father would sell some of our possessions to keep us from starving. It wasn’t uncommon to see dead bodies on the streets. Some starved, others froze to death, and some just gave up. Hunger and disease were the two biggest killers. There were, of course,

those who told us this would all pass, that we had simply to obey the rules and in time all would return to normal. *They can't kill all of us*, they reasoned.

“The day came when we were informed that trains were to transfer us out of the overcrowded ghetto. We were told that families were to be resettled in better areas in the countryside. It was a welcomed prospect, and I hoped that we would be among those selected to leave this dirty, congested place for the country. But then rumors began to trickle in that the families who were leaving were not going to a better place, but to slave labor camps where some were killed, and others were forced to work for the Nazis. Many simply refused to give credence to these stories while the rest of us were terrified. But again, community leaders assured us that these were just rumors and everything would soon be all right.

“And then our name was called – we would be going to the countryside. We took all our belongings, which weren't many, and boarded a train. There were no seats like on the trains I used to love to ride when we traveled from Warsaw to visit my grandparents in Lodz. *My grandparents? What had become of them?*

“We crowded into the cattle cars, and just when I thought I had found a place to stand, I was shoved backward. The car was already full, but they just kept herding more and more people into the car. *Where was my little brother?*

“The heat was simply unbearable, and almost immediately, the complaining began: *We are going to die in here. Move. I need more room. They might as well bury us in this train; we'll never survive.* You could hardly breathe; we were packed so tightly

together. It was terrifying. After a few hours, people needed to relieve themselves, and with no facilities, the stench was horrible. They had told us things would get better, but they only got worse. Exhaustion overtook me, and I found myself dreaming I was back at home, but someone would faint or cry out, jolting me out of the fantasy and reminding me I was living in a nightmare.

“Our ride only took about a day, but it seemed to go on forever. We later learned from others in the camp that their ride was even more horrendous. They were crammed in the cattle cars and would go for days without food or water. The Nazis had actually demanded they pay a fare for their train tickets! Sleep was nearly impossible, but after a couple of days, they said you fall into a state of stupor where you could be asleep and awake at the same time. Someone would die right next to you, but the car was so crowded, they barely slumped over.

“I had just turned thirteen. I was supposed to have had my Bar Mitzvah by now. I would have stood proudly in the synagogue, chanted from the Torah, and endured the praises of my family, friends, and relatives. Instead, here I was, enduring suffering like I had never thought possible. How much more of this could we take?

“When we arrived at the first work camp, or as we would call it later, the death camp, we were taken off the train and separated into different groups. When my mother was told to follow the women, she became hysterical. She grabbed my little brother and begged the guards not to separate them. They ripped him from her, and when she protested, the butt of

a guard's rifle found the back of her head, knocking her to the ground. I was in shock. Was this really happening? I wanted to fight, but I couldn't move.

“And then, when it seemed things couldn't get any worse, one of the other guards solved the dilemma by pulling out his handgun and putting a bullet through Chaim's head, with as much emotion and effort as he might use to pour himself a cup of coffee that morning. They were savages. My little brother lay dead on the ground, blood streaming from the gaping hole in his head. The image haunts me to this day and always will.

“No one cried, no one screamed – we were simply in shock. Surely what we had just witnessed with our eyes didn't really happen. Chaim couldn't be dead. And yet, he was. A five-year-old Jewish life was of little consequence to the Nazis.

“Father and I were herded into the men's line, while my grief-dazed mother, still in shock, was pulled into another line. We would now work for our tormentors. My two sisters, barely twelve and fifteen at the time, were placed with other girls their age. Only later did I learn what would happen to these girls. They would be used to *service* the Nazis. Fortunately, I was too young to understand such things. It would have been too much for me. But now I am a man. I'm sixteen and know exactly what they did to my sisters. I don't even know if they are alive.

“My mother only survived a few months. The devastation of watching her baby, her youngest son, murdered before her eyes, robbed her of the will to live. She was inconsolable. The other women covered for her as best they could, but soon it became clear to the guards that not only was she not doing

her share of the work, but she no longer cared whether she lived or died. Mercifully, before she could be sent to the gas chambers or be terminated, she was gone. One morning she simply didn't wake up.

"This happened three months after we arrived, but my father and I only found out a year later. I didn't even weep. By that time, I was completely numb. Death was everywhere. It had become too familiar to warrant a response. And part of me was grateful that she no longer had to suffer in this nightmare.

"I was sure it was only a matter of time before these monsters, or this godforsaken place would kill me as well. My father, on the other hand, was completely undone by this news. He held on for another year, for my sake, but in the end, hopelessness, despair, and malnutrition claimed him. Like my mother, one morning, he simply did not wake up.

"At fifteen, I was, at best, the man of the house, or at worst, the only one left in the house. Part of me hoped my sisters were dead. The thought of some sleazy, overweight Nazi officer with alcohol-laden breath, laying his hands on either one of them, sickened me.

"I was transferred to Auschwitz in early 1944. While we called the work camp a death camp, Auschwitz was an actual extermination center. As I passed through a gate, a guard hissed at me, '*You killed Jesus Christ, now we will kill you.*' Jacek was right. They blamed me for the death of a man who died 2,000 years ago – a Jew no less, someone they themselves would have killed, given the opportunity. I was 15 years old; I had never killed anyone! And I wondered, in passing, what exactly had become of Jacek. For all I knew, he could be living

in our house. Or maybe he had joined the *Hitler Youth* and was now training to fight for the Nazis.

“The guards obviously agreed with Jacek as they forewarned us of our fate, their retribution for our crime of killing Christ. The butt of a rifle in my stomach accompanied the threat, in this instance. How much more could I take?

“They then moved us to Birkenau, one of the camps adjacent to Auschwitz. There, in a red brick building, which from the outside appeared harmless enough, they had built fake shower blocks. Instead of encountering clean water, unsuspecting victims were led into the showers and asphyxiated by poisonous gas.

“This was one of the cruelest and yet most efficient tricks of the Nazis. How do you kill thousands of people at one time and keep them from panicking, or worse, revolting? You give them a cake of soap and tell them they are going to receive the first shower they have had in weeks or months.

“The red brick building was just one of many such death machines. Its only distinction was in the fact that it had been the first, or so I was told. Because I was young, it was my job, every day, all day, to drag the lifeless corpses of my people out of the gas chambers, loading them onto carts to transport them to the crematoria. All the while, I was hoping against hope that I wouldn’t share their fate.

“I was surrounded by death. I no longer felt human, so I guess they’d won. Clearly, that was the subliminal message the Nazis transmitted by transporting us in cattle cars. In truth, I felt just like an animal seeking to survive the barren winter – only winter was now going into its fourth year.

“Finally, in January 1945, the Germans began to demolish the gas chambers. Our captors blew them up, one by one. They seemed intent on getting rid of the evidence. You could see the fear in their eyes. Was this war coming to an end? Would we soon be free? Was someone coming to rescue us?

“Our hopes of freedom, however, were soon crushed. The barely living were rounded up and ordered to march from Auschwitz to God knows where. Thousands who were too weak were simply left behind. It was freezing, the dead of winter. Tens of thousands of us marched and marched. It was nothing for someone in front of you to simply collapse. Those who couldn’t walk were left for dead. I passed hundreds of dead bodies. Who knows if they were dead when they hit the ground or simply froze in the snow? What would once have shocked me had become commonplace. A dead body...even that of a child... barely fazed me. What had they done to me?

“I had determined from the outset that I would survive – if not for me, in the faint hope that I might one day see my sisters again.

“Finally, we arrived at Bergen-Belsen. By April, most of the guards had fled, but the remaining ones seemed perversely intent on leaving no inmate alive. After several days with no food or water, more and more Jews began to collapse, go crazy, or simply die. Bodies were everywhere. Typhus was spreading. Surely my body would soon succumb to these deathly conditions.

“And then, yesterday, April 15, 1945, five days after my 16th birthday, British troops arrived, and – miracle of miracles – we were emancipated!¹

“Now I am free. Or so they tell me. What does that even mean at this point? My parents and little brother are dead. My sisters, if alive, have been violated repeatedly for years. *What will become of me, of Tuvia Lebowitz?*”

By now, I was sobbing inconsolably.

“David,” the angel called out. I didn’t answer. “*David Lebowitz!*” he called out again.

Notes

1. Tuvia’s story is of course fictional, but it encompasses many of the very real horrors that Jews endured in the Holocaust.

Chapter Six



FROM ESTHER TO TRUVIA... HOW DID WE GET HERE?

Still sobbing, I cried out, “But why?”

“I told you it would be hard, but He has a task for you, and you have to feel it deeply so that you can deliver it effectively, even though it pains you – even though you feel like your very guts are being ripped out.”

I calmed down. “You know he never told us what happened there. Not even my father knows the full story. After they came to the States, it was as if they had taken a vow of silence. Not just my grandparents, but my great aunts as well. My God.” I sighed, “What had they suffered?”

And then I realized, “They had a brother, Chaim! He would’ve been my great uncle.”

Sobbing again, I could not get the image of my grandfather

being tormented as a young Jew in Poland out of my mind. Finally, I looked up at Ariel and asked, “How in the world did a message as pure as the one the woman from Galilee shared get so corrupted? She talked about a man of love and immeasurable compassion, and 1,000 years later, His followers are marching across Europe killing Jews as a part of their devotion to Him. Help me understand!”

Ariel answered, “Indeed, these were *religious* people – but incredibly corrupted in their understanding of what true devotion to God really was. Yes, they were religious, but they were not practicing what is written in the Bible. Religion, apart from a true relationship with God, kills. Corrupted men will manipulate religion for their own ends, be it lust for money or power.”

“But didn’t they read the Bible?” I asked.

“In time, David. All will be explained in time.”

“In the story of the family in Spain, the Jews were being told, ‘Convert or leave!’ The Church there seemed more like the KGB or present-day Iran.”

“You are correct, David. Those who converted were watched constantly by the Church to make sure they did not return to Judaism. Conversos accused of maintaining ties to, or secretly practicing, Judaism were cruelly punished.”

I was struggling to process this.

“The Church of the Middle Ages had certainly ceased to look anything like what the Holy Spirit had birthed on that warm summer day on Shavuot 30 CE, when the Jewish man, Simon Peter preached so powerfully on the Temple steps, birthing a powerful revival. Instead, Rome had become a

combination of greed, power, and politics dressed in religious robes. The Good News had not merely been robbed of its Jewish roots, but of its purity and power, its message of salvation and reconciliation to God.”

Yes, I had read about Peter, the Christian evangelist, during my *search for truth*. But it hadn't dawned on me at the time that he was *Jewish*. But of course, he was! It all took place here in Israel.

“I am sure that you also noticed that the Jews in the first story had no qualms about believing that Yeshua was the Messiah. Not only was Esther Jewish, but she met Him on His way to heal the daughter of one of the leaders in the local synagogue. Those first-century Jews were able to evaluate Yeshua without bias. However, 2,000 years later, after the worst kind of antisemitism coming forth from those who claimed to represent Him, it is nearly impossible for a Jewish person to look at Yeshua without prejudice.”

“We are taught, if not directly, indirectly, that one of the very definitions of being Jewish is that *we don't believe in Jesus*,” I emphasized. “When I was in elementary school, we had a discussion at the bus stop between several Jewish children and Christian children. We were seeking to define the differences between our religions. After a lengthy exchange of views – our bus was always late – the ‘Council of Cutshaw Avenue’ concluded that the primary difference was that they believed in a man named Jesus and we did not. End of subject.”

“Listen to the testimony of this rabbi.” A man wearing a yarmulke appeared on the massive screen and began to speak.

Growing up in an Orthodox Jewish household, I held great antipathy toward Jesus. The very name reminded me of the suffering laid upon Jewish communities for two thousand years: persecutions, forced conversions, expulsions, inquisitions, false accusations, degradations, economic exile, taxation, pogroms, stereotyping, ghettoization, and systematic extermination. All this incomprehensible violence and cruelty against us against our friends and families committed in the name of a Jew!

In my neighborhood, we did not even mention his name.⁴

“The rabbi, along with countless other Jews, could not help but factor in the Church’s ungodly behavior when considering Yeshua. But what if Jewish people were able to appraise both the person and the message of Yeshua without any knowledge of either how the rabbis have viewed Him or how the Church has misrepresented Him?” Ariel pondered. “What if they could read the New Covenant without this bias?”

“I don’t know that that could *ever* happen.”

“Perhaps not, but you are with me, David, to receive an honest, accurate picture of this Man and His followers. No, it will not erase what you have learned from history, but I will give you the knowledge to discern history so that you will be able to differentiate Yeshua from religious fanatics who caused great damage to the Jewish people in His name.”

⁴ *Shmuley Boteach, Koshers Jesus* (Jerusalem: Gefen Publishing House, 2012), ix.

Chapter Seven



WHO KILLED JESUS?

Ariel continued, “While the Holocaust, unlike the Crusades and the Inquisitions, was not explicitly religious, the Church had set the stage. Without centuries of Christian antisemitism, the Holocaust would not have had the theological pretext to happen.

“I am sure you have read quotes about Jews being called *Christ Killers*. The Nazis and others throughout the centuries have long enjoyed the employment of this claim as a satanic pretext for blood libels, pogroms, and Holocaust-scale genocide. In short, it is the excuse for nearly every perverted form of persecution that antisemitism has ever staged. And the enemy used all of this to further alienate Jews from their Jewish Messiah.

“In fact, Hitler even had Christian theologians helping

him. One set out to convince people that Jesus was not Jewish but Aryan. Watch.”

On the screen, a slight woman appeared. She was lecturing...like at a university.

In the Nazi era, in the first half of the 20th century, some scholars went even further to deny Jesus’s Jewishness altogether. The Nazis had set up an institute for the study and eradication of Jewish influence on German religious life. This was led by a highly regarded theologian named Walter Grundmann, who was still an influence at the time that I went to graduate school in the 70’s, some decades after the end of the war. The role of this institute, the mandate, was to demonstrate that Jesus was not a Jew, but an Aryan, on the grounds that in the first century the Galilee was populated primarily by Gentiles rather than Jews. The definitive study of that institute is this truly compelling book by Susannah Heschel, called *The Aryan Jesus, Christian Theologians, and the Bible in Nazi Germany*.⁵

“It is true that there was a distinction between Judeans and Galileans, and with the conquering of the ten northern tribes in 721 BCE, many Gentiles had moved in. But...

⁵ Adele Reinhartz **lectures** on “Jesus: Bad Jew or Good Jew?”, 2/13/2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ehwMHsuuc>

1. I can assure you they were not Aryans in the Middle East.
2. Jesus was actually a Judean living in the Galilee. Remember, his father was from Bethlehem, and Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the city of David from the tribe of Judah.
3. It is clear from Scripture that Jesus and his Galilean disciples follow Torah (Matthew 5:17). Yeshua is circumcised (Luke 2:21). His parents dedicated him at the Temple in Jerusalem (Luke 2:22). They return to Jerusalem for his bar mitzvah.¹ Jesus regularly goes to Jerusalem for the festivals, as does his family (John 7).

“In other words, *they were Jews*,” I offered.

“But the claim that He wasn’t Jewish, but an Aryan, gave them the ‘evidence’ that the Jews had actually persecuted the *pure race*,” Ariel added. “Yes, *Christ Killer* has become a common moniker for Jews during these past 1,900 years. Under this theme, Jewish blood has flowed down the streets of not only Jerusalem but numerous other cities as well.”

“It never made any sense to me,” I shared, “how an entire race of people, over thousands of years of existence, could be responsible for the killing of one man.”

“Well, David, who do you think killed Yeshua?”

“I could make a case for the Romans, as Jews were forbidden from enforcing a death penalty under Roman rule. But I do know that it was Jewish people who handed Him over to the Romans.”

Ariel helped, “Actually, David, it was primarily the Jewish *leaders*, not the people, who had a problem with Yeshua. I want you to read this.”

As the words came out of his mouth, they appeared written in fire. Two passages of Scripture were before me, with some commentary in between. They were suspended in the air and close enough for me to touch. I was in awe.

“Go ahead, read!” I did.

Now when the chief priests and Pharisees heard His parables, they perceived that He was speaking of them. But when they sought to lay hands on [Yeshua], they feared the multitudes [of Jews] ... (Matthew 21:45-46 NKJV).

“You see, David, the *ahm ha’aretz*, the people of the Land, loved Yeshua. The religious leadership did not arrest Yeshua because they feared the multitude of Jews! Yeshua’s popularity with the common Jew is what led to the decision to oppose him – to turn him over to the Romans.”

“When they finally did arrest him, it was secretly at night, when He was praying with His disciples. In the morning, the day they planned to execute Him, the residents of Jerusalem were stunned to see this beloved rabbi condemned. Read this next one.”

Again, I read as I was asked.

And a great multitude of the people followed Him... who also mourned and lamented Him (Luke 23:27 NKJV).

“Yeshua was taken to the home of Pilate. He was the Roman governor over the province of Judea. Read on.”

Again, emblazoned in fire, I saw the Scriptures, but this time certain words were highlighted:

Then the detachment of soldiers with its commander and the *Jewish officials* arrested Jesus... (John 18:12).

Then the *Jewish leaders* took Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace

of the Roman governor... (John 18:28).

“While in the Greek,” Ariel shared, “it merely says ‘they’ in verse 28, it is understood that the ‘they’ in this verse is referring to the Jewish officials in verse 12.”

“Ariel, I was told that the entire city of Jerusalem was shouting for Him to be crucified. That would be more than just a few leaders.”

“Nowhere in the New Testament does it claim that the entire city was calling for His death, but a crowd of people, out of about a half a million who were in the city at the time for Passover...and even this crowd had been worked up by the religious leaders. But you are not the first to wrongly assume this. As you will see on our journey, Yeshua was loved by the Jewish masses, and they came from all over the region to hear Him teach. I want you to read a message that a Messianic Jew sent to a Christian author on Facebook.”

“Facebook? An angel who’s into Facebook?”

“Well, I don’t have my own account, but yes David, we kind of know about *everything*. Read!”

Immediately, a Facebook page appeared on the screen:

Dear Martin,

My name is Avi Marks. I came across your website, and I found your article, “Jesus and the Jews,” very interesting; it was certainly well researched.

May I just offer one critique that will help your Jewish readers? You used the phrase “the Jews” over fifty times. Sometimes it is just part of the phrase “King of *the Jews*.” But more often than not, you are referring to the small group

of men who brought Yeshua to Pilate. John 18:12 makes it clear that it was not “the Jews” who brought Yeshua to Pilate, but “Jewish officials,” “officers of the Jews,” or the “Temple guards,” just to quote a few modern translations.

The problem with the way you use the term “the Jews” is that it makes it appear as if you are saying *all of the Jews*. There are a few times when you correctly say Jewish religious leaders, but for the most part, you simply say, “the Jews.”

It is true that in the Greek, John, at certain times, simply writes the phrase “the Jews” (John 18:14; 19:7,12), but there can be no doubt that he is referring to the Jewish leadership. In fact, some modern English translations, such as the New International Version, actually translate those passages using the phrase “the Jewish Leaders” as opposed to “the Jews,” even though they know that is not what the Greek says. How can they be so bold?

I’ll explain. Take a look at John 18:14: “Now it was Caiaphas who advised *the Jews* that it was expedient that one man should die for the people” (NKJV).

In this passage, it states clearly that Caiaphas was speaking to “the Jews”; he advised, “the Jews.” However, if we turn back a few pages, we can see exactly to whom Caiaphas was speaking:

Then the *chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the Sanhedrin*.... Then one of them, named Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, spoke up, “You know nothing at all! You do not realize that it is better for you that one man

die for the people than that the whole nation perish” (John 11:47, 49-50).

So “the Jews” of John 18 and 19 are clearly *the Jewish leaders*, not the Jewish population.

Let’s look at John 9 – the healing of the blind man.

The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?” His parents answered, “We know that this is our son and that he was born blind, but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.” His parents said this because they were afraid of *the Jews*, for *the Jews* had already agreed that anyone who confessed Yeshua to be the Messiah would be *put out of the synagogue*. (John 9:18-22)

Who are “the Jews” here? The blind man was Jewish. His parents were Jewish. Jesus was Jewish and all of his followers, including John, who was taking notes, were Jewish. And the resisters were Jewish. In fact, everyone we see in the entire book, except for John 4 in Samaria, John 12 (though these were probably Greek-speaking Jews since they came to worship in Jerusalem for Passover), and the Romans at the end of the story, is Jewish.

It is quite easy to determine to whom John is referring when he says *the Jews* here. They are the ones with the power to “put out of the synagogue” (see also 12:42) those who followed Yeshua. And that would be the local synagogue, at most, the Jerusalem region, as most scholars agree this took place at or very close to the Temple. But it would not include the Galilee and certainly not the millions of Jews scattered abroad who had never even heard of the Galilean Rabbi. One thing is clear, he was not referring to all Jews as they themselves were Jews.

“The Jews” is, then, a term used of a group of *Jewish leaders* who exercise great authority among their compatriots and are especially hostile to Jesus and his disciples. A recent study of the Gospels’ use of *Ioudaioi* confirms the view that when it is used in a peculiarly Johannine sense, that is, not with reference to Judeans or to Jewish customs, feasts, and so forth, it refers to certain authorities rather than to the people as a whole.⁶

Now I understand that it seems like a strange choice of words but keep in mind back then, “Jews” didn’t mean what it means today. For instance, the region was separated into three regions: Judea, Galilee, and Samaria. Yeshua and His disciples were Galilean, not Judean. The Samaritan woman refers to Jesus as a Jew – the same word for Judaeans. Probably because she did not realize he was Galilean.

⁶ https://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/research_sites/cjl/sites/partners/cbaa_seminar/Smith.htm

While technically, both the Judeans in the Galileans were *Jews*, there was tension between the two groups. Galilean Jews were more passionate about the land of Israel; hence there was a high number of Zealots in the region. The Pharisees were more concerned with the legal aspects of the Torah, both written and oral. The Pharisees, who were regular critics of Yeshua, we're mostly Judean. The word for Judean and Jew is the same: Yehudi.

When Mark records: "The Pharisees and all the *Jews* do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders," he probably means *Judeans*. All of the Jews would include Yeshua and his disciples. However, Dr. David Stern's *Complete Jewish Bible* translates this: "For the Pharisees and indeed all the Judeans." Indeed, both the DBL and BDAG, highly respected biblical Greek dictionaries, say that *Ioudaios* can mean both Jews and Judeans, obviously depending on context.

Given the fact that the Galileans were not as obsessed with the ritual or liturgical aspects of Judaism, this makes sense. And we can see why John may have used this term when he is in Jerusalem, as he is a Galilean. Only in Chapter six does John use the term while in the Galilee, referring to the Jews who struggled with some of Yeshua's was teaching – and these could have been disciples who came from Judea to follow the Galilean Rabbi.

Stern translates *Ioudaios* 55 times⁷ in John as Judean(s), not Jew(s). For instance, in John 1:19, was it *the Jews* from Jerusalem who sent Levites and priests to check out Yeshua,

⁷https://www.biblegateway.com/quicksearch/?qs_version=CJB&quicksearch=judean&begin=50&end=50

or was it just the Judeans? Judeans make much sense, as they were sending them *from Judea to the Galilee*.

Not all references to *the Jews* are negative in John:

- Salvation is from the Jews (4:22).
- Many people (all Jews) believed in Yeshua (2:23).
- Many Jews believed Yeshua was a prophet or even the Messiah (7:40-41).
- And in that place, many (Jews) believed in Jesus after the Hannukah confrontation (10:42).
- John reports that after Yeshua raised Lazarus from the dead, “many of *the Jews* ... believed in him” (11:45).
- “...a large crowd of *Jews* found out that Jesus was [in Bethany] and came, not only because of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead” (12:9-11). The chief priests (not *all Israel*) “made plans to kill Lazarus as well, for, on account of him, many of *the Jews* were going over to Jesus and believing in him.” Without understanding the nuance, it could appear that *the Jews* wanted to kill Lazarus because *the Jews* were following Jesus. But of course, that is not what it says.
- The Pharisees lament, “Look how the whole world has gone after him!” (12:19). Clearly, “the whole world” is hyperbole, referring to Judeans in Jerusalem at the time. Clearly, a very large number of *the Jews* loved Jesus!

Giving more credence that John associated *Ioudaios* with Judea as a region is his use of Israel.

[John's] occasional use of "Israel" and "Israelite" *always indicates a favorable bias*. The words appear a total of five times: Twice, incipient believers hail Jesus as "King of Israel" (1:49; 12:13), and John the Baptist declares that his mission is for Jesus to be "revealed to Israel" (1:31). Also, Jesus declares that Nathanael is "truly an Israelite in whom is no guile" (1:47) and refers to Nicodemus as "the teacher of Israel" (3:10).⁸

How could one who is antisemitic have such a favorable view of Israel or Israelites? And keep in mind that the usage in John of *Israelite* would not be the same as *Israeli* today, a citizen of the state of Israel. At the time, the Romans controlled the region. In context, *Israelite* clearly refers to someone serving the God of Israel.

It would have been strange for those who flocked to hear Him teach – many of whom were healed – to suddenly call for His execution. Scripture makes it clear that a very large number of Jews followed Yeshua, even some high-profile leaders like Nicodemus, who not only sought him out to question him (John 3) but along with another Jewish man, asked for his corpse, to give a proper Jewish burial (John 19:38-42).

When he had come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, "Who is this?" So, the multitudes said, "This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth... (Matthew 21:10-11 NKJV).

⁸ https://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/research_sites/cjl/sites/partners/cbaa_seminar/townsend.htm

Many of the people believed in him and said,
‘When the Messiah comes, will He do more
signs than these which this Man has done?’
(John 7:31 NKJV).

Nevertheless, even among the [Jewish] rulers,
many believed on him...” (John 12:42 NKJV).

John records it was the leaders who shouted for Him to be crucified. “As soon as the chief priests and their officials saw him, they shouted, ‘Crucify! Crucify!’” (John 19:6).

In the other accounts, where it mentions the crowd joining in, it seems clear they were manipulated by the leaders. As Matthew writes, “But the chief priests and the elders *persuaded the crowd* to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed” (Matthew 27:20). We are not told the means by which they persuaded the crowd, but bribery would have been the common resource of the time. (They had paid witnesses to turn in false evidence at the trial the day before.) Clearly, this *persuaded crowd* did not represent the people of Israel, as there were approximately 100,000 Jews living in Jerusalem, and because it was Passover, there could have been upward of another 500,000 visitors in Jerusalem at that time. Do you really think there were 600,000 Jews at Pilate’s Jerusalem Palace?

This may appear to you as nitpicking, but on the contrary, it is extremely important because so many Jews have been falsely blamed for the death of Yeshua, even killed as part of this

accusation of being *Christ-killers*. It is important to emphasize that it was primarily the Jewish leaders who were jealous of Yeshua and went to Pilate. The multitudes loved Him.

Thanks for your time.

Blessings,

Avi Marks

“This is crazy, Ariel. The entire Jewish nation has been blamed for the actions of a small group of jealous, politically-oriented leaders and a manipulated crowd.”

“I know, it is twisted and sad, but you should know not all the leaders were jealous of Him. Let the words of one of the passages that you just read in the e-mail, John 12:42, sink in.”

Again, the words appeared in fire as Ariel read them:

Yet, at the same time, many even among the [Jewish] leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees, they would not openly acknowledge their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue...

“These Jewish leaders believed but were afraid. *Nicodemus*, to whom Avi was referring, was a Jewish leader, a member of the Sanhedrin, in fact. He was initially scared to be caught even speaking with Yeshua and so met with Him in secret, but eventually, he became one of His most ardent followers.”

Another passage in fire appeared:

Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus, who was a member of the Jewish

ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him (John 3:1-2).

“David, it is entirely false to claim: one, that all Israel rejected Yeshua, as you will see in the coming lessons; and two, that the Jews, or even the Romans for that matter, were responsible for killing Yeshua.

“Let me put this dreadful argument to rest – *I know who killed Yeshua.*”

“Who?” I asked, wondering what Ariel would say. Wars have been fought over this question, and now an angel sent from Heaven itself is offering to tell me. *Unreal!* I thought.

“You did! You killed Him, David!”

Notes

1. Scholars are not sure if the bar mitzvah ceremony goes all the way back to Second Temple Judaism, but it does seem that the family is there for some sort of rite of passage for a young man. Hence, the rabbis are conversing with him. There is no hard evidence that a bar mitzvah or rite of passage occurred at 13 back then; it could've been at 12. It may not even have been called a bar mitzvah then but there are many who believe it was. The fact that the Gospel writers mention his age and the other details communicates to me that it was a bar mitzvah of sorts.

Chapter Eight



“ME? A KILLER?”

“What!?” I was incredulous. What was this angel talking about? “I am only twenty-eight years old. How could I have possibly killed Jesus?”

“Your sin nailed those spikes into His hands and feet,” Ariel said with a holy passion he had not yet expressed. “It was your selfishness and rebellion that placed Yeshua on that cross. Yes, David, you are the guilty one!”

“But not just you, David, all Israel is guilty of breaking covenant with God. In fact, the whole world lies condemned before “the one to whom they must give account.” (Heb. 4:13)!”

The last part of this sentence made me vibrate inside. It was like somebody was highlighting the words coming out of his mouth. Somehow, I knew he was quoting from the Bible. “It was the sin of the world – yours and that of everyone who

came before you or will come after. If the world is looking for Christ's killer, it needs only to look in the mirror.

“Do you really think, David, that anyone could have killed the Divine Messiah without God's permission? Many times, they tried to kill Yeshua, but they couldn't, not until Yeshua allowed them to. One time in his hometown, they were going to throw him off of a cliff. And he just walked right through the crowd, and no one could touch him. (Luke 4:28-30)

Yeshua taught his disciples that no one has the power to take his life. Go ahead and read, David.”

The words of fire that were still there reformed into another passage, and I read them aloud:

No one takes my life from me. I give my life of my own free will. I have the authority to give my life, and I have the authority to take my life back again... (John 10:18 GW).

“This is in the New Testament?” I asked, astonished. He nodded. “How many Jews have been mistreated, even killed in the name of this blood libel, when all along the truth that He chose to die was plainly written in their Bible?” *I could feel myself getting angry again.*

“The Church erased the Jewishness of Yeshua and then blamed the entire Jewish nation for His death. This is why people like you, David, need to stop listening to what others tell them and do their own research. Notice that I am not teaching you anything that is not backed up by the historical account of Scripture...and I have direct access to the Truth Himself.

When mankind has been given the divine revelation contained in the Bible, why would he then look to a human source to tell him whether or not Yeshua is the Messiah?

“Do you know how many times I have seen Jewish people, just like yourself, enter a season where the Father sends the Holy Spirit to draw them, to woo them, to attract them to Yeshua? They don’t know why, but they are suddenly curious; they want to know. Seemingly out of nowhere, there is a deep concern over their soul. Is there a heaven? Is there a hell? Where will I spend eternity? *I want to know God!* Yeshua Himself said when He walked the earth that ‘No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them....’ It is recorded in John 6:44.

“You know what most Jewish people do when they go through that season? Watch...”

The lights dimmed as the movie screen came back to life. *It was me!* I was walking into Rabbi Goodman’s office. Oh, I remember it well. I went there to confide in him – to tell him what I was going through, spiritually. When I spoke to him about my desire to find God, he was initially happy. Even when I told him I had researched different religions from the Far East, he remained pleasant, nodding benignly. But the minute I shared with him that I was intrigued by this man, Jesus, he became agitated, even angry.

“How could you, David? Your grandfather would roll over in his grave if he could hear you talking such nonsense. Don’t you know what those people have done to us in His name? *And now you want to join them!*” He was getting angrier.

“I didn’t say I wanted to join them, just that Jesus and His

story intrigued me,” I countered. I felt humiliated and shamed. He warned me in the strongest terms to end my spiritual journey if that was where it was leading me. “It will tear your family apart. If you want to go hang out with some Yogi in India for a year, fine. But we are Jews; we don’t believe in *that man!*” he warned. As I left his office, I felt like a traitor for even considering Yeshua. The movie ended.

“Now, David, God has had mercy on you. Because of His plan for you, I was sent, but you know as well as I, had I not pulled you out of that Starbucks, you might *never* have considered Yeshua again.” The word *never* hit me like a sword in my *kishkas*.¹

I felt so ashamed that I had let Rabbi Goodman’s intimidation keep me from seeking truth. “I am a writer, a journalist; I am supposed to look for the truth no matter where it takes me, and here, in the most important issue of my life, I caved in.”

“David,” he softly said, “I have watched that same scene played out thousands of times in the last twenty years alone. Jewish people who are wrestling privately with the issue of Yeshua go to their rabbi *instead* of the Bible and get shamed out of continuing their search. While it breaks my heart, please understand that Rabbi Goodman meant no harm. He cares for you and your family. He was simply seeking to protect you. He doesn’t know what you are about to learn, but he only knows Jesus through the eyes of history, where so many who claimed to love Him hated Jews. Yes, he *was* wrong. Religious leaders have always sought to control the beliefs of their constituents. Before the advent of the printing press, the poor souls were

completely dependent upon their leaders to tell them what the Bible said.

“There are some Jewish people, though, who have thought for themselves. Today they are called Messianic Jews.”

“I have heard of them. There is a large group right here in Philly...oh yeah...I am not in Philadelphia, am I?”

Ariel laughed, “It’s time for you, David Lebowitz, to rediscover the real Yeshua, the Jewish Jesus, as He lived and died and rose from the grave, in this very city – as a son of Abraham. And then, you will offer that Yeshua, not a distorted facsimile of Him, to your people, the Jewish people. The Lord has a task for you, but first, we will expose this gruesome identity theft that has caused so much pain. Are you ready?” he asked.

Before I could reply, Ariel, my new friend, had grabbed me by the hand, and we were flying again.

Notes

1. *Yiddish* for “guts” or “soul.”

Chapter Nine



CLASS IS IN SESSION

When we landed, we were in what I can only describe as a *high-tech, heavenly classroom*. Everything in the classroom was ancient and yet completely modern. For sure, it was the coolest room I have ever been in! There was a desk for me to sit at; it was made of the off-white Jerusalem stone. But the desktop was a tablet...I mean, the desktop was a tablet as in Moses and the Ten Commandments-type tablet. But inside the stone tablet was an iPad-like tablet interface. *My tablet had a tablet!*

The room was dimly lit in a yellowish-orange glow as if torches and lanterns were being used. In fact, it wasn't unlike the synagogue in Jerusalem except for the fact that we appeared to be suspended in outer space, moving at a very slow pace!

There were no walls or ceilings, and I could see the stars and moon above me. There was a floor beneath us made of ancient off-white marble. I had the feeling that the marble was about a yard thick beneath me, but I couldn't really see.

In the front of the room was another tablet, only it was much larger, about twelve feet by four feet. There was one file on the screen. It read, "DL1.0." – my initials. *This was crazy. It had to be a dream.*

I had an insatiable desire to learn, which I can't adequately explain in human terms – especially because it was the first time I was feeling it. All I can say is that I felt like my brain had been programmed to absorb, and I couldn't wait to start learning.

"This will be our homeroom, David. You will spend a good deal of your time here learning but don't get too comfortable, as we will go on several journeys.

"Let me lay some ground rules. I will be showing you passages from books, encyclopedias, even websites, and of course, God's Word so that you can prepare for your assignment. Everything I show you here will be saved on your tablet on your desktop in the classroom. You see, David, I am not going to tell you what to believe, but I am going to help you build your case, primarily based on the Scriptures but backed up by history. I will show you the evidence, but in the end, you must decide.

"There are two primary goals. First, you will use this information in fulfilling your destiny. Second, I don't want you to trust a word I say theologically if it is not backed up by Scripture. This is how many people are deceived. Paul wrote

to the Galatians that even if an *angel* comes to you and has another gospel, reject it!¹ And hello, *I'm an angel!* So, you better do your homework. Mohammad and Joseph Smith are just two of the more famous individuals who were deceived by false angels. Everything must line up with God's Word.

"And, as we study history, for all you know, I could just be making up stories. But if I supply you with the documents to back it up, not only will it be credible but, back to point one, you will be better equipped to convince others."

Convince others... what was he talking about?

"Let's begin," Ariel was now dressed like a professor. He had a sports jacket and a bow tie and even wore glasses that I am sure he didn't need. There was an emblem on his jacket of a standing, roaring lion with two olive branches encasing it. Behind that was a line of stitching that made it look like the Western Wall in Jerusalem. Written in Hebrew was:

גִּוּר אַרְיֵה יְהוּדָה

Like most bar mitzvah Jewish boys, I could read Hebrew, but I could not understand most of it.

"Gur Ariye Yehudu (Yehuda)??... what does that mean?" And before Ariel could even answer me, I blurted out, "Oh, *young lion of Judah...* Wait, how did I know that?"

Ariel laughed, "Oh, we *are* going to have fun, David. It's the prophecy that Jacob gave to Judah, back in Genesis 49:9, 'Judah is a young lion.' The Messiah came into this world not only through Israel but the tribe of Judah. And speaking of the name Judah, you're going to meet one very soon."

"Where have I seen that emblem before?"

Ariel touched the large screen, and a manhole with the emblem appeared. I could see from the stone around it that it was in Jerusalem. “Of course, the emblem of Jerusalem. But a manhole?”

“That’s right, my friend, welcome to Underground Academy! We’re deep!”

“Oh, the angel tells jokes too,” I quipped.

“Yes, I do, but I’m not completely joking. We are going to go deep, as deep as we need to go, to uncover the truth that has been hidden under 2,000 years of lies. Let me tell you something about Jerusalem. The streets that you walk on are not the streets that Yeshua walked on. Most of the buildings are not the buildings from his time. Jerusalem has been conquered over and over again. We can go all the way back to the Babylonians, then the Persians, the Greeks, and finally the Romans. That is when Yeshua was born.

“The Romans conquered it two more times even when it was already under their authority.

“In 70 CE and then again during the Bar Kochba revolt in 132 CE,” I added. I wasn’t a complete idiot, and if I had been before, I felt like my brain was hooked up to an encyclopedia now.

“Many of the church fathers had no passion for the city of Jerusalem, and so it was discarded. They wrongly assumed that the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple was proof that God had forsaken the Jewish people. After the Empire adopted Christianity, known as the Byzantine rule, the Bishop of Jerusalem, Cyril, sought to revive interest in the city.”

A man, certainly a scholar, began to speak from the tablet

on the wall:

The “Jerusalem mystique” was present and powerful, the potential of the city inviting, the presence of the pilgrims demanding, and the possible increased status of the Jerusalem Church compelling⁹

“There was a rebirthed passion for Jerusalem, but just for the city, not the people. Soon, the Muslims would conquer the city. Then the city was under the control of the Crusaders, the Mamluks, and Ottomans for 400 years, taking us up to World War I, when the British defeated the Turks. The British held the area from 1917 until 1948, when they vacated Jerusalem and Israel was reborn as a nation.

“Buildings were destroyed, parts of the city were built over other parts. Archaeologists continue to unearth new tunnels and ancient areas even to this day in Jerusalem. The Western Wall is actually much longer than what is seen in the typical photo of Jerusalem because a lot of it is still underground. It was only about 150 years ago that the actual City of David – the original Jerusalem – was rediscovered. More and more of the past is being uncovered thanks to the tireless work of archaeologists, particularly since Israel’s independence.

“But David, this is just a metaphor for what has happened with the true message of Jesus that was birthed in Jerusalem. False doctrine after false doctrine covered up God’s heart for

⁹ Walker, P. W. L. 1990. *Holy city, holy places: Christian attitudes to Jerusalem and the Holy Land in the fourth century*. Oxford Early Christian Studies. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

the Jewish people. It got so bad that some Christian leaders even taught their flocks to hate the Jewish people. *That was their God-given duty*, they were told.

“In the same way that Jerusalem has been uncovered in the last decades, more and more Jewish people are uncovering the truth. Even as the City of David has been re-discovered by the Jewish people, the Son of David is being revealed to Israel once again. It’s only just begun.”

“Just like Joseph,” I jumped in. “He was despised and rejected by his brothers. But in the end, when he was in a position of great power, he revealed himself to his brothers.” *How did I know this? I hope this super-intellect stays with me after this journey is over.*

“Very good, David. And when he did reveal himself, he was not angry with his brothers but recognized that God had a purpose.”

He tapped the screen, and I saw a video of a young man, clearly, Joseph standing before his brothers. There were others in the room, and Joseph told them to leave. He removed his Egyptian garb and makeup. He looked at them with compassion. He said to them:

“I am Joseph! Is my father still living?” His brothers seemed terrified by Joseph as he called them forward, “Come close to me. I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here *because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you.*”

For two years now, there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years, there will be no plowing and reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

“So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me a father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt. Now hurry back to my father and say to him, ‘This is what your son Joseph says: God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; don’t delay. You shall live in the region of Goshen and be near me – you, your children and grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and all you have. I will provide for you there because five years of famine are still to come. Otherwise, you and your household and all who belong to you will become destitute.’ (Gen. 45:1-11)

They began to embrace each other as they wept tears of joy, as the screen faded.

“Without their rejection,” Ariel continued, “he would not have been in place to save entire nations. The Jewish rejection of Yeshua opened the door for his message to go the nations. But Hebrew Scriptures predict a great return in the end times. Yeshua has great compassion even for those who have vehemently rejected him.”

This was amazing!

“Shall we get started? We will begin with names. I do not deny that names are important,” he began to lecture. “They are. But at the risk of contradicting myself, I would also warn you not to get too hung up on names. The Father is not looking to catch us on technicalities. Sadly, there are those who obsess over names and miss the essence of the person of Yeshua.”

Ariel tapped the center of the file that read DL1.0, and suddenly the computer within the ancient tablet came to life. Several men appeared. The first one said, “Unless you read the Bible in the King James English, you are not reading the Bible!” The second one said, “If you are not baptized according to our church’s constitution, you are not saved, and you’re on your way to hell.” The third and last one proclaimed, “If you don’t pronounce His sacred name correctly, you will be damned.”

Ariel was laughing. “Silly religious people – this is not the God of the New Covenant, who ‘is not willing that any of these little ones should perish.’”

As he said this, I heard a sound, not unlike the one my cell phone emits when I get a new text message. Right on cue, “No. 1: Matthew 18:14” appeared on the right side of my personal tablet.

“There is no angel at the gates of Heaven ready to say, ‘Sally, we really would like to let you in. Your heart was pure, you loved people, embraced the Messiah, and sacrificed for the Kingdom, *but* we got you on a technicality. You got a name wrong, and so you’re disqualified. Sorry about that!

“God is looking for every opportunity to save. People who

get caught up in names, genealogies, traditions, or rituals and overemphasize their importance have a *religious spirit*, and that is not a good thing, David – it blinds them to the love of God and sometimes, to God Himself. Paul warns Timothy about those who promote controversy rather than God’s love.”

The text message *d’ling* sounded, and another verse appeared on my desktop, again with a number beside it: “They have an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions...” (1 Tim. 6:4). My tablet desktop was taking notes for me. *I could’ve used one of these in college.*

“There is the letter of the law, and then there is the spirit of the law. Sadly, there’s always the danger of getting so hung up on the minutiae that we miss the very purpose of Yeshua’s coming, which was, ‘*to seek and save those who are lost.*’”² A third passage appeared.

“Having said that, if we are going to understand the New Covenant in context, we are going to have to review a few names, as these name changes and translations influence how we perceive both the culture and message of certain New Covenant characters. These name revisions have resulted in both Jewish and Gentile readers completely missing the fact that these people were Jews, with Jewish names. Revisions that have tragically obscured the Jewishness of the New Covenant, communicating incorrectly to Jews that the New Covenant is not Jewish.”

“D’ling,” announced the appearance of Jeremiah 31:31 on my tablet:

“The days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah.”

“David, while English versions of the New Covenant refer to Yeshua by His Greek name, *Iesous*, which when translated into English becomes *Jesus*, His parents never called Him either of those names. Joseph, His stepfather, was given very specific instructions as to what His name was to be and why.” My tablet promptly displayed Matthew 1:20-21:

An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take [Miriam] home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name [Yeshua] because he will save his people from their sins” (Matthew 1:20-21).

Ariel continued his lecture, “The name *Yeshua*, in Hebrew, actually has meaning. Just about every Hebrew name has a meaning or comes from a similar root with a meaning, and the angel was very specific about the name that the Son of God, the Messiah, should have: His name should be *Yeshua*. Pronounced slightly differently, putting the emphasis on the last syllable instead of the middle, *Ye-shu-à* means salvation. In essence, the angel told Joseph, ‘*His name is to be “Yeshua” (salvation) because He will “yoshia” (verb form, save) His people from their sins.*’ It is impossible to pick up on this prophetic wordplay in the Greek or English versions. All throughout the Bible, we

see children being given names connected to their destinies.

“And that, of course, was the destiny of the Messiah, *to bring salvation to His people and to be a light to the nations*. Indeed, Simeon, the old prophet who had been told he would not die until he saw the Messiah, prophesied as much.”

Then I saw an old man on the larger tablet begin to pray, tears streaming down his face into his gray beard as he held a baby in his arms. This had to be the Simeon of whom he spoke.

Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel (Luke 2:29-32).

“His name was *salvation* because He would bring *salvation*,” I added.

“The name *Yeshua* was also a shortened form of the name *Joshua*, which in Hebrew is pronounced *Yehoshua*. In later books of the Hebrew Bible, we find the Hebrew name *Yeshua*, and it is translated as “*Joshua*.”³ Joshua means “Yahweh is Salvation” or “Yahweh saves.” Tell me, David, what sounds more Jewish to you, the name *Jesus* or *Joshua*?”

“Well, Joshua, of course,” I answered.

“In the Greek, both Joshua and Jesus are exactly the same: *Iesous*. But when referring to the Messiah, they translated his name as *Jesus*. When Joshua is mentioned in the New Covenant, they do not translate his name as Jesus, even though

in the Greek it is exactly the same – but instead, they used the Hebrew transliteration – Joshua – leaving us to think they are two different names. As a result, we lose the Jewish character of Jesus’ name. While Joshua is seen as Jewish, the Jewish Messiah has been portrayed throughout history as being something other than Jewish.

“Jewish parents don’t name their children Jesus. *Jesus* is simply not a Jewish name. It is completely foreign to Jewish people. But in the New Testament period, we saw a bunch of people named Jesus. It was a very popular name. But imagine if they had correctly translated Yeshua to Joshua and not Jesus... just that one thing would have had an impact in how Jewish people perceive Yeshua.”

“So, Joshua and Jesus are the same name?”

“Don’t be so amazed, David. There is more.

“All your life, you were probably told that the mother of Yeshua was a woman named Mary. In fact, millions of people actually call her Maria. Why is this significant? It’s important because these names make the mother of Yeshua sound English as in *Mary* or Italian as in *Maria* when of course, she was neither. She was not the lead role in *West Side Story* or Jimmy Stewart’s wife in *It’s a Wonderful Life*.”

“How do you know about movies, Ariel?”

“Are you kidding? Clarence and I were roommates!” he said, obviously cracking a joke in reference to the angel in *It’s a Wonderful Life*.

“I always viewed Mary as a Roman Catholic teenager,” I offered.

Ariel chuckled and said, “That would have been difficult,

as she was born in Israel several hundred years before there even was such a thing as the Roman Catholic Church.”

“Well, what about this *mother of God* business? They worship her and pray to her in some cultures.”

On the larger tablet appeared a woman, a precious woman. She began to talk to me. “David, this breaks God’s heart and mine as well. I am just a woman, a very blessed one, but nothing more. The Father never intended that people would pray to me or worship me. While it is difficult to be sad when you are constantly in the presence of the Almighty, what people have made of me disturbs me greatly. And what is worse is that many who claim to adore me oppress my people. They pray that I will intercede for them, and at the same time, they persecute and kill my brothers and sisters. I am an Israelite, and my name, by the way, is Miriam, a *Jewish name* – the same name as the sister of Moses.”

Now I was Zooming or Skype-ing or whatever you want to call it with Mary! *The Mary*...I mean *Miriam*, of course.

“So why is your name printed as *Mary* in the New Testament, but the sister of Moses is *Miriam*?” I asked her.

“Oh, I’ll let Ariel explain that. He’s the expert. I shared what I needed to share. Bless you, David,” and the board was empty again.

“The answer is simple,” said my eager angelic teacher, “and it is not as sinister as you may think, although it still confuses the identity of Yeshua’s earthly mother. The New Covenant was written in Greek, so her name had already been *Hellenized* – that means made appropriate for Greek culture. Even in the original text, they wrote the Greek equivalent of her name,

Maria, rather than her actual name. And the English translation of the Greek *Maria* is *Mary*. Whereas when the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into English, there was no Greek influence. Thus, Moses' sister remained Miriam. Pronounced in Hebrew, Mir-yam, it is simply Miriam in English.

“One more thing, David, while Miriam was correct in that she was not divine, I don't want to sell her short. She was chosen for a reason. She was a humble, loving, God-fearing servant of the Lord. She has taken her place next to Sarah, Rebecca, and Rachel in the Kingdom. She is a very special woman and should have been an example to young Jewish girls throughout the centuries, but like Yeshua – her identity was greatly altered.”

“This is so new to me,” I responded. “But I have a question.”

“Shoot,” said Ariel.

“Okay, this *John the Baptist* character; if you are saying that the New Covenant is Jewish, who is this guy? I mean, he is a *Baptist* for crying out loud. How could there be anything Jewish about him?”

The massive tablet came to life again and a fellow wearing some sort of caveman outfit appeared. He was laughing at me.

“Tell me something, Big Dave,” he chuckled. “If I mentioned the name *Ezekiel*, would you think Jewish or Christian?”

“Ezekiel was a Jewish prophet, so Jewish, of course.”

“How about *Jeremiah*, *Daniel*, *Isaiah*, or *Haggai*?” the man asked.

“Well, they were also prophets from the Hebrew Scriptures, so, once again, ‘Jewish.’”

“Right, Dave.”

I didn't like the funny caveman calling me *Dave*. My name is David.

"OK, I'll call you David," he laughed again.

"But how – I didn't say anything."

"No, but you thought it, and I'm a prophet, which is not a mind reader, of course, but if the Lord allows it, I sometimes see things, and I saw that you didn't want to be *Dave*, okay David?"

"O... K," I uttered uneasily.

"David, getting back on point," the prophet continued, "now what if I mentioned the name *John the Baptist*; what do you think of then?"

"Well, Christian, right?"

Then he yelled out, "*Boooooom! Gotcha!*"

I was startled. This guy was a character.

"My name is John, actually *Yochanan* in Hebrew, and I was *not* a Baptist. And here is another shocking revelation for you: *There were no Baptists at that time – although they seem like fine folk,*" he said jokingly in a Southern accent. In his normal voice, he continued, "The truth is, David, I was a Jewish prophet, and I died, actually, I had my head handed to me on a silver platter – literally! – many years before anyone had ever used the word, *Christian*."

"In the manner of Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and Isaiah," he became serious, "I was honored to be the last and greatest of the Hebrew prophets. My mission was to proclaim the coming of the Messiah in fulfillment of prophecy. I came from a priestly family – my father was a *cohen*, a Temple priest!"

The sound played and Isaiah 40:3-5 appeared on my tablet.

“Sadly, I died prior to the New Covenant, but it was important for me to get out of the way,” adding with a feigned annoyance, “although they could have just let me die in my sleep – why the head?”

“David, the only difference between my predecessors and me was that my ministry was recorded in the New Covenant. They called me *haMatbil*, *the Baptizer*, because when my *100 percent Jewish followers* would repent, I would immerse them in water, symbolizing spiritual cleansing. Funnily enough, the practice did not begin with the New Covenant or as a Christian tradition; immersion in water had been common practice in Judaism as a form of ritual cleansing for centuries before I implemented it in my ministry.

“In fact, outside the Temple in Jerusalem were nearly fifty *mikva’ot* – immersion tanks – for Jews wishing to make a sacrifice at the Temple. The ministry of immersion that the Lord entrusted to me preceded and prepared the people for Yeshua’s coming. It was not something new to the people of Israel. They understood its significance. The fact that thousands of Jews ‘from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan’ went out to be immersed by me attests to this fact. None of them asked to me, ‘What is this strange new custom?’”

Matthew 3:5 appeared on my tablet. “The fact that people now associate me and my moniker with a denomination that began only five hundred years ago and that they don’t see me as a Jew is truly sad because it takes the Jewish context away from the Gospel narrative. God called me, a Jewish man, to call the Jewish people to prepare themselves for the Jewish Messiah.”

The screen on the larger tablet went blank.

“I like him, Ariel.”

“I should let you know that the people you are meeting do not look as they appear to you. It was decided that for the purposes of our investigation, most of these figures would appear to you as they would have appeared on earth during their lives.” Ariel explained.

“Good to know. I was hoping people didn’t dress like cavemen in Heaven!”

We had a good laugh. Ariel and I were becoming friends.

Notes

1. Gal. 1:8.
2. Luke 19:10. NLT
3. See Zech. chapter 3.

Chapter Ten



PETER THE POPE?

“Have you heard of Peter?” Ariel asked.

“Eh, yeah, he was one of the first followers of Je – I mean Yeshua, right? Wasn’t he the first pope?”

I thought Ariel was smiling because I began to refer to Jesus by His Hebrew name, but he was chuckling at my assertion that Peter was the first pope.

“Okay, *D’vid*,” he used the Hebrew pronunciation of my name, “there are two issues with Peter: His *name* and his *function*. Let’s start with his name. First of all, it wasn’t Peter. The word *Peter*, or *Petros* in Greek, simply means *rock*. Peter’s real name was Simon or Shimon in Hebrew. That was how Esther – the first woman you met, the one who Yeshua healed of bleeding – referred to him. However, on the occasion that he received the revelation and declared that Yeshua was ‘the

Messiah, the Son of the living God...”

Matthew 16:16 appeared at the top of all the previous passages that had been sent to me on my tablet. “Yeshua announced that henceforth...”

“*Henceforth?* Who talks like that?” A strong, well-muscled individual with a big bushy beard now occupied the screen. He was confident and clearly had a sense of humor. “Angel, just let me tell my own story.”

“David,” he turned to me, “I really think you would rather hear it from me. I don’t use any of those three-dollar words like Professor Ariel over there.”

“Oh yes, you are a brilliant communicator. The problem is, you don’t know when *not* to talk!” Ariel then mimicked, “Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters – one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah,”¹ reminding the man of his ill-timed words on the Mount of Transfiguration.

“Yeah, yeah, yeah...not my finest moment, but we could talk about that, *or* you could tell him about my sermon on Shavuot...or before the Sanhedrin when they told us to stop preaching the Gospel! I remember it like it was yesterday, ‘Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Yeshua, the Messiah, that this man stands before you healed... Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under Heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.’²

“In truth, it wasn’t that difficult. Even though He had gone,

He was still with us. We couldn't see Him, but man, we could feel Him. Yeshua's presence was almost tangible. The miracle of healing we'd just witnessed – a paraplegic jumping up and down, praising God – and the fact that we were now doing what we'd watched Yeshua do so many times empowered us. We felt as bold as lions – not afraid of any man!”

“Okay, fisherman, you got it right more than you got it wrong, at least after Shavuot, so I guess we could let you share for a bit.” They both laughed.

“Where were we...oh yes, when I had the revelation that Yeshua was the Messiah, the Son of God, He gave me a new name – *Kefa!*

“*Kefa* means *rock* in Aramaic, the commonly used language of the time. It's very close to Hebrew. However, when the New Testament was written in Greek, in most places, they did not transliterate my name. Do you know what that means?”

“Sure, that's when you take a word from another language and spell it with the letters of your own language to enable you to pronounce it, even though you may not know what it means,” I offered.

“Exactly,” said Simon Peter. “My name was rarely transliterated to Greek which would be *Cephas*. In most places, they translated it to *Petros* – the Greek word for *rock*, which in English is *Peter*. Yeshua, however, never called me *Petros* or *Cephas*, but only *Kefa* or *Shimon Kefa*.”

Scripture references appeared on my tablet:

“John 1:42; I Corinthians 1:12; 3:22; 9:5; 15:5; Galatians 2:9,11,14.”

Ariel interrupted, “The problem with using the name *Peter*

is the same as with *John* or *Mary*. They are fine names; they just take away from the Jewishness of the narrative. Your average Jewish person has no idea that the man Christians call *Peter* is actually Jewish.

“This brings us to the second issue, regarding his *function*. Folks miss the context regarding Yeshua proclaiming to Shimon that He would build His community of followers on this *rock*. They had just taken a field trip to Caesarea Philippi. This was one of the most demonic areas in all of ancient Israel. It was a center for pagan worship. There was a massive rock there and cave that led, so they thought, to hell itself. Thus, it was called the gates of hell.

“Yeshua, standing before this massive rock that was thought by many to be the source of immense spiritual power, said to Shimon, who would lead the body of believers in its early days, ‘In Me, you are far more powerful than this rock.’ He was saying that the powers of Satan and pagan worship are not even worthy to be compared to the Gospel message in the mouths of His apostles and prophets.

“He then said, standing before the ‘gates of hell’ that the gates of hell, meaning Satan’s domain, will not prevail against his *kehillah*.”

“Kehi-what?”

“*Kehillah*. It’s a Hebrew word that means community. I want you to use it when referring to the community of followers of Yeshua. Many people use the word *church*. Church comes from the Greek word *kyriakon*, which is not in the New Covenant. The word that is translated church is *ekklesia*, which means, ‘called out ones’ or ‘those called to assemble’ and comes from

the Hebrew word *kahal*, which means “audience” or “assembly.” *Kehila* also comes from *kahal* and means “community.” *Ekklesia* is a great word because those who follow Yeshua are called out from the rest of the world and are grafted into the Commonwealth of Israel, the Father’s household. No matter what you think of the word *church*, a word is only as powerful as its meaning to its hearer, and most people hearing the word *church* today think of buildings, not people.

“For instance, if someone said to you, ‘David, look at that church,’ what would you be looking at?”

“A building, I guess?”

“That’s correct, at least in the way the word is most commonly used today. But if someone said, ‘I belong to a *community*,’ you would think of people, not a building, right?”

“Makes sense.”

“Okay, back on topic – the Roman Catholics misinterpreted Yeshua’s words to mean that He was bestowing special authority on Kefa. From this distorted interpretation, a doctrine later emerged that taught that *Kefa* or *Peter* himself was *the rock* upon which Yeshua would build His Church. Indeed, Kefa was the first leader, along with the other apostles in the first Jerusalem congregation, but they took it too far.

“Centuries later, this misinterpretation extended to the Roman Catholics’ claiming that Shimon Kefa was the first pope.”

Shimon began to laugh, “I don’t know what’s crazier, that there was a pope in the first century or that he was *Jewish*! Can you imagine me, Shimon, wearing that outfit the popes wear or letting people kiss my ring? And how about that hat?”

We were all laughing now.

“It’s called a mitre, Shimon, and we need to move on now,” Ariel gently chided the fisherman. Still laughing, Shimon disappeared from the screen.

“Romans Catholics maintain,” Ariel continued, “that Peter was the primary leader of the early believing community and that he eventually moved to Rome and became the first Bishop of Rome. Through apostolic succession, every Bishop of Rome, or pope, after Peter would be the head of Christianity.”

“Apostolic *what?*” I asked.

“Apostolic *succession*. It is the belief in the uninterrupted transmission of spiritual authority from the apostles through successive popes and bishops. Roman Catholics mistakenly maintain that Peter passed his authority down to the next pope and so on and so forth. Many denominations believe in the idea that there has been an unbroken transfer of apostolic authority from the apostles to the present, but the Roman Catholic Church additionally believes the Pope’s authority on matters of faith and morals is divinely inspired and sanctioned.”

“So, you are saying that Peter’s authority was passed down to the second pope, and then he gave it to the next one, all the way down to today’s pope...and that they are therefore incapable of making mistakes?”

“No, *I* am not saying that, *Roman Catholics* say that. This Bishop of Rome, or Pope, was regarded as authoritative when it came to issues of doctrine and morality for the Church. It was maintained that, without its leaders, the Church would move into deception. Later on, they would declare that the Pope’s dogmatic teachings on faith and morality were infallible.³

“It is true that the Father raises up leaders to guide His people...” The text message sound prompted me to look down...

So [Messiah] himself gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of [Messiah] may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of [Messiah].

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming (Ephes. 4:11-14).

“...but they are always subject to the authority of His Word. God never expects us to blindly follow a man, especially one who claims he is incapable of making mistakes. As the passage says, leaders are given to His followers to bring them to maturity, so they can think for themselves – not to keep them enslaved to one man’s dogma.”

I remembered again how I allowed my rabbi to make me feel guilty over my interest in Yeshua. I know he meant well, but he was basically asking me to trust him and not seek the truth on my own.

“Either it is ridiculous,” Shimon was back, “or Yeshua changes His mind a lot because Roman Catholic doctrine

has changed quite a bit over the centuries, with a number of popes contradicting the edicts of other popes. There are even examples of violence and intrigue between popes and would-be popes.

“Believe it or not, David, many of the popes were far more *political* than *pious*. The first bishop to adopt the title of Pope was a guy named St. Damasus. He was accused of adultery and led murderous raids against his enemies, killing over one hundred and sixty people! He was anything but a genuine believer.

“Another pope, Symmachus, around the year 500 CE conducted what can only be described as a holy war against his enemies. As the two groups fought in the streets, killing scores of men, one of the pope’s ardent followers declared that the pope was ‘judge in the place of the Most High, pure from all sin, and exempt from all punishment.’ All who fell fighting in his cause, he declared, enrolled on the register of heavens.”¹⁰ The quote appeared on my tablet.

I responded, “Throw in a few virgins, and this sounds eerily similar to radical Islam.”

“You’re so right,” exclaimed Shimon. “Religion is religion no matter what name you give it. It is easier to get someone to fight for your cause if they are willing to die, and it is a lot easier to get them to be willing to die if you promise them paradise on the other side – plus something extra to appeal to their carnal lusts, like seventy-two virgins. For a destitute, uneducated Arab teenager who doesn’t see much of a future ahead of him, this promise is very attractive.”

¹⁰ G.W. Foote and J.M. Wheeler, *Crimes of Christianity* (London: Progressive Publishing Co., 1887), 123.

“It was the same with a lot of the Crusaders you showed me, right, Ariel? Many of them were poor peasants who suddenly found purpose and identity through fighting for the Church, even if it was misguided.”

“You are catching on quickly, David,” responded the angel.

“Another pope, Stephen VI,” Ariel was not to be distracted, “had the body of a previous pope exhumed and dressed in his Episcopal robes so he could stand trial. He was found guilty. This mock trial also declared all of Pope Formosus’ ordinations to be invalid. Apparently, he was not as infallible as once thought.”

“This is crazy!” I maintained. “How can this be true? I see the pope on TV, and he hardly seems capable of such things.”

“Fortunately, the Catholic Church has changed – for the better, I might add – over the years. And to be clear, David, there have always been true followers of Yeshua in the Roman Catholic Church. Many of the bishops throughout the centuries truly loved Yeshua and sought to serve Him. In fact, there were several Popes who genuinely sought to serve the Lord, but this sad history, one that most Roman Catholics don’t even know, did indeed take place. And David, it is important that I prepare you for your future task ahead, and that requires taking an honest look at history.”

“Okay, guys, I’ve already heard this, so I’m going to leave now. David, it was an honor to meet you.” And he was gone. *Future task ahead? An honor to meet me?* I wasn’t even sure if I believed any of this was happening – and here was Peter of the Bible telling me that he is honored to meet me!

Ariel interrupted my reflections, “Now concerning Peter

or Kefa and the belief that he was the first pope....” Suddenly on my tablet, opposite the Scriptures, under the heading, “NOTES” were listed four points.

“Read those out loud, please,” Ariel requested.

“Number 1. While it is clear from the early chapters of Acts that Peter – that is Kefa – was the greater among equals, the senior leader among the apostles, it is also clear that Kefa gave himself to traveling ministry (Acts 8, Acts 10) and turned over this responsibility to James....”

“Actually, his name was Jacob,” Ariel interrupted me, “but we will come to that later.” I continued reading.

“...The brother of Yeshua, as he was clearly the one in charge in later chapters, both in Acts 15 where Shimon Kefa testified and in Acts 21 when Paul visited Jerusalem. Furthermore, in Galatians 2, Paul writes “when certain men came from James to Antioch where Peter was,” proving both that Peter was sent out to Antioch from Jerusalem and that Jerusalem was the headquarters.

“Who is Paul? You mentioned him earlier,” I asked.

“Soon, David, just keep reading....”

“Number 2. Peter clearly wasn’t infallible, as we see in that same Galatians 2 passage. Here Paul rebukes Peter publicly for his hypocrisy in refusing to eat with Gentiles when certain men came from Jerusalem, though he freely ate with them before these men arrived. The tradition of the elders, which would become the Oral Law, forbade Jews to eat with Gentiles. This was not a biblical issue, but one of tradition – a bad tradition.

“Number 3. And lastly, while there is evidence Peter visited Rome, we never see him portrayed as the *Bishop of*

Rome. And even if he had possessed this position, where is it written in the New Covenant that the Bishop of Rome would hold the seat of authority over Church doctrine – ever? Let alone, forever? If such an idea were even biblical, Jerusalem, not Rome, would have been the obvious choice, as the Acts 15 Council, the first doctrinal conference of elders and apostles, was held in Jerusalem. And, of course, we know that Yeshua does not return to Rome to set up His millennial kingdom but to Jerusalem. See Zechariah 14:1-4.”

“Number 4. It would be a long time before Rome would be seen as the center of Christian life. Constantine does not embrace Christianity until 312 CE. Peter was killed in 64 CE by Nero.

“I know that some of these things are probably a bit confusing to you, David – ‘*Millennial Kingdom*,’ ‘*Jerusalem Council*,’ etc. I realize that much of this is new, but just stay with me, and it will all be clear in the end. The main point I want you to see here is that God never intended for there to be any central authority on earth that controlled the faith and doctrine of every believer. He alone holds all authority, and it is to Him and to His Word that men must come. People can and should read His Word for themselves.”

Notes

1. See Matt. 17:4
2. See Acts 4:8-12.
3. This doctrine was adopted by the Roman Catholic Church in the First Vatican Council of 1869-1870.

Chapter Eleven



NICE JEWISH BOYS: SAUL, JACOB, AND JUDAH

“David, you asked about Paul. He is the central author of the New Covenant – at least of the letters to the congregations – and his name was actually Saul of Tarsus. He was both Jewish and a Roman citizen, not to mention a rabbi of the Pharisees. He studied under Gamaliel, one of the most respected rabbinical scholars of his day. He was so zealous for God and convinced that Jewish people who believed in Yeshua were deceived that he sought to arrest Jewish believers and even approved the stoning to death of Stephen, a leader among the first Jewish believers.”

Acts 7:58 – 8:1 appeared, and I made a mental note to look it up afterward. Right now, I was hanging on the angel’s every word.

“However, on his way to Damascus to arrest Messianic Jews – Jews who believe in Yeshua – he was knocked to the ground and blinded by a great light. I remember that day! We angels weren’t too crazy about this guy. I mean, he was throwing Jewish believers in jail and even having some killed! But the Father said, ‘This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name.’¹

“At the time, I quietly thought *He deserves to suffer alright*, but couldn’t quite see how this guy would ever be preaching to the Gentiles. But, as always, Father knows best.

“Yeshua had a little chat with Saul on the Damascus road and convinced him that he was on the wrong side of the issue. After this dramatic encounter, he became a believer and actually began to share the good news of Yeshua with Jewish people. In fact, he immediately went into the synagogues and began preaching.”

“Wait a minute! Are you telling me that the primary writer of the New Covenant was a *Jewish rabbi*,² and that after persecuting Messianic Jews, he became one and actually went into Jewish synagogues preaching about Yeshua?”

“You’re starting to get it, David,” he said with a big grin. “This is what they didn’t teach you at your Hebrew school – and honestly, most churches don’t teach this either. Jews and Christians have been tragically blinded to the Jewish roots of the New Covenant.

“Well, why don’t Jewish people know this?” I demanded.

“That is why you are here, David, to answer that exact question! But not quite yet.” He continued telling Paul’s story.

“Many years later, as he traveled throughout the known world seeking to help both Jews and Gentiles discover a dynamic, real relationship with the King of the Universe, the Bible refers to the fact that he had two names.” On my screen appeared: “Then Saul, who was *also* called Paul...” (Acts 13:9).

“Sadly, for centuries Christians have taught that Saul changed his name to Paul after he became a believer. In other words, he had to get rid of his *wretched* Jewish name and take on a Christian one.”

“But Paul,” I jumped in, “is a Latin name and was popular in Rome long before Christianity. If anything, it would be connected to Rome, which was pagan and polytheistic.”

“Right, David, and let’s not forget. At the time that Paul was preaching, Rome was anything but a friend to the believing community. In fact, Rome became the primary persecutor of the first-century believers, the Kehillah, for the first three hundred years.”

Just then, a gray-haired English vicar appeared on the screen. He was addressing his congregation:

“The Roman Emperor Nero had the believers tied to poles in the garden, covered with tar, and set on fire to illuminate his garden parties. And then he would take other believers and sew them into the skins of wild beasts and set dogs on them to tear them to bits to entertain his guests. And I have stood in that garden and wondered how many believers died a horrible death for his barbecue parties.”³

“It is highly unlikely that Saul changed his name to reflect this barbaric culture. What’s more, if Saul truly changed his name from a Jewish one to a Roman one, then why did he wait so many years after coming to faith to do so?”

“Then why does it say he was also called Paul?” I asked.

“Let me ask you this,” Ariel replied. “Do you have a Hebrew name?”

“Of course. Anyone who grew up in a Jewish home outside of Israel knows that it is common for Jewish people to have two names, one that relates to the culture in which they live and a Hebrew name. Mine is Chaim.”

“Ah, Chaim, a great name. It means *life*,” Ariel commented, then continued. “When Saul was traveling in non-Jewish areas, he used his Roman name, Paul, and when in Israel or amongst Jews, he used his Hebrew name, Sha’ul. Saul is its Anglicized equivalent. Notice the passage doesn’t say, ‘Saul, who changed his name to Paul,’ but rather, ‘Saul, who was *also* called Paul’ ... (Acts 13:9) – as, *in addition to, not instead of*.

“Some of the smartest Bible teachers in the world miss this simple fact. This pastor you are about to see,” a man standing behind a pulpit appeared on the flat screen but in *pause mode*, “is an excellent Bible teacher, and he loves Israel. He and his church have given sacrificially to Jewish believers. But listen to him in a recent message.”

Ariel played me just one sentence. I couldn’t tell you the context of his sermon, but I simply heard him say: “Saul was on the road to Damascus. That is what his name was *then*.”

“Here is another one. This man’s messages are listened to by millions every week online.” Another man appeared. “Paul,

his *original* name was Saul...”

“This fine preacher, well-versed in the Scriptures, simply assumes that Sha’ul changed his name. If people so bright can miss this simple point,” Ariel noted, “how easy has it been for the enemy to rob Saul, one of the most prominent figures in the New Covenant, of his Jewish identity and thus confuse the nature of the New Covenant for Jewish people?” Ariel noted. “And what’s more, he continued to live as a Jew the rest of his days. At the end of the book of Acts – a book about the first followers of Yeshua – he is received in the last chapter *as a Jewish rabbi, from other Jewish leaders!*”

Ariel took a breath and gathered himself as if to say it was time to move on. “Earlier, I mentioned James to you,” Ariel said, switching subjects.

“You said his name was actually Jacob.”

“Good, you’re paying attention!”

Paying attention was an understatement. I just wanted to learn more and more!

“Well, I want you to meet Jacob, the physical half-brother of Yeshua.”

The screen of the massive tablet lit up again, and a handsome man in his thirties said to me, “Yeah, they sure did a job on my name. ‘James,’ for Heaven’s sake! No one ever called me James growing up. If they had, you might assume I was the butler or the chauffeur!” James was laughing. “But nope, I’m Jewish and grew up in Galilee.”

“You...grew up...with...*Yeshua*?” I tentatively asked, making sure I used the name that Jacob would have known Him by. How surreal it was to be talking to someone who

actually grew up in the same house as Jesus!

“Yeah, and it wasn’t easy. Try growing up in the shadow of the *Ma-Sye-Ya!* – *I might as well have been the butler!*” He raised his voice for emphasis but was smiling. “In all seriousness, it wasn’t easy. It took me a long time before I believed – imagine your half-brother telling you that His other genealogical half is God! But after His resurrection, there was no denying that, indeed, my brother was the Messiah. After I became a believer, others quickly looked to me for leadership simply because I grew up with Yeshua. I resisted this at first – I had doubted Him for so many years. However, to my surprise, that is exactly what He called me to do; to lead this new group of believing Jews in Jerusalem, along with Kefa and the other apostles, in following the Risen Messiah – my brother.

“I’ll let Ariel take it from here. I just wanted to meet you.” And he was gone.

Like Shimon Kefa, Jacob wanted to meet *me*? Who was I?

“David,” Ariel continued his lesson, “in just about every other translation of the New Covenant – German, Hungarian, French, etc. – the word James is properly translated as *Jacob* or *Yakov*.”⁴

“So why is it *James* in English?” I asked.

“Many have speculated that since King James authorized the English translation of the Bible, translators did this to honor him, but actually, the names Jacob and James had been synonymous for some time. The Latin name *Iacomus* (James) was very close to the Latin for Jacob, *Iacobus*, and it appears that it was just a linguistic corruption or confusion. Nevertheless, it has been a costly one.

“The problem, once again, with this mistranslation of *Jacob* is that it lessens the perception of the New Covenant as a Jewish document. If a Jewish person, like you, David, opened up the New Testament to the book of James, you would wrongly conclude that this James had no connection with Judaism or Israel. However, if the book, which was addressed to the twelve tribes of Israel scattered abroad, was properly entitled *Jacob*, your reaction would be just the opposite – you would instantly recognize that he is Jewish. It would convey and reinforce to you the Jewish context⁵ of the New Covenant.

“Moreover, most do not know the amazing story of how *Jacob* led the Jerusalem Messianic community for the next 30 years. The congregation continued to grow under the leadership of *Jacob* – again, there was *no first-century Jews* named *James*,” Ariel added with a smile. “The historian Eusebius recounts *Jacob’s* martyrdom.”

“Eu-who-bius? I’ve never heard of him.”

Ariel laughed and said, “Eusebius of Caesarea, also known as Eusebius Pamphili, was a Christian historian and exegete – and before you ask, that means he would study and interpret Scripture. He was also a skilled apologist for the faith. He became the bishop of Caesarea Maritima about AD 314. And sadly, he too has some unsavory views of the Jews. That was what they were taught. But Eusebius got his information from Hegesippus, a second-century Messianic Jew from Jerusalem.

A man around 60 or 65 years old appeared on the screen.

“Hegesippus?” I asked.

“Correct.” Ariel tapped the tablet.

“Jacob, the Lord’s brother, becomes the leader of the assembly of believers, in conjunction with the apostles. He has been universally called *Jacob the Just*, from the days of the Lord down to the present time. For many bore the name of Jacob, but he was different. He alone was permitted to enter the Temple and could be found kneeling on his knees, begging forgiveness for the people, so much so that the skin of his knees became horny like that of a camel’s, by reason of his constantly bending the knee in adoration to God and begging forgiveness for the people. Therefore, because of this and of his pre-eminent justice, he was called *the Just* in accordance with what the prophets declared concerning him.

“Now some persons belonging to the seven sects of Judaism,” at that moment a list of these Jewish sects appeared on the screen:

- Essenes
- Galileans
- Hemerobaptists
- Masbotheans
- Samaritans
- Sadducees
- Pharisees

“...existing among the people, which have been before described by me in the notes, asked him: “*What is the door of Yeshua?*” And he replied that He was the Moshia – Savior. Some believed, because of Jacob’s reply, that Yeshua is the Messiah. But the sects before mentioned did not believe, either in a resurrection or in the coming of One to pay back every man according to his works; but those who did believe, believed because of (the character and witness of) Jacob. So, when many even of the ruling class believed, there was a commotion among the Jewish leaders, and scribes, and Pharisees, who said: ‘A little more, and we shall have all the people looking for Yeshua as Messiah.’

“They came, therefore, in a body to Jacob, and said: ‘We entreat thee, restrain the people: for they are gone astray in their opinions about Yeshua as if he were the Messiah. We are asking you to persuade all who have come to Jerusalem for Passover, concerning Yeshua. For we all listen to your persuasion; since we, as well as all the people, bear thee testimony that thou art just, and showest partiality to none. Do thou, therefore, persuade the people not to entertain erroneous opinions concerning Jesus: for all the people, and we also, listen to thy persuasion. Take thy stand, then, upon the

pinnacle of the temple, that from that elevated spot thou mayest be clearly seen, and thy words may be plainly audible to all the people. For, in order to attend the Passover, all the tribes have congregated at the Temple, and some of the Gentiles also.'

Ariel hit pause, "Let me jump in here for a minute. You may not have heard of this phrase, *the pinnacle of the Temple*. This was a post about 450 feet from the road at the southwestern corner of the Temple mount. This is where the shofar would be blown, announcing the beginning and end of the Sabbath, amongst other key moments. Archeologists in the late 1960's found at the bottom of this southwestern corner, in the rubble from the stones that were hurled down during the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, an inscription that reads in Hebrew, '*The place of the blowing of the Shofar.*' They have a replica of it next to the Western Wall in Jerusalem, and the original is in the Museum of Israel just down the road.

"It's also where Satan took Yeshua and tempted Him to throw Himself down to the ground, saying that if He was truly the Son of God that God would raise him up. Of course, Yeshua brushed him off. This is of particular importance because of what you're going to hear next."

Ariel tapped the screen.

"The aforementioned scribes and Pharisees accordingly set Jacob on the pinnacle of the Temple, and cried aloud to him, and said: 'O just one, whom we are all bound to obey, in light of the fact that the people are in error, and follow Yeshua

the crucified, do thou tell us what is the door of Yeshua, the crucified.’ And he answered with a loud voice: “Why ask you me concerning Yeshua the Son of man? He Himself sits in heaven, at the right hand of the Great Power, and shall come on the clouds of heaven.”

Ariel hit pause, “This was not the answer they were looking for. They were hoping that Jacob would denounce his belief in Yeshua, and because he was so trusted by the people, they, in turn, would also recant their faith. Anyone familiar with the last hours before Yeshua was crucified would recognize Jacob’s response. He is quoting his brother, Yeshua.”

Words appeared, and I read aloud when he was being interrogated by Caiaphas, the high priest.

“Again, the high priest asked Him, saying to Him, ‘Are You the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed?’ Yeshua said, “I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power and coming with the clouds of heaven.” (Mark 14:61-62)

“So, they were not too excited about Jacob’s answer?” I asked.

“Let Hegesippus finish,” Ariel pressed play.

“And, when many were fully convinced *by these words* and offered praise for the testimony of Jacob, they said, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David.’ Then the Pharisees and scribes said to one another, ‘We have not done well in procuring this testimony to Jesus. But let us go up and throw him down, that they may be afraid and not believe him.’

“And they cried aloud and said: ‘Oh! Oh! The just man himself is in error.’ Thus, they fulfilled the Scripture written

in Isaiah: ‘Let us away with the just man, because he is troublesome to us: therefore shall they eat the fruit of their doings.’ So they went up and threw down the just man and said to one another: ‘Let us stone Jacob the Just.’ And they began to stone him: for he was not killed by the fall; but he turned, and kneeled down, and said: ‘I beseech Thee, Lord God our Father, *forgive them; for they know not what they do.*’

“That is also what Yeshua said when they crucified him,” I blurted out.

Ariel just looked at me with an acknowledging smile as the historian continued.

“And, while they were thus stoning him to death, one of the priests, the sons of Rechab, the son of Rechabim, to whom testimony is borne by Jeremiah the prophet, began to cry aloud, saying: ‘Cease, what you are doing! The just man is praying for us.’ But one among them, one of the fullers, took the staff with which he was accustomed to wring out the garments he dyed and hurled it at the head of the just man – Jacob.

“And so, he suffered martyrdom; and they buried him on the spot, and the pillar erected to his memory still remains, close by the temple. This man was a true witness to both Jews and Greeks that Yeshua is the Messiah.”

Hegesippus faded, and the screen went dark.

“What a story!” All of my emotions were fully engaged. I felt like I had just sat through a thriller. But Ariel was focused on moving on.

“I want you to meet Jacob’s brother.”

“*Yeshua!*” I exclaimed, terrified.

“No, he had other brothers. David, meet Judas.”

A shiver went down my spine. I was afraid to speak.

“Relax, David, I am not *that* Judas.”

“Who are you then?”

“I am Jacob’s brother, like Ariel just said, which makes me, yes, the half-brother of Yeshua. I know that Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Yeshua, is more famous, or I should say ‘infamous,’ than I, but I did write one of the books of the New Covenant, albeit a very short one, creatively titled after yours truly. The problem with the other Judas, in addition to the fact that he was a thief and a traitor, is that his name has become synonymous with ‘traitor’ in modern vernacular and in many dictionaries.”

On my tablet, I saw: “Judas: *someone one who betrays under the guise of friendship*, Webster’s Dictionary.”⁶

“But no one, thankfully, ever actually called me by that name. My name is *Yehuda*, or Judah in English, the same name as the fourth son of Jacob, of the tribes of Israel.”

Ariel took over, “As in the case of the name of *Yeshua*, had they skipped the Greek and simply transliterated from Hebrew to English, my friend here and his book should be known today in English by the name *Judah*.”

“*Judah*, or *Yehuda*, means “praise,” from the same root word we get *Judaism*, the name of the Jewish religion. When ancient Israel was separated into two kingdoms, the southern kingdom was named Judah, after the larger of the two tribes, the other being Benjamin. Modern-day Israel still refers to the southern region of the territories that were recovered in the Six-Day War as *Yehudah*.”

“Ariel, it seems that there has been a concerted effort to

make the followers of Yeshua look very *non-Jewish*. Not only has Yeshua's identity been altered, but also His first followers; even His brothers appear to have undergone an *extreme Gentile makeover*. I didn't know any of this! And I know that my Jewish friends and family don't know it either."

"David, we are just beginning. This is only the tip of the iceberg. Here, take my hand."

We were flying again.

Notes

1. Acts 9:15-16.
2. Formal rabbinic ordination did not begin until about forty years later, but *rabbi* was the term of honor given to a respected Jewish teacher in Paul's day.
3. Adapted from a message given by David Pawson at Brisbane Gateway Centre in April 1998 entitled, *What Hope for the Millennium?*
4. James appears in Spanish Bible as "Santiago"; it is derived from San (meaning, Saint) Diego, which comes from Jacob – but changed a lot along the way. Nevertheless, it has no connection to the English name *James*.
5. It is also interesting to note that in Jacob (James) 2:2, when it refers to the meeting place of believers, the Greek word that

is translated meeting in the NIV and assembly in the KJV is *synagogē*, from which we derive the English word synagogue. This was not a blatant attempt to change the meaning of the word because synagogue, while associated today with Jewish houses of worship, does mean assembly. However, if the New Covenant translators simply used the obvious English equivalent, synagogue, it would have sent a different message to Jewish people.

6. Webster's Online Dictionary, s.v., "Judas," <http://www.websters-online-dictionary.org/definitions/judas> (accessed August 10, 2012).

Chapter Twelve



THE LAST SUPPER OR SEDER?

Once again, we were going back in time. Above me were only stars, while below, I could see time periods passing me by. They looked like scrolling movie film, and I could make out the names – *The Industrial Revolution, The Revolutionary War, Napoleon, and King Louis XVI...* And as we again drew closer to the ground, I knew we were back in Jerusalem. It was evening, and the city was bathed in soft golden light, as torches illuminated almost every courtyard.

We hovered over one home in midair, and I realized we were defying gravity. We were able to see right through the roof. It was as if it were transparent. A group of people was sitting around a long table.

“What do you see?” asked Ariel.

“A dinner party? It looks pretty cool in ancient Jerusalem. No internet, phones, Facebook, or other distractions.”

“Look more closely,” he exhorted.

“I see a Kiddush Cup for blessing the wine, and that looks like matzah. It must be Passover. Are they having a Seder meal, the meal we eat on the first night of Passover?”

“Indeed, they are, but this is no ordinary Passover Seder. Look a little closer at the people.”

“Wait a minute. I recognize Peter, I mean *Kefa*, and that’s Miriam, the mother of Yeshua. Is this what I think it is?”

“Yes, it is the Last Supper, and tomorrow Yeshua will die.”

“Are you telling me that the Last Supper was a *Passover Seder*?”

“What else would you expect Jews to be doing *on Passover* in Jerusalem – celebrating *Festivus*?”

“*Seinfeld, nice.*”

A passage formed in a yellowish fire about two feet from my face.

Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. Yeshua sent Peter and John, saying, “Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover.”

“Where do you want us to prepare for it?” they asked.

He replied, “As you enter the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him to the house that he enters, and say to the owner of the house, ‘The Teacher asks: Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’ He will show you a large room upstairs, all furnished. Make preparations there.”

They left and found things just as [Yeshua] had told them.

So, they prepared the Passover.

When the hour came, [Yeshua] and his apostles reclined at the table. And he said to them, “*I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.*” (Luke 22:7-15)

“When you see Leonardo da Vinci’s painting of the Last Supper, you don’t think *Jewish*, do you?” the angel asked.

“No. Never!” I exclaimed, “If I remember correctly, he has *bread* on the table! It’s Passover, for goodness sake; Jews don’t eat bread on Passover! The matzah is central in the Passover dinner liturgy. The whole point of the matzah is to explain why we didn’t eat leavened bread as we escaped Egypt. It would be like wearing a bathing suit to the opera – it doesn’t fit the context.”

“What do you expect from an Italian painter in 1495? The Church had already drifted so far from her Jewish roots, no one would have even thought to bring it to the painter’s attention. The Church leaders had long ago consciously exorcised anything Jewish from the Jesus narrative. In Spain, they were already killing Jewish converts who returned to Judaism. Why would Leonardo emphasize the Messiah’s Jewishness? In fact, doing so could have put his own life in jeopardy.”

“That makes sense,” I agreed. “So Yeshua died on the first day of Passover?”

“Yes, but there is more.” Ariel and I were flying again. This was a very short trip. We landed on a grassy knoll near some large rocks. I realized later that they were tombs.

“Where are we?” I asked.

“No, ‘*When are we?*’ is the correct question. And I’ll give you a hint – in Heaven, we don’t call this day *Easter Sunday* any

more than we call the Passover you just saw, *Good Friday*. Read this passage, David.”

This time it was a cloud that formed in the shape of letters. But it was in Hebrew. “Ariel, I can’t read Hebrew. I mean, I can sound out the words, but I have no idea what I am saying. Most Jewish boys in America learn how to read the Hebrew alphabet for their Bar Mitzvahs, but rarely do we actually learn the language.”

“Try,” he said with a mischievous grin.

Then I remembered what happened earlier when I read the inscription. As I opened my mouth to read, I found I could both read *and* understand Hebrew! Amazing! The verse said: “He is to wave the sheaf before the Lord so it will be accepted on your behalf; the priest is to wave it on the day after the Sabbath.”¹

“Ah...so? What does this mean to me today?” I asked.

“David, this passage is from Leviticus 23. Adonai tells the Israelites to bring a First Fruits offering – Rosh haKatzir in Hebrew – before the Lord on the first Sunday after the first Saturday, or the Sabbath after Passover begins. On this day, the priest would wave a sheaf before the Lord. It is called the Feast of First fruits. Sha’ul, remember him? He wrote this: ‘But now [Messiah] is risen from the dead *and* has become the first fruits...’ (1 Cor. 15:20 NKJV).”

This time, it was in English, and I was beginning to grasp the significance of what he was showing me. “Is this the day Yeshua rises from the dead? And if so,” my thoughts were racing, “you are telling me that not only did He die on a Jewish feast day, Passover, but He rose from the dead on a significant Jewish day?”

“*Bingo!* Such a good student you are,” and he actually pinched my cheek in jest. But David, this is not just any special Jewish day! It is the day of *First Fruits!* Yeshua rose from the dead, as Sha’ul said, as its fulfillment. He is the first fruits of God’s harvest, and millions have followed Him. The same power that raised Him from the dead lives in them, giving them life everlasting. I imagine you would like to experience that, too?”

I could experience it, too? This was what I was searching for. Yes, I want that joy, that peace; I want that serenity I saw in Kefa, Jacob, and Judah. And they are Jews! I am not turning my back on my people. They are my people! This is what I have been longing for!

“Ariel, I’m ready. I want to embrace...*Ariel?* Where are you?” Finally, I was ready, and my angel suddenly disappeared. Unexpectedly, there was a commotion behind me. I was no longer floating but on the ground. I could feel the earth tremble beneath...I was in an earthquake. Suddenly an angel descended and moved the massive stone from the tomb. He then just sat on the rock and looked right at me and smiled like he knew a great secret. He was so bright; I could barely look at him. He looked like Ariel...wait, it was Ariel!

I turned around and saw two women who looked absolutely terrified and a few Roman guards on the ground trembling with fear. *Could they see me*, I wondered? Then I saw *why* they were trembling.

Ariel looked at the women and spoke, and as he did, his words formed in little clouds in front of me. I read as I heard him say to the women:

“Why do you look for the living

among the dead? He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ‘The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.’”
(Luke 24:5-7)

“Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead, and indeed He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him. Behold, I have told you.” (Matthew 28:6b-7)

They turned and began to run with a look of both confusion and excitement. As they did, one of them looked at me and said, “You heard him, right? He is risen. *HE IS ALIVE! Hallelujah! We have to tell the others!*”

Tears filled my eyes as they rushed past me. I don’t think I had ever been more at peace in my life. A few hours... minutes...days...*I had no sense of time...*ago, I was wondering if God was real and how I could know him. Now, I was an eyewitness to the resurrection. A heavenly feeling – something beyond human emotion – filled my chest. I had found truth.

“It is the presence of God.” Ariel reappeared by my side, no longer glowing, “The peace you are experiencing. It is His Spirit. He is drawing you to himself.”

I said excitedly, something akin to, “You were...you...ah.”

“Yes, I was chosen to announce that the King – the King of the Jews – had risen from the dead.”

I was beginning to understand that I was with no *Private First-Class* angel. This angel had some *cloud clout*. And what did that say about the fact that he was sent to me? What did all this mean? I'm just a writer from Philadelphia.

"That was an amazing day," he wasn't even talking to me. "There was rejoicing in Heaven on a scale none of us had ever seen before, not even when Moses parted the Red Sea."

"Were you in on that, too?"

"No, but I watched it."

"My rabbi once told me that the Israelites passed through the *Reed Sea*, not the *Red Sea* and that the water was only a few feet high."

"Tell your rabbi that he's right. It was also called *Yam haSuf*, The Reed Sea, because of the papyrus reeds and bulrushes that flourished along the shores of the Nile River, which was not far. Remember, Moses was found in the reeds of Nile by Pharaoh's daughter."

"So, the Israelites did cross over in waist-high water?" I asked, clearly confused.

"Oh David, no. That would have been an even greater miracle."

"What?" I asked, still confused. "What do you mean?"

"All of Pharaoh's army wouldn't have drowned in only two feet of water!"

We both laughed out loud as he took my hand again. Being somewhat analytical, I realized that I wasn't just laughing because he was funny, but because I was with an angel 2,000 years in the past, and I was happier than I had ever been in my whole life. Happy isn't even the right word. I was beyond happy.

I was ecstatic! I felt a joy beyond my ability, even as a writer, to express. Later, I would find the term “joy unspeakable” in the New Covenant – and that summed it up perfectly! “A peace that passes understanding,” it says elsewhere.

We were flying again but in daylight this time. When we landed, we were still in Jerusalem, but at the ancient Temple. We hovered above the courtyard, and I noticed the city was packed.

“Why are all these people here?”

“Today is the Day of Shavuot, one of the feast days when Jewish pilgrims from all over the region come to Jerusalem to celebrate, ending the forty-nine-day counting of the Omer, from the day Yeshua rose from the dead, *First fruits*, to the Feast of Weeks, *Shavuot*. Sadly, most Christians know this feast day only as the Day of Pentecost, a Greek word meaning “fifty.” Greek-speaking Jews would also have used this word, but the difference is that they knew it was a Jewish or biblical feast day. Most Gentile Christians know it only as the day that the Holy Spirit fell upon and empowered the believers, birthing the Kehillah.”

“Can you unpack that for me further? The Holy Spirit *fell*? What does that mean, and why is this Jewish festival important to Christians?” I asked.

“Ten days ago, forty days after His resurrection, Yeshua told His followers, about 120 of them, to wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit to empower them. He told them that once empowered, they would take this message, the message of forgiveness of sin and redemption through His sacrifice, not only to Jerusalem and Judea but also to Samaria and even to

the ends of the earth. Look.”

The cloud returned, and I read, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

The apostles assumed that now that he was alive again, Yeshua would surely lead a revolution and usher in the Messianic age predicted by the prophets. Read the whole conversation:

Then they gathered around him and asked him,
“Lord, are you at this time going to restore the
kingdom to Israel?”

He said to them: “It is not for you to know the
times or dates the Father has set by his own
authority. But you will receive power when the
Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my
witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and
Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Sadly, many preachers teach that Jesus rebuked them for expecting the fulfillment of the prophetic prediction of the Jewish prophets. In fact, ole J.C. said that there were as many problems as words in the disciples’ question about the restoration of the kingdom.

“Jesus Christ said that?” I asked.

“No! Of course not. John Calvin! But J.C. was wrong. It was the most logical question that any Jewish disciple who understood the Hebrew prophets could ask. The hope of the

Hebrew prophets was the restoration of the world under the reign of the Messiah. Yeshua doesn't rebuke them for this question but simply says that it is not the right time. The Father knows when the kingdom will be restored to Israel; in the meantime, He told them to go into all the world and share his message, starting in Jerusalem and then going out to the nations.

“And the apostles understood this, look at what Peter says about two weeks later ...after the Spirit empowered him... when he addressed a gathered group of Jews in Jerusalem.”

“Now, fellow Israelites, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Messiah would suffer. Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you – even Jesus. Heaven must receive him until **the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.** (Acts 3:17-21)

I reached out and waved my hand through the cloud. The letters scattered but then returned to form sentences again. *Unreal*, I thought. “So, when the rabbis talk about a Messianic age, that will happen?”

“Of course,” replied the angel. “That is the end game!”

Messiah had to come and first conquer sin in the heart of humanity. He will return to conquer the nations and set up His kingdom.”

Suddenly there was a loud crack. It seemed to come from the sky, like a windstorm – only this was more like a mini-hurricane without the rain.

“Look down, David,” Ariel instructed.

When I did, I could see a large group, I assumed the 120 he spoke of, gathered in an enclosure that was part of a colonnade.² Suddenly, flames of fire ignited and rested over the heads of each of the people, who were now loudly shouting and singing, to God, I presumed, in different languages. They seemed intoxicated with joy. “There is Shimon Kefa,” I blurted out as he made his way into the Temple courtyard, followed by the others.

“Keep watching,” Ariel was smiling. Something good was about to happen...I remembered Shimon and Ariel talking about his sermon on the Day of Shavuot.

The noise of the mighty wind, the flames of fire, and the spectacle of Galileans speaking in foreign languages had drawn a crowd of curious Jewish bystanders, which was growing larger by the minute.

Kefa stood up, “Men of Israel! ...” he declared. When he was done, the Jewish men gathered near him looked like they had seen a ghost; they were cut to the heart and asked, “What shall we do?”

Kefa was right. This was an amazing moment. I had never heard anyone speak like this – certainly not in my synagogue. With passion, authority, and insight into the Scriptures, he

proclaimed that Yeshua was Israel's Messiah. His hearers were deeply moved. All these Jews, many of whom had come from other nations for Shavuot, appeared to be stunned by the rough fisherman's powerful delivery. Even the other believers were looking at Kefa with a new respect and amazement as if to say, "Is this the same Shimon Kefa that we know?"

"A little more than fifty days ago, this same Kefa denied that he even knew Yeshua!" Ariel said.

"What!?"

"I am afraid so. It was just after Yeshua was arrested. A young servant girl accused him of being a disciple of Yeshua. He swore up and down that he wasn't. Kefa was a gaffe machine! One minute he declares that Yeshua is the Messiah, then the next, he is telling Yeshua that he won't let Him go to the cross. And then he denies even knowing Him – not just once, but *three* times!

"After Yeshua rose from the dead, Kefa was so ashamed. But Yeshua immediately reassured him of His love and forgiveness and affirmed that he would have a significant role to play in His Kingdom – no, not as the pope," he smiled, "but as one of the greatest communicators of Yeshua's message that there has ever been!"

Ariel snapped his fingers, and a video began to play right in front of me, without a screen or projector. It was a woman dressed in hiking gear. She had to be an Israeli tour guide. She was standing on a lakeshore addressing a group of people, presumably tourists.

"On the night that Peter denies Yeshua, he's warming his hands at a charcoal fire. The word in Greek for charcoal fire is

anthrakia. It is only used twice in the entire new covenant. Can you guess where the other instance is?”

“Where it talks about being baptized with fire?” someone offered.

“No, but good try!” she responded with a smile. “It’s just three chapters later. After Jesus rises from the dead, He seems to single out Peter. The angel tells the women who came to the tomb on Sunday morning, ‘But go, tell his disciples *and Peter*, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee.’”

“Then in John 21, Yeshua appears to the disciples at the sea of Galilee – actually right here. They go out to fish, and just like before, He asks them to throw the net on the other side after they had caught nothing all night. Suddenly, they have a miraculous catch. Even though they had all forsaken Him after His arrest, He reaffirms their calling. For it was during the first miraculous catch that He first called them to be fishers of men.

“But then, as they come to shore, He is making them breakfast. Michael, please read John 21:9.”

A young man wearing a *New York Mets* hat opens his Bible, “When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it and some bread.”

“Right, this is the second time that we see the word *anthrakia* – coals of burning fire. The first time is when Peter denies that he even knows Jesus. He actually calls down curses on himself. But in order for him to be healed, to be reconciled, not just to God, but to himself – to be free of the guilt, He has to revisit that painful night. No doubt, he was reminded of it when he saw the burning coals. And then Jesus takes him aside

and reminds him that he still has a task ahead of him, that he will be one of the primary heralds of this new movement.

“That had to happen before the Shavuot outpouring.”

And the screen vanished.

“I’ll let you in on a secret. The Father doesn’t always choose the ones whom others would. He took the youngest son of Jesse, David, and made him king over Israel. He chose Joseph, the hated brother of the sons of Jacob, who was sold as a slave, and made him the second most powerful leader in the world – just in time to save from starvation the very same brothers who had wanted to kill him – we spoke of that. And here, he takes an impulsive, uneducated, burly fisherman and gives him a gift like no one has ever seen before. The Father is far more interested in a person’s heart than in their talents. And Shimon has a great heart. Take a look.”

After hearing his message, the men cried out to Kefa and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” Kefa didn’t hesitate, “Repent and be immersed in water, every one of you, in the name of Yeshua, the Messiah, for the forgiveness of your sins.”

The crowd began to weep as people openly confessed their sins. It was like someone took a collective blindfold off these Jewish pilgrims, and they saw clearly that they were in need of forgiveness. This was nothing like Yom Kippur in my synagogue. Every year we all dress up and come to the congregation to pray. We fast for twenty-four hours – many without even water. We spend the morning reading prayers that someone else wrote, confessing our sins – but never in tears! Never like this. I wouldn’t say it is a joke, but neither is

it taken that seriously. At least now I could see that. It wasn't unlike what these people were going through *before* the Holy Spirit fell upon them. They came to Jerusalem out of religious obedience, even social excitement, but didn't expect to have an encounter with God.

The apostles organized the crowd and used what appeared to be a system of baths to immerse these people in water. Thousands went into the water and came out on the other side. As they did, they were glowing. They went into the waters with tears of anguish from the guilt of the realization of their sin and seemed to come out with tears of joy. Many were actually dancing with each other as they came out. In fact, it reminded me of the story of Miriam and the Israelites dancing as they passed through the Red Sea unharmed. The city was in an uproar. And while I could see that these people's lives were being changed, I couldn't understand why a Jew would be baptized.

"What is happening? Why are these Jews being baptized?" I asked Ariel.

"Remember what John told you earlier, immersion in water *began* with the Jews. These mikva'ot or immersion pools have been here for centuries. It was the practice of all those coming up to Jerusalem to present an offering at the Temple to first be made ritually clean by passing through these waters.

"The problem is that most Jewish people, when they hear the word *baptism*, tend to think of the Middle Ages, when so-called Christians forced Jewish people to be baptized in water, symbolizing their conversion from Judaism to Catholicism, just like Christophe in the story earlier about the Spanish

Inquisition. To the Jewish mind, baptism is not equated with coming to faith in the Jewish Messiah or seen as a sign of dying to the old nature and rising to new life, but rather with persecution, expulsion, and even physical death. Listen to this Messianic Jewish teacher.”

The screen appeared again:

“Baptism” also has been a dirty word for the Jews, and not only because it symbolized faith in Jesus. It meant much more than that. It meant total apostasy from Judaism and a complete betrayal of the Jewish people. In the eyes of the Jewish community, any of their people who became Christians were traitors of the worst kind. Even in Nazi Europe, rabbis would not allow Jews to obtain so much as a baptismal *certificate* in order to hide their identity and save their lives.

In the words of Rabbi Oshry, “A baptismal certificate has only one connotation: that the owner of the certificate has, G-d forbid, forsaken his Creator and denied his people, the people G-d chose as His treasure.” In light of this, many of us today who are Jewish followers of Jesus emphasize strongly that we are *still* Jews. We have not forsaken our people or forgotten our history!

As Jewish believers, we often call ourselves “*Messianic Jews*” instead of “*Hebrew Christians*” (Messianic and Christian are basically synonymous terms). We do this because we don’t want our people to stumble over negative terms and misunderstood expressions. If they must stumble, let them stumble over Yeshua Himself! We want our people to be confronted with the *person of Jesus*, not with persecutions by the Church. We want them to deal with the *message* of the cross, not with its misuse. We don’t even like to use the word “convert.” To the Jewish mind, this means joining an alien religion, *not* becoming born-again, repentant followers of the Messiah.¹¹

“But as you have just seen for yourself, it was not like that in the beginning. Thousands of Jewish men, plus their wives and children, joyfully and *willingly* entered into the waters of immersion, seeing it as something entirely Jewish, which it is.”

Written before me was a quote, in cloud-like letters as before:

A series of public ritual bathing installations were found on the south side of the Temple Mount. Because of the stringent laws regarding purity before entering holy places, demand

¹¹ Michael Brown, *Our Hands are Stained with Blood*, (Destiny Image) pg. 138.

for mikva'ot was high, and many have been discovered from first-century Jerusalem.³

“The difference is that immersion in water during the Temple period was something that was done over and over again, each time one would come to the Temple to make a sacrifice. In the New Covenant, it is something we do once when we come to faith – as these have done today – and it symbolizes the leaving of our old life behind and being empowered to live a new life for God. Just look at their faces – is it not obvious they are experiencing *new life*?”

A passage appeared.

Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Messiah Yeshua were baptized into His death? Therefore, we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Messiah was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so, we also should walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3-4 NKJV).

“Unbelievable!” I was beside myself. This journey was amazing. “Ariel, do you realize that Yeshua died on a Jewish feast day – Passover? He rose from the dead on the Jewish Feast of First fruits. And then He poured out His Spirit for the first time on His followers on the Jewish Feast of Shavuot. It is almost as if God was trying to remind people that *this thing is Jewish!* Am I right?”

“You’re preachin’ to the choir,” Ariel was beaming. “Yet,

the goal was always to reach the nations with this message. It wasn't meant to be exclusively for the Jews. Within a few decades, the number of non-Jews that would join the *Kehillah*, the community of believers, would far outnumber the Jews, and the Father was laying out a blueprint that would ensure everyone would remember that salvation began with the Jews. He hoped they would, in turn, "provoke Israel to jealousy" (Rom. 11:11).

"But they didn't," I offered. "The Christianity in those stories, the movies you showed me, bore no resemblance to anything that I've seen here today. The Church changed Him so much that no one would even recognize the Yeshua of the New Covenant. Not just His name, but His very nature. They make it seem like Yeshua doesn't even like the Jews – when in fact, all of his followers were Jewish! They turned baptism into something altogether foreign to Jews and then forced them into being baptized. They never emphasized, if they even knew it, that all these powerful milestones, like the resurrection, took place on Jewish holidays.

"And why, for instance, do Christians worship on Sunday? The Sabbath was from Friday evening to Saturday evening. If this started with Jews, why would they change the Sabbath?"

"You wanna go there? OK, I guess we can take a look at it."

The angel s-t-r-e-t-c-h-e-d, feigning exhaustion.

"But we will need to return to the classroom first. Hold on to me."

Instantly we were flying again. *I would never get tired of this!*

Notes

1. Lev. 23:11.
2. While it has been a longstanding view that the 120 were at the Upper Room, many modern-day scholars, including Daniel Juster and Richard Longenecker, as well as the NIV Study Bible authors, not to mention the 19th-century scholar Adam Clarke (Clarke's Commentary on the Bible) and many others believe the disciples were in the Temple, probably in an enclosed area as part of Solomon's Portico or Porch.

“When, moreover, we bear in mind the fact (which appears both from the Scriptures and from other contemporary records) that the Temple, with its vast corridors or ‘porches,’ was the regular gathering place of all the various parties and sects of Jews, however antagonistic the one to the other, it will be easy to realize that the Temple is just the place – both because of its hallowed associations and also because of its many convenient meeting places – where the disciples would naturally congregate. Edersheim says that the vast Temple area was capable of containing a concourse of 210,000 people, and he mentions also that the colonnades in Solomon's Porch formed many gathering places for the various sects, schools, and congregations of the people. In commenting on John 7, this trustworthy authority says that the gathering places in Solomon's Porch ‘had benches in them; *and from the liberty of speaking and teaching in Israel, Jesus might here address the people in the very face of His enemies.*’ It was, moreover, and this is

an important item of evidence, in Solomon's Porch that the concourse of Jews gathered, which Peter addressed in Acts 3 (See verse 11). Hence there can be little doubt that one of the assembling places to which Edersheim refers was the 'house' where the disciples were 'sitting' when the Holy Spirit came upon them." (Philip Mauro, *The Hope of Israel: What Is It?* 1922, http://www.preteristarchive.com/Books/1922_mauro_hope-israel.html#CHAPTER_X (accessed August 10, 2012).

Let us also consider that this was on the morning of Shavuot, one of the most significant days of the Jewish year. It was the custom of the disciples to worship and pray in the Temple courtyard daily – how much more on Shavuot? Luke records: "While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into Heaven. Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. And they stayed continually at the Temple, praising God" (Luke 24:51-53). This passage refers specifically to the ten days immediately after the ascension leading to Shavuot.

Furthermore, the Upper Room, at least the place where it is believed to have been, is a good twenty-minute walk from the Temple Mount and the immersion pools. The throng of Jewish pilgrims who witnessed the outpouring would have been at the Temple on Shavuot, as that is why they had journeyed to Israel. At the very least, if it was a home, it had to be adjacent to the Temple.

3. BiblePlace.com, *Southern Temple Mount*.

Chapter Thirteen



CELEBRATE THE SABBATH AND SQUANDER YOUR SALVATION!

Back in the classroom, he began...

“In the year 364 CE, at the Council of Laodicea, the Church formally declared Sunday as the Lord’s Day, the day of worship and rest, effectively changing the Sabbath from Saturday to Sunday – at least in their minds. The pervading sentiment of the Council is given expression in this quote from Canon XXIX:

Christians shall not Judaize and be idle on Saturday, shall work on that day, but the Lord’s Day they shall especially honor; and, as being Christians, shall, if possible, do no

work on that day. If, however, they are found Judaizing, *they shall be shut out from Christ.*¹²

“These believers were not merely discouraged from celebrating the Jewish Sabbath; they were *commanded not* to do so. If they *did*, they would be ‘anathema from Christ,’ as another English translation of the same quote says. That means they would be, in the eyes of the Church – but not the Father’s, mind you – cut off from the Church and the Messiah – in short, *excommunicated.*”

“How could they do that if it is not expressly written in the New Covenant? Where did they get the authority to do such things?” I asked.

“That goes back to the Kefa debacle. Remember when we talked about how the Roman Catholic Church misinterpreted Yeshua’s comment to Kefa?”

“Yes,” I said, marveling that my capacity to absorb information here was at least ten times what it had been when I was in university. “Yeshua was drawing a contrast with the massive rock at Caesarea Philippi near the cave that was believed to be the entrance to the supposed underworld – called the “Gate of Hell.” Roman Catholics believe that Yeshua bestowed some pope-like authority on Kefa.

“From there, they somehow concluded that Kefa, ‘the first pope,’ had special authority when it came to issues of doctrine, and so, every pope after him had this same authority. This really gave them *carte blanche* when it came to dogma. They could basically make up whatever served their purposes,

¹² John Nevins Andrews, *History of the Sabbath and the first day of the week* (Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald Publishing Assoc., 1912), 409.

whether it was in the Bible or not, and then declare that it was binding – not because God had said it, but because He had given them the authority to do so. In fact, later, they would claim that not only did the pope have permission to establish doctrine, but that he could not err in doing so – he was infallible. He was preserved by God from error. It is taught that this was an expression of God’s love to protect the Church from deception, but that is why we have His Word. It’s interesting that they only came up with this understanding *after* the invention of the printing press. In other words, once the people were able to read the Bible for themselves, they had lost control over doctrine. By claiming that the Pope was infallible when it came to matters of doctrine, they attempted to maintain that control. But putting such power in the hands of one man is not only dangerous: it’s unbiblical. The Biblical pattern for resolving issues of doctrine is in Acts 15, where you bring a large number of leaders together for prayer and discussion. But I digress...

For example, in *The Convert’s Catechism for Catholic Doctrine*, the question is asked, ‘By what authority did the Church substitute Sunday for Saturday?’ The answer: ‘The Church substituted Sunday for Saturday by the plenitude of that divine power which Jesus Christ bestowed upon her.’¹³

“The Scriptures are the highest authority for the body of believers. Yet they based this change not on the authority of Scripture, but upon their own misguided reasoning that the Father had given them authority *beyond* Scripture,” Ariel

¹³ Rev. Peter Geiermann, *The Convert’s Catechism of Catholic Doctrine* (St. Louis: Herder Book Co., 1946), 48.

concluded. “Over the centuries, the Church has abused its authority, using it to manipulate those dependent upon its leadership for guidance.”

“That’s horrible. How does God react to people who take their own ideas and turn them into hard and fast doctrine? They don’t even give scriptural support for their ruling because they claim, ‘The Church has authority.’”

“Well, David, He gets downright *langry!*”

“*Langry?*”

“Yeah, I made it up. It means that first He laughs at how utterly ridiculous it is for mere men, His creation, to pretend that they speak *for* Him without first speaking to Him – and then He gets angry.

“In Psalm 2, when speaking about the nations’ attitude toward Yeshua and Jerusalem, He also gets *langry.*” My tablet signaled new activity, as Psalm 2:1-6 materialized.

Why are the nations so angry?

Why do they waste their time with futile plans?

The kings of the earth prepare for battle;

the rulers plot together

against the Lord

and against his anointed one.

“Let us break their chains,” they cry,

“and free ourselves from slavery to God.”

But the one who rules in heaven laughs.

The Lord scoffs at them.

Then in anger he rebukes them,

terrifying them with his fierce fury.

For the Lord declares, “I have placed my chosen king on the throne in Jerusalem, on my holy mountain” (NLT).

“I always picture the United Nations when I read that passage. All those little people holding too much authority, pretending that they can out-vote God. You humans are something else, you know, heads of nations parading around with their entourages, feeling very important. From our vantage point, they look like ants – ants who talk too much!

“You see, David, Yeshua’s idea of leadership is so different from man’s.”

The board flickered, and, as on a movie screen, I saw Yeshua and His disciples. I was fascinated by what I witnessed. The meal was ending as Yeshua got up from the table. He took off His outer garment and wrapped a towel around Himself. *What was He doing?* I noticed that the faces of His disciples were equally mystified as He took a large washbowl and carefully filled it with water. Then placing it on the floor beside Him, He knelt down and started washing their feet.

What impressed me most was the manner in which He did it, showing all the tenderness and love with which a mother would wash her infant child. Don’t get me wrong, the man I was watching was 100 percent masculine; His hands were strong and angular. *The hands of a carpenter*, I thought. Hadn’t Esther shared in her story earlier that He was a woodworker by trade?

Having carefully washed the feet of each one of them, Yeshua was resisted by Peter alone, who at first resisted and then consented to the act of affection. Yeshua then drew the towel from His waist and, exhibiting the same gentleness,

dried their feet, at which point the image faded from view.

“Impressive, huh?” said the angel.

“Wow.” I wiped a tear from my eye. “Such love and humility,” I marveled. This short scene really touched me. “But why did Kefa resist?” I asked.

“Kefa felt like many of us would – he felt it wasn’t right for someone of Yeshua’s standing to lower Himself and do the work of a servant, but that was exactly the point He wanted to make. To be a true leader, you had to be willing to be a servant. He was setting an example.

“That is the ideal of New Testament leadership,” Ariel shared, “but rarely does a man lead from love. Most aspire to leadership for reasons of selfish ambition; to boost their ego, to have control, or to compensate for some lack in their own self-esteem. But Yeshua said that to be a leader, you must be the servant of all, and He set the example, not only by washing the feet of His protégés but by laying down His life for all mankind.

“Here is one of the most ancient creeds of the first believers:

“Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be
used to his own advantage;
rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death –
even death on a cross! (Philippians 2:6-8)

“Good leadership will always be accompanied by a deep concern for the welfare of those under their authority. Because of His great love, He left Heaven – He left the Father’s side – to come to earth.

“Furthermore, when human leaders make decisions without consulting God’s Word, or that are contrary to God’s will, they often end up doing more harm than good. They fail to see the big picture and can only guess at how their actions or decisions might affect those who will come after them. It was the same with this Council. They thought changing the Sabbath was harmless back in 364 CE, but now, with the benefit of hindsight, we can see how such edicts provided the groundwork for persecution of the Jews later on.”

A new passage appeared on my tablet: “But as he came closer to Jerusalem and saw the city ahead, he began to weep” (see Luke 19:41).

“Luke records that Yeshua was weeping over Jerusalem because they hadn’t recognized the day of their visitation. But do you think that Yeshua was weeping for that generation only?” Ariel asked.

As the scene unfolded before me, I saw Yeshua gazing down upon Jerusalem as He made His way down the Mount of Olives. His soul was in anguish as He saw the suffering of His people down through the centuries, suffering which could have been averted had they only recognized and welcomed their Messiah.

As He began to weep, it was as if I were seeing what He saw. And together, we watched a series of scenes, one after the other:

First, I saw the Romans destroy the city in 70 CE, the Temple being destroyed, and the city burned. Thousands were butchered: men, women, and children.

Then I saw the Romans crush the Bar Kokhba revolt in 135 CE. Those murdered were too numerous to count. For ten years, the Jews were not allowed to bury their dead. Jerusalem was renamed Aelia Capitolina, referencing false gods, and Judea was renamed Palestine, as the emperor sought to disassociate it from the Jewish people. Jews were barred from Jerusalem.

Next, I saw the Crusaders overtaking Jerusalem, butchering the entire city.

Then I saw a series of blood libels, where Jews were accused of kidnapping Christian children and using their blood in the making of matzah (a patently ludicrous accusation in light of the Jewish food laws which prohibit the eating of blood). Tragically, countless numbers of Jews – whole communities – were killed.

Jews were accused of poisoning the wells of Europe during the Black Death Plague in the 14th century. It didn't matter that the plague came from Mongolia; the Jews would pay with their lives. Even Pope Clement VI said the Jews were not to blame. But wholesale murder was unleashed. I saw religious zealots ushering Jewish people into a hastily constructed structure, and then it was set on fire.¹⁴ They were burned to death!

This was followed by Inquisitions – Jews being tortured,

¹⁴ https://www.anumuseum.org.il/blog-items/700-years-before-coronavirus-jewish-life-during-the-black-death-plague/?__cf_chl_jschl_tk__=pmd_TXbS6tpj2c_CyLgGwDZ3bendz_yGqn16n4y_qw9E2hs-1635403634-0-gqNtZGzNAnujcnBszQe9

forced to convert, or expelled from their countries.

Next, I saw a Ukrainian man, whose name I somehow knew was Bohdan Chmelnytsky. This leader and instigator of hundreds of pogroms murdered tens of thousands of Jews in the most vicious, sadistic ways. Most of them had fled Spain and other nations where they were not welcome, to come to Poland, a nation considered a safe haven for Jews, until Chmelnytsky came on the scene.

“Stop!” I screamed. “I can’t take anymore! How could these people call themselves Christians?” I yelled. “They’re murderers!”

“You made it further than most. Still, a drop in the bucket compared to the burden that Yeshua carries. He sees it all, past, present, and future. When He wept over Jerusalem, it wasn’t merely for the Jews of that time. He was able to see the terrible persecutions that awaited them in the future, both in Israel and in the diaspora...*and it broke His heart.*”

The Messiah’s image faded from view as I wiped the sweat from my brow. “I thought we were talking about Sunday worship. How did this get so intense?”

“Interesting that you should say that because those responsible for the seemingly innocuous act of changing the day of worship didn’t realize either that it would lead all the way to murder and even genocide.

“Okay. Are you ready to continue now?”

“Can you promise to keep it light?”

Chapter Fourteen



“THEORY” TRUMPS “COMMANDMENT”?

“Other well-meaning Christians have bought into different *theories* about why the Sabbath was changed, but that’s all they are, *theories*. None of them in any way abolishes Exodus 20.”

“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it, you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. For in six days, the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested

on the seventh day. Therefore, the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy” (Exodus 20:8-11).

“It would seem to me,” I offered, “that to change something so explicit – one of the Ten Commandments – you would need an equally explicit command.”

“Exactly. Whenever Yeshua made a change in the Mosaic law, it was never to abolish but to reveal. If you read his famous Sermon on the Mount, he says if you just lust in your heart, you are guilty of adultery. If you are angry at your brother, you are guilty of murder. Ironically, this is just after he said that he did not come to abolish the Torah but to fulfill it. And then, in the very next verses, he fills full the true meaning of the commands.

“Many were satisfied, knowing they did not commit any of the actions that were forbidden in the Torah, but they rehearsed them in their minds. But Yeshua never cancels a law. In fact, in his Sermon on the Mount, He intensified the Torah by applying the commands to one’s heart and thoughts.

“Simply lusting after someone became as adultery. Hating someone or even being angry without cause is like murder. In this way, Yeshua fulfilled the Torah – meaning He filled it full by bringing out the deeper meaning. So, it would be wrong to assume that He simply got rid of one of the Ten Commandants.

“There are, of course, those who hold the view that since we are now no longer under Law but under grace, that we no longer need to keep the Sabbath. If followed to its logical conclusion, this argument would remove any obligation to

keep the other nine of the Ten Commandments as well – Heaven forbid that believers embrace adultery, thievery, and murder because they are ‘no longer under the Law.’

“Another commonly held idea is that because the resurrection occurred on the first day of the week and is referred to as the Lord’s Day, another error which we will cover in a few minutes, it now supersedes the Sabbath as the day of worship or celebration.”

“Wait. Are you saying there is nothing in the New Testament that specifically says the Sabbath was changed to Sunday?” I asked in amazement.

“Nothing! Now that doesn’t mean that there are not a few passages that have been misinterpreted. For instance, Yeshua appeared to His disciples as they were gathered together on the Sunday on which He rose from the dead.”

“But they weren’t having a service, were they? They had just two days earlier witnessed their leader being executed. I imagine they spent most of their time together after that,” I offered.

“Yes, you are right, David, but some say a week a later, they were together on Sunday, when Yeshua appeared to them again, according to John’s Gospel.”

The white screen hummed to life and a character I’d not yet met appeared.

“Hello David, my name is Toma, some call me *Doubting Thomas*, but that really isn’t fair. It was just the one time, and you have to admit, it had been a rough few days for all of us.”

“What about when you blurted out on the way to raise Lazarus from the dead, ‘Let’s go, too – and die with Yeshua’?”

Ariel was laughing.

“That wasn’t *doubt*, Angel; that was *bravery*. I was willing to die. Did I misunderstand the mission? Uh, yeah. But still, I was ready to pay the ultimate price. And concerning His first appearance, don’t forget I hadn’t seen Yeshua as the others had. I’d arrived late that first night that He appeared to them, and I missed seeing Him. So naturally, I was pretty skeptical about it all. Who wouldn’t be? It had been an extremely stressful few days. I thought they were probably seeing things. You know, lack of sleep and all that. Anyway, I am here because I’ve got a message for my Jewish brother here. You ready, David?” Toma asked.

“Sure.” I liked his personality.

“OK. Even though I missed the first meeting, I made sure I was there for the second meeting – not that we knew when He would come back. I just made sure that I stayed close to home. And as it turned out, my brothers weren’t so crazy after all.”

A passage appeared on my tablet that read, “A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you!’” (John 20:26).

“I nearly jumped out of my skin!” exclaimed Toma. “I was standing there talking when I felt a tap on my shoulder and turned around. And there He was, smiling the biggest smile. You could tell He was enjoying it.

“‘Peace be with you,’ He said. “*Peace?* I nearly fainted.”

Ariel interrupted him, “What day of the week was that?”

“If you knew Greek,” Toma became more serious, “you would know that it doesn’t actually say *a week* later, but *eight*

days later! Now I know that some have argued that the counting included resurrection Sunday, *but I was there!*”

“Well?” I asked, “Which was it – Sunday or Monday?”

“Let me simply ask you something.”

Oy, these people are always answering questions with questions, I thought.

“If you were going to refer to a week from now, would you say, ‘in seven days’ or ‘in a week’?”

“‘In a week,’ of course.”

“Right, so if someone chooses to say ‘eight days,’ they probably don’t mean a week, because if they did, they would simply say ‘a week,’ not ‘eight days.’

“But honestly, *who cares?*” Thomas shouted, throwing up his hands. “It doesn’t matter. Of course, we were there! We were there on Sunday and Monday, and even on Tuesday – we were *living* in the Upper Room. We were not Judeans but Galileans. Our homes were several days away – and we didn’t have cars, trains, or buses back then. We were holed up in the Upper Room, wondering what in the world to do.

“In both accounts, if you noticed, the doors are locked. That was pretty uncommon in those days if you were at home. And there were eleven men there. Why would eleven men hide behind locked doors? I’ll tell you. *We were scared!* Even though the other brothers had had that one encounter with Yeshua a week, or *eight days* earlier,” he winked, “we had not seen Him since. And remember – they *did* kill Him. So yeah, we were still scared, quite nervous, and shaken up.”

Chapter Fifteen



SATURDAY NIGHT'S ALRIGHT

“Furthermore,” Toma continued, “the Kehillah had not yet been birthed. The last thing on our minds was devising some new order or routine for meeting. We were so broken; we had no idea that we would even stay together as a group, much less meet every week. Kefa was still so ashamed that he had denied He knew the Messiah. However, after Shavuot, everything changed.

“We did begin to meet. Would you like to know on what day? Read these two passages.”

I read.

“Every day, they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere

hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved” (Acts 2:46-47).

“This next one is right after we were beaten because we refused to stop preaching in Yeshua’s name!”

“The apostles left the high council rejoicing that God had counted them worthy to suffer disgrace for the name of [Yeshua]. And *every day*, in the Temple and from house to house, they continued to teach and preach this message: ‘[Yeshua] is the Messiah’” (Acts 5:41-42 NLT).

“*Every day!*” David, every day...in the Temple and from house to house. It was an amazing time looking back. We performed miracles and signs and wonders and, best of all, the presence of God. Yeshua was so close to us. It was simply the best time...” As Toma was reminiscing, he faded from the screen.

“David, remember the passage I shared with you in the beginning; It should be number three on your list.”

“Yeah, I’ve got it here.” I read it aloud. “‘The days are coming’ declares the Lord, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah.’”¹

“With whom is He making the New Covenant?” asked the teacher.

“With Israel and Judah.”

“You understand that at that time, when Jeremiah gave the prophecy, the people of Israel were divided into two kingdoms,

Israel in the north and Judah in the south. So, in essence, He is making this New Covenant with all of Israel, right?”

“Right,” I agreed.

“Now tap twice on the passage,” Ariel requested. When I did, the entire chapter of Jeremiah 31 opened up.

“Read verse thirty-three, please.”

“For this is the covenant I will make with the house of Isra’el after those days,’ says Adonai: ‘I will put my Torah within them and write it on their hearts; I will be their God, and they will be my people’” (Jeremiah 31:32-33 CJB).

“Now, what is the difference between the two covenants?”

“He says that this time, He will write the Torah on our hearts; He will put it inside us.”

“Exactly! So, the Father promises a New Covenant with Israel, then just over five hundred years later, He pours out the Holy Spirit on Jerusalem, after Yeshua’s death and resurrection, of course. He promises in this covenant to write the Torah, His Law, on the hearts of His people.

“Does it make any sense at all, that one of the first things He commands His fiery new Jewish devotees to do is to delete the fourth commandment – one that has just been written on their hearts, ‘Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy’² and replace it with something that centuries later, Gentile believers would use in order to excommunicate not only Jews from their communities but also Gentiles who sought to honor the Jewish Sabbath?”

“It would be highly unlikely,” I agreed.

“Another passage people use to say God has changed the Sabbath is Acts 20.” *D’ling*.

On the first day of the week, we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight (Acts 20:7).

“First of all, it does not say that it was their custom to meet on the first day of the week, just that they were meeting. Toma already told us that in Jerusalem, they were meeting *every day*. And it is quite possible they had gathered in order to hear Paul, who was their honored guest, speak.

“But even if this were their normal time to meet, let’s think it through. They came together on the first day of the week to break bread. The idea is that believers chose Sunday because of the resurrection. So, assuming that they had their *worship service* in the morning as He rose ‘early on the first day,’ that would mean Paul spoke from *breakfast until midnight!* It is highly unlikely that Paul either spoke that long or that they listened that long!”

“Why don’t you let me tell you how it was?” another personality emerged from the larger tablet. “My name is Eutychus, and I was there. If you keep reading the passage, you’ll find out that I died, yeah, I did, I fell right out of a window. Fortunately, Paul was there to raise me from the dead. The meeting had gone on for hours, and I found myself nodding off a few times, and then I must have fallen backward,

out the window, to the ground. Probably wasn't the wisest place to sit. The next thing I know, I am waking up on the ground, and Rabbi Saul has his arms around me, praying for me and telling me, 'Don't be alarmed.' Try not to be alarmed when you have just fallen three floors to the ground with enough force to kill you."

"Eutychus, I think you were going to share something with us about the Sabbath," Ariel reminded him.

"I was, and I will. David, when does the Jewish Sabbath start?"

"Friday evening."

"So, when does it end?"

"Saturday at sunset."

"So, when does a new week start?"

I was about to say Sunday when I realized his point. "Ah, Saturday night."

"You're catching on. So, doesn't it make sense that when Luke wrote in Greek, the 'first day of the week,' he really meant the end of the Sabbath? Jewish believers still went to synagogue on Saturday morning to hear the Scriptures read. Remember, people didn't have Bibles back then, and a good number of us didn't read. The New Testament had not been written! So, we were dependent on the Jewish believers to tell us what was written in the Hebrew Scriptures. Then in the evening, as the new week began, we would all break bread together, worship and hear the Word taught."

"That makes much more sense," I agreed. "In Judaism, the day always begins at sunset. We always celebrate the beginning of Jewish holidays in the evening."

“I remembered the month I spent in Israel during college and how weird it was for me that the week began on Saturday night. When you would see people on Saturday morning, you would greet them with the words *Shabbat Shalom*. However, if you did that on Saturday night, people would think you were strange. The Sabbath is over – the day is over. On Saturday night, when you saw people, you would greet them with the words, *Shavua Tov*, ‘Have a good week.’ On Saturday evening in Israel, there was a sense that you had left one season and entered into another. Stores that closed for the Sabbath reopened in the evening. Kids got ready for school, which started on Sunday. A new week was beginning.”

“Not just that, David, but we all had jobs on Sunday morning. We could not just stop working. The Jewish people didn’t work on Saturday, and they made up a good portion of our community. Sunday didn’t become a public holiday for 300 more years. It was Emperor Constantine who made this change in 321 CE.”

Toma deepened his voice for effect and said,

On the venerable Day of the Sun, let the magistrates and people residing in cities rest, and let all workshops be closed. In the country, however, persons engaged in agriculture may freely and lawfully continue their pursuits; because it often happens that another day is not so suitable for grain-sowing or vine-planting; lest by neglecting the proper moment for such operations, the bounty of heaven should be lost.

But in our day, we would have been working on what you folks call *Sunday* – which, you should know, is connected to the worship of the sun, not the SON!

“Well, I guess I am no longer needed. Adios, fellows!” And Eutychus was gone.

“Dr. David Stern, one of the top Messianic Jewish scholars in the world and an authority on the Jewish roots of the New Testament, in his *Jewish New Testament*, translates Acts 20:7 like this: ‘On *Motza’ei-Shabbat*, when we were gathered to break bread, Sha’ul addressed them. Since he was going to leave the next day, he kept talking until midnight’ (Acts 20:7 CJB).

“*Motza’ei Shabbat* refers to Saturday night. *Motza’ei* is the Hebrew verb ‘to take out,’ meaning that we are ‘coming out’ of *Shabbat*.³

“You would do well to buy a copy of his translation,”⁴ Ariel suggested.

“Why don’t you just download it to my tablet and save me some money?” I joked.

“Funny, David,” Ariel continued. “Now, there is something I want you to be very clear about. The Father has no objection whatsoever to people gathering to worship on Sunday, or the first day of the week, *Yom Rishon*, in Hebrew. They can worship on any day they want. No one is saying everyone must assemble for worship on the Jewish Sabbath – that’s legalism and will produce death. No, the point I am making is that God has never changed the Jewish Sabbath.”

“Why didn’t God just say... ‘Hey, I want everyone to meet on *this* day?’” I asked.

“*Because there is no set day for worship!*” Ariel half-shouted.

“The New Covenant is *purposefully* silent on this issue because the Gospel would be proclaimed in many nations and received by many different cultures. Believe it or not, many cultures don’t use a seven-day week. Much of the Roman world lived by an eight-day week, and the Egyptians had a 10-day week. And in some areas of Africa, they still use a six-day calendar. While the message of the Gospel – that Yeshua, the sacrificial Lamb, died and rose again so the world through Him can receive forgiveness of sins and eternal life – is unchangeable, the day and manner of worship of believers are not *written in stone*... no pun intended. Besides, the Sabbath was not given to the Church but to Israel.

“The problem is not ‘Sunday worship’ per se,” Ariel continued. “A concerted demonic effort to detach the Church from her Jewish roots has played a significant role in all this confusion. The Council’s edict to change the day of worship, from the Jewish Sabbath to what some refer to as the Lord’s Day, exposed the deep anti-Jewish feelings in the Church, which could be seen as early as the second century. This carried the unavoidable consequence of alienating Jewish adherents from joining the Church. It has bred a deep distrust of the Church in the hearts and minds of the Jewish people ever since.”

“Where does the phrase ‘the Lord’s Day’ come from anyway, if it isn’t in the New Testament?”

“Oh, but it is, my friend. And I should know, I am the one who wrote it!” The face of an elderly gentleman with a long gray beard took center stage on the screen of the large tablet.

Notes

1. Jer. 31:31.
2. Exod. 20:8.
3. Many scholars do believe that the first followers of Yeshua actually met on Sunday night after work. This is a valid view, and even if it is accurate, it in no way invalidates the Sabbath – in fact, it strengthens it. Why didn't they meet on Saturday morning when they were already enjoying a day off from work? Because they were committed to being in the Synagogue or Temple courts, worshiping and listening to the public reading of the Word alongside Jewish unbelievers. Nevertheless, Saturday night still seems more plausible than Sunday night, as it was already a day off: Synagogue in the morning, rest in the afternoon, and then the coming together for worship as believers in the evening.
4. Dr. Stern's translation of the Bible can be read free at: <http://www.biblestudytools.com/cjb/>.

Chapter Sixteen



MESSIANIC JEWISH ATHEISTS?

“Hello David, my name is John – not the John you met earlier. I *wrote* of the other John and his revelation that Yeshua was the Lamb of God in my account of the life of the Messiah. No one on earth had a deeper relationship with Yeshua than I. We were best friends. I knew Him most of my life, and even before I understood who He was, I looked to Him as an older brother – a mentor. After a long night in prayer, He chose me and eleven others to be His primary disciples.

“The amazing thing about the Master is that even though thousands followed Him, He always sought to get away from the crowds and focus on our training. Most people who have even just a fraction of the charisma and wisdom of Yeshua seek to use it to take advantage of people. Yeshua, while He was

on earth, did just the opposite. He shunned popularity and focused on *leadership training*.

“We didn’t understand it at the time, but He was raising us up to lead the Jerusalem revival once He left. And it could not have been easy for Him. We were a handful. My mother once asked Him – oh, this is embarrassing – if my brother, Jacob, and I could sit to His right and left in the Messianic Kingdom. This led to all kinds of hurt feelings, gossip, and jealousy among the disciples.

“Meanwhile, He always spoke of being a servant. Even after He washed our feet on Passover, just as a servant would, we were focused on our own individual roles. By the end of the Passover meal, a dispute arose among us as to which of us was considered to be greatest. Can you believe it!? He was about to be crucified, and we were arguing about who was more important. The next morning, He would submit to the most selfless, humiliating act as He hung naked on the cross. At that moment, our petty arguments seemed so inappropriate. Over the next month or so, after He rose from the dead, we would finally learn that to lead is to serve.

“It also changed how we saw ourselves as Jews. All our lives, we had talked about being *ha’am ha’nivchar*, the chosen people. But nobody ever told us what we were chosen for. And I would be lying if I said we didn’t have more than a little bit of pride because we were the chosen people. But finally, we understood that God never called us to some form of racial superiority but to shine his light to the nations. We were chosen as a people to birth the Messiah, bringing him into the world, and then to share his message

throughout the nations.

“That meant submitting to all kinds of hardships. It meant being hated and persecuted. When I found myself in a squabble with the very emperor of Rome, seeing that he wanted to kill me, I did not feel like a member of the chosen people.” He chuckled. “But in truth, that’s what it means to be chosen, willing to suffer so that others might find life. Paul wrote about this in II Corinthians 4. He talked about embracing the death of Yeshua so that others can have the life of Yeshua.

“Think of the rainbow. What do you see?”

“Well, in my day, it’s the international sign for the LGBTQ movement,” I shared, knowing that that was probably not the definition he was looking for.

“Yes, I am aware of what’s going on in your day. Quite a bit of confusion. But those too are people believers are called to serve and people for whom Yeshua died. Nevertheless, the rainbow symbolizes God’s covenant of great love for this world. He created it after the flood as a sign that he would never flood the entire world again. But in the rainbow, you see many colors, and they seamlessly flow from one to the other. God doesn’t view one nation as racially superior. And yet, He loves the uniqueness of each and every nation. When a Gentile comes to faith, he doesn’t lose his ethnicity – neither does a Jew. Together we make the beautiful rainbow.

“Maybe you remember Joseph’s coat of many colors?”

I nodded yes. The Angel and I had talked about that earlier.

“Well, those colors also represented God’s heart for the nations. Joseph was prophetically living out Yeshua’s destiny. Joseph literally saved the world, and as a result, was able to

rule over it next to the pharaoh. In the same way, Yeshua will don that coat of many colors when he comes back as King of the nations.”

I didn’t want to change the subject, but I wanted to know what he was talking about when he said that he got in a squabble with the emperor of Rome.

“Oh, you want to know about me and Domitian?”

“Eh...what...yeah.” He knew my thoughts!

John and Ariel both laughed.

“I was able, *Baruch HaShem*, to outlive all the other apostles. It wasn’t easy, mind you. Emperor Domitian, who hated believers in the Messiah, commanded that I be *boiled alive* in oil! Roman guards seized me in Ephesus and extradited me to Rome. I was nearly ninety years old, during a time when most men barely made it past fifty. And what was my crime? *Atheism*, of all nonsense!

“I stood before a man who claimed to be God, as they accused *me* of being a heretic.”

“How could you be an atheist? You were a believer,” I asked, puzzled. “Goodness, you wrote the Book of John!”

“And Revelation, First John, Second John, and, of course, Third John. The one religion that covered the entire Roman Empire during those years was *Caesar worship*. Every emperor of Rome was thought to be a deity – divine. So those who wouldn’t worship Caesar were considered atheists or heretics. The punishment for this depended on the ruling emperor of the time. When I was on trial, Domitian was emperor of Rome. He was referred to in his public documents as *Our Lord and God*, and he took his divinity quite seriously. He was one of

the most vicious men in history. In 96 CE, he put to death his own cousin for being an atheist. Of course, his cousin, Titus Flavius Clemens, was actually a believer in Yeshua, but any refusal to worship the emperor as God earned you the title of atheist. And you are going to be amazed at how he came to faith! Just wait.”

A quote, though not from the Bible, appeared on my tablet. I was reminded that Ariel had told me that he would be downloading information from a variety of sources.

He informed all governors that government announcements and proclamations must begin, “Our Lord and God, Domitian, commands” They must call Domitian God – or die. Thus, the issue was clear. It was a matter of gods. Either the Lord Jesus Christ or the Emperor of Rome was Lord-God. It was Jesus or Caesar.¹⁵

“I was brought before the emperor to be judged. We were in a full coliseum-turned-courtroom, and he asked me, ‘Is it true you are an atheist and refuse to declare that Caesar is God?’

“I serve Yeshua, the Messiah, the King of Israel, Savior of the world.”

“*Whoa!* Dude, that is amazing! What did he do?” I asked.

“He got a little upset.” John smiled, clearly understating the event.

“The great Domitian responded,” John now assumed a grand imperial tone, “You understand that the penalty for

¹⁵ *Revelations From Revelation*, Patrick M. Jones, 2008, Teach Services, Ringgold, Georgia, p. 19.

atheism is death?’

“I was in my eighties, David. What, was he going to threaten me with? *Heaven?* I was more than ready to join all my friends who had gone on before me, each one of them dying for the cause. Now it would be my turn, or so I thought. Domitian was, in essence, doing me a favor. I can’t tell you that I was too excited about being *boiled in oil*. But David, God will always give us grace for anything He permits. In that moment, I thought of Stephen.”

“Who is Stephen?” I asked.

“Stephen is one of my heroes. He was one of our disciples in Jerusalem and a true servant. When the first apostles were feeling overwhelmed by all the administrative duties involved in serving such a large and growing body of believers, we appointed a group of godly men as servant leaders who were suitable for the task.”

“Like Yeshua, when He washed the feet of the disciples?” I turned to Ariel, who smiled and nodded assent.

“Stephen not only served the people with compassion and humility,” John continued. “He was a mighty and effective communicator of the Good News. People would listen to him, mesmerized at his ability to explain their need for salvation. Through him, God did many mighty miracles. Blind eyes were opened, and the lame walked. At the time, the *Kehillah* was growing rapidly. Even many Jewish leaders had come to faith. The Jewish ruling council was none too happy about this.

“God was using Stephen powerfully to bring many Jewish people into the Kingdom. At that time, we were only reaching out to Jews – mostly from Jerusalem, but the message of

salvation and forgiveness would also touch many Jewish visitors to the Holy City. Stephen had a supernatural power of persuasion that I have not seen since, words that were backed up by signs and wonders. Opponents found it difficult to argue with him. And then again, he was so full of the love of God that many who sought to hate him ended up following Yeshua. He would lead many to Messiah, and then they would return to their hometowns or homelands as believers in their Messiah, taking the Good News back with them.

“Some of these Jews who had come to Jerusalem from other countries began to argue with Stephen. They mistakenly assumed that they could easily defeat him in debate, as they were far more learned than Stephen. They thought that once the bystanders saw how ‘baseless’ Stephen’s arguments were, they would forsake this ‘nonsense that the Messiah had come and had risen from the dead.’

“Well, their scheme didn’t go quite as planned. Stephen could field any argument, and invariably they were the ones who ended up looking foolish. He simply amazed us with his quick-wittedness and knowledge. You would have thought he was wearing an earpiece, and someone was feeding him the answers. It was as if the Spirit of God was simply telling him what to say. He was a young man speaking to men who were twice his age and who had studied the Hebrew Scriptures all their lives.

“Of course, this is exactly what Yeshua said would happen:

Be on your guard; you will be handed over to the
local councils and be flogged in the synagogues.
On my account, you will be brought before

governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. *At that time, you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you* (Matthew 10:17-20).

“Those leaders were flabbergasted and infuriated when they couldn’t stand up to Stephen’s Holy Spirit-inspired wisdom. So, they moved to plan B. It is amazing to what depths men with wounded egos will stoop. Humiliated by Stephen, they produced false witnesses who accused Stephen of speaking blasphemous words against Moses and against God. This was then reported to the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council, and Stephen was arrested.

When Stephen began to testify in his own defense, the people listened as if entranced. It was supernatural. He stood before those who clearly wanted to kill him and spoke as if he were an invited guest lecturer. It was obvious to all that he was far more concerned about their well-being and their eternal destiny than he was in defending himself. He used his last chance to defend himself to seek to bring other Jewish men to Yeshua – to salvation.

“It was as though he was seeing deep into the soul of every man there. Take a look.”

I looked and saw Stephen testifying before a makeshift court; his face was glowing, like that of an angel, as words spilled from his mouth. The members of the Sanhedrin grew even more furious. But Stephen, clearly full of the presence of

God, was not concerned. He looked up to Heaven and cried out: “Look, I see Heaven open, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”

This so provoked the crowd that with a scream, they rushed at him. It was as if the presence of God, which produced such peace in Stephen, had the exact opposite effect on his hearers. They recognized that the more he spoke, the more convincing and powerful he became, but their hearts were so hard; they just wanted to make him stop.

They dragged him outside the city and formed a circle around him. Then stones started flying, as one after another hurled rocks at Stephen, gashing his face so that blood poured from an open wound on his forehead and his nose. As rock after rock found its target, another hit him directly on his left ear, slicing it in half. I could hardly watch. They were killing him. And yet, I couldn't turn away either. Amazingly, despite facing death and being surrounded by a frenzied mob, Stephen remained as calm as any man I had ever seen. No hysterics, no begging for his life. He seemed almost distracted...and then I saw why.

As rocks continued to slam him from every direction, he prayed – he actually prayed: “Lord Yeshua,” he cried out, “receive my spirit.” Then he fell to his knees and cried out again, one final cry, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.” And he died.¹

Even in his final seconds, he was more concerned for his killers than himself. I was truly amazed.

I turned to John, “*They killed him?*” He could see the tears in my eyes.

“Actually, David, Stephen has never been more alive! When he gave up his spirit, he simply left his body and went to receive his reward. In fact, all of Heaven was cheering when he arrived!”

Notes

1. You can read the full account of Stephen in Acts 6 and 7.

Chapter SEVENTEEN



BOILED ALIVE

“It was that peace that you have just witnessed in Stephen that gave me the courage I needed many decades later as I stood before Domitian. I trusted that God’s presence would cover me in the same way.

“That demented dictator, Domitian, continued to rant like the madman he was, ‘Bow before me, heretic, and declare, ‘Domitian is God!’”

“I shouted in Hebrew, then in Greek, ‘*Shema Yisrael Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Echad.*’

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is One,”¹ I quoted from memory the Shema!

“Yes,” said John, “and this infuriated him even more. ‘Death to the atheist!’ he shouted. The crowd joined in. ‘Boil him alive! Death to the heretic Jew! Feed his boiled

flesh to the lions!’

In your day, David, people rail against Hollywood for making ungodly forms of entertainment – and rightly so in most cases. But in my day, there were no movies or reality TV competitions – this was entertainment. Coliseums would fill to capacity just to watch a man being torn apart by lions, or burned alive or, as in my case, boiled in oil.

“Yikes. I get it, but I’m still not going to watch *Real Housewives of Potomac!*”

We all laughed.

“As the crowd clamored,” John continued, growing serious again, “for my execution or *boiling*, I stood there enveloped in the peace that passes all understanding...

“Wait,” I interjected. “The peace that passes all understanding... is that a thing?”

“Oh yes, it is,” explained John, “and you will soon know it. It is a piece that simply doesn’t fit what you can touch, taste, feel, smell or see. It’s what you saw in Stephen. Despite the fact that they were killing him, he was at peace. God has that ability!

“There was one time when we were all in a boat on the sea of Galilee when a massive storm moved in. We were all sure we were going to die. Do you know where Jesus was? *He was sleeping!* While we were all convinced we were about to drown, he was getting some rest. That is supernatural peace, and it passes our natural understanding!”

“What happened!”

“He woke up, rebuked the storm, everything was okay, and then looked at us and feigned disappointment and asked us,

why we were afraid, ‘Do you still have no faith?’

“We looked at each other as if to say, *who is this guy?*”

“But now I had this peace, and I thought, *this is it. I am finally going to be with Him. Reunited with my best friend! No more sadness, no more pain – just forever in His presence*, until my thoughts were rudely interrupted by Roman soldiers, men who had been turned into bloodthirsty savages by the inhuman nature of their work, violently grabbing me. They dragged me over to the vat of oil, as the crowd, eager for a spectacle, followed. And then they hurled me over the top. I plunged into the massive pot, closing my eyes to keep the oil out. And as quickly as I could, I stood up. The oil, dripping from my head and clinging to my beard, came up to my armpits.

“‘Light the fire!’ came the command. A flame ignited the oil-soaked logs beneath the pot. As the flames burned higher, I knew it would only be a matter of time before the oil would heat up and begin to boil.

“*Time for one last sermon,*” I thought, knowing they wouldn’t kill me quickly because that would put an end to the show. I opened my mouth for what I assumed was the last time on earth and shared as passionately as I knew how about the love of God and His desire that all would be saved. Rather than plead for my life, I exhorted the crowd to turn to Yeshua. ‘No emperor can save you. He is not God. He only pretends. But there is One who can bring you eternal life!’

“David, it simply didn’t matter anymore. The worst they could do was kill me, and they were doing just that. As the Messiah said, ‘Don’t fear those who can merely kill the body but fear him who can destroy both body and soul in hell.’ I

discovered in that moment that when you have nothing to lose, you lose all inhibitions. There's nothing to hold you back. I knew it was my last opportunity in this life, and I was determined to make it count.

"I continued to implore them to turn from their sins and find forgiveness in Yeshua.

"In time, to the delight of the emperor, who I am sure just wanted me to shut up, the oil did begin to boil.

"David, have you ever been burned by oil?"

"Actually, yes, I have. On my last wedding anniversary, I took my wife to a beach house in Delaware. I had the bright idea of making her dinner – pan-seared tuna. However, I didn't realize how hot the oil had become or what would happen when I placed the fish in the pan. Flames shot up everywhere, and boiling olive oil flew out of the pan and onto my hand. For hours, my hand throbbed in pain, and many months later, I still have the scars on my hand to remind me of it. Of course, that can't be compared to what you went through."

"But still, you have a reference," said John. "You understand boiling oil is lethal. However, even as the oil boiled around me, I felt no pain. In fact, it was just the right temperature – therapeutic even to my old bones!

"Domitian was furious, but the people – they were half terrified, half incredulous. How was it possible? How can a man be put in a pot of boiling oil and survive, and more than that, seem impervious to the experience? Like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who were thrown into a fiery furnace and were not harmed, I was protected by the Lord.

"It was quite surreal, to be honest. They threw me in,

expecting me to die, but I simply stood there and continued speaking. No burns, no pain...nothing. No one seemed to know what to do. Everyone just stood there, staring. So, finally, I simply climbed out. Even the formerly hardened guards were too terrified to do anything. They must have thought, *who was this man who could withstand such a lethal punishment?* They begin to murmur that I must be a god and not Domitian.

“Then I thought, *well, I’ll just leave.* And since no one tried to stop me, that’s what I did. I could hear the emperor shouting to his guards to stop me, but they were simply too frightened. I learned later than many who were there turned to the faith – *including the cousin of Domitian.*”

“Ah, so that is how he came to believe in Yeshua. And then Domitian later had him executed for being an atheist.”

John nodded, “Eventually, because Domitian could not kill me, and it’s not like I had a car and could simply drive away, he had me exiled on the Island of Patmos, and that is where I wrote these words...”

I heard the familiar sound from my tablet and read: “*On the Lord’s Day* I was in the Spirit...” (Rev. 1:10).

“Many Christians, even some of my own disciples, wrongly assumed that I was referring to Sunday. While I understand why people might assume that I was actually referring to a specific day of the year of the Roman calendar. A reference anyone reading the prophecy at the time would have understood.

“As I said, Domitian took the idea that he was deity very seriously. Other religions were tolerated as long they did not conflict with Caesar worship. This became a problem for the Christians. Jews were exempt from Caesar worship. And for a

long time, Gentile believers were as well, as long as the Roman government saw this new movement as a sect of Judaism. Judaism was *Religio licita* or “permitted religion.” Under Nero, in the 60s, Christianity was viewed as *Religio illicita*, an illegal religion, and he unleashed intense persecution against Gentile believers. Domitian was even more deranged. He passed a law “that no Christian, once brought before the tribunal, should be exempted from punishment without renouncing his religion.”¹⁶

“At that time, I was spending my time between the different congregations Smyrna, Pergamos, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea, and Thyatira – and of course, Ephesus. Rome no longer saw me as Jew, and in fact, many of my Jewish brothers viewed me as a heretic. While in Ephesus, I was summoned to Rome.

Another quote appeared on my tablet.

Once a year, everyone in the Empire had to appear before the magistrates in order to burn a pinch of incense to the godhead Caesar and to say: “Caesar is Lord.” ...To refuse to say, “Caesar is Lord,” was treason...¹⁷

“This yearly event was known to be *the Lord’s Day*. This is what I was referring to, not Sunday. Believers, knowing my history with the emperor, defying him, and surviving, understood the significance of the Lord giving this revelation to me on that specific day. It was meant to highlight the theme

¹⁶ Foxes book of Martyrs <http://www.ntslibrary.com/PDF%20Books/Foxes%20Book%20of%20Martyrs.pdf>

¹⁷ *Revelations From Revelation*, Patrick M. Jones, 2008, Teach Services, Ringgold, Georgia, p. 19

of the book of Revelation, which can be found over and over again within its pages: *Stand firm in the faith, even unto death*. I was chosen to write the book because I had already chosen death over capitulation. In addition to being thrown into a vat of oil, I was on the island because of my faith.

“Consider these verses.” *D’ling*

I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in [Yeshua], was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of [Yeshua] (Revelation 1:9).

Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, *even to the point of death*, and I will give you life as your victor’s crown (Revelation 2:10).

To the one who is victorious and *does my will to the end*, I will give authority over the nations... (Revelation 2:26).

They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; *they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death* (Revelation 12:11).

“If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity, they will go. If anyone is to be killed with the

sword, with the sword, they will be killed.” This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of God’s people (Revelation 13:10).

This calls for patient endurance on the part of the people of God who keep his commands and remain faithful to [Yeshua] (Revelation 14:12).

“It was no accident that God chose to give this revelation to me on the very day that virtually every believer under Roman rule – many of them, my children in the faith – would be confronted yet again with this crucial test of loyalty: *Caesar or Yeshua?* – a test which, for some, could mean death.

“Those believers understood both the reference and its implication. If only people would read the sacred writing *in context*, they would understand so much more!”

Another quote appeared on my tablet, “. . . Many Christians were thrown to the lions, charged with atheism for refusing to sacrifice to the emperor who claimed to be God.”¹⁸

“You have to understand, David, that to publicly confess, ‘Yeshua is Lord,’ was to put one’s life and family in serious peril. Sadly believers, especially today, miss the point of what my brother, Saul, wrote to the Romans at the seat of Caesar worship: ‘If you declare with your mouth, “[Yeshua] is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Rom. 10:9).

“That’s it? Really? Just confess Him and believe?” I asked.

“Actually, it was a bit more complicated than that for the believers living under Roman rule.

¹⁸ Ibid.

“Once you understand the background of Caesar worship and the persecution it entailed, you suddenly realize that to do this – to publicly confess that Yeshua was Lord – was, in essence, to say, ‘I am willing to die for my faith in Yeshua.’ What Saul is doing here is indirectly confronting the issue of commitment because to confess that you were serving Yeshua was equivalent to confessing that Caesar was, in fact, *not* your Lord. And that could earn you a one-time lunch meeting with a lion in a Roman coliseum – where you were the lunch!

“Still today, believers are suffering for their faith all over the world. In Muslim nations, even nations that tolerate Christianity, they will not allow one of their own to leave Islam. It is a crime punishable by death.”

On the board, I saw the pictures of two men. One was an African man, the other Middle Eastern. Half of the African man’s face was horribly disfigured, and his right eye was gone. Under his picture, it read:

Umar Mulinde, 38, Apostle, Uganda

Ex-Muslim who preaches Yeshua to Muslims and supports the state of Israel. Two Muslim extremists threw buckets of acid in his face.

Under the Middle Eastern man, it read:

Youcef Nadarkhani, 34, Pastor, Iran

*Ex-Muslim pastor in Iran who was charged with apostasy and sentenced to death. Awaiting execution.*³

“It saddens me, David, that so many people have missed the central theme of the book, hidden in that verse. The Lord’s Day reference was a reference to persecution, something that Youcef and Umar both know well.”

“This is fascinating,” I whispered, stunned by what I was learning. “So, you weren’t referring to Sunday at all?”

“No, David, I wasn’t. Just think about it. What makes more sense? I am receiving perhaps the greatest prophetic visitation that any human has ever received, and I mention... *oh, by the way, it’s Sunday.*

“Now, I do understand that Sunday was more significant than Tuesday or Thursday, as Yeshua did rise from the dead on a Sunday, but still, Sunday occurred fifty-two times every year – it wasn’t that uncommon. However, doesn’t it make more sense that I am referring to the one day of the year when the faith of every believer in the Empire would be tested to the hilt, as I am writing a book to encourage them to overcome, persevere, and not give in to persecution?”

“Completely! This is awesome!”

“I am pleased to see that you are grasping this, David. The Master has chosen well.”

“*Chosen?* For what?”

But John was gone. The board was totally blank. But not me. I was high! That is the only word I can think of to describe it. I felt like someone was waking me up, and then I would wake up again to ever newer levels of knowledge. I don’t think there are any words in English to explain it.

“John was amazing, wasn’t he?” I rhetorically asked Ariel. “He is my favorite so far. I miss that guy already.”

“You can see now why he and Yeshua were so close. Of course, He loved them all, but John was a special younger brother in the faith to Him. And David, let me say this one more time before we move on. This is key, and I don’t want there to be any misunderstanding. The Lord delights in His people when He is worshiped – no matter what day His people come together to worship Him, and Sunday is just as good as any day. But what I do want you to understand is that Sunday never displaced or replaced the Sabbath. And for Jewish believers in the Messiah, He still expects them to honor the Sabbath – not a condition to receive eternal life, but as a matter of calling.”

Notes

1. Deut. 6:4.
2. Matt. 10:28.
3. Umar Mulinde and Youcef Nadarkhani are actual 21st-century persecuted believers.

Chapter Eighteen



YESHUA THE LIBERATOR!

“This stuff is so completely Jewish. I can’t understand why the Jewish people rejected Him.”

“But did they, David? After untold centuries of false doctrines that *authorized* the Church to persecute the Jewish people, it is no wonder that *today*, Jews have learned to stay away from the Church. But it was not like that in the beginning. In fact, if the Jewish people had indeed rejected the Messiah, the message would never have been taken to the nations. The fact that *Jesus* is a world-renowned name today and His followers number in the billions is irrefutable evidence of the faith, commitment, and success of those early Jewish believers to whom Yeshua entrusted His message of salvation. It was Jewish messengers who spread His message to Africa, Europe, and Asia.

“Let’s go back to the days immediately after Yeshua ascended into Heaven. Take my hand.”

We were heading back in time, once again. I loved this part! And again, scenes from history flashed below me as we journeyed back through time. When we arrived, it was night.

We gazed once more into the room where Yeshua had celebrated Passover with the disciples. But now, the room was filled with men and women who were praying.

Ariel began, “Remember, David, how Yeshua, just before He ascended into Heaven, told these people not to return to Galilee, but to wait in Jerusalem for what the Father had promised – the Holy Spirit? And as you can see, they are obeying Him even though they don’t really know what to expect. They spent their days in the Temple courts and nights back at the Upper Room, constantly seeking God for His promise. There are over one hundred people in that room seeking Him, and every single one of them is Jewish.

“Let’s fast-forward a few days to Shavuot.”

And within seconds, we were viewing a sea of humanity in the Temple courts on the morning of Shavuot. In one of the enclosures off of the courtyard, I could see the 120 gathered here, waiting and praying. This was the same scene he had shown me earlier.

“David, they had no idea what was about to happen. Read this verse.” I saw this passage illuminated and read:

When the day of [Shavuot] came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven

and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them (Acts 2:1-4).

We watched, and I was fascinated that it was only the *sound* of a mighty wind. There was no movement as the Holy Spirit visibly fell on each one. We couldn't help smiling as we noted Kefa was the first to stumble from the enclosure in the Temple court where they had been praying and poured out into the public area, where he preached his first sermon under the power of the Holy Spirit to an enormous crowd, all of whom were *Jews*. I remembered that the angel had previously told me that these Jews were not just from all over Israel but from all over the known world. They had come up to Jerusalem on pilgrimage to celebrate Shavuot.

“By the end of the day, David, three thousand men believed in Yeshua and were ready to be immersed in water.”¹

“I remember this,” I said. “They were immersed in the mikva'ot pools surrounding the Temple.”

“Let's take a look,” Ariel said as he leaned forward, and in seconds we were watching another amazing scene. There was great joy amongst the crowd as thousands of new believers in the southern sector of the Temple were being immersed in water.

“Ariel, that looks like more than three thousand to me!”

“Indeed, you are right. Sadly, they only counted heads of

households back then. In truth, there were over ten thousand new believers – and again – all of them were Jewish! And consider David, many of these men had not traveled with their families. So, while many of them arrived in Jerusalem as spiritually broken and beat up, seeking to survive under Roman rule, they returned home as new men. Their wives were stunned as they radiated love for their spouses, something that was simply uncommon in the world at that time.

“Let me take a few minutes to explain something to you, and then we will get back to Shavuot. While many people falsely think that the New Testament restricts women, nothing could be further from the truth. Until this time, there had been no document more liberating for women than the New Testament. You have to understand that very few marriages at that time were based on love and mutual respect. Virtually every marriage was arranged. In many cultures, women were viewed as property. In Roman cultures, women were treated very poorly, often viewed merely as objects for sexual gratification and reproduction. A good many women died in childbirth. In richer families, the women were expected to bear children as quickly as possible, with little rest between pregnancies. In fact, many girls were doomed at birth. Boys were preferred, as they could carry on the family name, and for a girl, the father would have to provide a dowry to her husband upon marriage. At certain periods in Roman culture, fathers were permitted to *expose* their newborns if they chose. Exposing a child meant that the child was thrown in a river or allowed to die naturally from starvation. This fate, in most cases, fell upon girls.”

I was sick at hearing this!

“In most cultures, women could not receive an education, testify in court, socialize in public, or talk to strangers. Young women were secluded until marriage, and women wore veils in public. Men looked down on women, seeing them as inferior.

“Yeshua, however, broke all the rules and treated women as equals. To be clear, we all have defined roles to play in our lives – for instance, you’re never going to have a baby, David!”

“I hope not!” We laughed.

“The Father has created men and women uniquely different to complement each other in their relationships as they raise families. Men tend to be more disciplinary, while women are more nurturing. Yes, men and women are different but equally valued and loved by the Father.

“And while on earth, Yeshua did what He could to shake up the status quo. On His way back from Judea to Galilee, He and His disciples passed through Samaria. While the disciples went into town to buy food, He did the unthinkable. He talked to a woman in public! John recorded the whole story in chapter four of his account of Yeshua.

“When the disciples came back, they nearly jumped out of their tunics, as they saw the Master talking to a woman.

“Let me show you another example.” Ariel snapped his fingers, and a portable version of the tablet appeared before me, like a flat-screen TV, and a movie began to play.

Yeshua was at the Temple courts teaching a group of eager listeners when an aggressive collection of people approached. They appeared to be religious leaders, bringing before Him a woman. She was scratched and bruised, clearly their prisoner.

Her hands were bound. They pushed her forward, making a circle around her. Then the ringleader turned to Yeshua.

“Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. In the Torah, Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now, what do You say?”

Oh my goodness, they were going to stone her, like they did Stephen. It would have been one thing if this were merely a movie. But Ariel was showing me something that really happened.

“No!” I blurted out. “They can’t!” Ariel was smiling. “This isn’t funny; how can you smile!?”

He just looked at me and said, “Keep watching.”

I continued to watch as they asked Yeshua if they should stone her to death. Some of them even appeared to be giddy as they put the weight of this woman’s life upon Him.

Yeshua gazed at them intensely but said nothing. He then bent down and began to write in the dirt. They continued to badger Him. “Surely if You are the Messiah, You wouldn’t go against Moses, would You?” As He continued to simply write on the ground, the view closed in on His fingers. I could see the words He was writing in Hebrew...

“Gossip, jealousy, bitterness, hatred, immorality, hypocrisy...”

Yeshua was listing sins in the sand, even as they continued to pressure Him to decide the poor woman’s fate. Finally, He stood up and looked each of them straight in the eye and said, “Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” Then He continued to write on the ground...

“Pride, deception, manipulation, thievery...”

His confronters were stunned, embarrassed, and clearly outwitted. No one was giddy anymore, as they all walked away, one by one, starting with the oldest all the way to the youngest.

Yeshua then untied the hands of the woman. She was weeping, knowing that she had barely escaped a gruesome death. Yeshua comforted her and asked, “Where are your accusers? Didn’t even one of them condemn you?”

“No, Lord,” she said.

And Yeshua looked at her with eyes of compassion and said, “Neither do I. Go and sin no more.” And the tablet went blank.

“You see, David, they knew they had no legal authority under Roman law to kill her, and that is why they sought to trap Yeshua. They knew if He said, ‘Stone her!’ He would be in trouble with their Roman overlords. However, if He was unwilling to pronounce a death sentence over her, they would tell the people that He didn’t obey Moses. Instead, He made them look like fools.”

“Is this story in the New Testament?” I asked.

“Yep, that and much more, which reveals how counterculture the teachings of Yeshua were. If you read what Sha’ul wrote to the Ephesians, it probably won’t be so earth-shattering to you... but to his culture, they were revelatory and deeply challenging.”

I looked to the tablet and saw: “Husbands, love your wives, just as [Messiah] loved the [Kehillah] and gave himself up for her” (Eph. 5:25).

“That’s a beautiful passage,” I remarked.

“Sure, it is – *for you* – a twenty-first-century American

husband. But for the Ephesians and the rest of the known world at the time, it was revolutionary. It was very rare for a husband in those days to look at his wife in this way – as someone he cherished, protected, and for whom he was willing to die. You have no idea how radical this teaching was. Asking a man to express unconditional love and affection for his wife was unheard of. Western culture has Yeshua to thank for this shift. Without the teachings of the New Covenant, the West would never have become as civilized as it has.

“Of course, the belittling and devaluing of women went on for centuries because the Church did not emphasize these teachings and forbade people to read the Bible for themselves. Even in Jewish circles, women continued to be treated poorly. Josephus, the great first-century Jewish historian, noted, ‘The woman, says the Law, is in all things inferior to the man.’² Here are a couple more quotes from both Jewish and Christian sources.”

I looked to the tablet:

Rather should the words of the Torah be burned than entrusted to a woman...Whoever teaches his daughter the Torah is like one who teaches lewdness.³

– ELIEZER BEN HYRCANUS

What is the difference whether it is in a wife or a mother, it is still Eve the temptress that we must beware of in any woman...? I fail to see what use woman can be to man, if one excludes the function of bearing children.

– ST. AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO

“While so much has changed in the West in regard to how women are viewed, much of the world still treats women as

objects or property. Hold your stomach and watch this.”

A video played on the tablet. A Muslim sheik was teaching on the proper way to beat one’s wife. I looked at the angel incredulously. He was not smiling.

“If the husband wants to use beatings to treat his wife, he must not do it in front of the children. It must remain between him and her....”⁴

The video ended quickly. “This is sick!” I roared, “Religious leaders giving instructions on the *godly* way to beat your wife!”

“Oh David, if you knew how many horrible and tragic events take place every day on your planet. Women are raped, sold into slavery, and forced into prostitution in nearly every country, every day.⁵ Evil men line their pockets with money, as their consciences are seared. They feel no guilt or remorse as they use and abuse these creations who were made in the image of God.

“This is why Yeshua was so radical in His treatment of women – He hates the way men have used physical strength to take advantage of women. Even when a woman with a notoriously promiscuous past came and wept at His feet, He would not send her away. He was actually in the home of a religious leader at the time, and everyone there judged Him for letting her touch Him. But Yeshua rebuked them. In truth, there was no difference between them and her – they were all guilty of sin before God. The only distinction was that the woman knew she was a sinner, while the smug religious ones misguidedly trusted in their own virtue for salvation.

“No one in history has had a greater influence on the liberation of women than Yeshua,” Ariel said emphatically.

Notes

1. Acts 2:41.
2. Josephus, *Against Apion* 2.201.
3. Rabbi Eliezer, 'Mishnah, Sotah' 3:4
4. Wife Beating in Islam – The Rules, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wp3Eam5FX58>.
5. The Richmond Justice Initiative (www.richmondjusticeinitiative.com) is a great resource to get educated concerning human trafficking and sexual slavery in the U.S. and around the world. It is headed by Sara Pomeroy, a former student of mine.

Chapter Nineteen



TENS OF THOUSANDS OF MESSIANIC JEWS

Returning to the subject of the Jewish revival that began on Shavuot 30 CE, Ariel continued, “So these men who were giving their lives to the Messiah returned home as changed men. In most cases, their wives were so amazed at the new way in which they were treated that *they* quickly became followers of the Messiah as well.”

I looked at the scene as one after another entered into the mikva’ot – the immersion pools.

“Rising up out of the water is a picture of the new life in the Spirit that Yeshua gives to all who ask. And 3,000 is a very significant number.”

“Why?” I asked.

“Well, Shavuot, traditionally, is the holiday on which Israel

celebrates the giving of the Law to Moses at Mount Sinai. On the day Moses brought the tablets of the Law into the camp, the people's sin was so flagrant, Moses threw down the tablets, breaking them – and 3,000 men were put to death.”¹

“So, 3,000 people died when the Law came – without the power of the Holy Spirit, the law produces death. There is no problem with the Torah; the problem was in man's inability to abide by it. But with the coming of the Holy Spirit, and the possibility of having the Torah written on their hearts, not just tablets, 3,000 people received new life!”

“Powerful!” I exclaimed.

“And this number quickly grew,” the angel continued. “In Acts 4:4, it states that the number of *men* grew to about 5,000 – that means in reality there well over 20,000 when you count the rest of the family members *and* need I say it....”

“...*All of them were Jewish!*” I finished his sentence. I was so excited. I could not wait to get back to earth and share this with my Jewish friends and family.

“Indeed, they were, David, and it wasn't merely the uneducated or the unwanted, though the Lord loves them greatly, who were placing their trust in Yeshua. Acts 6:7 says, ‘So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of *priests* became obedient to the faith.’”

“Right, the Cohanim that you told me about. It is funny; no one today calls a rabbi a priest. Why were they called priests back then?”

“It's true, David. If your typical Jewish person were to read that second part, they would probably all think that these

priests were Catholic. Why? Because, as you said, there is no such thing in modern Judaism as a *priest*. The spiritual leaders were called *rabbis*, even back then – Yeshua was called *rabbi* by his disciples. But there were also priests who worked in the temple in the sacrificial system. Without a Temple, which was destroyed in 70 CE, there was no need for priests anymore, as the job of the priests was to offer sacrifices to God in the Temple on behalf of the people. Even when there were Jewish priests, they would not have used the word *priest* but *cohen*, which is a common family name even today among Jewish people. The fact that a large number of these men, the *cohanim*, who worked in the Temple, had come to faith, shows that the good news of Yeshua was reaching *every sector* of Jewish society.”

Ariel snapped his fingers, and a rather serious-looking man spoke to me from the tablet screen.

“And that included Jewish society outside of Israel as well. Sha’ul, who once imprisoned Jewish believers, made it a point of principle everywhere he traveled, to seek to reach the Jewish people first.”

“David, meet Lukas. Everyone up here calls him Dr. Luke.”

“Hello, David. What a pleasure to meet you.”

Despite his stern demeanor, his voice was warm and his manner friendly.

“Hi... eh...Dr. Luke.”

“Dr. Luke was the first historian among the early believers. He traveled with Sha’ul for some time, always taking notes.

Eventually, when Sha'ul was imprisoned in Caesarea for two years, he began to put together an account of their travels. And he collected information from others, *firsthand accounts*, so he could write a history of the Kehillah, going as far back as the birth of the prophet John. There is no one up here, other than God and Sha'ul himself, who knows more about Sha'ul than Dr. Luke.

“I think Sha'ul would agree that I know more about him than he knows about himself. He was brilliant, but he really could have used a smartphone,” laughed Luke. “He was so focused on his task that he would often wear two different types of sandals, forget to eat, or even wear his tunic backward for half a day until someone finally had the courage to tell him. Of course, he would always laugh at his absentmindedness. The first thing he would ask me every morning was, ‘What city are we in?’ It became a running joke between us, even when he was imprisoned for two years in Caesarea, waking up in the same place each morning. The authorities allowed me almost constant access to Sha'ul during that time.

“Let’s talk about Sha'ul’s commitment to reach the Jewish people even while he was called to the Gentiles,” said the doctor.

Before me lay two passages:

I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I take pride in my ministry in the hope *that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them* (Romans 11:13-14).

For I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: *first to the Jew*, then to the Gentile (Romans 1:16).

“This next passage may shock you as it did me when I heard Sha’ul dictate these heartrending words to Tertius, his scribe. We were in Corinth at the time, and Sha’ul was greatly concerned for the believers in Rome. Emperor Claudius had expelled the Jews, both Messianic and non-Messianic, from the city in 49 CE. Midway through the next decade, they were allowed to return; however, the non-Jewish leaders of the Roman Kehillah had falsely believed that the exile of the Jews had been a sign that God had rejected them. Upon their return, they were treated poorly – second class. The book of Romans was written to counter this false theology. However, Sha’ul took a break from teaching in chapter nine, and he simply shared his heart for his people. He wanted them to feel God’s heart for Israel. Sha’ul knew that this would be a major issue in the future. As I recall, he was weeping so intensely that Tertius could barely understand him.

I speak the truth in [the Messiah – I am not lying, my conscience confirms it through the Holy Spirit – I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. **For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from [Messiah] for the sake of my people, those of my own race, the people of Israel.** Theirs is the adoption to sonship; theirs the divine

glory, the covenants, the receiving of the Law, the temple worship, and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen (Romans 9:1-5)

I was stunned by what I'd just read.

“Yes, David, he was willing to give up his place in Heaven, in the Messianic Kingdom, if only more of his people could know the Messiah. He carried this burden with him until the end. While false historians have portrayed Sha’ul as an enemy to Israel, I never met anyone who loved the Jewish people more. Despite his calling to the Gentiles,” continued Dr. Luke, “the principle, *to the Jew first*, was always in his mind. Take a look at these passages.”

Scriptures appeared again as clouds in the air; the only difference was that this time they were scrolling so I could read them all and certain words were in boldface. This was to highlight the fact that Sha’ul’s priority, in every new city, was always to seek out the Jewish people and tell them the good news of their risen Messiah:

When they arrived at Salamis, **they proclaimed the word of God in the Jewish synagogues.** John was with them as their helper (Acts 13:5).

From Perga, they went on to Pisidia Antioch. **On the Sabbath, they entered the synagogue** and sat down (Acts 13:14).

At Iconium, **Paul and Barnabas went as usual into the Jewish synagogue.** There they spoke so effectively that a great number of Jews and Greeks believed (Acts 14:1).

On the **Sabbath**, we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a **place [where Jewish people met] for prayer.** We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there (Acts 16:13).

As was his custom, **Paul went into the synagogue,** and on three Sabbath days, **he reasoned with them from the Scriptures...** (Acts 17:2).

As soon as it was night, the believers sent Paul and Silas away to Berea. On arriving there, **they went to the Jewish synagogue** (Acts 17:10).

Every Sabbath, he reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade Jews and Greek (Acts 18:4).

They arrived at Ephesus, where Paul left Priscilla and Aquila. **He himself went into the synagogue and reasoned with the Jews** (Acts 18:19).

Paul entered the synagogue and spoke

boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the kingdom of God (Acts 19:8).

“We see from Acts 14:1, where it says, ‘as usual’ and Acts 17:2, which states, ‘as was his custom,’ that this was something Sha’ul *always* did. I was with him during much of this time, and the moment we arrived in a new city, his first question was always, ‘Where’s the synagogue?’ If we’d had a GPS back then, he would have had it programmed to immediately locate synagogues!

“In many of these places, numerous Jewish people came to faith; in others, there would be persecution; more often than not, it was a mixture of both.

“Everything originates with the Jewish people in God’s scheme of things. The Jewish people gave the world the revelation of the One true God, His Word – the Bible – and ultimately the Messiah, Yeshua Himself. In addition to instant messaging and Starbucks,” Luke said with a smile. “Yes, I am being silly, but God’s hand of favor is on Israel, even though most Jewish people are not believers. His calling is irrevocable. And for good reason, it is through Israel that God not only blessed the world with the Messiah and His message but just look at modern inventions. Israel has learned to take water from the sea and make it drinkable.”

“I know, 80 percent of their drinking water starts as saltwater. They have desalination plants all over the country.” It was nice to add to the conversation.

“Right, and drip irrigation, the technology to grow things

in the desert with minimal use of water was invented by Israelis. Their “pill cam” helps doctors treat their patients. This is not because the Jewish people are better; it is because God is gracious to the world. If God decided, because of Israel’s unbelief, to take his calling away, computers all over the world would simply stop working. Hospitals would have great difficulty functioning. Though Israel is a tiny nation, her technology has reached all over the world.”

“But the greatest expression of this was through spreading the message of Jesus. When we were not received by Jewish people, we would go to the Gentiles. Sha’ul would quote Isaiah 49:6 that speaks of being a light for the nations and bringing salvation to the ends of the earth. Yes, drip irrigation is important, but the water that gives life to a dry soul – salvation – is even more important.”

“And the children of Abraham have paid a heavy price for being God’s chosen vessel. Persecution, hatred, even attempted genocide – 52 of them! – have pursued the Jews to this day. Without Israel, there is no Messiah and no salvation. And since the New Covenant was made with the House of Israel and the House of Judah, and salvation is of the Jews, it should come as no surprise that Heaven decreed the Good News would be preached to the Jewish people first, and then to the nations. And this proclamation was not without effect! Far more Jewish people than you realize received Yeshua in the first century! And today, more and more Jewish people in Israel and all over the world are embracing Him.

“I remember when Sha’ul returned to Jerusalem,” Luke continued. “I believe the year was 58 CE, almost three decades

after the birth of the first community of believers. The Gospel by that time had gone all over Europe and Asia, even into Africa!

“Surely, you would have thought, by now, the Jewish revival in Jerusalem would have died down. But it was not so, David. When we arrived in Jerusalem, Sha’ul met with Jacob, the brother of Yeshua and senior leader of the Jerusalem community.”

Luke turned to Ariel, “I’m assuming you have explained the Jacob/James name debacle. Such nonsense!”

“Nope, I let Jacob do that himself,” Ariel responded with a wink.

“Good. Jacob and the elders,” Dr. Luke continued, “gave a great report concerning the work of the Gospel in Jerusalem.”

Another verse formed before me.

Then they said to [Sha’ul]: “You see, brother, how many **thousands of Jews** have believed, and all of them are **zealous for the law**” (Acts 21:20).

“There are two eye-openers here and a mistranslation.” I could see that Dr. Luke loved to teach. “First, they report to Sha’ul that the awakening is continuing in power and bearing much fruit. However, it is even better than what you read, David, because the Greek word translated “thousands” is *muriades*. Do you know what that word means in English?”

“*Muriades*,” I thought aloud. “Clearly, by context, it is an amount. It sounds like *myriads*.”

“Right, David. Do you know the meaning of *myriad*?” asked Dr. Luke.

“I don’t know. I guess it means ‘a lot.’”

“One myriad is ten thousand. Myriads, plural, are *tens of thousands!*”

A verse formed in front of me as Ariel jumped in, “Dr. Stern’s translation of this verse is more accurate.”

I read, “...They also said to him, ‘You see, brother, how many **tens of thousands of believers** there are among the Judeans, and they are all zealots for the Torah’ (Acts 21:20 CBJ).”

“Not only does Dr. Stern’s translation bring out the fact that tens of thousands of Jews or Judeans, Jews who lived in the areas surrounding Jerusalem, had embraced Yeshua, but it suggests something that would have sent shockwaves throughout the Middle Ages during the Crusades and Inquisitions, even to many today who teach replacement theology, that God is finished with Israel or fulfillment theology, that everything in the Torah has been fulfilled, so ethnic Jews no longer have a role to play – and here is what they miss, that these tens of thousands of Jewish believers were ‘*zealots for the Torah!*’ Oh, that those so-called Christians who outlawed the Sabbath, forced Jews to deny Judaism, and be baptized, among other atrocities, could have simply read this book instead of listening to the lies and half-truths that abounded!

“It destroys the myth that Yeshua came to start a new religion apart from Judaism. Jacob, here, is clearly not reporting this to Sha’ul as a problem but as something exciting. In Yeshua, the Torah had meaning and life. Ezekiel and Jeremiah

both prophesied that one day God, who had written His Law on tablets of stone, would one day write it on their hearts!”

...I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts... (Jeremiah 31:33).

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws (Ezekiel 36:26-27).

“Somehow, many Christians today have come to look at the Torah, the Law of God given to the Jews, as a bad thing. It was bad only in that it could not produce life – but it was never intended to. The Torah itself was given as a revelation of God’s righteousness, and thus it exposed man’s sinfulness. The Law of Moses not only showed us how to live, but it also served another role in that it revealed our inability to actually keep the Law fully – it revealed our need for a Redeemer.

“Sha’ul, speaking of the Torah in Romans, says: ‘So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good.... We know that the law is spiritual...’ (Rom. 7:12,14).

“These were Jewish believers on fire for God and zealous for the Torah. Now keep in mind, when people today think of the Torah, they often conjure up images of black hats, long black coats, and endless, tedious rituals. Most of modern-day Judaism is not following the Torah per se, but traditions built

upon the Torah and a *supposed* secret Oral Law² which Moses was given on Mount Sinai, in addition to the written Law.

“But goodness, what is more *Torah* than the Ten Commandments? Take a look at them – they are God’s practical instructions for righteous living, far removed from rote tradition! They are in fact, responsible for all that is good in western civilization. Our constitutions, legal codes, and court systems all find their source in the Law of Moses. The only thing remotely close to ritual is the keeping of the Sabbath, and who can argue with the fact that we all need time off for rest, reflection, and rejuvenation?”

“And, David, here is something you may have overlooked. While Sha’ul had written some of his letters to individual congregations by this time, there was, as yet, no New Testament. All that the new believers had were the Hebrew Scriptures – the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings.”

“So even the Gentiles of the day were almost solely reliant on the Old Testament?” I asked.

“David – there was nothing else!” Luke insisted. “In fact, when Sha’ul wrote to Timothy that ‘all Scripture is God-breathed,’³ he was referring to the Hebrew Bible, as the New Covenant Scriptures were being written!”

“To further illustrate this point, take a look at what Jacob and the other leaders were concerned about.”

A passage formed as clouds before me.

[The Jewish believers] have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling

them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs. What shall we do? They will certainly hear that you have come, so do what we tell you. There are four men with us who have made a vow. Take these men, join in their purification rites and pay their expenses so that they can have their heads shaved. *Then everyone will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law* (Acts 21:21-24).

“Some of the Jewish believers were concerned by rumors that Sha’ul was teaching a heresy, saying Jews who embraced Yeshua should ‘turn away from’ the Torah. Furthermore, it confirms that Sha’ul himself was ‘living in obedience to Torah.’ The funny thing is the very idea that caused deep concern among the apostles eventually became Church policy in the Middle Ages. The believers were alarmed that Sha’ul may have rejected the Torah, but by the Middle Ages, not only were Jews who came to faith *not encouraged* to continue to live as Jews, they were *forbidden* to do so – sometimes under the threat of death! Acts records that Sha’ul, Jacob, and the other apostles affirmed that it is wrong to teach Jewish believers to forsake Jewish life and calling, but the Church of the Middle Age made it doctrine!

“Some, even today, teach that Sha’ul left Judaism. But I can show you, just from what I wrote in Acts, that he continued to follow the Torah.

“In Acts 18, Sha’ul cut his hair because of a vow he had

taken. What kind of vow do you think would require you to cut your hair?”

“I am not sure,” I responded, wishing I had been more attentive in Hebrew school.

“In Numbers 6, Moses receives special instructions for a man or a woman who wants to make a vow of dedication to the Lord. It is called a *Nazirite vow*. During the vow, you would not cut your hair, but at the end of the vow, you would shave your head completely, and Sha’ul did that.

“Another example is in Acts 27. Let’s use Dr. Stern’s translation for this: ‘Since much time had been lost, and continuing the voyage was risky because it was already past Yom-Kippur...’ (Acts 27:9 CJB).

“Sha’ul specifically mentions the Fast, referring to Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, here. But why did he not just say, ‘because fall had arrived’? Had Sha’ul truly disassociated himself from Judaism, as some claim, he would not still have been referencing the Hebrew calendar.

“Further evidence is provided when Sha’ul is on trial in Acts 23:6. He appeals to the fact that he *is a Pharisee and the son of a Pharisee*. Notice he doesn’t say that he *was*, but that he *is*, as in, ‘the present tense,’ a Pharisee. People today think the word *Pharisee* means hypocrite, and yet here was one of the most honest, true-to-yourself theologians in the world saying, ‘I’m a Pharisee!’

“Okay. Let’s get back to Sha’ul in Jerusalem; I remember it well! Jacob and the other leaders came up with a good plan to show clearly that Sha’ul continued to live as a Jew. I recorded it in Acts 21. They told Sha’ul to go along with their strategy

so that everyone would know that he ‘was living in obedience to the law.’ Sha’ul, who was nobody’s pushover – and I know better than anyone – went along with the plan just to prove what was true, that he, while ‘not under the condemnation of the Law,’ still sought to live according to God’s pattern for Israel – the Law of Moses.

“Take it from one of Sha’ul’s closest companions for many years, David. He never stopped living as a Jew.”

“Hang on there, Luke. Remember our instructions. Everything must be backed up with Scripture. No commentary. Only then will he be prepared,” Ariel interrupted.

“And what do you think I have been doing for the past half-hour?” remarked the doctor. “David, I wish you great success on your journey. I trust that something I said will prove useful.”

And with that, he disappeared. The tablet was blank.

Notes

1. Exod. 32:19-28.
2. The Oral Law or Oral Tradition is believed to have accompanied the written Torah, which Moses received on Sinai. The Oral Law was supposedly given in order to know how to live out the written Torah. It is believed that Moses passed this down to Joshua and from Joshua to future generations, all the way until it was codified in the Talmud, beginning around 200 CE. However, there couldn’t have been an Oral Law because, in the

time of King Josiah, they had lost the written Law and didn't even know what Passover was, much less an Oral Tradition. When the Book of the Law was recovered, they had to start from scratch. If there had ever been an Oral Tradition, it had long been gone. Strangely, the Oral Law has now been written down in the Mishna and Talmud. It is probable that the religious Jews in the time of Yeshua did not actually believe that the Oral Law came from Sinai, as it was merely referred to as 'The Traditions of the Elders.' Yeshua Himself rebuked the Pharisees for putting these traditions above the Word of God (see Mark 7:9).

Furthermore, concerning the idea of an Oral Law, we find in Exodus 23:3-4 that "When Moses went and told the people all the Lord's words and laws, they responded with one voice, 'Everything the Lord has said we will do.' Moses then wrote down everything the Lord had said...." This passage says that God shared all his laws, and Moses wrote them down. There was no secret Oral Tradition. The children of Israel were told to obey all that was written (see Deut. 30:10, 31:9,24,26; Josh. 1:8). (For deeper study on this subject, see: Michael L. Brown, *Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus: Traditional Jewish Objections, Volume 5* (San Francisco: Purple Pomegranate, 2010).

3. 2Tim. 3:16.

Chapter Twenty



BREAKING NEWS! FIRST-CENTURY ORTHODOX JEWS PROVE YESHUA IS MESSIAH

“Wait! Rules? Prepared? Journey? What are you all referring to?”

“Soon, David, soon.” Ariel grabbed my hand, and we were flying back to the classroom.

Seated at my desk with Ariel standing in front of the massive tablet, he began to sum up this last visit with Luke. “So, you see, not only was there a massive revival in Jerusalem with signs, wonders, and miracles, but these Jews continued to live as Jews. If you had walked up to John, Jacob, Kefa, or any other of the leaders of the Jerusalem revival and said, ‘Praise

God! How does it feel to be free of the Torah and Judaism and to now be a Christian?’ they wouldn’t have known what you were talking about. All they understood was that they, as Jews, had found the Jewish Messiah. What could be more Jewish than that? What they may have asked is, ‘What is a Christian?’ as they referred to themselves as *believers* in those early days. The term *Christian* was first coined in Antioch many years later by unbelievers. It was the way they referred to believers in a Greek-speaking city.

“In the beginning, just days after the Shavuot outpouring, do we see Kefa and John going to a church building in Rome to pray? No, of course not. Look at your tablet.”

I read, “‘One afternoon at three o’clock, the hour of *minchah* prayers, as Kefa and Yochanan were going up to the Temple...’ (Acts 3:1 CBJ).”

“They were praying the afternoon *minchah* Jewish prayers?” I asked, clearly already knowing the answer, having just read it. “Just like I do sometimes at our local synagogue. This is mind-blowing! I never pictured the followers of Jesus praying from the Siddur, the Jewish prayer book.”

“It doesn’t say *minchah* in the Greek, but why else would you go to the Temple at 3 p.m.? David, Luke showed you all those passages about Sha’ul going first to the synagogue whenever he would enter a new city. What? Do you think he walked in and said, ‘Hey, my name’s Paul, used to be Saul. Can I share a little bit this morning during the service about a new religion we have started called *Christianity*?’”

“Based on what I learned today, that seems very unlikely,” I shared.

“Sha’ul, the Jewish rabbi, came to tell his people about their long-awaited, resurrected Messiah – and that through Him they could have eternal life. This was the same Messiah of whom the prophets of Israel spoke.

“However, David, if you really want to know whether Yeshua was the Jewish Messiah, you don’t even need the testimony of Sha’ul, Kefa, or the prophets. In truth, all you have to do is look to the Jewish leaders of Yeshua’s day – the Sanhedrin.”

“I don’t understand. It was members of the Sanhedrin that handed Yeshua over to the Romans. How could they and *why* would they prove that Yeshua is the Messiah?”

“Well, they didn’t do it on purpose! Watch.”

I turned to the tablet, and as it came to life, a scene began to play before me.

I could see that the high priest, his entourage, and all the Sanhedrin were gathered. These were the elders of Israel. Then a stunned jailer ran in and cried out, “They’re gone! They’re gone! Those rabble-rousers have escaped! The jail door was locked, and the guards were there, but when we opened it up, they were all gone!”

A buzz traveled throughout the room as the high priest, and the captain of the Temple guard tried to figure out what was happening. They were visibly shaken.

Then someone ran into the room and yelled, “Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the Temple courts teaching the people!”

Several of the Temple guards went with the captain to investigate. Sure enough, there were Kefa, John, and the

others, proclaiming that Yeshua was the Messiah. The captain appeared worried. He could see that the local Jews loved the apostles and what they had to say. If he arrested them by force, the people might revolt. But Kefa and the others simply turned to him and said, “Fear not. You don’t need to use force. We will follow you.”

They were brought before the Sanhedrin. The high priest stood and began to question them in an angry, smug tone. “We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name, yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty for this man’s blood,”¹ he half yelled.

Kefa spoke for the apostles. He was sharp and bold, and yet respectful, as he proclaimed, “We must obey God rather than any human authority. The God of our ancestors raised Yeshua from the dead after you killed Him by hanging Him on a cross.”²

I remembered that while the Jewish masses, who came from all over the region to hear Yeshua, loved Him, many of the jealous leaders had asked the Romans to execute Him. It was clear to me that Kefa was confronting those who *did* turn Yeshua over to the Romans to be killed, the Sanhedrin. *He does not blame all Israel.*

“Then God put Him in the place of honor,” Kefa continued with a holy anger, “at His right hand as Prince and Savior. He did this so the people of Israel would repent of their sins and be forgiven. We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, who is given by God to those who obey Him.”³

The high priest and the others were so angry, it appeared they wanted to kill the apostles. They were frustrated and

jealous that these uneducated Jews from Galilee had the whole city listening to their message. It was clear that they were determined to stop them at any cost, lest they lose their power over the people.

And just then, one of them, clearly a respected member, stood up. He asked that the apostles be briefly removed so they could discuss the issue at hand. Then he raised his voice and said, “Men of Israel, take care what you are planning to do to these men! Some time ago, there was that fellow Theudas, who pretended to be someone great. About 400 others joined him, but he was killed, and all his followers went their various ways. The whole movement came to nothing. After him, at the time of the census, there was Judas of Galilee. He got people to follow him, but he was killed, too, and all his followers were scattered.

“So, my advice is, leave these men alone. Let them go. If they are planning and doing these things merely on their own, it will soon be overthrown. But if it is from God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You may even find yourselves fighting against God!”⁴

I had chills! *If it was from God, they could not stop it!* Fortunately, he swayed the majority. The disciples would not be stoned to death...at least not yet. Still, they were brought in, and these arrogant, false leaders had each of them beaten with a whip. They were ordered again not to speak in the name of Yeshua. But the apostles, unlike you would imagine any prisoner who has just been whipped, left rejoicing, and as they did, the tablet returned to its normal state.

“Wow! What a story. Why does Hollywood waste its

time on zombies and superheroes that never die? This is far more compelling!”

Ariel asked me, “Do you know the name of the man who stood up and convinced the Sanhedrin not to kill the apostles?”

“No,” I answered.

“His name is Gamaliel, remember? I told you earlier that Sha’ul studied under him. I am sure you have heard of Hillel.”

“Of course. He was one of the greatest Jewish leaders ever. Without him, there would be no Mishna or Talmud. Hundreds of universities and every major one in the U.S. have a *Hillel House*, a place for Jewish students to maintain their Jewish culture and identity while away from home. I would occasionally eat Shabbat meals there when I was in college.”

“Gamaliel was Hillel’s grandson and also a very respected Jewish voice of his time. He was a senior member of the Sanhedrin. There is no doubt that it was his lineage and respected position that kept the other elders from executing the apostles that day. But what was his argument?”

Like Neo learning martial arts in the Matrix, I could recall everything with vivid detail. “He told them that if Yeshua was not from God, they had nothing to worry about – He would soon be forgotten. Other would-be messiahs died, and no one remembered them. However, he warned, if Yeshua was the Messiah, then they would not be able to stop His message from spreading and would find themselves in the uncomfortable position of fighting against the One they claimed to represent.”

“Very good, David. Let me ask you something. Do people remember Yeshua and His works? Do they still talk about Him? Or, like those others, Theudas and Judas, to whom Gamaliel

referred, has He been forgotten?”

I didn't even answer the question. “So according to the wisdom of one of the greatest Jewish leaders of the first century, *Yeshua must have been sent from God*. Amazing! I remember reading while growing up that John Lennon once said the Beatles were more popular than Jesus and that Christianity would eventually vanish.”

“Oh, they were popular...*for a minute*. But Yeshua has had staying power for two millennia. I think it is safe to say that John Lennon had a tendency to *imagine*.”

My funny angel.

“You know, David, Orthodox Judaism testifies to the validity of Yeshua's sacrificial death in another quite profound way.”

“Really? How so?”

“You are familiar with the *Talmud*, yes?”

“Familiar? I know what it is...the Oral Law written, the *Mishnah* and the commentary on it, called the *Gemara*. But no, I am not a student of it.”

“Tell me what you know about Yom Kippur – the Day of Atonement.”

“It's the holiest day of the year for Jews. We confess our sins and fast in the hope that God will forgive us.”

“Do you sacrifice a goat as well?”

“What? What are you talking about?”

“Before *fasting* became the crucial element on Yom Kippur within the Jewish community, the emphasis was rightly placed on the sacrifice. Leviticus 16 is the premier chapter about Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. There are two brief mentions

about fasting, and virtually the rest of the chapter is all about the sacrifice. Aaron, the first high priest and brother of Moses, was to sacrifice a goat before the Lord. Actually, there were two goats. The high priest was to lay his hands on the second goat and impart all the sin of Israel.”

A passage lit up my desktop tablet. I read:

When Aaron has finished making atonement for the Most Holy Place, the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall bring forward the live goat. He is to lay both hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites – all their sins – and put them on the goat’s head. He shall send the goat away into the wilderness in the care of someone appointed for the task. The goat will carry on itself all their sins to a remote place; and the man shall release it in the wilderness.
(Lev. 16:20-22)

“This is where we get the term scapegoat – when someone suffers for, or is accused of, another’s crimes.”

“Why don’t we still do this?”

“The Temple was destroyed in the Great Revolt and sacrifices ceased. Over time, the emphasis moved from the sacrifice to fasting, but it was the sacrifice that was commanded in the Torah to take away sin. Fasting was never intended to, nor can it, take away sin. The whole idea of a sacrifice was that you cannot atone for your own sins – someone else has to

suffer. Their blood must be shed.”

“So why then do we fast?”

“Good question David. Why do you fast? Imagine that you were caught in the midst of a crime. Let’s say you were going 100 mph through a neighborhood and crashed into someone’s home. You are arrested and given a court date. How would you present yourself to the judge? Would you wear torn jeans and a dirty t-shirt before the court?”

“Of course not! I would wear a suit and tie. I would get a fresh haircut as well!”

“Why?”

“He is the judge. My fate is in his hands. I would want to communicate to him that I was sorry for what I did in hopes that he would extend mercy. To present myself to him in a disrespectful way would ensure maximum punishment.”

“Very good, David, but tell me, can wearing nice clothes take away what you did? Can a murderer just wear nice clothes and say nice things and then be set free?”

“No, I suppose not.”

“But I can guarantee you this,” the angel added, “if the murderer shows up showing no respect for the judge or regard for the court, it will have a powerfully negative effect on the jury.”

“In the same way, fasting was never intended to take away sin. It was merely the *posture of humility* in which the people of Israel presented themselves before the Lord. While the high priest was presenting the offering before the Lord and imparting the sin of the nation into the scapegoat, the people waited in hopes that God would forgive them.

“Now, imagine if while Aaron was doing his ceremonial duties on the Day of Atonement that the people treated it just like any other day – they worked, they ate, and they laughed. What would that have communicated to the Lord?”

“That they were not serious or that they didn’t even believe they needed to be forgiven,” I replied.

“Exactly, but if the people didn’t work or eat and humbled themselves, that would communicate something entirely different to the Lord. It would convey, ‘We are serious. We have sinned. Please accept the sacrifice.’

“And that brings me to my point. Did God always receive the Yom Kippur sacrifices?”

“I don’t know. I never really thought about it.”

Ariel quickly replied as if he was eager to share a great insight, “Well, the rabbis and sages over the years thought quite a bit about it! In fact, the Talmud itself, which in the eyes of the Orthodox Jews is equal to Scripture, states as a matter of fact that God rejected the Yom Kippur sacrifices from 30 CE to 70 CE. This can be found in tractate Yoma 39b.

The quote was on the tablet.

“Our Rabbis taught: During that last forty years before the destruction of the Temple the lot [‘For the Lord’] did not come up in the right hand; nor did the crimson-colored strap become white; nor did the westernmost light shine; and the doors of the Hekal would open by themselves,

“Jesus died in 30 CE, right? And the Temple was destroyed around 70 CE! Did they know this?”

He didn’t answer but kept teaching, “According to the Talmud, there were several signs that would testify as to whether or not God had received the sacrifice and forgiven the people.

“First, the priest would draw lots from an urn. One of the lots had written on it *LaHashem* or *For the Lord*. The other lot had the words *LaAzazel*. If the priest drew the lot *LaHashem* in his right hand, that meant that God received the sacrifice. However, if it showed up in the left hand, it meant the opposite.”

“Well, that is just a 50/50 chance. How could the people pin their hopes on such odds? There is nothing supernatural about that. I could just flip a coin.”

“Not so; we are talking the same result over forty years. The chances of flipping a coin just five times in a row with the same result are 3 out of 100! Try it!” He threw me a five-shekel coin.

“Okay,” nothing like a game to bring down the tension. I flipped it once with the five looking right at me, and it landed on the other side. I turned it back over with the five looking at me again and flipped it another time; this time, it landed with the five facing me.

“Try again.”

On my next try, I got tails twice in a row and got a little excited. *Won’t the Angel be shocked if I can do it five times in a row?* But on my third try, it landed on heads.

“Give me another try.” As silly as this was, I was having

fun. It landed on tails. Then tails again. Then tails for the third time! And the fourth time, it was heads.

“Just to be clear, that was all you. No tricks. Eventually, by the 33rd time, you probably, according to odds, would have gotten the same result five times in a row. It’s not impossible. But imagine forty times in a row! Believe it or not, that could happen only once in 1,099,511,627,776 times – and yet the Talmud claims that it happened in the first century.

“Don’t worry, young man, I’m not gonna ask you to try,” he laughed and then continued.

“Another sign was that a crimson thread that was tied to the horn of the scapegoat would supernaturally turn white. Actually, part of this thread was taken from the goat and tied to the Temple doors. This way, the people would be able to see if it turned white, which meant that God had accepted the young goat that was sacrificed. And this also did not happen even once during those forty years.

“The next miracle was that the western-most light, called the *ner ma’aravi* – this was on the menorah in the holy place – was not burning the next morning. This was also considered a bad omen as the priest would have used this light to relight the other branches of the menorah. Just like the shamash candle on the Chanukah. But each year for 40 years, they woke up on the morning of Yom Kippur to find the fire extinguished.

“Lastly, every night during this 40-year span, on Yom Kippur, the Temple doors would supernaturally open. The greatest rabbi just at the end of this 40-year span was Yochanan Ben Zakkai. He is credited with saving Judaism. He pleaded with the Zealots not to revolt against Rome, and they wanted

to kill him! They saw him as a traitor, but he escaped Jerusalem and moved to the coastal city of Yavne. There the Romans allowed him to continue teaching. Ben Zakkai predicted that these signs were signs of impending judgment and that the Temple was soon to be destroyed. And that is exactly what happened. But sadly, Ben Zakkai missed the main point! It was Yeshua who prophesied 40 years earlier that the Temple would be destroyed because the Jewish leadership missed the day of His coming.

“However, the main point is that according to the most respected post-Second Temple period Jewish document – the Talmud – the God of Israel rejected the Yom Kippur sacrifices every year. However, what the Talmud fails to reveal – whether through ignorance or conspiracy – is what took place in 30 CE, when God began to reject the offerings, as you adeptly shared earlier.

“The death of Yeshua!” I blurted out.

“Exactly! And of course, we know that the reason the counting ended at 70 CE was not because God suddenly began to receive the sacrifices, but...”

“...because the Temple was destroyed by the Romans!” I finished the angel’s sentence. “There were no longer any sacrifices. I never knew this! Jewish people need this information! You are telling me that according to Judaism’s most trusted source, from the time of Yeshua’s death until the destruction of the Temple, the Yom Kippur sacrifices were not accepted. Unreal!”

“I don’t know if you know it, but there are two versions of the Talmud – one that was written in Judea called the

Jerusalem Talmud and one that was compiled in exile, called the Babylonian Talmud – and both of them agree on this point.”

“Ariel, the Jewish people – non-religious ones like me, or like I was – they do not know this. Someone has to tell them!”

“Yes, David, *someone* indeed must tell them,” Ariel stated with a twinkle in his eye.

Notes

1. See Acts 5:28.
2. Acts 5:29-30 NLT.
3. See Acts 5:31-32 NLT.
4. Acts 5:35-39 NLT.

Chapter Twenty-One



COMMUNION IS JEWISH!

“Come on, David, I want us to return once again to Yeshua’s last Passover. It’ll be a short visit. Are you up for another flight?”

“You need to ask?” I responded as I stretched out my hand. Instantly, we were soaring. As we neared the first century, Ariel began to descend. We passed live scenes that looked like a movie film. The closer we got, the slower they got. We passed the Day of Shavuot. I could see Yeshua speaking with His disciples. It was followed by a scene where He appeared to a large group of people – more than several hundred. They were amazed, knowing that the Rabbi had just been executed. Now, He was cooking fish on the shores of the Galilee, and I could see Kefa jump into the water from a boat and wade to shore. Next, we flew over the tomb, the rock, and the angels. And finally, we returned to the scene of that last Passover.

This is the same room in which Kefa and the other disciples received the Holy Spirit on Shavuot. The meal appeared to be over. Yeshua picked up a piece of unleavened bread, and as He broke it, He said:

“Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.”¹

Then He shared it with them, each one taking a piece.

“Was that the Afikomen? At our Passover Seder, that is the very last thing we eat.”

“Keep watching, David. I will explain everything in just a minute.”

Next, Yeshua picked up a cup of wine and said, “Drink from it, all of you. This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”² And they drank.

“Wait a minute! Communion was instituted at a *Passover Seder*? Unbelievable!” I found myself saying that a lot. “Ariel! You are blowing my Jewish mind!

“When I think of communion, which I hardly ever do, I always envision Roman Catholics lining up to receive a wafer and a sip of wine from their priest. I definitely don’t associate it with *Passover*!”

“David, the blessing of bread and wine has been a Jewish tradition for millennia. You just did not make the connection with the Lord’s Supper because the Church has so *religisized* the practice that it hardly bears a resemblance to a Seder meal and the fellowship and warmth of friends sitting around a dinner table. But yes, the Lord’s Supper was inaugurated at the last Seder that Yeshua enjoyed before He gave His life as a

ransom for all mankind.”

“Eh... religisized. Is that a word?”

“I’m an angel. I can make up words. Haven’t you ever heard of the tongues of men *and angels*? Ah, forget it. What I mean is that they so dressed it up in religion that it hardly resembles its original intent or context. There is so much more I want to unpack with you concerning this subject. I think we need to take this back to the classroom.” Ariel’s voice trailed off – and this time, instantaneously, I found myself back in my heavenly-ancient-techno-classroom.

Ariel just picked up where he had left off, as though we hadn’t just traveled two thousand years in time – assuming I was back in the twenty-first century. “During the Passover Seder meal, it is customary to remove the middle piece of the three pieces of matzah from the white linen covering and break it in two. Tell me what happens in your home, David.”

“Well, my father, who still leads our Seders, takes his role very seriously, even highlighting in each *Haggadah*³ for every participant (and we usually have around thirty people!) exactly when and where they have to read. He would take one half of the broken piece of matzah, the *Afikomen*, and wrap it in white linen – normally a napkin. He would hide it somewhere in the house, and the children would search for it after the meal. The finder would return it to the leader, and then we’d all partake of it.

“As a kid, that was the most exciting part of the Seder. My sisters and my cousins, and I would run around the house after the meal, tearing our home apart, looking for it. The winner got two dollars! Now my girls do the same thing with their

cousins, though the going rate is now 10 dollars – *inflation*.” I was smiling. Passover was always a wonderful time in the Lebowitz home. “But what does the tradition of the Afikomen have to do with the Passover? I had never thought to ask.”

“The rabbis say it is to remind you of the sacrificial Passover lamb. How right they are! Sadly, they don’t know who the Lamb is. It can only be understood in light of Yeshua. He was the Lamb of God. He took the matzah, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’⁴ Clearly, the bread He broke was unleavened, as it was Passover. Leaven is often compared to sin in the Bible. Sha’ul reinforces this when writing to the Corinthians. Read from your tablet.”

...Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Messiah, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the *unleavened bread* of sincerity and truth (I Corinthians 5:6-8 NKJV).

“Only Yeshua could say, ‘This is My body,’ because only He was ‘a lamb without blemish or defect’ as is stated in I Peter 1:19 – He was sinless! Even during the original Passover, the Lord said that lamb had to be ‘without defect,’⁵ that was because, even though they didn’t know it, the lamb pointed to

the Perfect Lamb of God, Yeshua.”

All these passages were being highlighted on my tablet.

“Amazingly, many churches today serve *leavened bread* for the Lord’s Supper! They seem to have entirely missed the point that the reason the bread is without leaven is to symbolize that Yeshua was sinless – the only man without sin.

“Let’s listen to how the prophet John, whom you recently met, describes his cousin, Yeshua.”

John appeared on the tablet but not in real time, as in our earlier conversation. This was more like watching a video on *YouTube*. As Yeshua came toward him, John said for all to hear: “Look, *the Lamb of God*, who takes away the sin of the world!”⁶

“But in order for Him to be the Passover Lamb,” I interrupted, “He would have to – *whoa* – He would have to die!”

That is why the Yom Kippur sacrifice was so important. Blood had to flow. Remember I told you that Leviticus 16 is all about the Yom Kippur sacrifice, well it says in Leviticus 17:11, “For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one’s life.”

“So, without blood, there can be no forgiveness?” I asked.

“That’s right, David. Are you sure you’ve never studied the New Testament?”

I wasn’t quite sure what he meant, but he didn’t stop to explain.

“Just like it’s depicted in the Seder with the middle matzah, His body was broken. After He was killed, He, too, was wrapped in white linen and hidden for a time. And just

as the matzah is found and returned for all to eat, He too returned to life and those who believe, partake of Him.”

“This is all so *Jewish*. I can hardly believe it!”

“And yet it is true! Jewish tradition,” continued the celestial professor, “has no clear explanation as to what the Afikomen is and where it came from or why it is broken. The practice actually predates the first century.⁷ This special piece of matzah represented the Messianic hopes of the Jewish people. Even as Moses rescued the children of Israel, the Jewish people looked to the One of whom Moses spoke when He said, ‘The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to Him.’⁸”

“The Afikomen represented the Messiah. Yeshua, His disciples, and all first-century Jews knew this. When He took the matzah and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body,’ let’s be honest – it would have seemed very strange if they didn’t understand that the broken piece represented the Messiah. However, because they were familiar with the Messianic tradition, they understood His meaning. By taking *that* piece of matzah and saying, ‘This is My body,’ He was, in essence, saying, ‘I am Israel’s Redeemer.’”

“Sadly, the rabbis who came after Yeshua sought to disassociate Judaism from the idea that a human being could perform the divine function of redemption. In fact, Moses himself, the central figure of the Passover, was completely removed for this reason! His name is not even mentioned in the Haggadah – the book for the Passover liturgy!”

“That’s crazy,” I protested. “Of course, Moses is mentioned in the Passover Seder – he’s the protagonist!”

“Really? Where?” the angel challenged me. And as I thought, I realized he was right. I couldn’t think of one place in the entire Passover ceremony where Moses was mentioned.

“How can Moses not be part of the Passover celebration? That would be like celebrating the Fourth of July and not mentioning George Washington!” I argued.

“It is all about control, David, and sadly, leaders in virtually every religion do it – whether it is fanatical Islamists telling would-be suicide bombers that they will soon be in paradise or Catholic bishops creating purgatory in order to raise money for their buildings. They will use any means necessary to keep people from thinking for themselves. However, let’s not dwell on that right now, but return to the Afikomen.

“In the Passover, Yeshua, the Divine Son, was broken, then wrapped in linen and buried, ultimately conquering death itself, by rising to life.

“The very word *Afikomen* symbolizes the coming of Yeshua.”

“What does it mean?” I asked.

“Well, interestingly enough, it is not a Hebrew word. In fact, it is Greek,” the angel explained. “And in the first century, it was pronounced in its future tense *Aphikomenos* – which means, ‘He is coming!’”

“Amazing. There could have been no doubt as to who He was claiming to be!” I exclaimed.

“Look at the matzah,” Ariel snapped his finger, and suddenly there was a piece of matzah in my hands! “What do you see? What are its characteristics?”

“It’s slightly burnt. It has holes in it.”

“Anything else?”

“All of the holes and the burnt area in between go in one direction.”

“So, what you’re telling me, David, is that this broken piece of unleavened bread that Yeshua was holding in his hands was pierced, bruised, and had stripes.”

“Sure, if you want to use those words.”

“Oh, David, those are not my words, but those of the prophet Isaiah when he spoke about the Lamb of God who would take on the sin of the world. Not just that, Isaiah prophesies that he would see the light of life again – in other words, resurrection.”

A passage appeared, and I read it out loud, “‘But he was *pierced* for our transgressions, he was *bruised* for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his *stripes*, we are healed.’

“I can’t believe it! It says right there that he would be pierced, bruised, and have stripes, just like this piece of matzah!”

“It is heartbreaking that millions of Jews celebrate this meal every year and do the Afikomen ceremony and yet don’t see the deeper meaning,” lamented Ariel. “But soon, that is going to change!”

“You see, there is another equally significant meaning in the hiding of the matzah. Despite being Jewish and coming from Israel, Yeshua has been largely rejected by the Jewish world since the first century. However, the day will come when the Jewish people will return to Him – but only when they search for Him, as children do the matzah.”

A passage lit up my tablet, and I read aloud, “‘You will

seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart” (Jer. 29:13).

“You are here today, David, because you chose to seek Him out. But a day is coming when far more than a Jewish writer from Philadelphia will seek Him. Instead, all Israel will long for Him. The Father has promised.”

Another passage appeared:

For the Israelites will live many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred stones, without ephod or household gods. Afterward the Israelites will *return and seek the Lord their God and David their king*. They will come trembling to the Lord and to his blessings in the last days (Hos. 3:4-5).

“But that says they will return to David?” I asked.

“King David was only a type of the Messiah, and Yeshua was in the lineage of David. As you and I know, King David is dead, but Yeshua rose from the dead, and Israel will return to Him. In fact, many already have! The rabbis have long correctly interpreted this as referring to the Messiah.”

Notes

1. 1 Cor. 11:24 NKJV.
2. Matt. 26:27-28.
3. The *Haggadah* is a special book that contains not only the story of the Exodus but the structure and the ritual of the Seder (*Seder* means “order”). It is read aloud at the Passover Seder.
4. Luke 22:19
5. Exod. 12:5.
6. John 1:29.
7. To be clear, there are many valid views on when the Afikomen was introduced into the Passover Seder. Some believe it was started by first-century Jewish believers (as it so clearly resembles the Messiah) and was later adopted by the greater Jewish community. The fact that Jewish tradition is so vague and unclear regarding the ceremony lends credence to this view.
8. Deut. 18:15.

Chapter Twenty-Two



THE BLOOD OF THE LAMB ON THE DOORPOST OF YOUR HEART

“Let’s move on to the wine,” suggested Ariel. “On Passover, Jews drink four cups of wine.”

“Don’t I know it!” I joked. “The Cup of Sanctification, the Cup of Deliverance, the Cup of Redemption, and – ah – help me out, Ariel.”

“Praise, David, the Cup of Praise.”

“Right, the Cup of Praise.”

“They each symbolize something powerful. But let’s focus in on the third cup because that is the cup of wine you drink directly after you share the Afikomen – the *Cup of Redemption*. This is the cup that Yeshua took when he said....”

A passage appeared that read, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you” (Luke 22:20).

“I get it!” I yelled. “At last, I see it! I don’t need to feel guilty because I am Jewish. It is totally Jewish to believe in Yeshua. It couldn’t be any more Jewish! He is our Passover Lamb. The perfect, sinless –”

My revelation was interrupted by the arrival of another passage on my tablet. I read it out loud.

For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, *but with the precious blood of [Messiah], a lamb without blemish or defect* (1 Pet. 1:18-19).

Ariel elaborated, “Kefa, after describing Yeshua as the Messiah who would suffer as an innocent Lamb, likens His blood to the blood of the Passover lamb which had to be placed on the doorposts of their homes. His blood would serve a similar, yet even more powerful purpose.”

“His blood,” I proclaimed, “covers the doorpost of my soul. In the Passover story, the blood of the Lamb on the doorpost of one’s home kept the Angel of Death at bay. However, Yeshua’s blood, and I’m only now just grasping this, protects us for all eternity. The Passover is a picture of what God wants to do spiritually for everyone.”

“Right, David!”

“The blood of the spotless Lamb of God is impenetrable.

The enemy, Satan himself, cannot touch you once you apply it to your life. It is not merely effective for one special night in Egypt *but for all eternity*. On that Great Day of Judgment, those who believe will be pardoned, just as the firstborn male was on Passover, because of the blood of the Lamb.”

“Right, David! But there is more. At 9:00 a.m., the very hour that Yeshua, the Lamb of God, was nailed to the cross, the first Passover sacrifices were being offered in the Temple. And when He breathed His last breath and cried out, ‘It is finished!’ it was 3:00 p.m., the exact time of the second Passover sacrifice.”

“He truly was the Lamb of God,” I whispered.

“No, David. He *is* the Lamb of God!”

“There is so much more I want to tell you, David, but you must be getting tired by now.”

I should have been exhausted, but I was totally alert. “Not at all! P-l-e-a-s-e, tell me more!”

“OK then...,” said the joyful angel.

Chapter Twenty-Three



LAMB OR RAM?

Ariel continued, “The Lord laced the Hebrew Scriptures with prophetic hints, pictures, clues, illustrations, and examples, going all the way back to Adam and Eve – all to help us arrive at the truth. Here is one of those hints that points to Yeshua. See if you recognize the story.”

I saw on the larger tablet screen an old man on a donkey in rugged terrain accompanied by a young man and his servants. They stopped, and it was obvious that the old man was giving instructions to his servants, who were nodding assent. He seemed to be assuring them that they would return. Then, leaving his donkey with the two servants, he and the boy set off up the mountain. They journeyed together in silence; the boy shouldered a heavy load of wood while the old man bore a heavy heart but never faltered in his step.

“Is it Abraham and Isaac?”

“Not bad! Now, let’s listen in.” Ariel tapped the speaker icon on the massive tablet in the lower right-hand corner, and the line through it disappeared. Immediately, we were able to hear their dialogue.

Isaac spoke first, “Father?”

“Yes, my son?” Abraham replied.

“The fire and wood are here,” Isaac said, “but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?”

Abraham answered, “God Himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.”¹

I watched as Abraham and Isaac arrived at the place God had shown Abraham, and together, they built a low altar. And then, after arranging the wood Isaac had carried up the mountain onto the altar, Abraham – *to my shock (yes, I already knew the story, but actually seeing it was different!)* – bound his son and laid the compliant young man on the wood. He was really going to do it! Isaac was clearly confused and questioning, yet without a word, he obeyed his father, trusting in his father’s perfect love for the son he doted on. Abraham turned away, not wanting Isaac to see his tears, which now flowed freely. It was clear that he was struggling with what he knew he must do. *I found myself hoping he wouldn’t do what I already knew he had to do.* He turned back to his son and kissed him. His tears falling on Isaac’s face and hair, Isaac felt his heart and lungs constrict with fear. Now terror gripped him. The unimaginable suddenly became a reality when his father took out a knife!

I wanted to scream, “No. Don’t do it!” but I knew it would be to no avail. As Abraham, eyes stricken, raised the knife high

to plunge it into his son's heart, suddenly a voice, not mine, cried out.

"Abraham! *Abraham!*" An Angel called out.

His hand frozen in midair, Abraham replied, "Here I am."

"Do not lay a hand on the boy," He said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God because you have not withheld from Me your son, your only son."²

My heart was still pounding. I was actually sweating. I knew the story, but when I saw the knife raised and Isaac tied to the altar, helplessly submitting to his fate, I was beside myself.

"It's okay, David...." Ariel assured me. "All this happened a very long time ago.

"Now focus, David, because I want you to see what's still to come."

I watched as Abraham looked up but saw no one. He looked around to see who was calling him, but instead, his eyes found a ram caught in the thicket. So, Abraham sacrificed the ram that God had supplied instead of Isaac, his son. The tablet went into hibernation as the screen went blank.

"Did you see what took place there, David?"

"Yes, he almost killed Isaac!" I blurted out.

"No, David. Something else. Remember when on the way up the mountain, Isaac asked his father where the sacrifice was? What did Abraham say?"

"He said God Himself would provide a lamb."

"Exactly. So where is the lamb?"

"They found him caught in the thickets," I responded.

"No, David, look at your desktop and read it to me."

"Okay." I looked down and read, "Abraham looked up and

there in a thicket he saw...*a raaaaam*. Okay, he didn't find a lamb, so? What's the difference?" And then, as if someone flicked on a switch, "Ohhhh!" I said, indicating that I now understood. "Because *Yeshua* is the Lamb!"

"Bravo, David, A ram is a full-grown male sheep. He could never be used in a Passover ceremony. The lambs had to be babies, just one year old. They had to be perfect without spot or blemish. But God did not provide a lamb as Abraham *prophesied*. His prophecy was accurate, though, but his timing was off by about 1,600 years!

"Yeshua is the Lamb to whom Abraham referred. He just didn't know it at the time, but when he said, 'God will provide the Lamb,' he was speaking prophetically. And, another prophet, John, whom you now know, publicly announced his arrival calling Him the 'Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.'"

"Yes, I remember!" I exclaimed. "This is amazing."

The angel continued, "Isaac was a *type* of Yeshua. A *type*, in the Bible, is a person or a prophetic event that predicts or foreshadows something in the future. Isaac, the son of promise, was a prophetic type pointing to Yeshua, who was also a promised Son."

A passage popped up on my tablet, and I heard the familiar chime.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6).

“Think about it. God had an only Son, and Abraham had an only son. Yes, he had had Ishmael too, but that had been his own doing. Isaac was the long-awaited, *promised* son whose birth was supernatural, in that, Sarah was not only barren but far beyond the age of childbearing.”

“And Abraham,” I jumped in, “was willing to give to God his dearest possession, his only beloved son. In turn, 2,000 years later or 1,600, as you said, God reciprocates by sending the Lamb of which Abraham spoke, the One most dear to Him, Yeshua – His only Son!”

“Both Sarah and Miriam had supernatural births,” Ariel added.

D’ling! John 3:16 was suddenly written in huge letters on the massive tablet:

For God so loved the world that He gave his one
and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall
not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).

“There were multiple prophecies foretelling just about every aspect of His life and ministry. I don’t know how anyone could have missed them,” Ariel added.

“The problem is that most of us aren’t looking. It was only recently that I found myself concerned about the fact that I don’t know what God expects from me. I am 28 years old, and this is the first time in my life that I am taking God seriously.

“I never thought to study the prophecies. What did that have to do with me, I always reasoned. I think most Jewish people are like me. I am not speaking of Orthodox Jews, but

secular, cultural Jews. My life is good. I make a good living, I am healthy, I love my wife, and I have two wonderful daughters. It simply never hit me, *until now*, that there might be more.”

“Oh David, there is more...so much more,” Ariel reassured me. “And it was always there for you if you had simply searched. For instance, the prophet Isaiah foretold the Messiah’s mandate 700 years before He came.”

The passage from John faded, as the prophet Isaiah himself took center screen and began to recite portions from the ancient prophecy. He was clearly well along in years and squinted as he read from a very ancient-looking parchment. As he read, the passage scrolled across my desktop tablet, with certain words emphasized:

Just as there were many who were appalled at him –
his **appearance was so disfigured** beyond that of
any human being
and his **form marred** beyond human likeness –
He was **despised and rejected by mankind**,
a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.
Surely **he took up our pain**
and **bore our suffering**,
yet we considered him punished by God,
stricken by him, and afflicted.
But he was **pierced for our transgressions**,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,
and **by his wounds we are healed....**
and **the Lord has laid on him**

the iniquity of us all.

He was oppressed and afflicted,
yet **he did not open his mouth**;
he was led **like a lamb** to the slaughter,
and as a sheep before its shearers is silent,
so **he did not open his mouth**....

For he was **cut off from the land of the living**;
for the transgression of my people he was punished.
He was **assigned a grave with the wicked**,
and **with the rich in his death**,
though **he had done no violence**,
nor was any deceit in his mouth.

Yet **it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause
him to suffer**,
and though the Lord makes **his life an offering for sin**,
he will see his offspring and **prolong his days**,
and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand.
After he has suffered,
he will see the light of life and be satisfied;
by his knowledge **my righteous servant will
justify many**,
and **he will bear their iniquities**.

Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and
he will divide the spoils with the strong,
because **he poured out his life unto death**,
and was numbered with the transgressors.

For, **he bore the sin of many**,
and **made intercession for the transgressors**.³

As Isaiah disappeared, I protested to Ariel, “But that’s not in the Tanach,”⁴ I protested, “that’s got to be from the New Testament!”

“Look it up for yourself,” he said. “You read part of it earlier about the Matzah being pierced, striped, and bruised.”

“Seven hundred years before Yeshua,” I pondered aloud. “How could it be? He describes everything!”

“He would be rejected. He would suffer for us. He would be sinless, and ultimately, He would die for us, willingly bearing the punishment for our sins, and then come to life again. But why does it say, He would see His *offspring*? Yeshua didn’t have children.”

“He didn’t? There are over one billion people on earth who claim Him as Savior and Messiah. You don’t think they qualify as children?”

“Ohhh, I see. It’s talking about *spiritual* children!” The familiar chime directed my attention back to the screen. I read out loud: “Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God...” (John 1:12).

“And Isaiah also prophesied that He would die a sinner’s death – in His case, that was crucifixion, ‘he was pierced for our transgressions,’ and that He would be buried with the rich. This was fulfilled when Joseph of Arimathea, a wealthy man and a member of the Sanhedrin, the ruling council among the Jews, donated His own tomb for Yeshua’s burial. What he didn’t know, of course, was that He wouldn’t be needing it for long.”

“Yeah, because Yeshua would rise from the dead. Like Isaiah said, ‘He will see the light of life again.’”

So much! So much to take in! I was finally feeling like I was nearing overload.

Yeshua, the Jew...our elder brother...He was the Passover Lamb... He gave His life willingly for me...like Isaac, he was the Son who was sacrificed...this is it! This is what I have been longing for...this is what has been missing in my li –

Suddenly lights and colors were going in every direction, and I was flying out of control, with no angelic escort. “Ariel!” I shouted. Where was Ariel!? “**ARIELLLLL!**” I shouted louder.

I was spinning in circles. I was terrified. What was happening? And then I saw the woman who Yeshua healed of her blood condition; images of the boy who was burned alive by the Crusaders in the synagogue flashed before me; and then I saw Christophe, who fled the Inquisition in Spain after they killed his father. I continued to spin and fly through time, when suddenly I saw my grandfather, as a young teen in Auschwitz...and then darkness.

Notes

1. See Gen. 22:6-8.
2. See Gen. 22:11-12.
3. Isa. 52:14; 53:3-12.
4. Tanach is an acronym for Torah, Writings, and Prophets. It refers to the Hebrew Scriptures.

Chapter Twenty-Four



CARRYING HIS CROSS

I hit the ground with a thud, and the lights came back on. I was back in Jerusalem, *but where?* There was shouting from what looked like a palace courtyard. I walked in the direction of the noise, curious to see what all the commotion was about. As I did so, I felt a strange draft around my legs. Looking down saw I was wearing sandals, and... what? *Was I wearing a dress?* I checked. No dress, but I was arrayed in the robes of any Jewish man in the first century. Even my arms and legs, I noticed, were a bit darker, and hairier. *Sweet*, I thought, this was a nice change from my snow-white, typical European-Ashkenazi-Jewish-complexion. Then I wondered, *how cool would it be...* and I touched my face. Yes! A full beard! Now that was something I could never do before. I was smiling, but not for long. *Lisa would be impressed...and then should make me shave.*

I walked inside the palace courtyard, and there beyond a loud and angry crowd was Yeshua, standing, bloodied and bruised beside someone who looked to be an important Roman dignitary or ruler. He'd obviously been beaten severely; I could hardly make out his face.

As I stood there, an order was given, and Yeshua was taken away by soldiers into the palace, and not gently. I followed behind, amazingly, not scared. The whole company of soldiers surrounded Him. They took His hands and tied them to a post. Another soldier produced a whip that had multiple tails, and at the end of each tail appeared to be a lead ball with tiny spikes or nails coming out. *My God! They're going whip Him with that thing!*

Just before they did, everything froze, and a screen ascended from the ground. It was very similar to the *portable tablet* in which I conversed with Luke. It was the size of a widescreen TV. A man appeared on the screen. He was not talking to me but to a large crowd. He was in his late 30s, and while I was sure he was a Bible teacher, he was not dressed very religiously at all – just jeans and a sports coat. He didn't speak like a religious person, either. He was a regular guy. I liked him already.

A flogging was such a barbarous, intense, horrendous mode of suffering that many men simply died from it. They stripped the victim almost naked, which is very shameful in Eastern Jewish Ancient culture. The man's neck and shoulders and backs and legs and buttocks would

be exposed and bare. And on each side would stand a professional executor and he would have a cat-o'-nine-tails. It was a handle from which preceded straps of leather. At the end of each was strap was a ball made out of stone or metal and with spikes of bone protruding. The metal would tenderize the man's body, and the hooks would sink deeply into the man's flesh.

Then the executioner would take a tug on the cat-of-nine-tails to make sure that the hooks were sunk deep into the man's flesh. And then he would literally rip the flesh off the man's body. The flesh on the man's back would look like ribbons. He would be a bloodied mess. His body would be absolutely traumatized and thrown into shock.¹

Just as the screen lowered back into the ground, I heard the loud "Snap!" of the first swipe. The little daggers dug deep into the flesh on Yeshua's back, and as the soldier violently pulled back the whip, "No!" I shouted. No one heard me as the crude weapon continued to rip His back apart, again and again. They wouldn't stop. The soldiers were laughing. *They were enjoying this!* Only when the count reached thirty-nine did the torment finally stop. He remained upright only because his arms were tied to the post.

A couple of soldiers untied Him. "Smack!" One of the Roman guards struck Yeshua in the cheek with all his might,

drawing even more blood. Then another one, as they continued to mock Him. Yeshua did not retaliate but just looked at them with compassion. I was stunned. Isaiah's words drifted in the back of my mind as if the prophet was whispering them to me.

*He was oppressed and afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;
he was led like a lamb to the slaughter,
and as a sheep before its shearers is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.*

The soldiers then took some thorny branches and proceeded to twist them into a wreath, forming a makeshift crown. These branches had massive thorns on them. They fixed the crown on His head. The thorns dug deeply into His scalp, no doubt, causing more pain as blood dripped down His brow. Then they stripped Him bare and adorned Him in a purple robe. Still, He did nothing. They began to mock Him, "Hail King of the Jews," as they laughed.

Those fools. They had no idea. Again and again, they struck Him over the head and spat on him. Then, they knelt down before Him in mock homage. Finally, they took the robe from Him and returned His clothes to His bloodied body. I felt like I was going to be sick.

At this point, He was handed over to another garrison who took Him out and laid a heavy beam upon His back – clearly part of the cross. After all this, they would make Him carry His own execution stake – the cross on which he was to be impaled! Written on a sign that they fastened to the cross in

Aramaic, Latin, and Greek (don't ask me how I knew) were the words, "King of the Jews." The Jewish leaders protested, but the Roman who appeared to be running the show refused to have it removed.

Suddenly, they were forcing Him in my direction. *Should I run? Should I hide?* I simply froze. A man next to me huddled with his two boys, probably visiting Jerusalem for the Passover. Surely, he did not bring them here to see this! They were just as stunned as I was.

As they neared, Yeshua collapsed under the weight of the massive cross, slamming His already beaten body against the stone pavement, crushing Him, and then pinning Him to the ground. He was physically unable to get up. One of the soldiers started to say something to the man next to me, but when he noticed his sons, he turned to me instead and said something in Greek. Amazingly, I understood him and then realized that the guards had also been speaking in Greek this whole time, and I had understood.

"You! Carry His cross!" He barked at me. Surprisingly, I wasn't scared; I wasn't scared one bit. I ran to Yeshua and picked the execution stake up off of His body. It must have weighed well over a hundred pounds. Tears were streaming down my face as this innocent Rabbi lifted His head. His face was half-covered in dirt and pebbles that now clung to the blood on His cheek.

And then He looked at me – or should I say *in me* or *through me*. Love personified gazed into my soul and His eyes pierced through my very being. I felt naked. In that instant, I knew that He knew every wicked thing I had ever done – every

time I secretly looked at pornography, yelled at my wife, or disrespected my parents. He saw. He knew every time I had lied or cheated. He could see every petty grudge I held, how I was jealous of more successful writers and bloggers, and the pride – oh, the pride of life that consumed me, how I love my reputation.

In light of what He was suffering, my selfish ambition seemed so absurd. I suddenly felt guilty for joining in with the other students and bullying Rudy Green in Hebrew school. And then, I felt horrible shame for pressuring Beth Sanger to sleep with me in high school, taking her virginity, assessing its value at about the same level as taking a friend's pencil for a test. *What had I done?* I then heard these words in my mind:

For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.²

*Laid bare...*yes, that was exactly how I felt. He could see everything. I was surrounded by a thousand Roman swords, but the worst they could do was pierce my flesh. The eyes of Yeshua dug deep into the darkest regions of my soul, leaving me exposed and without excuse. He exposed me as a hypocrite, pretending to be so perfect.

I thought my heart would burst. I wept for my sin. I wept for those I had hurt. *He* was suffering today for *my* sins. In the past, if I did something that I knew was wrong, I might feel a tinge of guilt, but ultimately, I would justify my behavior. *What's the big deal? Everyone does it.* The next time, it would be even easier – less guilt and then no guilt at all. Now, I saw that my shortcomings were indeed a big deal. My sin was doing this to Yeshua. This was not a lamb, bull, or goat at the Temple – this was the Messiah, God's Son, and He was going through this hellish ordeal in order that I might be pardoned! How could I resist Him any longer!?

Again, I heard Isaiah's voice in my mind:

*But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him.*

I could not break His gaze. All this time, I thought that David Lebowitz was a good guy. *What had I done that was so evil?* I would reason. *I am not as bad as this one or that one.* My problem was that I only compared myself to those around me – my friends and coworkers. But now, looking into the very essence of righteousness, I could see that in comparison, I was dirty. Even my good deeds were often motivated by pride and ambition.

Isaiah was again in my ear:

*All of us have become like one who is unclean,
and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all*

*shrivel up like
a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.*³

Another voice spoke in my mind:

The fool says in his heart, “There is no God.”
They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is
no one who does good. The Lord looks down
from heaven on all mankind to see if there are
any who understand, any who seek God. All
have turned away, all have become corrupt;
there is no one who does good, not even one.⁴

I was experiencing the rudest of awakenings! I was two thousand years in the past on the dusty cobblestone streets of Jerusalem – the actual Via Dolorosa – with the dying Messiah only a few inches away. It was true – David Lebowitz was not a good guy at all. He was selfish, unforgiving, and corrupt, just like everyone else. I deserved God’s judgment.

Then I heard these words in my spirit: “Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death? Thank God! The answer is in Yeshua the Messiah our Lord.”⁵

Another passage: “For what one earns from sin is death; but eternal life is what one receives as a free gift from God, in union with the Messiah Yeshua, our Lord...”⁶

Yes! He is my only hope. He is anyone’s only hope! Despite His knowing everything there was to know about me, I felt no judgment – just unsurpassable love and affection. On

the one hand, I had never seen or understood how much I had transgressed the Torah, and on the other hand, I could see His desire to make things whole for me. It was His law I had broken, and yet he wanted to fix it. Despite all the pain, the beatings, and flogging that He had endured, a slight but undeniable smile appeared on His face as He looked at me. Things would be okay.

Notes

1. Material based on information taken from *Jesus Died*, from Mark Driscoll of Mars Hill Church in Seattle, Washington.
2. Heb. 4:12-13.
3. Isa. 64:6.
4. Ps. 14:1-3.
5. Rom. 7:24-25 NLT.
6. Rom. 6:23 CBJ.

Chapter Twenty-Five



“SURELY, THIS MAN WAS THE SON OF GOD!”

“*Ahhh!*” I cried out as a big Roman boot found my stomach.

“Get up already!” the soldier hissed.

Had he not kicked me, I don’t know that I ever could have broken away from that holy gaze. While it was only a matter of seconds, I felt like I had been on the ground for several minutes. So much had been communicated in such a brief fragment of time without one word being uttered. I picked up the heavy beam with passion, and we marched a little over a quarter of a mile, outside the city walls, to the place where they would crucify Him.

I was told to stop, and I dropped the heavy beam. The moment had arrived. But just before they would nail Him to the wooden beam, the tablet came forth again from the

earth as the young Bible teacher returned on the flat screen. Everything and everyone around me froze. The teacher said:

The ancient Jewish historian Josephus called crucifixion the most wretched of deaths. They could hang for upwards of nine days, going in and out of consciousness, stripped almost, or altogether, naked. It was done publicly; it was state-sponsored terror, meant to instill fear in any other would-be lawbreakers. This would be like crucifying people in front of a local mall, or a store, or a park; the kind of place where people frequented often, and large crowds would gather.

The body is in such trauma and shock at this point that men are weeping; they are in and out of consciousness, and dropping and dripping off of their bodies would be urine, feces, tears, and blood. For some, this was sport. They thought this was hilarious and entertaining.¹

The flat screen descended into the earth, and the crucifixion began. I wanted to turn my head, but I also wanted these soldiers to know that I would be a witness to their deed. *No, I would not turn away.*

They placed the beam on another vertical beam. It was longer, and together they formed a cross. They fixed the two beams together with ropes.

The soldier grabbed Yeshua by the hand and held it down on an end of the crossbeam, while another soldier pulled out a massive nail – at least six inches long, like a railroad spike, and placed it firmly against the right hand² of Yeshua. A hammer was produced, and without wasting any time, with a loud grunt, he brought the head of the hammer down firmly on the center of the nail, pushing deep into the center of the Messiah’s hand, between two bones. Yeshua winced but said nothing. Another strike, and it appeared that the spike was through His flesh and into the wood. A few more blows of the hammer, and Yeshua appeared to momentarily lose consciousness as His hand was secured to the wood. And then the other hand was pierced.

The soldiers now moved to secure His feet to the vertical beam. They placed one over the other and then pounded a single nail through the center of His feet, causing agony beyond description. Once done, using ropes, they levered the cross into position and dropped it into a cavity about three feet deep into the hard ground, jarring Yeshua’s entire body. At the sound of the jolt, everyone shuddered as His body was pulled downward from the nails in His hands and pushed upward on the spikes in His feet. The pain he felt would have divided time as he hung there between Heaven and earth.

The scene transformed once more, thankfully, as I didn’t know how much more of that I could watch. The flat screen reemerged, and this time the setting was a university lecture hall, and a professor was addressing his class.

A death by crucifixion seems to include all that pain and death can have of the horrible

and ghastly. Dizziness, (muscle) cramps, thirst, starvation, sleeplessness, traumatic fever, tetanus, shame, publicity of shame, long, continuous torment, horror of anticipation, mortification of untended wounds, all intensified just up to the point at which they can be endured at all but all stopping just short of the point which would give the sufferer the relief of unconsciousness. The unnatural position made every movement painful. The lacerated veins and crushed tendons throbbed with incessant anguish. The wounds inflamed by exposure gradually gangrened. The arteries, especially at the head and stomach, became swollen and oppressed with surcharged blood, and while each variety of misery went on gradually increasing, there was added to them the intolerable pang of a burning and raging thirst. And all these physical complications caused an internal excitement and anxiety which made the prospect of death itself, of death, the unknown enemy at whose approach man usually shudders most, bear the aspect of a delicious and exquisite release.³

Hung completely naked before the crowd, the pain and damage caused by crucifixion were designed to be so devilishly intense that one would continually long for death but could

linger for days with no relief.

According to Dr. Frederick Zugibe, piercing of the median nerve of the hands with a nail can cause pain so incredible that even morphine won't help, “severe, excruciating, burning pain, like lightning bolts traversing the arm into the spinal cord.” Rupturing the foot's plantar nerve with a nail would have a similarly horrible effect.⁴

In crucifying someone, one thing is for sure – no one was concerned with a quick and painless death. No one was concerned with the preservation of any measure of human dignity. Quite the opposite. Crucifiers sought an agonizing torture of complete humiliation that exceeds any other design for death that man has ever invented.⁵

I was returned to my present reality, which more resembled a nightmare, as I looked at the Man hanging from the cross – He was unrecognizable. The flogging alone had turned this Jewish teacher into a mass of human flesh. The beatings and the pulling out of His beard had so ravaged His face as to make Him unrecognizable. Again, I heard Isaiah in my mind. “*His appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being and his form marred beyond human likeness...*”⁶

The soldiers had removed His clothes again. Then, like this whole thing was a game, the soldiers began to cast lots to see

who would get His garments.

I thought of the movie I had seen as a teenager, *The Robe*, where Richard Burton plays the Roman tribune who not only oversees Yeshua's crucifixion but wins His garments. However, the robe brings a curse on him until He finds peace in Yeshua. But this was no movie. I heard a whisper in my mind: They divide my clothes among them and cast lots for my garment.⁷

Was this also foretold? I thought.

Some among the crowd were mocking Him. Two people walked by and said, "If You are the Son of God, then prove it. Come down from the cross."

I remembered the words that Ariel shared with me when he quoted Yeshua: "No one takes My life from Me. I give My life of My own free will. I have the authority to give My life, and I have the authority to take My life back again."⁸

Even some of the rabbis taunted him, "He saved others, but He can't save Himself! He's the King of Israel! Ha! Let Him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in Him," they laughed. The Roman soldiers joined in.

Astonishingly, a man was suffering a torture unlike anything I had ever seen, and they acted as if it was nothing more than a show. They had no idea who they were messing with! He should destroy them. Call down fire from Heaven! My blood was boiling. *Don't they know that He is doing this for them!?* My anger at them was overridden by my fear for them. This was the Son of God, the Messiah, they were daring to crucify.

I would find out later that indeed He could have destroyed them. When Kefa resisted His being arrested by lashing out with a sword, Yeshua said: "Do you think I cannot call on My

Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels?” (See Matthew 26:53)

A couple of soldiers offered Him some liquid in a sponge. I didn't know what was in it, but I soon found out, as the screen emerged again. The young Bible teacher was back, and this time he shared something that literally made me gag:

During a trip to Greece, Israel, and Turkey, in one archaeological dig, we saw seating from an ancient public restroom. And people would sit on marble slabs, and water would roll underneath as a sort of shared bathroom. And underneath the seat, there was an opening, so I asked one of the archaeologists, “What was that for?” They said that the servants would be paid to take a stick with a sponge on the end and use it to clean the person while they were seated upon the toilet. But then they found that as they reused the sponge, people would get sick, and they would develop infections. So they began dipping it in wine vinegar as an antiseptic to kill the germs.

I literally, in that moment, lost it. I just sat down and started tearing up and fighting back complete weeping. It dawned on me. When they took the stick with the sponge on the end, dipped it in wine vinegar, and tried to shove it into the mouth of Jesus on the cross, they used

a soldier's ancient combination toilet brush/
toilet paper. It was the kind of thing he had used
to clean himself on the battlefield. And he took
that and tried to shove it into the Messiah's
mouth, to silence and shame Him.⁹

The tablet re-entered the ground, and I felt nauseated. As they offered Him the vinegar-filled sponge, the soldiers laughed at Him and shouted, "If You are King of the Jews, save Yourself."

And then...He opened His mouth and calmly said, as if He were talking to an invisible person standing before Him, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

My God, they have beaten Him, ripped the flesh from His body, hit Him in the head repeatedly, shoved a crown made of thorns into His brow, and now have Him hanging from a cross by His hands and feet in what could only be excruciating pain – and He forgives them.

I began to weep. *Who is this Man who so generously pardons His tormentors?*

Yeshua's friends looked on in astonishment. His mother, Miriam, was being held by a young man as she sobbed – *wait! – he looks familiar.* It was a younger version of the old man John that I had met earlier. Yes, he was at the Passover meal as well. He did say he was one of the original twelve. Standing with them were several other women.

Suddenly, darkness came over Jerusalem – and possibly over the world. It was around noon on what had just been a cloudless spring day. In a matter of minutes, it became so dark

I could barely make out the cross. In my spirit, a voice recited a prophecy.

*“In that day,” declares the Sovereign Lord,
“I will make the sun go down at noon
and darken the earth in broad daylight.”*¹⁰

My God! It was as if Elohim wanted to reinforce the fact that we were extinguishing “The Light of the World” when we crucified Yeshua.

I looked straight at Him. He was in agony as He hung there. The whole weight of His body was being brought to bear on the single spike driven through the middle of His feet. There was no little platform for Him to stand upon, as has been depicted in so many paintings. No, His full weight was upon that rusty nail that was surely chafing against every nerve in His feet.

It seemed that every breath He took caused incredible pain, as He had to push up from His feet using only the spike for leverage and pull up from the nails in His hands. And each time, His back – which was bloodied and raw, the nerves exposed – would drag against the crudely-hewn wood, inflicting excruciating pain.

It came as no surprise to me when I later discovered that the very word *excruciating* is derived from the word *crucify!*

For six, endlessly long hours, He hung there as a sense of abandonment and desertion pervaded the hearts of those who kept vigil that day. It must have been the middle of the afternoon, as an eerie foreboding hung over the city when Yeshua suddenly cried out in Aramaic, “*Eli, Eli, lama*

sabachthani?” which translated is, “*My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?*”¹¹

As I heard these words, my gut wrenched. I was engulfed with a feeling of utter despair, of anguish, of horror, and questioning desperation. I didn’t just cry; I groaned. Such a feeling, I had never had. Again, I heard the voice of Isaiah in my head, “*Yet it was the Lord’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer.*”

I yelled out loud, “How? How could this be God’s will?”

Again, the prophet was in my head: “*...and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*”

I continued to weep. *He was doing this for me.* He was taking my punishment.

“*You killed Him, David,*” I heard Ariel’s words as if he were standing next to me. Now I understood. It wasn’t the Jews, and it wasn’t the Romans – it was my sin that killed him. I felt it so deep it was as if I was the only lawbreaker on earth, and he was doing this for me. I wept for my sin. I hated what I was. I looked up to find the Messiah’s glazed and tortured eyes resting on me. Expressionless, as He looked upon me, He simply said, “It is finished,” and I could almost feel His final exhale. *He was dead.*

Suddenly, the earth violently shook, and I could hear the sounds of rocks splitting as the earth cracked. Even the soldiers, along with their commander, seemed to finally understand that they had committed a crime against Heaven. Cries of terror and fear accompanied everyone’s awful realization that they had perpetrated a horrible evil that day. Yes, it was His choice to die, but now these soldiers had to live with the fact that it

was so easy for God to find such willing instruments. They were terrified.

The inner conviction that had fallen upon all present was encapsulated in the centurion’s solemn summation, **“Surely, this man was the Son of God!”**

Notes

1. Ibid., *Jesus Died*.
2. I understand that there is much debate as to whether Yeshua was pierced in the hands or the wrists. In my research, I found strong arguments on both sides, but at the end of the day, who cares? The focus must remain on the fact that He went to the cross for us. While it is fine, even commended, to study out these issues, to place too much focus on them obscures the greater issue. He died for us. Nevertheless, if you would like to discuss this, please go to <http://on.fb.me/itheft>.
3. *The Life of Christ*. Frederick W. Farrar, Dutton, Dovar: Cassell and Co., 1897. Print.
4. As quoted in Paul S. Taylor, “How did Jesus Christ die?” *Christian Answers Network*, 2003, <http://christiananswers.net/q-eden/jesusdeath.html> (accessed August 11, 2012).
5. *The Life of Christ*. Frederick W. Farrar, Dutton, Dovar: Cassell and Co., 1897. Print.
6. Isa. 52:14.
7. Ps. 22:18.
8. See John 10:18 GW.
9. Ibid., *Jesus Died*.
10. Amos 8:9.
11. See Matt. 27:46.

Chapter Twenty-Six



WAR!

As the words escaped His mouth, I was ripped from the scene – pulled back heavenward somewhere above time. However, on this occasion, I was not taking a casual flight through history with my angel – there was *violence* in the air. I was being forcefully pulled back through time. The images I saw this time were not below, at least at first, but above.

There was war.

Angelic beings took their stand against one another. I saw one dressed in battle armor, a general; instinctively, I knew his name was Michael. He was tall, regal, and valiant, and he commanded the respect of all. On Michael's side were orderly rows of huge angelic beings, warrior angels ready to fight for a cause. Thousands lined up; their devotion to Him was evident.

The demons they fought against all had other names

connected to regions. A hideous being, equally muscular and grotesque at the same time, was named the Prince of Persia, while another was called Caretaker of Jerusalem.

But the one that really nauseated me was the King of Rome. He was dressed, not in armor, but in religious garb. He was grossly overweight, reminding me of Jabba the Hutt of *Star Wars* infamy. He would eat until he would vomit and then eat the vomit. He seemed to enjoy every form of perverted behavior there was. Their foot soldiers were a disorderly but vicious crew of demons. They would fight with one another for rank, as ego and arrogance governed them, and yet, hate and fear bound them together in a perverse unity.

Below them, how far I could not tell, men fought – first with words, manipulation, and deception and then with weapons. The scenes were clearly *parallel*. Whatever war was being unleashed on earth was also being fought in the heavenlies.

Why was I being shown this? I wondered. And where is Ariel?

The battles below were not merely military. Multitudes of conflicts were being waged. I saw a white man in Africa. He stood on a large platform before millions of people sharing passionately about the very things I had just witnessed – that Yeshua the Messiah gave His life for them, and through Him, they could escape God's wrath and have eternal life. Above the preacher, a spiritual battle ensued – demons desperately seeking to maintain their hold on the people while angelic beings simultaneously fought for their freedom. So many of the people had chains visibly upon them, like prisoners. I could see that even as the war waged above them, smaller

demonic entities had their talons buried deep within many of the hearers. Their names were *witchcraft, adultery, bitterness, shame, abuse*, and the like. The forces of God, both angelic and human, were fighting for the souls of men!

One by one, as the people came forward answering the preacher's call, angelic beings would swoop down like a smart bomb seeking its target, jarring these demons loose from their captives. The people would respond with tears of joy as they discovered their newfound freedom; some were jumping up and down with excitement. The weight of guilt and sin was gone; the demonic control dislodged. The evicted demons, however, in contrast, screamed in agony. It was like as long as they were attached to their host, they were okay. But unattached, they were like a fish out of water. They were in pain, and they were angry.

What was clear to me in all of this conflict was the centrality and importance of what Yeshua had accomplished in His death. The absolute power of His blood, the blood of an innocent Lamb, to set the captives free and to authorize angelic intervention on behalf of the souls who believed in Him was in evidence everywhere.

It was absolutely clear to me that the critical factor in all of this was the *decision of the person to go forward* – to believe in the Messiah and accept what He had done for them. At that moment, they became *new people* – I could see it – delivered out of Satan's cruel domain into the Kingdom of God. I could tell the difference between those whose sins had been taken away by the Lamb's blood and those who were still under Satan's control.

It was evident that there were other spiritual dynamics at work here as well – the words that came from the preacher’s mouth were set on fire by angelic authorities and appeared to me as fiery arrows of Life going forth, literally piercing the hearts of his hearers. The man preaching had no idea. It could only be seen in this spirit realm. Of course, he could feel it! The respondents too. I remembered what Luke wrote about the Jewish men who heard Kefa – “They were cut to the heart.”

Behind the stage were hundreds of people of whom the crowds were completely unaware. They were engaged in prayer but looked more like war, a spiritual war, from my view. It seemed that their crying out to God for the gathered souls to find freedom and salvation played a role in the people’s response. Some were pacing, others were kneeling, but all were praying. These prayer warriors or soldiers might have been dressed in normal clothes outwardly, but spiritually, I could see that each one of them was fully dressed in battle armor. Some of them were clearly native to Africa, and others were American or European. But they were one. It was clear that they had one mission and one purpose, and there was so much love between them. There were older folks and teenagers, and even some children. It was beautiful.

As their prayers ascended, I could see the spiritual atmosphere around the meeting visibly clearing as the enemy was driven back. With some, tongues of fire were released as they prayed; others released a smoke-filled incense that traveled upward toward Heaven like a message to God. These people *knew* they were at war.

Still, among all the elements at play here – the preacher’s

words, the angelic intervention, the believers' prayers and the power of God's Holy Spirit touching people, like when I looked into the eyes of Yeshua – I could see that the pivotal factor remained the decision of the individual, either to believe and receive the salvation that Yeshua offered, or not. Nothing determined the outcome more than that decisive first step that those in the crowd individually took towards Yeshua. As they stepped forward, the demons would begin to scream. But it was only when they got close to the stage and began to pray that the angels would be released upon them.

This was all absolutely amazing. As I marveled at everything I had witnessed, at what I had been so privileged to see and hear and know, I felt something dark invade my space, and the next thing I knew, I was being ripped away again.

Fear filled my consciousness; it was so tangible I could smell it as I spun out of control in utter darkness. I thought I was going to be sick. Then a cold shiver went up my spine as I recognized that I wasn't alone. I was in the very presence of evil.

After several minutes, I arrived quite suddenly back in the classroom, but what I witnessed, I was not prepared for. Ariel was on the ground; a demonic being had his foot on his neck, keeping him from speaking. His eyes were upon me, and he seemed embarrassed. Other demonic creatures – the most hideous sight I had ever seen – filled the classroom. A horrible stench emanated from them.

One of them began to move in my direction. I was terrified but had nowhere to run. I was paralyzed with fear. However, as he approached me, he slowly began to change

into another being – a beautiful, attractive being – maybe the most appealing creature I had ever seen.

“David,” he said with a voice like velvet that brought with it all the comfort of a loving mother, “we have come to rescue you. What has happened today could have nearly destroyed you, your family. Your father...”

Just then, Ariel yelled out. I could barely see him as the beautiful being shielded him from my view, or at least tried to. “David!” he yelled, “these demons will masquerade as angels of light, but they want to ki...”¹ The demon’s foot pushed harder against Ariel’s throat, silencing him once again. My beautiful angelic creature momentarily reverted back to its former repulsive appearance as he turned in the direction of the demon guarding Ariel and communicated with a look that could have killed. “Keep him quiet, you idiot! We don’t have much time!”

Confusion filled my mind...

As he turned back to me, with each degree of the turn, he would be less demon and more angel until he was staring at me, once again, with a hypnotic appeal – a beautiful, empathetic love that made me just want to melt in his presence. His silken voice and tender tone mesmerized me, draining me of all resistance. I was no longer afraid of him but drawn to him as if enchanted by a spell.

“David,” his voice seemed to envelop me, “you are safe now. They cannot confuse you anymore. Can you imagine what this foolish decision – to become a *Christian* – would have done to your family? Your father? Embracing Jesus would kill him!”

I felt the worst guilt I had ever experienced – no, *shame*,

was a more accurate term. He was right. What was I thinking?

“Do you really want to lose your friends, your family, your standing in the community? Do you want to be labeled a fanatic? Do you want your children to be treated as pariahs by other children? Parents would have warned their children to stay away from yours – that is, assuming Lisa hadn’t left you and taken the kids with her. Of course, you don’t want to put them through that.”

He was right. I didn’t.

“Just imagine – living alone in an apartment. Divorced. Your kids will come to visit every few weeks, but they won’t want to. They’ll be embarrassed by you.

“And David, let’s be honest. There is nothing wrong with you as you are. You’re a wonderful person. Sure, you’ve made some mistakes, but nobody’s perfect. God knows that. He made you from dust, after all. He doesn’t expect you to be flawless. And the things you’ve done wrong, you can make up for by simply doing good deeds. Eventually, your good deeds will blot out your sins. You don’t need someone else to die for you. What a crutch! You can save yourself, David. That is the beauty of truth – it is all up to you. That is the purpose of religion, to give you a way to make up for your misdeeds.

“Your rabbi was right, David. You are a great writer, but you have never studied religion. How could it be that you, in such a short time, have discovered a truth that your rabbi, who has devoted his entire life to the study of God and His word, hasn’t seen? Thousands of years of sages and rabbinic scholars making it clear that Jesus could not have been the Messiah, and you, a novice, figure it out overnight? It’s crazy, David. That is

why you have a rabbi – to lead you and guide you so you will not be deceived.

“David, it is time to go home now. Don’t go and throw away all you have on something that’s a lie. You have a great life. You are well respected; you have a beautiful family, a good job, and lots of friends. What more do you need? And moreover, your future is bright. You will write books. Other authors will quote you. I see a Pulitzer Prize coming your way. I can give you all this...and more. You just need to stop pursuing this nonsense that something is wrong with you.”

He made so much sense. *What had I been thinking?* I almost threw my life, career, and family away. I didn’t want to lose it all – to be mocked behind my back as some religious fanatic. All over some bizarre dream...

How horrible it would be to not be welcomed at our synagogue or the Jewish Community Center, where I not only exercise but lecture every year. We would have had to move. I couldn’t imagine raising Hope and Ellie in an environment where they would surely suffer and be rejected – and not for what they did – for what *I did*. *What kind of a father was I? How selfish I had been.*

I was drifting now – only semiconscious, the feeling you get in the moments just before anesthesia takes effect. Only I wasn’t falling asleep – I was staying in this barely awake, dreamlike state. It was *wonderful*. I didn’t even need to think, as thoughts were graciously being fed to me.

This beautiful creature had saved me. Embracing Yeshua – I mean, Jesus – would have ruined my life. I felt so much shame that it was tangible. I continued to drift in and out of

consciousness, feeling like I was being released from all I had been through. *My life was fine. I should be happy, not searching for hidden meanings for my existence.*

And just like that, a wave of guilt came over me as I had a vision of my father. He was weeping and asking, “David, how could you do this to us? How could you humiliate your mother and me like this?” The shame over what I *almost* had done was overwhelming. “Thank God your grandparents are not alive to see this! They lost everything in the Holocaust, and you become a Christian?”

Next, I saw my wife – she was hurt and angry. Yelling at me, “I am not going to be married to a Jesus freak. Leave!” as she pointed to the door where two suitcases, already packed, had been placed next to the entrance to my house. Lisa is one of the kindest persons you’ll ever meet. But she looked so hurt and confused. She had never yelled at me like that.

In the scene that followed, my rabbi and I were planning a funeral. “David, I told you this Jesus nonsense would kill your father!” Fear gripped my soul. I was coming out of this perfect sleep into a horrible panic. *My father is dead? I killed him?* My heart was racing. I felt myself once more spinning out of control...

Notes

1. See 2 Cor. 11:14.

Chapter Twenty-Seven



ARIEL!

I abruptly woke up. I was back in Starbucks, and I was in a panic. It was a dream. It had all been a dream. My heart was racing, like coming out of a nightmare. *My father!* I thought, *oh, thank God, he is not dead. It was all a dream.* I quickly surveyed the coffee shop to see if anyone noticed me. I wiped the drool off my mouth. What a morning this had been. I just came in to get some work done, and somehow, I must've dozed off – right in the middle of the café. *What a dream!* It was so real, but here I was safe and sound back in the Starbu –*whoa!*

Apparently, it wasn't a dream, or I hadn't yet woken up, as I was sucked out of my body quite violently like a vacuum was angrily pulling me back into the heavenlies. When I arrived at the classroom, the scene had changed dramatically. Ariel was no longer Ariel, *the professor*, but Ariel the Warrior. His muscles

were protruding through his battle gear. He was massive, and he was determined, and the situation was completely reversed. Ariel now had that same demon, who'd earlier had his foot on Ariel's throat, on the floor, and was returning the favor. Gasping in his mighty grip was my once beautiful angel, only now I was able to see him for who he really was, a revolting, hideous creature – a demon.

Other equally huge angels filled the room, each in possession of a cowering demon. Apparently, reinforcements had arrived after I left.

Ariel looked at me. I felt so guilty for ever having doubted. "David," he said. His voice was the same and yet completely different. The teacher was gone – the general had arrived. "Did you not understand the meaning of their mission? These creatures are deceitful beyond anything you can imagine. They will disguise themselves as truth, but they remain what they are – hideous, conscienceless, fallen angels."

The demon attempted to break Ariel's vice-like grip but was only squeezed tighter for his trouble.

"They will use every trick in the book from guilt to manipulation, from lust to pride, just to keep you from the truth. This is what they do. And you're going to have to learn to recognize their voices and then learn to silence them. You'll need to learn to take captive every thought that goes against God's Word. You could have ended this nonsense had you done that, but instead, you listened. You thought about their twisted logic. You entertained a life without Him. You feared the rejection. You decided it wasn't worth it. And the more you did, the more strength you gave these hideous creatures.

But if you had just used his name, the name of Yeshua, of Jesus, they would have scattered.

“In the vision, you saw the battle over the souls of men. A man proclaimed truth while others prayed, but it was only as each one made a decision to trust in Yeshua that freedom came.

“But make no mistake, David. There is a battle waging over *your* soul. The powers will lie and manipulate with guilt and fear to steer you away from eternal life. They are bent on evil and devoid of conscience. They want to take you with them to their final abode – the lake of fire.¹ They will play on your emotions, pander to your ego, promise you whatever you want, and then reel you in. They are not unlike me in their desire to shape your mind – only I’m offering you life while they seek your death.”

I spoke, but no words came out. I cleared my throat and tried again. “But they said my wife would leave me, and Ariel, I saw my father’s funeral. The rabbi said that I had killed him! I was told I would lose the respect of my colleagues, and my friends would all turn on me.”

“And they may,” Ariel said with an authority that sent shivers down my spine. “And John the Apostle was boiled in oil, John the prophet was beheaded, and Kefa was crucified *upside down*. Thousands of others have suffered an equal or worse fate for the Master, and every one of them has received their reward.

“Today, former Muslims who have embraced Jesus will be killed by family members. Other Jews will be kicked out of their synagogues. Catholic parents who don’t know Him

will reject their children who do. Just as you took up Yeshua's cross, you will have to take up your own...every day. You must be willing to embrace a life of rejection and live with the fact that people simply don't understand you or what you have done.

“In order to do that, you have to focus on what you have gained. You have to focus on what He did for you...”

I remembered Him hanging on the cross and my eyes meeting his as he lay on the ground.

“And look what he gave up for you. He became a human, a servant, and allowed himself to be humiliated and killed for you. There shouldn't be anything that you won't do for Him. He does not promise you an easy life, but He does promise you eternal life.”

Ariel continued, “Remember in the vision David. When did the demons lose authority over the people?”

“When they finally responded to Yeshua,” I answered. “The moment they did, angels soared out of Heaven and set them free. The blood of the Lamb broke the power of Satan from them as demons were dislodged.”

“As I said, there is a battle waging for your soul right now. The Holy Spirit has people praying for you, people who don't necessarily even know who you are. They are simply praying in obedience to His prompting. That is how we gained the upper hand over these demons today – through the intercession of His people.

“You can read later how Daniel the prophet prayed and fasted for three weeks, strengthening Michael and his forces so they could defeat the Prince of Persia and deliver a message

to the prophet. In your case, their prayers have released an immense portion of *prevenient grace*² in your life. Prevenient grace is what God uses to draw people to Himself before they even know Him. However, most do not receive what you have received, and one day you will give an account.

“But David, after all is said and done, the decision is yours. It doesn’t matter how many people pray for you; if you harden your heart, as you started to do moments ago, you will cut yourself off from this prevenient grace and the convicting presence of the Holy Spirit.

“You must decide, young man. Do you want truth, freedom, and eternal life, or the respect of friends, most of whom, by the way, *already* gossip about you behind your back? Would any of them even come close to doing what Yeshua did for you? Would any of them die for you? Would they allow themselves to be beaten or flogged until their backs had been ripped open? Would any of them allow themselves to be tortured to death for you, as Yeshua was?”

I didn’t need to answer. *No one would ever do for me what He did.*

“David, you have a window of opportunity. God is drawing you to Yeshua. But if you choose not to respond, then there is no guarantee He will ever draw you again. After rejecting such a gracious opportunity, you may be blinded to it the rest of your days, never giving it a second thought. This demon right here will seek to make sure of that.” The demon struggled again to get free but could not. “He and his friends will feed you every lie you can imagine to keep you blinded. Yes, they will promise you the world, even a coveted Pulitzer.”

Oh, how foolish I felt! I was ready to trade eternal life for temporary fame.

“Yes, David, they will do whatever it takes to keep you lost and blind from the truth.”

“Blinded!” I exclaimed, “that is exactly what I’d been as I drifted out of here before, escorted by, eh, him,” I pointed to the demon. “Like I was being lulled into a beautiful lie, one that made sense but would keep me from the truth.” I turned to the demon. I was angry, as I now understood how he’d sought to deceive me. He hissed at me in frustration, but unlike before, he was now powerless.

“David, once you give your life to Yeshua, you will not have to worry about these pests. Yeshua will give you authority over them. They’ll still be around, but you’ll trample them under your feet. Most people are terrified of them, but in truth, this pathetic being is absolutely terrified that you will receive Yeshua and then use your authority against him.”

The defeated demon writhed, furious that his cover was being exposed. Just a few minutes earlier, he had been so strong, so confident, and convincing. He had thought he had won. Now he was weak and wretched, even pitiful, in Ariel’s tight grip.

“David, it really is time to go home now. Just like in the vision, you have the authority – more than anyone else – to choose freedom, to choose Yeshua. Or you can remain friends with this guy,” nodding in the direction of the demon. “Remember, you initiated this when you began your search for the truth. God heard your prayers as you began to go to the synagogue regularly and pray through the Siddur. He heard

you because you were sincere. And my visitation to you was his answer.

“Instinctively, you knew that there must be more. And now that you’ve found it, you must decide. That part no one else can do for you. But the moment you choose Yeshua – the moment you confess that you believe, you will know that you are free – just like the Jews in Jerusalem that you saw on the day of Shavuot, just like the people you witnessed in Africa. You will be free... *and you will know it!*”

Almost as if on cue, I was once again being sucked back into a tunnel which reverberated with the words: “*So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed...if the Son sets you free, you will be free...if the Son sets you free...free...free.*”³

Notes

1. Rev. 20:15
2. Prevenient grace “is divine grace that precedes human decision. It exists prior to and without reference to anything humans may have done. As humans are corrupted by the effects of sin, prevenient grace allows persons to engage their God-given free will to choose the salvation offered by God in [Yeshua the Messiah] or to reject that salvific offer.” Wikipedia.com, s.v. “prevenient grace,” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prevenient_grace (accessed August 11, 2012).
3. John 8:36.

Chapter Twenty-Eight



DECISION TIME!

I opened my eyes, and I was back in Starbucks. Drool, again, was seeping from my half-opened mouth onto the newspaper I had been reading, the other half of which lay on the floor. I checked the clock. It was 9:30 a.m. Only half an hour had passed. The hipster was gone, the same young lady was working behind the counter, the student was still pecking at his keyboard, and the couple by the window discussing business was still discussing business. Nothing had changed apart from the fact that a few more people had entered, and no one, it seemed, had noticed the drooling dude asleep in the corner.

I stood up. Then I thought better of it and sat back down again, wondering if this journey was truly over or whether I might not find myself at any moment flying or spinning through time. Like an accident victim who slowly begins to

move his hurting limbs to see if anything is broken, I *mentally* checked myself. What had just happened? Was it real, or just a dream? Dreams do feel so real while you are dreaming, but once you are awake, you realize how unreal the dream actually was. But now I was awake, and it still felt entirely authentic.

Did I just watch Yeshua die? Was I really in Jerusalem? And did I just witness an angelic battle over my soul? Was that even possible?

Furthermore, did I just spend what seemed like an entire day – actually apparently only thirty minutes – *with an angel time traveling? Or did I imagine it? Did I just doze off and have an incredibly bizarre yet realistic dream, or did I really meet biblical characters? I smiled as I thought of how they interacted with me. Am I Dorothy, finally back in Kansas – or in my case, downtown Philly? Or is Oz real?*

Did God really just answer my prayer – my yearning to know the truth?

Well, there was one sure way to find out. I could simply do a little research on the Internet to see if what the angel said was true. Was Peter really Kefa, was John the Baptist actually Jewish and was he beheaded, and was James actually Jacob? The subjects I could check were endless. Was the Last Supper essentially a Passover Seder? Were there really immersion pools in the Old City of Jerusalem? And how about all that stuff about Caesar worship that John talked about? Google and I would clear this up in five minutes.

I bent down and pulled my laptop from my backpack and opened it up, excited to see if any of this was true. As I clicked on my web browser, I heard a *ding*, not unlike the sound that the tablet would make when a new passage was downloaded,

signifying that I had a new e-mail. My research could wait a minute. I went over to my mail program, and my heart skipped a beat. There *was* a new e-mail.

The sender's name was *Ariel!*

I nearly fainted. I stared at the screen of my MacBook Air, mouth wide open in stunned disbelief. *O-h...m-y...G-o-d!* I waited a few seconds just to collect my thoughts and to give my heart a chance to slow down. Then I clicked on it.

Shalom D'vid,

I thought you might need this. See attached.

We'll be in touch.

Your celestial mentor,

Ariel :-)

I almost screamed! *Unreal*, I thought. I just sat there frozen, unable to move for about ten minutes. *It was real! It was completely and entirely real! And if it was real, then everything he taught me is true...*

and...

that means He is real! Yeshua is real!

As I defrosted from my state of shock, I began to feel that same feeling that I sensed earlier with Ariel. It was an amazing feeling but so hard to put in human terms. Joy like I've never known. Peace that was beyond human reason – what did they call it, *the peace that passes understanding*. And with it, revelation and insight!

Yes, I understood why He came, Who He was, and why He had to die. I watched Him exhale His last breath. I carried His

cross! And I witnessed Him ask God to forgive the very ones who would kill Him. And right there in the café, tears began to flow as I thought of my sin, just as they did when He fixed His gaze upon me. But now I knew He would forgive me.

Realizing people would notice my now uncontrollable display of emotion, I grabbed all my stuff and moved to a more private area where I could further digest what had happened and what was happening to me.

I sat down again and thought, *Yes, I believe, and nothing will ever be the same.* “I believe,” I said out loud, and as I did, I felt something – tangible joy – jump inside of me. A weight lifted off of me, and I truly felt like I could fly.

I remembered what the angel had spoken to me just before I left the classroom this last time: “But now, you must decide. The moment you confess that you believe, you will know that you are free – just like the Jews in Jerusalem that you saw on the day of Shavuot, just like the people you witnessed in Africa. You will be free...and you will know it!”

I was, and I did!

Maybe Bono still hadn't, but I *had* found what I was looking for; it was Him, Yeshua the Messiah, the Jew from Galilee. He loved me! He loved me so much that, in all my confusion, He sent *an angel* to open my eyes. Love for Him flooded my consciousness, as I remembered again his eyes locking with mine as he lay on the ground, broken and beaten. Tears began to form in my eye ducts. I craved Him, and I wanted more. I wanted to see Him again. I wanted to express to Him what I was feeling. And then suddenly I remembered the attachment in the e-mail.

I turned back to my computer and clicked on it. It opened up into some kind of multimedia encyclopedia program. Everything was there – all I'd learned – everything that had been downloaded to my heavenly desktop was now on my earthly one. *Too much!*

Suddenly, I missed Ariel. He rescued me from that slithering, lying demon. *Would I ever see him again?* I looked down at the e-mail and reread the words, "We'll be in touch." Yes, I would see him again. *Can't wait!* I thought.

I felt so full of love at that moment, I feared I would burst out sobbing right there in the Starbucks. I jumped up, put my laptop away, left the newspaper, and walked quickly to my car.

As I got into my Camry, again, I was flooded with amazing feelings that I had never known before. I finally did burst into tears. I cried more that day than I think I had in the last ten years. Not since my grandfather's funeral had I been so overcome with emotion. But that was grief; this was something else. I had never been so happy in my life. My name was written in Heaven, and I now belonged to God. After knowing about Him my whole life, knowing what he did for the Jewish people, now I would know Him as a son knows his father.

After fifteen minutes or so had passed, I finally turned on the ignition and began my drive home, having no idea what the future would bring. I thought of my wife, my girls, and my goodness, my father, the son of Holocaust survivors. *How would they react? I would have to keep this quiet for a while – but how could I? They will surely notice the change. Either way, eventually, I'll have to tell them.*

They did not have the advantage of time traveling with an angel. They still viewed Yeshua as we had been taught – a Jew, yes, but One who'd started a new religion, a religion that had persecuted our people in the cruelest ways for centuries. Fortunately, Ariel had equipped me to answer every question.

I turned onto my street. I was still basking in His presence. Tears were still welling up as I was filled with such gratefulness and deep satisfaction. I don't think I had ever experienced more peace and contentment in my life. Yet, it made no sense. My life was about to get crazy. When the Jewish community of Philadelphia discovers that *David Lebowitz* – son of Harvey Lebowitz and grandson of Holocaust survivors Tuvia and Edith Lebowitz, *The Philadelphia Inquirer* columnist – now believes that Yeshua is the Messiah, they are *not* going to be happy. And yet, there I was in my car, just as happy as one could possibly be. While I didn't want to lose any of these relationships – I loved my wife and my parents – I had found the meaning of life. I had found Life itself, and it was a Jewish man. I watched Him suffer as no one has ever suffered. Yes, it will be hard, but how can I turn my back on someone who would do that for me? I was willing to lose everything; friends, family, career... if it ever came to that.

And then I heard His voice speaking inside of me.

Then he said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. What good

is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self? Whoever is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels” (Luke 9:23-26)

I will never be ashamed of Yeshua, I thought. And suddenly, I remembered something, as if an alarm had just gone off, that the entire time I was with Ariel, he and others kept telling me that I had a special purpose – a particular task. *What is it I am supposed to do? Am I to tell other Jewish people about the Messiah? Will I write books about this? I am a writer – a trained journalist. Would anyone publish me?*

I chuckled at the thought of asking my Jewish bosses to get behind such a project. Well, whatever His purpose was for me, I was willing. *I hope no one will boil me in oil or try to crucify me.* I smiled, knowing that neither scenario was very likely in a northeastern U.S. city, *but whatever comes my way, I trust He will give me the strength to deal with it.*

Who would have thought when I woke up that morning, with the grand plan of going to Starbucks, reading the paper, and working on my column, that I would meet an angel – (not to mention John the Baptist and Shimon Kefa), watch Abraham nearly kill Isaac, listen to Isaiah prophesy, and travel through time? Or that I would witness the Last Seder *and* Yeshua’s resurrection, watch angels and demons battle over my soul, and get a Master’s degree in *truth*.

But the most amazing event of all that I witnessed was the

act of selfless love that divided history, that was planned even before Abraham was given his son Isaac – Yeshua’s death on the cross as our Passover Lamb.

As I neared my house, a peace flooded my soul, and I recognized that life as I knew it was over. I also knew my quest was over. Ariel was right. The moment I said those words, *I believe*, something changed inside of me. I would later read this passage: “Therefore, if anyone is in Messiah, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2 Cor. 5:17 NKJV).

Yes! I was a new creation! I am sure that if God had opened my eyes, I would have seen an angel swoop down and cut me loose from the darkness I had walked in all my life. Maybe it was Ariel himself – my angel, my teacher, my friend. The blood of the Passover Lamb was now on the doorpost of my soul.

The spiritual battle for my soul might be over, but a new battle was about to commence once it became public knowledge that David Lebowitz was now a friend of Yeshua. I knew my faith could not remain a secret. I had to tell others. I also knew that it would touch every area of my life, from my family to my vocation.

Yes, it was beginning to make sense. God clearly had something special for me – an assignment. I again recalled how Kefa and Jacob seemed excited, even honored to meet me. *What was this mission?* Something about exposing the *Identity Theft*, the angel said.

All in good time, I thought. *For now, I just want to enjoy every second of being in His presence.* At that moment, I assumed I

would be enveloped in that peace for the rest of my life.

I was wrong.

I turned into my driveway to find my wife, Lisa, frantic, running to the car, tears streaming down her face.

“David, where have you been? We have been calling you! *There’s been a horrible accident! It’s your father..”*



FINAL THOUGHTS

Thank you so much for reading my book. I can't wait to discuss this with you online. Most of the marketing for this book has been by word of mouth, through friends, family, and social networking. If you feel that others need to absorb the truths found in this story, there are a few things you could do to help us.

Talk to your friends about the book. Share on Facebook and Twitter, and please include the link to purchase *Identity Theft*: **www.IDTheftBook.com**

Go *right now* to **www.amazon.com** and search for “Identity Theft Ron Cantor” and leave a positive review. Share your experience.

“Like” *Identity Theft* on Facebook: **www.facebook.com/identitytheftbook**

And if through reading *Identity Theft* you came to faith in the Messiah, find a great Messianic congregation or church that loves Israel, so you can grow. If you need help, just email me at ron@cantorlink.com.

Thank you again for reading *Identity Theft*. Be sure to check out Jerusalem Secret – Part 2 of David and Ariel’s adventure! And the final book in the trilogy is coming...

RON CANTOR



STUDY QUESTIONS

Chapter 1

1. Can you relate to David's desire to find out where he would go when he died, or whether there is a God?
2. Have you ever seen an angel? If yes, explain.
3. Why is David struggling to believe in Yeshua? The Gospel makes sense to him, but he says that his Jewishness is keeping him from embracing Yeshua. Explain.
4. Ariel tells David that in the year 35 CE, Yeshua was understood in the context in which the Jewish prophets described Him. What does that mean to you?

Chapter 2

1. In this story, what opened your eyes the most concerning the woman with the issue of blood?

2. Did you find her narrative believable? Why or why not?
3. Did you ever consider that her bleeding would keep her from marriage?
4. Did you ever consider the impact of her ritual uncleanness upon her whole life?
5. How did you feel when she finally touched Yeshua?
6. Could you relate to the fact that she had a knowledge and belief in God based on holidays and traditions but didn't even understand that she could have a real relationship with God?
7. Had you ever considered the future of this woman – what happened after she was healed?
8. What do you make of her being surprised that Gentiles were coming to faith?

Chapter 3

1. What do you know presently about the Crusades?
2. Catholic leaders promised the Crusaders a ticket to paradise if they died fighting in the Crusades. What does this remind you of?
3. How did you feel as the synagogue burned?
4. What are your feelings concerning the fact that the Crusaders sang worship songs as the Jews were burned alive? Did you know this?
5. Why do you think Jews have a skewed view of the New Testament?
6. Does the New Testament tell Christians to fight wars for Jerusalem?

Chapter 4

1. What do you know about the Spanish Inquisition?
2. What would you do, given the choice of baptism or expulsion?
3. Is this effective New Testament evangelism? Did Yeshua teach anything that resembled this type of forceful outreach to the Jews?
4. What was the name they called the Jewish converts? How do you feel about that?
5. Do you have any idea how many Jews in Israel today are of Moroccan heritage? (Jews that fled Spain.)

Chapter 5

1. Was it difficult for you to read this chapter? Why?
2. Were you aware that many Jews who suffered in the Holocaust were called “Christ-killers”?
3. Why do you think the Jews did not fight back? (Eventually, in the Warsaw Ghetto, when the intentions of the Nazis were abundantly clear, the Jews did fight back. Dan Kurzam’s *The Bravest Battle* is possibly the best book written on the subject. It is written like a novel, based on hundreds of interviews.)
4. After the Holocaust, survivors, particularly those who moved to Israel, were reluctant to share their experiences with their children and grandchildren. Why do you think that was?
5. Talk about how you think you would have reacted to freedom after so many years of death and torture.
6. What was your reaction to the last sentence of the chapter?

Chapter 6

1. Have you had a loved one die in or survive the Holocaust?
If yes, share a bit.
2. Why does David compare Spain of the 1400s to modern-day Iran or the former Soviet Union?
3. How, in our time, have people used religion to manipulate people to act on their behalf?
4. Why was it far easier for Esther and Jairus to receive Yeshua as the Messiah than it is for modern-day Jews?
5. What reasons does the rabbi give for holding “great antipathy” towards Yeshua?

Chapter 7

1. Before reading this chapter, if someone asked you, “Who killed Jesus?” how would you have answered?
2. Can you make a case that when John uses the phrase the Jews, he is referring to the Jewish leadership and not the people? (Hint: see John 11:47ff and John 18:14.)
3. Is it true that the entire Jewish population was calling for the crucifixion of Yeshua? What Scripture verifies your view?
4. What two verses in this chapter speak of Jewish leaders coming to faith?

Chapter 8

1. Why is David “incredulous” at the beginning of the chapter?
2. What is significant to you about John 10:18? What argument does it settle?
3. Do you know people who have been talked out of believing

in Yeshua by well-meaning friends, family members, or religious leaders? Explain.

4. What do most Jewish believers in Yeshua call themselves?
5. What does Ariel mean when he uses the words distorted facsimile at the end of the chapter?

Chapter 9

1. Can you think of people you have encountered that are so obsessed with minor issues that they lose focus on the major issues? (For instance, those who consider anything other than the King James Version of the Bible, not the Bible.)
2. The angel used the term religious spirit; what does he mean?
3. Explain the wordplay that Yeshua's father Joseph understood in Hebrew but is lost when translated into other languages?
4. When _____ is translated in the New Testament the Greek word Iesous is used. Iesous is also used for this name: _____.
5. The name of Yeshua's mother is actually _____, the same name as the sister of _____.
6. John the _____ was not actually a _____ but a Jewish prophet like _____, _____, or Ezekiel.
7. Discuss: Before you read this chapter, how did you view John the Baptist – as a Christian or a Jewish man?
8. How did the apostles accommodate so many Jews (3,000 plus women and children) that wanted to be immersed

in water (indicating their reception of Yeshua as Savior and Messiah)?

Chapter 10

1. The name Peter is pronounced _____ in Aramaic and means _____.
2. Why does the angel prefer to use the word Kehillah (community) instead of Church?
3. Roman Catholicism incorrectly teaches that Peter (Kefa) was the B_____ of R_____ or the P_____. Do you agree with this? Why or why not?
4. To whom did Peter quickly turn over the leadership of the Kehillah in Jerusalem?
5. Does the New Covenant teach that the Bishop of Rome would sit in the place of authority over the community of believers?
6. To which city will Yeshua return? List the Old Covenant passage where this is prophesied.

Chapter 11

1. Paul/Shaul was actually a Jewish _____ who was persecuting Messianic Jews before coming to believe in Yeshua.
2. Did Paul change his name? Explain.
3. James, the brother of Yeshua was actually called _____.
4. What is the problem with the name James? It communicates to Jewish people that _____
_____.

5. The proper Hebrew way of pronouncing Judas is Y_____ and it means _____. This was also the name of _____, the southern kingdom.

Chapter 12

1. The Last Supper was actually a _____ meal.
2. What strange element appears in Leonardo da Vinci's portrait of the Last Supper? Why is it strange?
3. Yeshua rose from the dead on what Jewish feast day? What New Testament passage from the epistles does this connect to?
4. Where does the author claim the Holy Spirit outpouring took place? Do you agree? Why or why not?
5. What is the Hebrew word for "Pentecost," and why were there so many Jews in Jerusalem on this day?
6. What was the difference(s) in Kefa's life between the time that he denied he even knew the Messiah and when he preached on Shavuot?
7. What images come to mind to Jewish people when one speaks of "baptism"?
8. Yeshua was crucified on _____, He rose from the dead on _____, and He birthed his Kehillah, community of followers on _____. What message do you think God was seeking to convey by this?

Chapter 13

1. In what year did the Catholic Church officially forbid resting on the Jewish Sabbath in favor of Sunday?
2. What was the penalty for anyone caught resting on Saturday?
3. By what authority did the Church make this ruling?
4. What is the highest authority for the believer: Church leadership or the Scriptures?
5. Why was David moved by Yeshua washing the feet of His disciples?
6. Explain what Ariel means when he says at the end of the chapter, “those responsible for the seemingly innocuous act of changing the day of worship didn’t realize either that it would lead all the way to murder and even genocide.”

Chapter 14

1. Explain what David means by, “It would seem to me that to change something so explicit – one of the Ten Commandments – you would need an equally explicit command.”
2. Is there any place in the New Covenant where it explicitly says, “The new Sabbath is Sunday” or “God prefers to be worshiped on Sunday”?
3. Why does Thomas say that it really doesn’t matter what day the Lord appeared to the twelve when he says, “Who cares?”
4. Why does Thomas say that they were constantly in the Upper Room?

Chapter 15

1. Why does Ariel bring up Jeremiah 31:31 again in connection to the Sabbath not being changed? What is his point?
2. When does the day begin in the Hebrew calendar?
3. See endnote 3. If they gathered on Sunday night, why would that further strengthen the idea that the Sabbath was still honored by first-century Jewish believers?
4. Why didn't God just tell everyone to meet on a specific day, according to Ariel?
5. Have there ever been nations that didn't use a seven-day week?

Chapter 16

1. What event finally helped the disciples to see that Yeshua's style of leadership was different from the world's?
2. What crime was John accused of?
3. According to Matthew 10:17ff, what can we expect to happen when we are persecuted? Give an example of where this happened in the New Covenant.
4. How has the author's account of Stephen's execution opened your eyes?
5. Apply I Corinthians 10:13 to Stephen's experience. Would you be willing to be a martyr for Yeshua? Discuss.

Chapter 17

1. Discuss what it may have been like for John to preach from the pot of oil. (The account is fictional, based on tradition, but a likely scenario for a believer during that time period.)

2. What would every Roman citizen be required to confess each year on the “Lord’s Day”?
3. What was the crime for those who would not confess?
4. What is the theme of the early chapters of Revelation? Give at least one passage.
5. Do you see Romans 10:9 in a different light now that you understand the background of Caesar Worship? Explain?

Chapter 18

1. Who took the Gospel to the other nations in the beginning?
2. Trick question to emphasize the obvious: How many of these new believers, numbering in the thousands, were Jewish?
3. What did it mean to “expose” a newborn? What was the most common reason for this?
4. List three restrictions on women in most ancient cultures.
5. List two ways Yeshua challenged the status quo regarding women.
6. How did the Jewish leaders seek to trap Yeshua when they brought Him the woman caught in adultery? What was the Catch-22?
7. Why was Ephesians 5:25 radical in the first century?

Chapter 19

1. Why is 3,000 a significant number (in regard to Shavuot)?
2. What Scripture shows that the Good News was even touching Jewish religious leaders?
3. Why does David think the priests were Catholic?
4. What was Saul willing to endure in order to reach the Jewish people? (See Romans 9.)

5. When Saul entered a new city, where did he go first? Why?
6. Name three things we would not have without the Jewish people.
7. How has Acts 21:20 been misinterpreted?
8. When Jewish people came to faith in the first century, did they reject the Torah or embrace it at a deeper level according to the latter part of Acts 21:20?
9. Under the New Covenant, is the Torah discarded? According to Jeremiah 31:33 and Ezekiel 36:26-27, what happens in regard to God's Law, the Torah?
10. Read endnote 2 and explain the Oral Law.
11. What did Paul do to prove that he still honored the Torah in Acts 21?
12. List two more things Paul did that show his respect for the Torah. (Hint: Acts 18 and 27.)
13. What does Paul call himself in Acts 23:6? Look up that word in the dictionary. When used as an adjective, what is the definition? Is this fair? Read Acts 15:5. Only senior leaders were invited to this council and yet a significant portion of them were _____.

Chapter 20

1. What would have been the response of the first Jewish believers had you asked them how it feels to now be a Christian?
2. Who was Gamaliel?
3. Why did the angel say that the Sanhedrin proved that Yeshua was the Messiah?

Chapter 21

1. The Lord's Supper was instituted at _____
_____.
2. What do you envision when you see the Lord's Supper?
3. What did the angel mean by "religisized"?
4. What is the "Afikomen"? What does it mean (see the end of the chapter)?
5. Why could only Yeshua take the matzah and say, "This is My body"?
6. Why is it strange that some churches use leavened bread for the Lord's Supper?
7. How do Yeshua's death, burial, and resurrection resemble the Afikomen ceremony?
8. Why is Moses not found in the Haggadah?
9. List an Old Covenant promise that speaks of the Jewish people returning to Yeshua.

Chapter 22

1. Which cup of wine did Yeshua pick up in the Gospel narrative?
2. The blood of Yeshua was like the blood of the _____, which covered the _____ of the Jewish households in _____.
3. What happened in the Temple at the very moment Yeshua was crucified, and at the very moment He died?

Chapter 23

1. Abraham told Isaac that God would provide a _____ but they found a _____ caught in the thicket.

2. What was the significance of that?
3. What is a “type”? Give two examples of a prophetic type that pointed to Yeshua.
4. Despite all the prophecies, what is the reason David gives here that most Jewish people don’t see Yeshua as the Messiah?
5. Why does David think that Isaiah is reading from the New Testament?
6. Make a list of all the ways Yeshua fulfilled Isaiah’s prophecy.

Chapter 24

1. Briefly describe what it means to be flogged.
2. Had you imagined that Yeshua had been so badly beaten even before His crucifixion?
3. What do you think it would have been like to fulfill Simon’s role and carry Yeshua’s cross as David did?
4. Hebrews 4:12-13 describes what David was going through in regard to his sin being revealed. Before that, he assumed he was a good person. Have you ever had an experience like that where you suddenly realized your sin before God?
5. David didn’t just focus on outward sins, but inner heart sins such as jealousy, pride, and bitterness. Do you think the Church is quick to jump on outward sins but seems to tolerate the unseen heart sins? Explain.
6. Do you agree with Isaiah that we are all sinners? In Isaiah 64:6 he says, that “all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.” What does he mean?

Chapter 25

1. In addition to execution, what was the goal of crucifixion in the eyes of the Roman government?
2. In reading the professor's description of crucifixion, what stuck out to you? What surprised you?
3. How did Yeshua fulfill Isaiah 52:14?
4. What other Scriptures did you see Yeshua fulfill as you read this chapter?
5. The word _____ is derived from the word _____.

Chapter 26

1. Do you believe there is war in the unseen spirit realm?
2. Do you think demons have specific purposes connected to specific sins or sicknesses? Can you think of any passage that would back that up?
3. What was the connection between people going forward and their being set free? There are no altar calls in the New Testament. What act was used as the primary way that someone confessed faith in Yeshua? (Hint: See Acts 2:38 and 8:36.)
4. What Scripture in Revelation speaks of our prayers being as incense in bowls presented before the Lord?
5. Apply the idea that the demon was able to change into a beautiful creature to your own life. Have you ever convinced yourself that something evil was actually good?
6. What tools did the demon use to seek to trip up David in his search?

Chapter 27

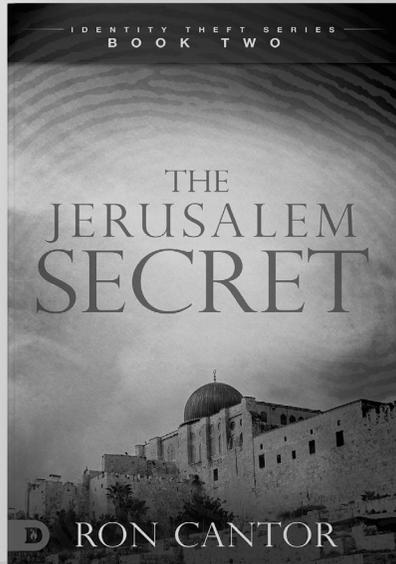
1. The angel said, “These creatures are deceitful beyond anything you can imagine. They will disguise themselves as truth, but they remain what they are – hideous, conscienceless, fallen angels.” What New Testament passage does this bring to mind?
2. What are your thoughts on Ariel’s response to David when he said, “But they said my wife would leave me, and Ariel, I saw my father’s funeral. The rabbi said that I had killed him! I was told I would lose the respect of my colleagues, and my friends would all turn on me”?
3. The angel spoke of Daniel’s prayers strengthening the angelic forces. Read Daniel 10 and share how you think this can work in your life. Have you ever fasted unto the Lord?
4. What is prevenient grace? Can you remember the first time you experienced it?
5. In addition to people praying, why do you think that the demon was powerless against Daniel? What can we learn from this?

Chapter 28

1. How did you enjoy the book?
2. Name the three main things that you learned or were reminded of.
3. How did you like the ending? Do you have any idea what may have happened?
4. Would you be inclined to read Book Two in the Trilogy?
5. If so, for the story, the history, the teaching, or all three?

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ABOUT RON CANTOR

Here is a little bit about me. I serve as President of Shelanu TV, the only 24/7 Hebrew language digital TV channel in Israel sharing the message of Yeshua. I also serve as the Israel Director for GodTV, where I host three TV shows: *Out of Zion*, *Get Real*, and *Ask the Cantor*.

I was born into a Jewish home, but I did not know God! I realized at age 17, there must be more. This led me on a journey where I discovered that Yeshua (Jesus), whom I thought was for the Gentiles, was, in fact, the Jewish Messiah.

My wife Elana, a native Israeli, and I have lived in Israel since 2003. Since then, I have served as a pastor of a Messianic congregation in Tel Aviv and as CEO of Tikkun International (now RITG), a global Messianic family of congregations and ministries.

In 2020, GOD TV partnered with several Messianic Israeli and Arab Christian leaders to birth Shelanu TV, and I was asked to become the president. Through Shelanu TV, we are sharing the good news of Yeshua 24/7 with thousands and thousands of Israelis each month – in Hebrew. Never before in history have so many of my people had access to the gospel in their own language like this. A harvest is happening, and a greater harvest is still to come! Until ALL Israel is saved (Rom. 11:26)!

You can keep up with Ron by:

Visiting his website at www.RonCantor.com

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H A S T H E M E S S I A H B E E N R O B B E D ?

Supernatural visitations. Divine time travel.
An age-old cover-up. In the middle of it all:
One man is miraculously transformed by Yeshua.

In an instant, David went from being a skeptical Jewish newspaper columnist to a desperate seeker of Truth. The catalyst was an angelic visitation—a moment that marked him forever.

David's quest spans numerous philosophies and religions, culminating with the person of Yeshua the Messiah – Jesus Christ as He has come to be known. David plummets into a vigorous spiritual tug of war. Part of him is intrigued and fascinated by the Messiah, while another is plagued by guilt. How could a Jewish person like himself believe in Yeshua, considering all the horrific acts that have been done to his ancestors in His name?

In this 10th Anniversary edition, author Ron Cantor takes you on an unforgettable tour of history as an angel supernaturally escorts David through the halls of time, and he has *reloaded* the story with many new insights for David to discover. You will soon discover that though atrocities have been committed in the name of Yeshua, the greatest crime of all may be against the Messiah Himself... a crime of *Identity Theft*.

BOOK ONE

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